John - Commentaries by Walter Thomas Prideaux Wolston

Seekers for Light, Eternal Life - How to Get It

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

(John 5:20-47)

Notice the words of the Lord, at the close of this chapter, where He says: “Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me: for he wrote of Me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” We live in a day when people think that what Moses wrote is not to be received. There are doubts about his words. I just want to say to you, before we go into the subject before my mind tonight, that the Lord Jesus Christ puts His stamp upon the writings of Moses, as He says: “Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me: for he wrote of Me.” Observe, He distinctly says, Moses wrote of Him. Do not you tell me that Moses did not write that which bears his name, for then Christ was wrong in saying he did? I do not think the Lord Jesus was wrong. Ah no! And He says, Moses wrote of Him. I say this, because we live in a day when so much doubt exists as to the authenticity of Scripture, and many young men are caught in this snare of Satan. It will be a good thing for you if you get your doubts dispelled. Our Lord says, authoritatively: “Moses wrote of Me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe My words!” (John 5:46-47), Are we to credit Christ, or not?

Now the point I would fain press on you this evening is the value of the word of the Lord Jesus Christ. I think it is important to notice these words of Christ. “If ye believe not his (Moses’) writings, how shall ye believe my words?” Do you believe the writings of Moses? You reply, I have my doubts. Thank God, I have not. I am very sure that the Lord Jesus, the Eternal Truth, the Son of the Father, knew exactly what He was saying when He so distinctly stated, — that the writings of Moses bore witness to Himself. Moses was a witness, a distinct witness, to Christ; and you will find that the Old Testament Scriptures are in full accord with what we call the New Testament, while the New Testament Scriptures fling great light upon the Old. The New Testament, if rightly apprehended, throws a wonderful light upon what God has given us in figure, type, and shadow in the Old Testament.

But a person may say, — What is the object of the Old Testament? Well, it is really the picture-book of Christ. You will find in it, if you search, that which brings out, by way of illustration, the most precious truths concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the chapter now before us, the Lord adduces four witnesses to Himself, and it is of vast importance that you and I should pay heed to what Jesus says.

1. John the Baptist bore witness of Him: “Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth” (vs. 33).

2. “But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of Me” (vs. 36).

3. And then, again, “The Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of Me” (vs. 37).

4. And, last of all, the Scriptures bear witness of Him: Ye “search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me” (vs. 39). But He adds, very solemnly, “and ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life.” Ye “search the scriptures”; I can commend you for that, He says; but eternal life is not found in Scripture. “They are they which testify of Me. And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life.” This fourfold testimony to Christ might well convince any heart.

I have no doubt He was then addressing a company of caviling Jews. I am not addressing a company of cavilers, I trust. I do not think many of you young fellows are of that hopeless class, who despise grace, and refuse the truth. I trust and believe you have come here with a desire to really learn that which will meet the need of your souls, for time, and eternity. I think you are in earnest. I am in earnest, by grace; and trust, by God’s help, to show you that the knowledge of Christ is transcendently important. Now, many a young man thinks that it is a poor thing to be a Christian. I say it is the grandest thing possible to be a Christian; and there could not be a better time, for a man to become a Christian, than when he is young. Why? Because, if God spare you to have a long life, how much better will that life be, if spent in the service of the blessed Son of God, than spent in a routine of sin, folly, and unsatisfying pleasure, which never give any real blessing to the soul, even though at the close of your days you may turn to the Lord. I do not think any man who turns to Christ, in the last hours of his life, can look back on his life with pleasure.

Is there a man here this evening who says, I will go on with the things of the flesh and the devil until I am about to be called out of the world, and then I will turn to Jesus? And what will you then give Him? You will give to Jesus the dregs of a badly spent life. What do you think of yourself? I know what you think. You would judge a man who did that to be a downright poltroon. Nevertheless, such is Christ’s grace, that even so, you would be received. He says He will not cast out any one that comes to Him. But what I want you to do is to possess Christ as a present, living, loving Saviour. You may have Him, my friends, where you are, this evening. You may have the knowledge of eternal life now, and may go on your way in the sweet and happy service of the Lord, and in the enjoyment of His love; and you may depend upon it, the possession of a good conscience is a great thing; and the possession of eternal life is a wonderful thing. To be in the service of Christ, is infinitely better than being in the service of the devil.

The god of this world knows all his troops; he knows all his subjects. I admit, my friends, he may keep you in peace, and may not make you aware of his government; but our Lord says, “When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace” (Luke 11:21). And who is the strong man? The devil. And what is his palace? The world. And who are his goods? Sinners. I was, at one time. Thank God I am not. If you are not on the Lord’s side, you are. Each one is marked. Ah! but you do not like to own the hallmark. You may depend upon it, God knows

those who are His, and the devil knows who are his. Yes, it is very simple. You are either on the Lord's side, or not. Which side are you on? If you have never been to the blessed Lord hitherto, let me urge you tonight to have to do with Him now. For, mark! you must at some time. Every man that faces me tonight must have to do with the Lord Jesus Christ, sooner or later. It may be today. It may be tomorrow. You have no lease of life. You may have taken your lodgings, or your house, for a month, or on a lease; but you have no lease of life, and you cannot tell when you may pass into eternity. Either then, or now, you must have to do with the One whose blessed words we have before us this evening. I pray you to hear them. Oh, hear the words of the blessed Lord! It is of vast importance to give heed to His voice.

You may observe that our Lord speaks of two hours in this fifth of John. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live" (John 5:25). Again, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29). You have here brought out the absolute contrast of the two hours; the hour of grace, and the hour of judgment. Mark this there is a very great difference between "the resurrection of life," and "the resurrection of judgment" It is a common thought that there is going to be a general resurrection by-and-by. Such is not what Scripture teaches; there is no general resurrection. There are two resurrections; the resurrection of life, and the resurrection of judgment. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection," saith Scripture (Rev. 20:6). The two resurrections are separated by at least a thousand years. There is no doubt about it. In Revelation 20:4-5 the risen saints are spoken of as living, and reigning for a thousand years with Christ; and then we read, "But the rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years were finished." The first resurrection takes place before the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, the second resurrection is after the close of that reign. Be certainly assured that the Lord Jesus will yet reign. He is King of kings, and Lord of lords, and He is going to reign over the earth. The first man lost it; the second Man redeems it. The first man brought the curse into it; and the second Man, the last Adam, will remove that curse, and bring in universal blessing when He comes to reign as King.

The resurrection of life, and the resurrection of judgment, are as different as light and darkness. The resurrection of life is the portion of the man who has Christ, and if dead, when Jesus comes again, he is raised to life. The man who has lived and died in his sins, and has not known Christ, is raised to judgment. And what will that be? Oh! do not you face it. Do not you risk it. Stop, friend, I implore you, do not risk it. I will not attempt to delineate it; how could I? No tongue of man can depict that awful moment when God raises man for judgment. Enough that it is a resurrection of judgment, and every sensible man should flee from it. Every man who has his senses exercised before God will flee from it. The resurrection of life is a resurrection unto blessing. It is the moment when the Lord shall come, and shall take up from the grave His own people, bought by His own blood, and who, through grace, have found Him to be their Saviour. The resurrection of judgment is when unblessed men will stand before the great white throne, and be judged according to their deeds.

Do you think, for a moment, that a man who has spent a life in sin will not be judged? How can he get off in the judgment day? How can you get off then, if the question of forgiven sin be unsettled? The whole genius of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ makes that impossible; because the great truth of the gospel is that, after sin entered into the scene where man had fallen, and before the moment when God must judge it, Christ has stepped in, and borne that judgment. Consequently the believer never goes into judgment, which is exactly what our scripture affirms. Jesus says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" (vss. 24-25).

And what is the result of hearing the Son of God? "They that hear shall live." What kind of life? It is life eternal! Not life in this world! Not life in this scene! You have that already, but it is forfeited. You cannot tell how long you may have it. Thank God, the believer has eternal life. In that 24th verse our Lord Jesus Christ brings before us the present, the past, and the future. About the present, He says, "He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life; "then as regards the past, He says the believer "is passed from death unto life," and if he look at the future, "shall not come into condemnation." The whole horizon of the soul is filled up by that one verse. How beautiful! How simple "He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent me." Do I hear His voice? Do I hear His word? Do I believe the Father sent Him? I do, from the bottom of my heart, and I confess that He is what He says He is. I confess Him Son of God, and Son of Man. I confess my need of Him, and my faith in Him. And who sent Him? The Father sent the Son. What a wonderful thing that the Father, the Eternal Father, should have sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world. Yes, Scripture says, "The Saviour of the world." Wonderful and amazing truth! Yes, the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world, and that Son went into death to take you and me out of it. He died on the cross, and presented His own precious blood as an atonement for sin, so that man might be washed in that precious blood, and be presented to God, in all its cleansing efficacy, the recipient of eternal life.

Observe that the Lord says here, "He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life." Life possessed, is the point here. And what was our state before we lived? Dead. Mark that. You may have natural life; I admit it. You may have plenty of it. Perhaps it is not a life you would care to have exposed. You would, most probably, not like everybody to know what the deeds and doings of that life have been. That is not my concern. God knows that. My friend, look here, you have not spiritual life; but the Gospel of John brings before us the blessed truth of Jesus coming into this world, revealing God to us, and bringing to us the very thing we had not. There are two sides of the gospel. There is what I call the negative and the positive side of the gospel. What is the negative side? The negative side is the meeting of my need. And what is the positive side? That which comes to me, and becomes mine in the Person of Christ. I will show you what I mean.

In the First Epistle of John, we read, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." He brings us what we had not got — life. That is the positive side. But then it adds, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." There is the negative side of the gospel. Christ takes away what we had got — our sins. You see the gospel, when it comes to a man, tells him of his sins. That is naturally the first thing. When a man is touched by the Spirit of God, is quickened and awakened, he immediately thinks of his sins. Quite right! Think about your sins, for sins you have. You are a sinner, and you ought to know how you have sinned. The first thing that is touched is your conscience, and it is a blessed thing when conscience whispers, "Thou art the man."

But what do I see the grace of Christ doing for my sins? I see them all blotted out in His own precious blood. My conscience accuses me of sin, and then comes the thought, I have not a life that will suit God; I have not one thing suitable to God. I get the sense that I am dead towards God, and then I hear, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." God proposes to give you life, eternal life; and observe, "the gift of God is eternal life." You cannot win it, or earn it. You cannot buy it, and do not deserve it. But God gives us it.

I know the wages of sin is death, but what do I see? Christ, if I may so speak, taking those wages, that you and I might be saved. I see the cross, and the work He has done on the cross. He has taken all the penalties and demerit of sin, borne sins, atoned for them, and, thank God! blotted them out. “Now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. 9:26). Look, look at the cross. There my sins have been borne, and have disappeared.

See then, as the fruit of the cross, how God can righteously and freely give us life, eternal life. My dear fellows, have you this life? The man who has it not is in a poor case. How frail is the life you have. Only this week some one told me of one of your comrades who died just a week ago. He felt ill; a little operation was performed, and in three days he was gone into eternity! That is number two this session. My dear friend, do not you think you had better be ready for eternity? Do you think you would be a worse man for being a Christian? Suppose you are going to be a doctor, do you think you would be a worse doctor for being a Christian?

But, says some one, I am going into a line of life where I cannot be a Christian. Well then, clear out of it; that is all I have to say. Why ensure your soul’s eternal damnation? If I cannot take Christ into the line I am going to take up, then I will clear out of it. The point is this, I have to go into eternity. You have eternity before you. How will you spend it? Where will you spend it? And with whom will you spend it? You may not know; I know what my eternity is going to be. It is to be an eternity with Christ. Thank God! I know that I have eternal life, and every Christian should know that, for “He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life; and shall not come into condemnation,” shall never be judged, “but is passed from death unto life,” says the Saviour.

Now how does this come to pass? The Lord tells us, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.” This hour began with His own ministry on earth, and is not finished; though He has finished the work of redemption, and is now at the right hand of God in glory. But who are the dead? All who have not heard and believed Him are dead. Those who have, live, for “the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.” Nothing could be simpler, nor more sure. “Verily, verily,” is a good foundation for faith to repose on. It is not often we get that in Scripture; but rarely did Jesus use those words. I conclude that the Lord so speaks to press us to listen to Him. Mighty indeed are the results of hearing the voice of the Son of God. “They that hear shall live.” Blessed is the man that has heard the voice of the Son of God. I know it. I believe there are some sitting here tonight, who can say, I have heard the voice of the Son of God speak to me in these students’ meetings. They were human lips through which it came, but it was His voice I heard, the voice of the Son of God. His word sank into my heart, and I am quickened.

It is important to notice the difference in the character of the two hours of which our Lord speaks here. During the first hour He quickens into life by His word: “For as the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself,” and beside this the Father “hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth.” There is the second hour, the hour of judgment. Do you suppose the patience of God will always last? Do you think the first hour is endless, and that the long-suffering of God with man’s sin is to be infinite and eternal? Make no mistake, the first hour is about to close. “The long-suffering of our Lord is salvation” (2 Peter 3:15); but the hour-glass is to be turned. When, God only knows; but the turning thereof will introduce judgment in place of grace. God is giving you now the opportunity of being saved. Hear what the Lord Jesus says: “These things I say, that ye might be saved” (John 5:34). Are you saved? Not yet! Do you not want to be saved? He wants you to be saved. How may you be saved? Only by Him. Will works do it? A dead man cannot work, and that is what you are. Works cannot do it. I know people think they can be saved by works. That is an egregious mistake!

I recollect the time when I was not converted. I began to think of my soul, and I thought I must do something. I used to set myself a hard Bible-task, which I thought was meritorious. I tried to master the prophecies of Isaiah; but I soon got tired of them. I was only a poor dead man, trying to work out a salvation I did not possess. I was dead when I began, and dead when I finished. Of course I failed; but God stepped in, and the Son of God spoke to me shortly after. Blessed be His name, I heard His voice. Have you heard it? Oh, my friend, hear it now. “The hour is coming, and now is.” That is the hour of grace. It is a long one, I admit. Take the figure of the hour-glass. The hour of God’s grace has been running on from the moment in which Christ then spoke. His death, resurrection, and ascension to glory have transpired, and still that hour has run on. But it is well-nigh spent, and our Lord says another “hour is coming,” and what will then take place? The hour-glass is turned, and what has been the hour of mercy and salvation becomes the hour of judgment. Do not you think that it is a great mercy that hour-glass is not yet turned, because you are not saved yet? When turned, the unbeliever will be found without salvation, and without the possibility of being saved. It might be turned tonight. In the meantime, thank God, it is not turned, and there is yet another opportunity for you and me to reach the Saviour, if we have not yet done so.

If you have not yet come to Him, who says in the tenth of John, “I am the door,” hear His voice now. You may be saved tonight if you will enter in. Christ says, I am the door. Come, He says, enter in by Me. It is Christ you must know. It is Christ you need. I believe many of you have a longing, and a desire for Christ. You have a longing desire for rest that the world cannot give. I will ask you a simple question, Has the world satisfied you? No. I find a man saying, “I am going to a ball tomorrow night, and to something else on Tuesday, and I would like something else on Wednesday — I must have a little fun.” A little will not do for me. I must have something that is perpetual; I must have something that is perennial; and what is that? The grace and love of Christ. That grace and love of Christ fill the heart with peace and joy. Perhaps you say, I thought it was a dull thing to be a Christian. That is a thorough mistake. The only really bright thing I know is to be a Christian. Everything connected with Christ is blessed and durable. Every earthly joy is transient. The world’s laughter is vanity, for “as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity” (Eccl. 7:6). That fire soon burns out, that is the meaning of it. The laughter of the fool is like the crackling of thorns under a pot, there is no durability about it. There is no durability in what you are engaged in. There is no durability in the pleasures of sin. They are only for a season, and you have to meet their consequences and pains in eternity; but the love of Christ fills the heart with joy in this world and forever. He saves you and lets you know that you are saved.

But you say, Is it not presumption to say that? How can it be presumption, if He does it? Suppose some one were to jump into the water and seize you when you were drowning, would you think it was presumption for you to say, you owed your life to the man who risked his own to save yours? The reason you are not sure of your salvation is, because you have been thinking you have something to do in regard to it. It will not do. You have not been brought to the point of seeing that you can do nothing whatever, and that you must rest alone on the love and work of Christ. Until I see I am hopelessly lost, I shall never give up my struggling. Let me illustrate my meaning. A man had fallen overboard. The harbor was deep, and there were no boats about. The man was drowning, for he could not swim, and the cry rang out for help. There was one man, a capital swimmer, near at hand, who had saved many from drowning, and he was called. “Jim, you are wanted, there is a man overboard.” When Jim came down to the spot, everybody thought he would jump in at once. Instead of that, he quietly looked at the

struggling man. There he was in the water, splashing, and using all his strength to keep afloat. The crowd eagerly cried to Jim, who held his peace. “Go in, man. It is a shame. That man will be drowned.”

The man went down, but he came up again, and when he came up the first time, he came up pretty strong. He could splash a good bit, and showed a good deal of strength. Again the crowd urged Jim; “Coward,” they called him; but Jim held his peace, and the man went down again. Then Jim took off his jacket and his boots. The man came up the second time, and still did a good deal of splashing and struggling. At last he flung up his hands, exhausted, and was about to sink again, when like an arrow Jim dashed to his side, put him on his shoulder, and brought him ashore, and saved him. He was then asked, “Why in the world did you not go in sooner?” His reply was simple: “Because he was too strong; if I had gone in at first, he would have dragged me down, and I should not have been able to drag him out.”

That is just the difficulty with many as to their souls. You are too strong. You have been doing too much. You think you must bring something, and you must do something. That is not it. You are without strength, a poor sinner, and must let Jesus save you. The gospel is very simple, and very blessed. Listen “When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6). It is all the work of Christ. There is no work on your, or my side. Salvation is by faith, and faith only, not by works. “Unto him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom. 4:5). It is the work of Christ, done for us, that meets the claims of God. Then comes the sweet word of the gospel, which convicts me as a lost, ruined, and undone sinner, and then I listen to Christ’s blessed voice, saying, “Come unto Me and I will give you rest” I listen and believe, and, as I believe, I pass from death unto life. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming. and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live.” You receive life, eternal life, from the Son of God. But there is a second hour coming, and a very solemn hour it is, for it is the hour of judgment. Will the Christian come into it? Never! The Christian will not be judged. “He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation (or judgment), but is passed from death unto life” (vs. 24). And why will not the Christian be judged. Because the Saviour has been judged for him; and, so the Lord says here, the man who believes in Me will not be judged, he shall not come into judgment.

Elsewhere we read, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). The second resurrection is unto judgment, but the first resurrection is unto life. Then the Lord will come for His own people, and rescue all those whose hearts have been yielded up to him, not merely in word, but in reality. Is there a link between your heart and the Saviour, who lives in glory? If so, He says, “He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” On the other hand, the man who does not believe the gospel is on his way to judgment. That is a poor outlook, a dark outlook. If you are a wise man, you will gladly say, Christ for me. Let others make their choice as they will, but Christ for me! is the language of my heart; and believing on Him, I hear Him say, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth in Me hath everlasting life” (John 6:47). That is most assuring. Not less so is that verse with a top and a bottom, but no middle: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). Which half of the verse are you in, the top or the bottom half? If the bottom, the wrath of God abides on you; if the top, you possess eternal life. Make sure of where you are.

Another Comforter, Born of Water and of the Spirit

It is of the last importance that we should understand that which the Lord Jesus brings before us in this Scripture with regard to the new birth. I do not deny that in other parts of scripture you hear about the new birth, because even in the Old Testament it is referred to, but in fullness of detail, and depth of expression, nothing can surpass that which we have here from the lips of the Saviour Himself. Added to this is the fact that His words are personally addressed to a man—better, I believe, than any man in this hall to night—if human goodness come into the question—but to the best man that the earth could produce the Lord says, “Ye must be born again.” The new birth is an absolute necessity, if man is to enter into known relationship with God.

Now, the way in which this truth is brought out in this chapter is very interesting. I do not say that the truth which the Lord brings out is that which, most of all, attracts the heart, or wins the affections, but what He unfolds here is of primary importance for our souls. If therefore we have not understood, if we have not comprehended, experienced or gone through what the Lord describes in this chapter, we may take it as an absolute certainty that we have not taken one solitary step Godward, Christward, or Heavenward. Well, you say, that is a very sweeping assertion. If it suffice to sweep away what is hollow, unreal, or false in any soul here, I shall thank God, and so will that soul likewise. “Ye must be born again,” is written over the gateway of God's kingdom—an absolute rule, with no exception.

The Lord had gone up to Jerusalem at the Passover. When there, many had believed in Him—apparently. “Many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did.” Then we read, “But Jesus did not commit himself unto them.” Why? “Because he knew all men.” He did not trust them. He “needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man.” Man, in the springs of his moral being, disliked and distrusted God. This, you will find in the third chapter, He reminds Nicodemus of, as He says, “We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.” Man will not have the witness of the Son of God. Concerning those who professed to believe in Him, how solemn is the record, “Jesus did not commit himself unto them.” The truth found in the end of the second chapter of John is this, Jesus says to man, I cannot trust you. In the third chapter all is reversed, and there He says, If you are going to be blessed, you must trust Me. That is an immense difference. Why did He not trust man? Because there was nothing in man to suit God. It is a humbling truth which we must all learn. There is nothing in man, as man, that will suit God, gratify His heart, or answer either to His claims, or His nature. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh”—it is not spirit. I know men do not like this doctrine, but, beloved friends, let me appeal to you. If you have never yet known, or passed through what the third of John teaches, bow now to the testimony of Scripture, bow to the solemn word of the Lord Jesus, and do not reject what He there so emphatically presses.

But you may say, Did not these people believe in His name? They did, but when? When they saw the glory of His Person? They did not see it. When they saw what He was, and who He was? Alas! they were blind. When they saw His miracles? Yes, and then thought much better of themselves for their faith. If you put a man on the bench, and demonstrate certain things which his eyes can see, and concerning which he is to give judgment, he immediately feels he is of importance. He can draw conclusions from the things before him perhaps honest and just conclusions—but that is not faith, it is reason. There are plenty of believers in the world today of the type spoken of in the second of John.

Theirs, however, is not divinely produced faith. It is merely mental credence of a fact, or a thing concerning which they have had ocular demonstration, and which they cannot deny. Faith after a divine sort is clearly defined by the Baptist, as he says, “He that hath received His testimony hath set to his seal that God is true” (John 3:33). Faith, then, is the soul's reception of a divine testimony.

When we come to chapter 3, we see that Nicodemus firmly believed in the miracles. He could not deny them—he could not gainsay them, and therefore he comes to Jesus with this confession, “Thou art a teacher come from God.” He comes up like a scholar to be taught, But there was what distinguished him from those of chapter 2; there was a need in his soul. He came to Jesus by night. It was at the risk of losing his reputation, which he would minimize by coming at night. True, but he came to Jesus, and that ensured blessing. Why by night? He did not want anybody to know that he had come to Jesus. There are many persons today exactly like that. They would like to come to Jesus, and get their need met, but at the same time, they would not like all the world to know it. Nicodemus knew perfectly well that the world would be in opposition to him if he confessed Jesus to be what He was—the Christ. John the Baptist had plainly declared that Jesus was the Messiah. This news had gone forth throughout the land, and Nicodemus ruler of the Jews, and man of importance though he was—knew full well that if he confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, he would have the whole nation against him. What matter? If all the world is against you, and you have the Lord Jesus, what matter? Suppose you have all the world with you and are without Him, you will sink to an eternal hell without Christ—you are opposed to the Son of God.

Nicodemus took the first step, and the right step, when that night he came to Jesus—impelled, no doubt, by desires to know something more about Him, desires that nothing but Christ could gratify. It was the expression of the inward craving of the heart, that man, unknown to himself, has after God. Why is man seeking after God? Because he has lost Him—he knows that. Wherever you find men trying to reach after God, it is only a confession—a tacit confession possibly—that they have lost God, they know Him not. Where will they find Him? They can only find Him, where, thank God, Nicodemus found Him, in the person of the Man who died on the cross for sinners. There only is the place where man can fully find God. You cannot so find Him, in creation. You there find His handiwork, not Himself. “The heavens declare the glory of God: and the firmament showeth His handiwork” (Psa. 19:1). But that is not Himself. You may have seen a fine piece of sculpture, and admired it greatly; and you have also been shown a magnificent picture, and you have, in your rapture, said, What a wonderful genius, what a hand that man has! Look at the skill of his chisel, and the power of his brush—what a wonderful man! Stop, I will tell you something about him. He is utterly selfish, beats his wife, and starves his children. Seeing his handiwork does not declare to you his nature—you do not learn his heart. If I turn to nature, and study creation, I see the “eternal power,” and almightiness of the Lord there, but that does not bring out His heart. No, you never get the heart of God brought fully out until you come to that which this scripture brings before us. Here you have the Son of the living God standing before a man dead in sins, and telling him that His Father has so loved a ruined guilty world as to give His Son to die for it. God is Love.

Nicodemus did not know that when he came up that night. He came as a scholar, desiring to be taught, but is little prepared for the first lesson he has to learn. He is met at once by the Lord with this statement, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nothing could be more solemn. Nicodemus understands Him not, and anything more absolutely stupid than his reply (vs. 4) can scarcely be conceived. But the Lord passes that over, and amplifies, and emphasizes the truth, saying, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” In verse 3, it is “he cannot see,” and in verse 5, “he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” None can see God's kingdom, and none enter it save they who are born again. There must be a nature suited to that kingdom. Unless a man possess that nature by new birth, he does not understand the things of God. That is why, if you talk to an unconverted, an unawakened man, about heavenly things, the subject is most irksome to him. Talk about religion, preachers, sermons, ordinances, ecclesiastical forms, or philanthropy generally, and he will very likely be either a capital listener, or a critic, but tell him of heavenly things, touch the soul, bring in the claims of God, press the guilt of man, and the necessity of this new birth, and it is at once a most irksome subject. He has neither eyes to see, nor ears to hear, unless, unknown to himself, there have first been a work of God's grace—a need created—in his heart.

Observe how the Lord opens this subject out. “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” The reason is then given. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh”—a most solemn truth with regard to what man is, as man. Everything partakes morally of its source. Flesh is flesh. Do with it what you will, it is flesh, and nothing but flesh. Educate it to the highest pitch, and it is flesh still, not spirit. Raise the flesh to the highest point you can, and what is it? Flesh, Saul of Tarsus went to the very summit, so to speak, of the tree of human excellence in religion, and what was he doing?—persecuting and slaying the saints of God. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” You may sublimate the flesh as you like, but you will never distil spirit out of it. “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” It partakes of its source; the nature of it is the same as its source.

Then Jesus turns to Nicodemus with immense force, saying, “Marvel not”—for He saw the blank look of amazement that possessed that man's face, dark as it was—and just as the Lord read his face, so does He read your heart, my friend—”Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” Would you enter that kingdom?—”you must be born again.” Would you have to do with God, and enter into His heavenly things?—”you must be born again.” This, beloved friends, is intensely solemn. There is another “must” I shall come to presently, where the Lord shows that if you and I are to be rescued from our lost condition, He must die. But the first thing is this, He gets at the soul. The plowshare of conviction was allowed to do its work in the conscience of Nicodemus that night, and I have no doubt he was absolutely staggered beneath the weight of the saying, “Ye must be born again.”

As Nicodemus answers, “How can these things be?” light would appear to be desired, if not already dawning on his soul. He is an anxious inquirer. It is a very happy thing when a man gives up all his learning, and all his knowledge, and takes the place of nothingness at the Saviour's feet. That is what Nicodemus does here, as he says, “How can these things be?” Now he is going to learn. Have you ever asked that question yet? Have you ever been troubled with the knowledge that “you must be born again,” and yet have not been able to answer in your soul honestly before God, that you have been born again? Have you ever quietly before God asked “How can these things be?”

The Lord's reply to Nicodemus is very suggestive. “Art thou the teacher of Israel, and knowest not these things?” He ought to have known them. This weighty truth of the new birth was in a sense not new. It was figuratively alluded to in Old Testament Scripture. What the Lord speaks of here was known before, because He says presently, “If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?” He had been speaking, up to this moment, of what he calls “earthly things,” that is to say, that the new birth was a necessity for every soul of man, even to enter God's kingdom in its earthly aspect, and sphere. The Old Testament spoke thus: “Fear not, O Jacob, My servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will

pour My Spirit upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring" (Isa. 44:2-3); "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God" (Ezek. 36:25-28). Here we have doubtless the new birth depicted, in moral effects that could not be without it, in connection with "water and the Spirit." If the figure had a doubtful meaning to any mind, the Lord's reference to such in John 3 as "earthly things" should dispel all such doubt. Observe that both these passages speak of the kingdom of God not yet come, but prophetically marked out as that which is to come. They both refer to the future day of Israel's blessing, when the kingdom of God will be manifested here upon the earth. Those verses are yet unfulfilled, and the Jew is now rightly looking forward to that day. What the Lord Jesus brings out in the chapter before us, however, is not to be waited for, because, if I might so say, the kingdom of God was there in the person of the Son of God that day. (See Matt. 12:28; Luke 17:21, margin). Man had not eyes to see it; but nevertheless the power of it, and every characteristic trait of its blessedness was there in His person. When set up, and we brought in to it, it can be said, "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." How perfectly displayed were all its principles in the Person of the blessed Saviour!

Let us now inquire, What does the Lord mean by being "born of water, and of the Spirit"? You will find, as we go through John's Gospel, that He constantly uses figures—figures that are perfectly familiar too—to express some weighty spiritual truth. He uses them as symbols of something unspeakably blessed in relation to the soul and God. In the fourth chapter, He uses the well, to which the poor woman of Samaria had come for water, as the figure of the Spirit of God indwelling the believer, and, in the seventh chapter, speaks of that same Spirit as "rivers of living water."

Many expositors have endeavored to extract baptism out of this expression of the Lord, but we must remember that baptism was not a Jewish rite. A man may be baptized, but does that give him new birth? We must be careful always to use Scripture in its right context, and not distort its figures, or symbolical language. Let us turn to other parts of the Word of God to learn the meaning of water.

Our Lord takes water in John 13 and washes the feet of the disciples, saying thereafter, "Ye are clean, but not all." Then in chapter 15, when Judas had gone out, He says, "Now ye are clean"—through the water that I washed your feet with? No. "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." Water, in Scripture, is always the Word of God applied by the Spirit. It brings God's thoughts to man, and morally judges all that is in him, withal purifying his heart. Again, in the nineteenth of John, out of the side of the dead Saviour, there comes "blood and water"—the blood for expiation, and the water for purification. Water carries the sense of moral cleansing, because man's nature is vile; whereas the truth is that what is needed for man is a nature suited to God. Therefore Jesus says, "born of water and of the Spirit," that is, there must be a new nature thus characterized morally—the water—and in its source—the Spirit. Water purifies that which already exists, whereas "that which is born of the Spirit" in its nature partakes of that of which it is born. It is a new nature imparted by the Spirit—a new, life which is really Christ in us. Morally the soul becomes a "partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4). I have no doubt, then, that the water, as a figure, is the Word of God, applied by the Holy Spirit to the soul. The Word carries with it the sense and conviction of my defilement, and need of purification, which, impossible as of the flesh, is only found through the end, under God's judgment, of all that it is, in the cross of Christ (hence the water flowed, as the blood, from His side in death) and by the communication of a new life and nature.

Turning now to Eph. 5:25, we read distinctly what water means: "Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." Again, James 1:18 undeniably attributes new birth to the word: "Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth." So also does the Apostle Peter: "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently; being born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever" (1 Peter 1:22-23). Nothing could be more conclusive to any mind subject to Holy Scripture.

We have therefore the word of God the instrumental means of the new birth; but not the Word of God alone, for the Word of God alone is inoperative, It must be conjoined with the living power and energy of the Holy Spirit. If I am born again, I am so by the Word, but also of the Spirit. It is God's sovereign grace reaching the soul by His own blessed Word and producing faith in it, the Holy Spirit to this end using the Word of the Lord. The result is a new life—a new nature characterized by its source. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Have I been born again? That is a question that every soul within these walls may well ask himself. Thank God, I know that I have been born again, and that is why I am so desirous that you should be also, because it is fundamental to the soul entering into relationship with God, without which there is none, and makes it capable of the enjoyment of God, and what is of Him. Put a man into heaven, if it were possible, without the nature thus received, and he would desire to get out of it as fast as he possibly could, because he would feel he was morally, utterly unsuited to the scene.

The Holy Spirit, then, is the mighty agent, and the Word of God is the instrument, which being received as the result of this divine action by faith in the soul, there is the imparting of this new nature. To again quote Peter's words, we are "made partakers of the divine nature." I quite admit that the possession of this new nature does not carry with it power. That will come in its due place in John 4, in connection with the Holy Spirit as a spring within the believer. But the point here is that there 6 imparted, by the Word and Spirit, a new life, a new nature, a new existence before God. "Born of God" is elsewhere the way St John speaks of it. Thus, in chapter 1 of his gospel we read, "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons (children) of God, even to them that believe on His name, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Then in his first epistle we read, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (ch. 5:1). Again, "Whosoever is born of God sinneth not" (vs. 18); and "whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world" (vs. 4). This I call the New Testament term, in its highest development, for this blessed truth—of which the primary elements have been before us—"born of God," which carries with it the thought of relationship.

Returning to our chapter, we now find the Lord speaking to Nicodemus words which should have revealed His divine glory to him, and unfolding the heavenly side of the truth. As yet all had been earthly. "We speak that we do know, and testify that We have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." Observe there is a great difference between this, and the end of chapter 2. There they believed the miracles, but did not receive the testimony. In the "We" of verse 11 we have the most absolute testimony to the Godhead of Christ. True, it is a Man who is speaking, but that Man had been with God, He

knew God, nay more; He was God, and He speaks as God. He knew all about everything; knew exactly what suited the heart, and nature of God, and He says, “We speak that We do know, and testify that We have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?” He is leading up to heavenly things, because His object was to win the heart of man for heaven. Then He passes on to tell us how this is effected. “No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.” Well, you say, I cannot understand that. I do not ask you to. Do you believe it? If you believe it, you have in your soul the sense of the glory of the person of Him who speaks here.

The Son of Man, as to His divine nature, was from heaven, and in His Person we have a revelation of heavenly things in all their freshness, as He, who, because of the glory of His Person, could be said (even when speaking to Nicodemus) to be in heaven, and was its glory, enjoyed them. He came out of that scene to a scene absolutely unlike it. For what? He came down to reveal the Father, and, while ever remaining in heaven in the essence of His divine nature, inseparable in His Person from the humanity with which He was clothed, He was found on earth in the form of a servant, in a nature which He will never leave, and in which He has undertaken man's cause, and gone to death to deliver him from eternally perishing. He came to fit you and me to enter that scene where He had ever been, and to make us companions with Himself for evermore. Precious Saviour!

How did He effect this? Listen—“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.” He brings out that if there be an inexorable necessity for this new birth because of man's condition, not less is it the necessity of God's own nature that sin shall receive its judgment if man is to enter the heavenly scenes of which He speaks. We not only have sins that must everlastingly debar us from His presence, but we possess a nature unsuited to God, and therefore the Lord brings out in verses 14 and 15 the truth of the cross, the necessity of His death to meet the claims of God in righteousness, and make a pathway for us into glory. How? Through His death for us on the tree? Look at these two “musts,” and put them together. “Ye must be born again,” “The Son of man must be lifted up.” The “must” of man in his need, is divinely and fully met by the “must” that flows from the heart of Christ in His blessed grace, and led Him to the cross. The Son of Man must be lifted up. All that the flesh was in man must meet its judgment. His sufferings for us were necessary. Did Nicodemus understand that? Do you? He knew well that deliverance came to the dying people, when bitten by the serpent, by simply, in faith, lifting their eyes to the brazen serpent on the pole. What has brought in death? Sin. And what do I see upon the cross? He who is Himself the Son of God, and the Son of Man, who knew no sin, made sin for us; and, in His death, sin in the flesh is condemned. As He dies, death is annulled, and my sins are blotted out. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” Is not that good news? Who does “whosoever” mean? Who does it not mean? That is the point.

But you might say, Who can the Son of Man be, that will die on the cross for a sinner like me? Jesus anticipates the query, as He passes from the necessity of His death for God's glory, in sin's necessary judgment, to the deep and ineffable love of the nature of God, saying, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” You have come back to the spring of all goodness. You reach up to the very source of all blessing. It is the heart of the living God, “for God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son.”

God is love, and His love has been shown in this wonderful way, that He gave His only begotten Son. And now, all of man set aside for God, and for faith in the cross, and God revealed, not only in the holy judgment of sin, but in His nature of love, there is not merely the new birth, but the life received in it takes its blessed form as eternal life; the one connected with the earthly things, and necessary in order to see or enter into the kingdom, the other found only in the testimony of the heavenly things that have come in by the cross, and known and enjoyed in the revelation of them.

It is when the soul sees this that the beautiful link that secures blessing is formed—the little link of faith, that which connects the soul with God. Have you ever weighed that 16th verse. It is very beautiful. There are two things that God does in the verse, and two things appear on man's side. They are these—God, loving and giving, and man, believing and having. How blessed! You say, That is very simple! But is it too simple for you? You will never get eternal life in any other way; God loving and giving, and man believing and having, is the divine way. What! get eternal life like that? Yes—for “the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6), and “he that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3).

Eternal life is something a great deal more than being saved from death and judgment. I believe most of us have limited the thought of eternal life to this, I shall go to heaven when I die. Eternal life is what we possess as life now, and soon as heavenly glory with Christ. If I think of eternal life, I think of the Father, and the Son—of those bygone ages of sweet unbroken communion between the Father and the Son, and I am told that if I believe on the Son, who died, and rose again, I get eternal life. Jesus as it were says, I am going to bring you into association with Myself in all the joys, and incomparable delight that I have known forever. I have come down to this scene to unfold it to you, and to clear away the barriers, and the hindrances. Rising from the dead, He has gone, as Man, again to the scene where He ever was, and the Holy Spirit has come down to put the believer in the enjoyment of eternal life. That is why the Spirit of God is called “truth” in John's First Epistle. “The Spirit is truth.” God is, but the truth is the absolute delineation and expression of something that is. You could not say that God is the Truth—He is true—but Christ is the Truth, the Truth about God and about man. In His death on the tree I learn the truth about my own ruin, and my own position, in relation to God—and my condition of distance from God, and, blessed be God, the absolute end thereof. When I look at Jesus now on the throne, there He is still the Truth, the truth as to my nearness to God. Christ is the measure of everything before God. On the cross He is the measure of my need, and distance from God; and now, on the throne, He is the truth as to my acceptance and nearness to God. Christ is the truth objectively, and the Holy Spirit is the truth subjectively, as making all good and true to the soul of the believer experimentally.

I do not think Nicodemus got the whole truth that night, but he went away with an arrow in his conscience. He comes up again in the seventh chapter, when he puts in a word for Jesus edgeways. Then again at the cross, he appears. There are three stages in his history. It is midnight with his soul in the third chapter of John, twilight in the seventh, and daylight in the nineteenth.

And now, as I close, let me ask, How does it stand with you? Is it midnight, twilight or daylight in your soul's history? Have you been “born of water, and of the Spirit?” Have you yet received eternal life by faith in the Son of God? If so you will gladly follow the Spirit's teaching yet before us in John's gospel.

(John 2:23,25; 3:1-21)

We have been glancing hitherto at the night scenes which are specially relative to the history of the Lord Jesus while here upon earth. In the treatment which He received at the hands of man we get the development of the real state of man's heart, and the absolute demonstration of the perfect moral ruin, by sin, of the first man. Completely away from God, and under the power of Satan, he is seen manifestly as an utterly lost sinner, needing redemption and new birth.

In the night scenes that will now pass before us we shall see either in type and shadow, or in plain doctrinal statement, how the sovereign grace of God comes in to meet the state we have described. And first of all we will ponder over the striking scene before us, in the verses I have read, where the truth of new birth by the Spirit of God is developed, for regeneration is the only antidote to man's ruin.

Every man who has been born into this world must be newborn, if he is to see or know the kingdom of God. For observe, the man who is only born once dies twice, but the man who is born twice will certainly

not die twice, and, thank God, he need not even die once.

It is very important to get hold of this truth in its simplicity, that man as man needs to be born again. There is an idea abroad today that because Jesus was a man, therefore somehow or other, in some peculiar unknown way, humanity has been raised, and that man as man — I mean sinful man — has been raised into nearness to God. Such a thought, I have no manner of hesitation in boldly affirming, is utterly false, and has no foundation whatever in Scripture. The incarnation of the Lord Jesus does not bring you and me, beloved friends, to God. It only proves how far away from God we were. And therefore I am prepared for the language in which the Lord declares to this interesting religious ruler that he "must be born again."

The history of this man who came to Jesus by night is very charming, because we see in it what I call progress in a man's soul. We do not all get into the light in a moment, by a jump as it were; as a rule we get on slowly. True, this was the beginning with Nicodemus, for wherever the Holy Spirit mentions Nicodemus, He records the fact that he came to Jesus by night. John 3 tells us of his so coming; the seventh chapter refers to him as "he that came to Jesus by night"; and the nineteenth chapter speaks of him as "Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night." And what did he do at the last? He came out boldly for Christ in broad daylight. I wonder whether you have done that or not? I wonder whether you have even taken the first step of coming to Christ secretly? If not, I urge you to take that step tonight.

You tell me rather disparagingly he came by night. Well, never mind, he came to Jesus, and that is more than you have done yet. There are three stages in his history. I call John 3 midnight, John 7 twilight, and John 19 daylight. It was darkest midnight in that man's soul when he came stealthily creeping to Jesus, hoping that nobody saw him; he was beginning to get a glimmer of light when he put a word in sideways for the Lord in John 7; but the death of Christ produced in Nicodemus what His life had never effected. When he saw that He was dead, he got the clear revelation of the truth of John 3, and his actions said in the face of the whole world, Think what you like, say what you like, do what you like, Christ is for me, and I am for Him: I identify myself with the Man you have cast out and crucified. He is on the side of Jesus boldly. God grant you may be there from this night forth, if never before.

But it is important to see, and that is the great point in this man's history, that man must have an entirely new nature in order to have to say to God at all. You will have to get an altogether different nature from that which you got from your mother as a child of Adam. Neither you nor I have a single thing in us, or about us, that will fit us for the presence of God. A good many years have rolled by between the second chapter of Luke's Gospel, which we have already pondered, and the second chapter of John. What has taken place? The blessed Savior has passed through infancy, childhood, youth, manhood. He has come out after years of perfection in private life in Nazareth, and having been baptized of John in the Jordan, the heavens are opened, and a voice is heard declaring, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And, forsooth, you doubt that He is the Son of God! I pity your folly, and your unbelief; you are blindly shutting your eyes to the most lovely object that God could put before those eyes, whether upon earth or in heaven. You are closing your eyes to God's beloved Son, and your ears to the heavenly testimony of God, when Jesus, having been baptized, and emerging from the water, is greeted with the salutation, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

We have already seen that on the Mount of Transfiguration, when Peter would have put Jesus on a level with Moses and Elias, and said, "Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias" (Luke 9:33), the Father's voice is again heard, saying, "This is My beloved Son: hear Him." He did not say "Hear Him" at the baptism of Jesus by John; He took it for granted, so to speak, that when He was proclaimed Son of God, everybody would listen to Him; but when Peter would put the Savior on the same level with the Lawgiver and the Reformer, the Father instantly steps in and sweeps Moses and Elias off the scene. Do not forget this. Moses is gone, for the law could not save you: Elijah's day is gone by, for reformation could not meet your case: and we are in the day of the Son of God, the day of the revelation of the Savior, and the Father's voice says, "Hear Him."

And did people hear Him, and did they believe on Him? Well, the end of John 2 tells us that many believed on His name, when they saw the miracles which He did. But what follows? "Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man, for He knew what was in man." Do you think there is any saving virtue in the faith that believes in miracles? Plenty of people nowadays try hard to get what they call evidences of Christianity. If you could fill this hall with what are called external evidences, I would not give a "thank you" for them. Why? Because they would not produce in my soul or yours or any man's, living faith in the Person of the Son of God. If I cannot trust Jesus for what He is, and for what God tells me about Him, I shall never trust Him because of the external evidences that people are so desirous of having. Do I not believe in miracles? Yes, I delight in the miracles of the Lord Jesus. But do those miracles lead the heart to trust Him? Not a bit. I trust Him because of the revelation God has given to my soul of what He is. And observe, the faith that is produced only by miracles seen by the natural eye, — that faith, the Lord says, I do not trust.

There is a great lesson, I think, for every person who hears me, and for every one throughout Christendom, in those words of the Lord Jesus in the last verses of John 2 He as it were says, "You believe in Me when you see My miracles: you do not trust Me for what I am, but because of My power to do: then, says the Lord, I do not trust you. He knew what was in man; He knew that man had got a nature which was irretrievably

ruined, — a nature in which there was evil that could not be eradicated — a nature which was of no value at all before God, and that there must be brought in something entirely new. And therefore in this third chapter of John the Lord passes on to tell of the way in which the soul gets this new nature, to tell of the new birth which all must pass through if they will see God's kingdom. It is of vast importance for the soul to see this, God cannot trust me. The voice of Jesus in John 2 says, I cannot trust you; and the same voice in John 3 says, You will have to trust Me. Can you say, "Ah, blessed Lord, I can trust Thee, and if I had a thousand souls I would trust Thee with them all"? Who would not trust in Him, the Son of the living God?

I said this morning to a young man, who had a doubt about Jesus being the Son of God: "How could you be the image of your father if you were not your father's son? And how could Jesus be the revelation of God, the image of God, if He were not God's own beloved Son?" And just let me say this in passing: if the Lord Jesus Christ be not God's Son, He is not worthy of the credence or the confidence of a single heart in this hall. And why? Because He said He was the Son of God, and if He were not, He has been guilty of falsehood, and therefore He was not a good man. Did He not say to the man whose eyes He had opened in John 9, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" And did He not also tell him, "Thou hast both seen Him, and He it is who talketh with thee"? The dear simple fellow fell down and said, "Lord, I believe, and he worshipped Him." You cannot do better, my friend, than follow his example; and if you have any doubts about the divinity of the Lord Jesus, may God dispel those unworthy doubts, and lead you to listen to the language and testimony of the Son who only knows the Father's heart, and nature, and who came from heaven to earth to reveal the Father's love, to make known the nature of Him, whose eternal Son He was, but who became also in time a man in lowly grace to meet the need of man, and that by His own death.

But first of all in this night scene Jesus brings out the solemn truth that man needs to be born again, and the way it comes out is very interesting. There is a little word connecting the second and third chapters of John's Gospel which does not appear in our ordinary English Bible. It says in the end of chaper 2 that "Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man; for He knew what was in man"; and then the third chapter really begins with, "But there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus." The Spirit of God, so to speak, says, I will bring before you the very nicest piece of humanity that the world can produce, a man who would be supposed to have claims to anything and everything, on the ground of his moral character, and religious activity. The very best specimen of a man that the earth can produce, as the expression of religiousness in the nature of man, comes now to the Savior, and becomes the means of bringing out the truth on this subject.

"Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews...came to Jesus by night"; and you may ask, What brought him? I have no doubt whatever that he was brought by the distinct sense in his own soul, that whatever he was, and whatever he possessed, he could not meet the claims of God; he desired to have something better than he had. He is a picture of thousands and tens of thousands of religious people today. Although they have a great amount of religion they are not satisfied, the heart is not happy, the conscience is not purged, they are not at rest: they would like to have something they do not possess, but they have not yet come boldly to Jesus. Well, Nicodemus came to Jesus, and he came by night. The reason why he came by night is, I think, pretty plain. He hoped nobody would see him, he did not wish anybody to know about it. And that is what generally takes place when a man — above all, a religious man — really comes to Jesus, and is born of God, in the end of his days. It is an immense mercy, surely, but still he does not like to let everybody think that he has been wrong all the bygone days of his history.

Now look here, my friend, if you have never yet been born of the Spirit of God, let nothing hinder you from coming now to Jesus. Let me urge you by all the joys of heaven, and by all the certainties of eternal damnation, if you die in your sins, to turn now to the Lord in uprightness and truth; for remember, "he that doeth truth cometh to the light." Nicodemus really came to the light though he came by a tunnel. He said to himself, I will get to the One who will give me light, but I will take care to let nobody know about it, for the very fact would be a tacit confession that I am not right. Well, beloved friends, it is infinitely better to find out and to own you are wrong, than to go on wrong without knowing it. I said to that young man today, "If I am wrong in my faith I will forever thank the man who will put me right." Do you not want to be put right? Do you not want the truth? Do you not want to know the Son of God, if as yet you know Him not? Surely!

Let me ask you, friend, Have you come to Jesus even as Nicodemus did? Perhaps not yet. Well, would not this very night be a good time to come to Him? Could you ever have a better time for coming to the Lord? At this very moment, where you sit, let your heart turn round to the blessed precious Savior, who died and rose again, and if you have never gone through in your soul's history what is described here, let it be this night. Unsaved man, unconverted man, unwashed, unpardoned man, it is high time you came to Jesus.

I trust some here are like Nicodemus, troubled, anxious, burdened. He had not got the truth, he felt that, and he came to Jesus to get it. He came like a scholar going to school. He believed that Jesus was a teacher come from God. He was of that class, of whom I spoke, who are convinced of things by their eyes, but that is not faith.

The Lord at once sees where he is: the darkness is no hindrance to Him. He reads your very heart. He knows the secrets of your inmost soul. He knows your deep need. He knows that you have eternity before you, and that you have the sins of a whole lifetime upon your guilty soul, if unsaved to this hour. He will tell you the truth, whether it be palatable or not. It was exceedingly unpalatable to Nicodemus I think I see the look of amazement on his face, as the Lord answered his first inquiry that night. He, so to speak, takes the place of a pupil, and recognizes the Lord as a divine teacher. He implies by his words, I believe you are a divine teacher, and I am quite willing to be a scholar, though I should not like anybody to know it. But the Lord immediately answers, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." I am persuaded the astonishment of Nicodemus was great to be told that he was not fit to enter the kingdom of God, and did not possess the capacity to understand divine things. But he did not, nor do you, nor I, save as the fruit of God's own sovereign grace working in our souls. Go to a man born blind, and describe to him the beauties of some lovely landscape in the country. Does he understand you? No, he is absolutely, by his very condition, unable to comprehend what you have been describing. He has never seen a mountain, or a river, or a wood; he can form no idea of a landscape. You may endeavor as much as you like to picture it to him, but he has not any adequate power to understand what is perfectly familiar to you. Man's sin has carried him into distance from God, and he has now a nature that cannot apprehend divine things. "There is none that understandeth" (Rom. 3:1).

This is Nicodemus's first lesson, and at once he says: "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" Most foolish, you might say, but the Lord does not rebuke him. He only makes it the occasion of patiently opening out the truth: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." What this meant Nicodemus did not understand. What it means, many, alas! nowadays do not understand. There are many who think it means

baptism. I am persuaded it means nothing of the kind. A man might be baptized, and live the life of a Christian professor, and at the end pass into hell forever.

Oh, but you say, there is the Spirit. Yes, if there be the work of the Holy Spirit, all well and good. But what is this being “born of water and of the Spirit”? There can be no manner of doubt as to the meaning of the Lord’s words. Water is the figure used frequently in Scripture for God’s Word. Do you not recollect in Ezekiel 36, to which the Lord alludes here, it is prophesied that when Israel is restored by-and-by, “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you” (vs. 25). Isaiah uses water likewise as a figure of the Word. “I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed” (Isa. 44:3).

Coming now to the pages of the New Testament, I find the Lord in John 13 washing the disciples’ feet, and then in John 15 we find Him saying to them, “Now ye are clean.” How? Through the water? No, but “through the word which I have spoken unto you” (vs. 3). In Epheisans 5 I read that “Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word” (vss. 25-26). The Apostle James says, “Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures” (James 1:18); and again St Peter says, “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever” (1 Pet. 1:23). It is the Word of God, in the living power of the Holy Spirit, that is ever and only the means of the new birth.

Now what the Lord presses upon Nicodemus here is that the new birth is an indispensable necessity for every soul of man ere he can see or enter into the kingdom of God, whether you look at it on its earthly side for the Jew, or its heavenly side for the Christian now. You say, But I have been baptized. Nevertheless you will go to the lake of fire, unless you are born again — “born of water, and of the Spirit,” as the Lord puts it here. Baptism is not new birth. I value baptism greatly; it is an integral part of the faith of my soul; but it will not convey to you or to me a new and vital principle of existence before God, and that is what we need. You and I need a new life and nature to put us in a state in which we can know and enjoy God.

It is the Word of God used by the Spirit of God that is the means of the new birth. I do not exclude faith; no doubt faith has its place. There is faith in the soul with regard to the Word; but you will find that souls are always born by the Word of God. The Lord adds immediately, as the proof of this necessity, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” Educate it, it is but educated flesh; make it religious, it is religious flesh; improve it, reform it, it is still flesh. Another has well said, “You may sublimate the flesh as you like, you will never distil spirit out of it.” Why? Because “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” It partakes of the nature of its source.

From the Lord’s words which immediately follow, we can gather the perfect consternation that must have filled the heart of this Jewish ruler. “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” Let me press on you, with the greatest earnestness, that the Lord Jesus Christ says to you, and to me, as well as to Nicodemus, “Ye must be born again.” That is what I call an inexorable “must” — namely, the necessity of man’s nature as a ruined sinner before God, and the question raised by God for you is this — Have you been born again? There is another “must,” which we shall look at presently.

“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” This brings in a new life and nature altogether. You and I have been born according to the laws of natural generation; we are children of Adam; but we have in us the flesh. Will it ever do for God? It will not. We have a nature with all the faculties and capabilities necessary for man’s existence here on earth, but that does not fit us for relationship with God, because it is corrupted by the flesh. Hence man must have a new nature altogether; he must be born of water, and of the Spirit.

“The wind bloweth where it listeth.” God is sovereign, but He always uses the Word, and He can use a very feeble instrument to bring His Word to a soul. He may even use a dumb creature as an instrument of His grace, as in a case of which I know. You may think it a strange thing if I say that a cow was the means of a man’s conversion. An infidel was out walking one Sunday evening — and you know Sunday is always rather a dismal day for a man who is not a Christian — and was wishing the day was over. He went into his park, on the other side of which grazed his cow. The cow came across the park when she saw her master, to whom she was attached, and licked his hand, which was on the railing. He suddenly recollected a scripture which he had learned when a child: “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider” (Isa. 1:3). (Parents, teach your children the Scriptures.) As this scripture flashed upon his mind, the poor infidel exclaimed, “Upon my word, after all the Word of God is true; that beast knows me, and I do not know God.” And he was converted, thank God! Conversion is always by God’s Word, and He uses that Word as the means of blessing to souls, perhaps years and years after the Word has been heard.

More than a century ago there was a boy listening to a preacher in a church in the town of Dartmouth, about four miles distant from the spot where I was born in Devonshire. That boy became a man, and lived to a great age. He lived to be a hundred years old in the backwoods of America. One day, when he was still able to do a little work in the woods, he sat down, and began thinking. “This is my birthday,” he said to himself; “today I am a hundred years old,” and he turned back upon his past life. Back and back he went till he remembered when, as a boy of about seventeen, he sat in Dartmouth parish church and heard John Fletcher preach from this text: “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema-Maranatha” — cursed when He comes (1 Cor. 16:22). The preaching and the text came up in his mind after eighty-three years, and the old man said to himself, “I do not love the Lord Jesus Christ; I shall be lost.” He was a convicted sinner, and soon believed in the Lord, and was saved. That scripture, heard eighty-three years before, was the means of his conversion. Thank God!

Ah! my friend, God’s Word is quick and powerful, and He often sends strange parts of it to awaken a man, for “the wind bloweth where it listeth.” What do you suppose was the scripture used of God to my conversion? It was this: “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe and tremble” (James 2:19). That scripture was quoted to me thirty-five years ago, and I saw the truth, that I had no more real faith than a damned devil in hell. I am not ashamed to say that I saw my company, and fled. I was awakened, and said to myself, “I had better turn to God at once,” and I did, praised be His name. Oh! beloved friends, give heed to the Word of God, and if you have never yet turned to God, will you not turn to Him just now?

Nicodemus is now thoroughly aroused by what the Lord had said to him, and he exclaims, “How can these things be?” The Lord tells him that, as a teacher in Israel, he ought to have known what Ezekiel says in chapter 36, which we have already considered. And He adds: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that We do know, and testify that We have seen; and ye receive not Our witness.” Man does not care to believe God. You will frequently find people saying, “I cannot believe.” You cannot believe whom? Pick up a newspaper, and read of some

horrible crime, or accident, and you believe it every word. Take up Bradshaw, to consult his time-tables for a journey, and you trust him implicitly. But you take up God's Word which tells you that you are a lost sinner, and that God in love gave His Son for you, and you say, "I cannot believe it." Yours is a downright bad case. You cannot believe the God of truth! You can believe a man like yourself, but God, the living God, you say you cannot believe. What an insight this gives us of man's heart! The Lord says, "We speak that we do know." He knew God's requirements, and He knew man's necessities, but yet man did not believe.

Having spoken of earthly things, the Lord passes on to tell of heavenly things. He alone was qualified to speak of them. "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven." He alone knew what suits heaven, what God requires, and what God desires; and He came down from that scene of heavenly light to make all this known, and not only to make known God's requirements, but also to meet the need of man. How He meets that need He now unfolds. He was on earth, He had come down from heaven, and He was going up to heaven again; but, wondrous truth, He was in heaven at the very moment when He spoke to Nicodemus. He says, "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven." Only the Son of Man, who, as to His divine nature, was in heaven, could bear witness to what suited it, as having come from thence. To quote the words of another: "We have a revelation of heavenly things brought directly from heaven by Christ, and in His Person. He revealed them in all their freshness — a freshness which was found in Him, and which He, who was ever in heaven, enjoyed; He revealed them in the perfection of the Person of Him who made the glory of heaven, whose nature is the atmosphere which all those who are found there breathe, and by which they live; He, the object of the affections which animate this holy place from the Father Himself down to the last of the angels who fill heaven's courts with their praises, He is the center of all glory. Such is the Son of Man, He who came down to reveal the Father — truth and grace — but who divinely remained in heaven in the essence of His divine nature, in His Person inseparable from the humanity with which He was clothed! The deity which filled this humanity was inseparable in His Person from all the divine perfection, but He never ceased to be a man, really and truly a Man before God." ("Notes on the Gospel of John," by J. N. D., p. 37, Morrish, London.)

As He passes on to tell of the heavenly things, He again replies to Nicodemus's query, "How can a man be born again?" Jesus tells him, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" — that is, you must be born again, and I must die. Alone upon the ground of My death, and My passing under God's judgment, can you be brought to God. You want life, Nicodemus, but for you to get life I must take death. Observe the "as" and the "so" in that fourteenth verse. You know the story of the brazen serpent. Israel was bitten by the fiery serpents, and the people were perishing. The serpent on the pole was the figure of the creature that did all the mischief. What has wrought the mischief in regard to man? Sin. And what is the fruit of sin? Death. And the Lord, in applying this figure to Himself, unfolds to us the truth that He must die, and pass under judgment. His incarnation alone cannot bring blessing to lost sinners, though it is very blessed to look at it in itself. I must have His death. I can only feed upon Christ as the One who has died and risen again.

No doubt the Lord read the thoughts of Nicodemus's heart at that moment. Nicodemus might think, But where is the man who could die for me, and bear my judgment? The Lord answers that immediately: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Look at what we have here: the Son of Man in verse 14, and the Son of God in verse 16. God has emptied His heart, if I may say so, in giving His own beloved Son. His interest in man was so great, His love for man was so deep, that nothing less could express it. Satan in the Garden of Eden had told man, God is not good enough to give you the fruit of that tree; and what is God's answer here? My love to you is so great and deep that I will give My only Son, My well-beloved for you, "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

How simple and how full that sixteenth verse is! It has two sides: God's side, and man's side — God

loving, and giving; we believing, and having. How simple God's way of salvation is, and how precious the Person in whom it is all wrapped up! It has been well said that Christianity is not a set of dry dogmas, to which you have to give your assent, but divine truth wrapped up in the Person of a living man. The glories of His Person none can fully unfold, theyare simply unfathomable and inexpressible, but I love to sing —

"How wondrous the glories that meet In Jesus, and from His face shine. His love is eternal and sweet;'Tis human, 'tis also divine!His glory — not only God's Son — In manhood He had His full part — And the union of both joined in oneForms the fountain of love in His heart."

It was love, divine, precious, unspeakable love that led Him to die for us on that accursed tree, and, if you believe on Him, you have eternal life through His death. I say receive it, believe it. You may tell me you cannot understand it. No, but what I cannot understand I can believe, what I cannot fathom I can swim in, what I cannot comprehend I can enjoy. I know that God's Son has died for me, and I know that the source of all blessing is in His perfect love. It was a lunatic, it is said, who wrote these words —

"Could I with ink the ocean fill,Were every blade of grass a quill,Were the whole heaven of parchment made, And every man a scribe by trade;To write the love of God aboveWould drain the ocean dry,Nor could the scroll contain the whole,Though stretched from sky to sky."

Think of being loved by God after such a sort, and yet not believing it. Believe it now, my friend, and you will have everlasting life. But you tell me, I do not know for whom this everlasting life is. The answer is here: it is for "whosoever believeth in Him." Believing in Jesus, you shall not perish, but have everlasting life. You will be brought into everlasting blessing, in association with the Son of God. What you have to do is to trust Him, bow down your heart to Him, and then confess Him. That is the way of salvation. For it is added, "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved."

Nicodemus went away that night, and thought a good deal, I have no doubt, and after a while the Jews began to plot to take away the Lord's life, and then Nicodemus began to think, It is time for me to come

to the front a little, and show which side I am on.

The moment he does speak a little word, indirectly, on behalf of Jesus, how is he met? With scorn and derision. "Art thou also of Galilee?" say the Pharisees; "search and look; for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" (John 7:52). The speakers begin to think he is almost a pervert or convert. Ah, my friend, do not you be turned aside by the laughter of some person who knows less than yourself: do not let the sneer or the jeer of a worldling turn you aside from coming boldly out for the Savior.

Now that the truth is out, and the world has shown what it thinks of Jesus, do as Nicodemus did in John 19. In John 3 it was midnight darkness in his soul; in John 7 twilight marks his state; but in John 19 it is what I call daylight in his soul. The Son of Man was lifted up, and Nicodemus then understood the meaning of John 3:14, and therefore he comes forward boldly, with his hundred pounds of spices, and he says to the whole world: I believe in Him, the Son of God, and Son of Man; I accept Him, I trust in Him; He has died, and died for me, and I am His from this hour forth. Will you say that from this hour? Then you will be able to sing that hymn —

“The gospel of Thy graceMy stubborn heart has won;For God so loved the world,He gave His only Son,That ‘whosoever will believe, Shall everlasting life receive.”

God's Restoring Grace, Restorative Ministry

(John 21:1.25.)

We looked in our last chapter at the occasion when the Lord met Peter after He had risen from the dead. The record is very simple. And what we have had is only told us in Luke 24. When the two disciples from Emmaus entered the room, where the apostles and others of the Lord's disciples were gathered together, they were met by this assurance and confirmation of that which their own souls had witnessed and tasted, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." Where the interview took place, when, how, or in what circumstances, we are not told. God has been pleased to fling a veil over that remarkable scene, when a Master, inimitable in grace, restores the heart of His failing servant to Himself-a servant who had, in a moment of weakness, grieved that Master, and wounded His love as only love can be wounded; but we are sure that Peter's heart was thoroughly restored to the Lord.

Evidently a few days had rolled by between the scene recorded in Luke 24 and those described in John 21, because it says in this chapter, "This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead"(ver. 14). It is said to be the third time, but, historically, it is undoubtedly the seventh time. He was seen five times on the resurrection day, the Lord's Day. First of all by Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9; John 20:1-18), then by her Galilean friends (Matt. 28:1-10), then by Peter (Luke 24:34), then by the two that went to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-34), and then by the company who were in the room at Jerusalem, " the eleven, and them that were with them " (Luke 24:33; John 20:19), which of course takes the company out of merely an apostolic category. There were a good many of the disciples gathered together with the apostles on that interesting occasion, when Thomas was not with them. That was the fifth time. The next Lord's Day the Lord appeared again, and Thomas was then with them (John 20:26-29). And now we have come to the seventh time historically.

In the first of the three appearings recorded in John 20; 21, you have that which is specially connected with the Church. Closed doors, a company inside, and the Lord in the midst. In plain language, you get the commission of the assembly to be in this scene, like Him, and for Him.

The next week, when Thomas was with them, the Lord appeared again. There you have really the blessing of the Jew prefigured. Thomas would not believe till He saw the Lord. The Jews will not believe in Him till He is seen coming in glory by-and-by. Then the third scene (21:1-11) gives us pictorially the ingathering of the Gentiles. It is a figure of the millennial scene. Thus we have in these three scenes, the Church of God, the Jews, and the Gentiles.

This seventh appearing becomes the beautiful occasion of the Lord's restoring Peter publicly. Christ not only restores the heart that has slipped away privately to Himself, but, if that servant has had a place for Him, He restores him publicly.

Now you will remember that before the Lord was seen of the company of the disciples, the angel had by the women sent them these words, " Behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you " (Matt. 28:7). Hastening to carry their message, the women were met by the Lord Himself, who says to them, "Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me" (ver. 10). His disciples were to leave Jerusalem, the spot of ordered religion, and they were to go down to Galilee, a despised place, outside Judaea.

And now, in obedience to the Lord's command, they find themselves down in Galilee, and they also find themselves in old historical scenes, with the old boats, and the old nets (see Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11). And what are they doing there? They are waiting for their Lord to come, and while they are waiting for Him, see what they do. Friends, nothing tests us like waiting. The greatest test of the state of our hearts is time. Nothing tests us like time. Now what were these men doing? Waiting? No! Fishing! And Simon was the ringleader. They thought they would fill up the time. " I go a-fishing," says Simon. " We also go with thee," say the others. It is astonishing how one saint can lead others. It is a great thing to see the way in Scripture in which unconscious influence is described. We all of us affect each other, either for good or evil. You do not need to speak. I will tell you something far more powerful than your speech. It is your life. The spirit of a man is infinitely more important than his communications.

" I go a-fishing," carried the whole seven from shore to sea, but "that night they caught nothing" (ver. 3). In Mark 1:17, the Lord had said, "Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him." They had then turned their back on their boats and nets; they had left all to follow Jesus. Now, when the morning had come, the Lord stands on the shore (ver. 4), but they did not know Him. Why? Because, beloved friends, a very little bit of distance from Christ, a little working of the will, will render the sight so feeble that I do not know the Lord, even when He comes near me. They were but two hundred cubits from Christ. They were only one hundred yards from the shore, and yet they did not know who He was. I think that is why the Lord tells us the distance. Ah, my dear friends, if I am going to be useful to the Lord, I shall need to be nearer to Him than that. " I will instruct thee, and teach thee, in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye" (Psa. 32:8), is God's way of guidance. You could not see the turn of my eye at the end of the hall. You could see it if you were near me. " I will guide thee with mine eye" is a most touching way of the Lord's saying, Keep near me. However, John knows Him by His word.

Then Jesus saith unto them, " Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No" (ver. 5). All they gave Him was a cold, No! Oh, the coarse, rough, cold answer, that comes from a saint's lips sometimes. Yes, brethren, we get coarse away from Christ. Oh, you say, they did not know it was the Lord. That is no excuse. It was not even, No, Sir! This lack of courtesy does not affect Him, as He says: " Cast the net on the right

side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes" (ver. 6).

John immediately gets his eyes opened, and says: " It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea" (ver. 7). He made for the shore as fast as ever he could. He wanted to get near the Lord. He had once, when called (see Matt. 14. 28-32), stepped out on the water to meet the Lord. This time he does not wait for an invitation. He seems to say, " I know He would like to have me near Him." And in a minute he is near the Lord. If he had not been all right in his conscience, as well as in his affections, he would have kept away a little bit. This action shows me here that he was all right. All had been forgiven, and the Lord had spoken peace to his troubled heart. And now when he is alive to the fact that it was the Lord, he says, I will get near Him.

" And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes. As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread " (vers. 8, 9). I have no doubt that that fire of coals spoke to Peter's conscience, because it must have brought to his memory the fire of coals in the high priest's hall, when he denied the Lord. He was then warming himself by the world's fire, and of course he got his fingers burned. And, beloved, if you and I are hail-fellow-well-met with the world, there must come sorrow and distress.

And now the Lord bids them bring of the fish which they had caught, so " Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three; and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken " (ver. 11). I do not doubt, I may say in passing, that this is just a beautiful sort of figurative illustration of what will be in the millennial day. In Luke 5 the net broke. Here the net does not break. It is the perfection of all that Christ will bring in by-and-by.

And now, when they have brought the fish to land, the next word is, " Come and dine." The Lord prepared that which was necessary for the body, a figure surely of what He gives for the soul. He has the necessary food, and ministers just what we want. And look at the lovely invitation: " Come and dine! And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord " (ver. 12). Now why do you think the Spirit of God put that in? Because I believe every one of them was longing for an assurance that it really was their Lord. I cannot get away from Christ without there coming an indescribable effect on the soul. Things become misty in the soul's apprehension, and clear spiritual vision is lost.

" Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise " (ver. 13). He is the Master of the feast. He is the Host. With His own peculiar grace He makes them eat. He puts all His guests at perfect ease. When He gave a feast once before, that none might be missed over, He made His guests sit down in ranks of fifty on the green grass (Mark 6:39, 40), and the record is " there was much grass in the place" (John 6: 10). Christ's way of meeting the soul is always perfect in tenderness and careful consideration. There is nothing lacking in it.

When they had dined, the Lord deals with Peter. It was not when he was cold and hungry. He will feed and warm you first, if He have to correct you after. " Come and dine," He says to them. They were near a warm fire now, but they had been out in the cold all night, and doubtless were hungry and cold. The cure for hunger and cold, is food and warmth. That is the nature of divine ministry,-the ministry of love. Hence we read, " No man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as Christ the Church " (Eph. 5:29). We are nourished by food, and cherished by warmth. Both are in view by the Sea of Galilee.

Now if I have got away from the Lord, it is when He has got me back to His side, and I have known the restorative effect of His ministry that breaks the heart by its grace, it is then that He can ask me any question He likes, and the heart responds. And now all needed in Peter's case comes out.

" So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" Peter had boldly said long ago, " Though all shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended" (Matt. 26:33). He now answers, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I am attached to thee." It was quite true, and the Lord accepted it. The fruit of His blessed grace was perfectly clear to His eye, and " He saith unto him, Feed my lambs."

Then a second time, He said, " Simon, son of Jonas, tallest thou me?" You will observe the question is different in each case, and so is the commission. The first question is, "Lovest thou me more than these?" The next is, "Lovest thou me?" Do you love Me? Again Peter replies, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I am attached to thee." Then the Lord saith unto him, " Shepherd my sheep." He was going away, and He puts into Peter's care those that were dearest to Him. It shows the confidence of Christ in this now broken-down man. " He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? and he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep" (ver. 17).

Here you observe the Lord changes His query by changing the word which expresses love. In the first two questions He had said, . Peter, on each occasion, replies, . The Lord's word for " love " is that used for divine love, which never fails; Peter's, that which expresses brotherly affection-which often fails, as in his own case towards the Lord. On the third occasion the Lord comes down to Peter's word, and says, , i.e., Are you attached to Me? " Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Are you attached to me? " And now, as it were, he flings open the doors of his heart. He says, As I look back at what my path has been, others might well doubt, but " Thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." He, so to speak, opens the doors of his heart, that Christ may look down into the deep recesses of that heart. He acknowledges that it required divine penetration to discover that he, who had boasted of more love than any for Christ, had any love at all.

The other apostles might have thought he was a hypocrite. But he was not. Self-confidence was the root of his failure, and the Lord here reaches the root. He speaks not of his fault, but of what produced it, and He did not leave his conscience alone till Peter had really judged the root himself. Self-confidence in Simon Peter was completely broken, but in order to this God let him have such a fall that he never forgot it.

There is scarcely a verse in either of his epistles that has not an allusion to his fall, while " Kept by the power of God through faith " (1 Peter 1:5), seems to be his motto ever afterward. Go through his epistles, and you will find in nearly every verse a sort of allusion to this sad episode in his history. His self-confidence was utterly broken up, and in place of it there sprang up a simple confidence in Christ, a confidence that the Lord saw and delighted in. When Peter says, " Thou knowest all things," then Jesus replies, " Feed my sheep." He says, I am going away, Peter, but I will now put into your hands that which is most precious to my heart. Here the Lord shows His deep affection for, and confidence in Peter, as He says, " Feed my lambs-shepherd my sheep-feed my sheep." He was restored fully to the Lord, in every sense of

the word, and I judge also sweetly reinstated in the confidence of his brethren. I have no doubt that on the day when Peter denied the Lord, and ran away, there sprang up a feeling in the rest of the disciples' hearts, He has disgraced the whole company. I am afraid we are sometimes not a little hurt at the tumble of a brother, because we are disgraced. But have we the sense in our souls that it is the Lord who has been dishonored? That is far more important for us to feel. But the Lord here restores Peter fully, and he is then commissioned to care for those who are so dear to the heart of Christ, during His absence.

And now there is yet deeper grace on the Lord's part to His dear servant. Peter had had a wonderful chance of witnessing for Christ, but he had missed it. He had saved his life at the expense of denying the One he really loved. And now he might feel poignant sorrow at having missed that opportunity at a great crisis. The Lord seems to say to him, You had a chance before, Peter, but you lost it; I am going to give you another opportunity of witnessing for me, and more than that, you shall not turn aside. " Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me" (vers. 18, 19). He would give him an opportunity of again being a witness for Him, and this time His grace would sustain him. What he had failed to do by his own will, he was yet to do by the will of God. He had said he was ready to die for his Lord in his own strength. In a day to come he should die for his Lord, energized and sustained of God thereto.

Beloved, there is nothing like the grace of Christ. Get your hearts strengthened in the unfailing grace of Christ. Indeed, " it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace" (Heb. 13:9). Well might Paul say to his son in the faith, " Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus " (2 Tim. 2:1). There is nothing so blessed as the grace of Christ. And although we may have often grieved that grace, thank God the grace is there still.

It is important to notice that these words of the Lord to Peter were spoken in the presence of his brethren. He was restored publicly. Whatever they may have thought about him, it was manifest that the Lord thought a great deal of him. We are slow-too slow-to trust a saint who has fallen. Not so Christ. If a servant fall, we 'say, I can never trust him again. " Never trust a horse with broken knees" is an old saying in the world, and ofttimes saints act on it with a failing brother. Why? Because we have so little of the sense, in our own souls, of what grace is. On the other hand, God cannot trust us till we are broken.

If you study Peter's history, you will see that the breaking of that man was the making of him. God has to bring many a saint down to the very gutter, to break the springs of self-confidence that are there, for He will have reality, and always exposes the reverse, sooner or later. Then He lifts them up, and carries them on, and makes them the vessels of His grace as they never were before.

This charming scene concludes by the Lord saying to Peter, " Follow me " (ver. 20). Precious words of gracious encouragement! " Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me " (vers. 20-22). John was doing what Peter was told to do. The

latter, curious as to his companion's future, inquires, " Lord, and what shall this man do?" How apt we are to be heedless of our own command, and be occupied with that of others-their service and their ways. You had better leave your brother alone, was the Lord's rejoinder. " Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me." Follow Me, and let your brother alone, says Christ. I believe it is a great principle. That is the last word He said to this dear man in the Gospels.

The Lord help us each one to get the sense of the immensity of the grace of Christ. And if there is a fallen brother, may we have grace to help him. And then if the Lord pick up and restore that soul, He can make him a most useful vessel. One cannot but be struck with how remarkably Peter ranks in the Acts of the Apostles. As a servant he was really sustained by grace. The bitter, terrible fall that he had was the means of making him follow quietly and simply after the Lord. May we know what it is to keep near Him, because if we follow Him we are safe.

And let me, in conclusion, quote to you young Christians a few words of this beloved and restored servant: " Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear " (I Pet.1:13-17).

The day that I fall is always the day that I cease to fear to fall. As long as I am fearing I never shall fall. May the Lord keep each one of us, with fear in our hearts, and following Him simply, for His name's sake.

O Lord, Thy love's unbounded,So sweet, so full, so free:

My soul is all transported

Whene'er I think on Thee!

Yet, Lord, alas, what weakness

Within myself I find;

No infant's changing pleasure

Is like my wandering mind.

And yet Thy love's unchanging,

And doth recall my heart

To joy in all its brightness,

The peace its beams impart.

Yet sure, if in Thy presence

My soul still constant were,Mine eye would, more familiar,

Its brighter glories bear.

And thus Thy deep perfections

Much better should I know,

And with adoring fervor

In this Thy nature grow.

Still sweet 'tis to discover,

If clouds have dimmed my sight,

When passed, Eternal Lover,

Towards me, as e'er, Thou'rt bright.

O guard my soul, then, Jesus,

Abiding still with Thee;

And if I wander, teach me

Soon back to Thee to flee.

That all Thy gracious favor

May to my soul be known,

And, versed in this Thy goodness,

My hopes Thyself shalt crown.

Another Comforter, Receive Ye the Holy Ghost; of, Life More Abundantly

(John 20:19-23.)

The expression in the twenty-second verse, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost,” is that to which I desire, with the Lord's help, specially to turn your attention this evening. I am persuaded, that no right, or adequate conception of the meaning of the Lord's words can be gained, unless there be a careful review of the surroundings of the scene in which this statement occurs. It is perfectly manifest that we have not, in this chapter, reached the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down. It is quite clear that we do not reach that until fifty days have elapsed after the scene brought before us in the twentieth of John, nevertheless, the Saviour says here to His loved ones, as He breathes on them, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost.” What does He mean?

Now, if we turn back to the previous chapter, we have the most stupendous fact recorded that the world has ever known, and recorded in a very remarkable way by the Spirit of God, namely, the marvelous fact of the death of the Lord Jesus. That death is of unspeakable importance to every soul of man. God has been careful to tell us about the death of His Son, with many details, four times over. Every gospel contains an account of it, each perfect, each having special details, but all combining to tell the wonderful truth that the Son of God has died, and died for man. His death, I repeat, with all its details, is recorded four times, whereas His birth is only given to us twice.

You may not be very clear about all that is wrapped up in the wonderful truth of the incarnation, which is beyond any creature's finite grasp, but you must know the meaning, and the value, of the death of the Saviour, if you are going to be saved. Little does it matter what you know about creation, although “through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things that do appear” (Heb. 11:3), and this puts God into His place, and us into ours; but it is of vital importance to understand what is taught by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In John's gospel, Jesus is presented as the Divine Word—the Son of the Father. It is the personal and intrinsic glory that is His, and has ever been His, as Son of God, that is brought forth in this gospel. You have therefore, no genealogy, and no allusion to His birth. How could you have these in a gospel that presents the Eternal One—the Christ—coming down to men, and walking among men for their blessing? You could not have His genealogy, and birth into this world, in a gospel like John's, which tells of the Eternal Son of God having come into this scene to manifest God, and the Father, and that eternal life might be known in its true, full character, and be given to those who had it not. But then, as we have seen, if we are to have any part in it, He must die. Man is dead in sin; man is carried into distance from God by sin, and nothing but the death, sacrificially, of Him who is here presented as the Eternal One, can bring the soul to God.

In the twelfth chapter of this same gospel, where, you will recollect, on the occasion of the approaching passover feast, some Gentiles came and said to Philip, “Sir, we would see Jesus,” the Lord, when He hears of it, immediately says, “The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (12:23, 24). He was this corn of wheat, the solitary, unique, peculiar, self-existing One, become man—a holy, perfect, sinless man. He was alone in all this; every other man was sinful, therefore, you see, that incarnation in no way whatever, links Christ with man, in the state in which he now is, nor gives man any link with Him. I am well aware that the doctrine is widely held, and taught, that, because of the

incarnation of the Eternal Son of God, that therefore, in some occult way, man has been raised out of his ruin and brought into union with the Son of God. Such, I am bold to say, is utterly false, and not of God. Do you not see what this would mean? If He unites Himself to us, in our fallen state, He is brought down to our level. Now what is the truth? There is no union with Christ till He is risen. It is to the risen, ascended Man in glory, that the believer is now united. Union with Christ is not by incarnation, but consequent upon His death and resurrection, and even then not by faith, but by the Holy Spirit. It is not by the Son of God coming down, and uniting Himself to man, in ruin, and wretchedness, and guilt down here. Nay! His own words show that this last was impossible, for “except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”

Let us look at some of the fruit which that corn of wheat, having died, has now produced. Blessed be God, He did die. He went down into death in all its terribleness, and overcame it. He went, in love and grace, to the cross, and there took up, before God, the whole question of man's sins, transgressions, and guilt; and not that only, but He there identified Himself with that, which was the condition, and state of the first man, and sustained all the judgment due to him from God. Blessed be His name. He not only bore my sins, but I know that there, in His death, He ended for me all that I am, as a child of Adam. That is what faith clearly sees. The judgment of God—the due of man—was laid upon Him. Man, but for Christ's atoning work, must sink forever in the depths of an eternal hell, and could never rise out of the judgment of God.

What a joy is it to turn the eye to the One, who, in deepest love, and self-sacrifice, has borne the dark, indescribable, overwhelming judgment of God, and thus settled for God, and for faith, every question of my sins, and my sin also. But He has borne that judgment, and come up out of it—the last Adam—the quickening One. On the cross He sustained the unsparing judgment of God, and you may depend upon it, if when Christ was made sin for us, He was not spared, you, I repeat, may be certain, that you will not be spared in the day of God's judgment, if you are found in your sins then. The blessed truth of the Gospel is this, that “God spared not His own Son” that He might spare us, “For He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21). Because He has suffered in the darkness, we are brought into the light; and because He knew what it was to be forsaken of God, on our account, therefore, the believer in the One who is alive from the dead, knows the complete and full acceptance, which it is the delight and joy of the heart of God, to accord to those who trust in His Son.

Now we read in John 19 “It is finished!” What is finished? I cannot tell you all that those wondrous words contain. Can you tell me what is not finished? You cannot. All God's claims of outraged holiness and broken law have been met by the death of Jesus, and all the exigency of man's condition, that he might be before God, also met by the judgment of the cross. Yes! God has been glorified, Satan has been defeated, and man is delivered absolutely by that death. “It is finished.” Blessed words! Wonderful words! glorious words for anxious souls! glorious words for sinners. “It is finished.” Have you been laboring to do something for your own salvation? You are too late. All has been done already. All has been perfectly finished by Jesus, alone on that cross, and the answer of God has been expressed by His taking Him from the grave and putting Him in glory.

John's gospel presents the divine side of the cross. Here Jesus lays His life down, and takes it again. He is a Divine person. In the second chapter he says, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” In the tenth chapter the Lord again says, “I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and have power to take it again.” It is true that He was “raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father” (Rom. 6:4). It is equally true that He was “put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit” (1 Pet. 3:18); but forget not, for if you forget you deprive Him of a large portion of His glory, that He raised Himself from the dead, and “sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb. 1:8). What a Saviour! Listen to His words, “It is finished!” “Peace I leave with you.” Peace, made by the blood of His cross, is His dying legacy to every sin-sick soul, in this dark, benighted world; peace, the fruit of that work by which God has been glorified, sins borne, and put away, and redemption fully accomplished.

Let us now consider the chapter I have read. Here we find the Lord risen. The importance of this fact cannot be over-estimated. Resurrection is the backbone of the Gospel. There are some details connected with it, which I will touch on for a moment, because we find ourselves here in what I may call the region of loving souls. In this twentieth chapter we are among hearts that love Jesus. It is a choice atmosphere, that of a company of people who truly love Jesus. In the twentieth of John we are in such an atmosphere, and first of all, meet with that devoted woman, Mary Magdalene. She was a woman of wealth, no doubt, possibly a titled person—Mary of Magdala—but spite of all, under the power of Satan, until the Lord cast out “seven devils” from her. Her heart was thenceforth deeply attached to the Lord, and Luke tells us she ministered unto Him of her substance (ch. 8:2, 3). But He who was her deliverer and her Lord, is dead. Her heart is broken. The light has gone out of her life. She has nothing to live for now, and she goes to His sepulcher, early in the morning, long before the sun is up. Others follow later, but she is first, and all by herself. Impelled by her love she thus visits the sepulcher, and finds the stone gone, the tomb empty. Fear and trembling seize her, and she runs to tell Peter and John the sad news. “They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him.” She knew He was their Lord as well as hers, hence in verse two she says, “They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him.” When she comes, presently, to speak to the angels, she says, “They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him” (vs. 13). Oh! it is blessed when the heart speaks in that way!

Peter and John go out, and find that every word is true that Mary had told them. They come to the sepulcher, and, looking in, see “the linen clothes lie, and the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.” There is the absence of all evidence of disorder, untimely haste, or hurry. Matthew tells us of an earthquake, as the angel rolled away the stone. Do you suppose that act was to let the Saviour out? God forbid, a thousand times, the thought that the stone should be rolled away to let Jesus out. Oh no! What was it rolled away for then? To let you and me look in. He had risen, in calm majesty, long before that stone was rolled away. They had to gaze into an empty tomb, where the Saviour had lain, and we see what perfect order there was. It was as if He had taken a night's repose, had risen early in the morning, and had left everything perfectly orderly behind Him, in that vacant tomb. “And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.” Yes! He rose from the dead, a triumphant, victorious Saviour, and He left behind Him the tacit, yet eloquent proofs, of the victory that He had won, over sin, and Satan, and death. He left those evidences behind Him for the faith, and comfort of those, who care to gaze into His grave. That some hearts did care, is very evident.

When Peter and John had seen the evidences of the resurrection—for they “saw and believed”—they “went away again unto their own home.” They had a home. “But Mary stood without at the sepulcher weeping.” She had no home in a world, that had cast out her Lord. It was empty for her. The world was henceforth characterized, for her, by the sepulcher where they had laid Him, where she last had seen the body of her beloved Lord. It was no place for her, now that He was not there: the light had gone from her life. She was bereft and comfortless, and stood

weeping. She was deeply attached to Christ. Are you? God beheld in that woman a heart that beat very true to the person of His Son. Do you think He was an unobservant witness of those tears which fell so copiously? Did He look on that scene complacently, and without interest? I think not. I believe the Father watched it with deepest interest, and the Lord likewise. What was the result? Angelic comforters appeared. God sent them, we may be sure, of kindly purpose, and Mary, through her tears, saw “two angels in white, sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.”

Angels had been ministers to the blessed Saviour all the way along, and what joy they must have felt in going to the spot where He had lain, after accomplishing redemption, not for them, certainly, but for man. But though so interested, observe that no sound of praise, no notes of joy, or paeans of thankfulness, arise from these angels, and for the simplest reason. He did not die for angels. He died for sinners, hence angels could not fully appreciate a moment like this, nor raise a note of worship equal to the occasion. If I may so say, they were silenced, by the knowledge that they could not sing a suited song—the glad thrill of joy that an emancipated, saved, blood-washed sinner delights to raise. I think they must have been amazed that they did not hear this song of thankfulness then; but they have ofttimes heard it since, sung by those who have learned the truth of redemption. They saw only a weeping woman, and to her they addressed the words, “Woman, why weepest thou?” She simply replied, “They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.”

Now note what follows. Mary evidently had turned her back upon the angels, but that only shows how absorbed her heart was. I believe, that if you, or I saw two angels, we should have a good look at them. Her eyes are blind, however. Her heart is absorbed with Christ, and indifferent to them. The truth was this—the heart looking for Jesus can be satisfied with nothing but Jesus. She then turns herself back, and sees a man. She supposes this man to be the gardener, and she is not attracted by him, either, as he says, “Woman, why weepest thou?” But He goes a little deeper—”Whom seekest thou?” Blessed Lord! how He knows what the heart wants. “She supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.” Look! in the energy of her affection she offers to do that which her womanly weakness would not have permitted, and more than that, she gives no name. “If thou have borne him hence.” The reason is so simple. She thought everybody in the world was actuated by the same desire as herself, and thinking only of the same object; there was no need to give Him a name. You have a friend dangerously ill. You go to the door to inquire his state, and when it is opened, you do not mention his name. You simply ask, “How is he?” That is the way of affection.

Here it is the same with Mary. She thought that, necessarily, everyone was thinking of the One she was occupied with. And was not this grateful to the heart of Jesus? Sure am I that it was, for He is never far away from a heart so attached to His blessed Person, and therefore, in a moment, and by one word, He reveals Himself, as He says, in tones that she had often heard before—”Mary!” “She turned herself.” She had evidently turned away from Him, supposing that He was the gardener. Neither angelic nor human influences affect her. “She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni, which is to say, Master.” The shepherd's voice had been heard by the sheep. She knew the tones. The light was there. The darkness was gone, and she is just going, doubtless with deep reverence, to embrace Him, as the Galilean women, in the twenty-eighth of Matthew did, when He stops her with, “Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (vs. 17).

What is the special truth unfolded here? The Lord Jesus is here seen as the last Adam, the second Man. Mary had hitherto only thought of Him as her Lord, about to have an earthly place, and an earthly kingdom, and her heart was filled with hopes that He was now going to establish that kingdom, and rule in it as King. One can conceive, therefore, a pang of new sorrow entering her heart, as He says, “Touch me not.” I think I can understand Mary feeling, if not saying—Lord, I lost you before, and my heart was broken, and now that You have again come back from the dead, am I to lose You once more? He, as it were, says—No, Mary, you had Me once on earth, and lost Me, You shall have Me forever, now, in a new way, and in a new place, in an intimacy of relationship, that never could have been yours before.

This is involved in what He then adds, as He says, “Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.” He has taken up new ground. The true “corn of wheat” has risen from the dead, and is now about to bring forth much fruit. What is the fruit? Those whom He calls “my brethren,” and whom He can bring into full association with Himself, in the new place He has taken. He had never before spoken as He does now—”I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and to my God, and your God.” Up to the twelfth of John He speaks almost invariably of “my Father.” From the thirteenth to the Seventeenth chapters He speaks a great deal about “the Father,” to His disciples, in a certain sense, putting them on transitional ground, and paving the way for what comes out here. Now the full truth comes out. Death had closed the history of the first man, in the cross, where the second Man, the Lord from heaven, in grace, and substitution, died for him. He rose from the dead, and now there is the beginning of a new era. He is the Head of an entirely new race, as the second Adam—the last Adam, and now He delights to say, and loses no time in saying, to this devoted woman, whom He will accept as a fitted messenger to bear such wondrous news, “Go tell my brethren, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.” He, as it were, says to Mary, I had from all eternity, a place which was peculiarly My own. But I was alone there, and, in love, I have come down into this scene (alone in it too because of His very perfection as man), and have died, for those who were under sentence of death, and, on the ground of accomplished righteousness, I am enabled to carry back with Me, to that spot whence I came, those whom I call My brethren, and to associate them with Myself, in the place, to which (though not new to Me) I am going back, in a new way, as Man, alive from the dead. You go and tell My brethren, that the place, which was always Mine, in the enjoyment of the Father's love, of His favor, and of His presence, I am now going to bring them into with Me. My Father is their Father, and My God their God.

The disciples are to be brought into the position, and according to the relationships, of Jesus Himself, with God—and with the Father. He had accomplished a work that placed Him, as Man, before God, and the Father, in glory, and His own were redeemed according to His work, and set in the same glory, and in the same relationship as Himself. Never was there a message so marvelous, so precious, or so deeply fraught with spiritual blessing, committed to any living soul on earth, as that which this deeply devoted woman got that resurrection morning, and do not forget that it was her devotedness that won for her this unspeakably glorious commission.

But why may she not touch Him? He let the Galilean woman hold Him, as we are told in Matt. 28:9, where the point is the resumption, in another day, of His relationships, with a remnant of His earthly people, though on the ground of resurrection. Why, then, will He not let Mary touch Him? The truth is simple. Here He is going to heaven. He is in a heavenly condition, and the saint, of this dispensation, is in Him there, in that new place, and on new ground altogether. Not by sight, nor by touch, is He to be known thenceforth, and in order to know that, there must be what comes out presently. There must be life, according to the position, in which Jesus now was as risen, and about to ascend. This life was to be by the power of the Holy Spirit, who was, however, not yet come.

Mary carries her message to the brethren, who thereby are gathered together. In the nineteenth verse it says, “Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut, where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus, and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.” There is the fruit of His work. He sees of the travail of His soul, in measure. Alive from the dead, He comes into their midst, and the first word He speaks is, “Peace be unto you.” The Prince of Peace, He has made peace on the cross, by the blood of that cross. He rises from the dead, and becomes Himself the first witness of the peace that He has made. He goes amongst His loved ones, and how beautifully must these words, “Peace be unto you,” have fallen upon their ears, and troubled hearts, that evening. “And when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.” Happy gathering! And, oh! has not your heart been thus gladdened too, as you have seen the Lord? It is only as you see the Lord that you will be made glad.

And now you will find the truth in proper sequence. You have Christ's death, and the finishing of His work, in the nineteenth chapter; the resurrection, as a proof of the value of that work, in the beginning of the twentieth chapter; and now you have Him coming, and proclaiming peace to the disciples, in the upper room, and, as a result, immediately on seeing Him, they had it, and joy of heart follows. His death and resurrection, really apprehended by faith, invariably carry with them peace to the conscience, and joy to the heart. I get peace from His work, and joy from the knowledge of His person. Now see what follows. “Then said Jesus unto them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.” They were now to go out, as His commissioners, into the world, bearing the testimony of the peace He had first made their own. It is not, you observe here, an apostolic company. I know some will say, If they were not the apostles, who were they? They were the disciples generally, the brethren and sisters, the assembly of God in principle. If there were any doubt about this, the twenty-fourth chapter of Luke makes it clear. When the two disciples, one of whom, I think, was a woman, came back from Emmaus, where they had seen the Lord, they “found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon” (Luke 24:33, 34). The Holy Spirit is most careful, for a specific object, to show that it was not only an apostolic company, who were thus together this first evening. One of the apostles was not there.

Thomas was not present, as we are told (vs. 24). It was the general company of believers in the Lord, the assembly, that became, on the descent of the Holy Spirit, in Acts 2, the nucleus of the Church. It was Mary's message that really gathered them, and so gathered, what have they? Jesus in their midst, and, consequently, peace and joy. A happy company they were, I need not say, and now the Lord gives them a commission. It is a commission common to every child of God. In verse 21, Jesus says, “As my Father hath sent Me; even so send I you.” The Father had sent Him into the world, to be the expression of His own perfect love and grace to it. And now, He says, I am going out of the world, but I leave you behind, to live in it for Me, and to show Me forth.

How is this produced? Because, you see, the Christian has the life of Christ. What is a Christian? He is one who is born of the Spirit, and is now indwelt by the Spirit. He has his sins forgiven, and blotted out by the work of Christ. What he was, in the flesh, as a responsible child of Adam, has been ended on the cross. He is now in Christ, and Christ is his life. He is quickened with the very life of Christ. It is preeminently resurrection-life, and on the other side of sin, death, the judgment of God, and the power of Satan. It is life in victory! I can now better understand the meaning of what the Lord says in the tenth of John, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (vs. 10). I do not deny that the disciples had eternal life, as they walked with the Lord, here below, before the cross. Undoubtedly they had it objectively in Him who is the Eternal Life. Now they were to have it subjectively, and consciously in their souls, by the Holy Spirit. Thus the Christian has it now. I do not deny, that men, in Old Testament times, were quickened with the life of the Son of God, but they knew nothing about it—it was not revealed. All apprehension of the liberty and freedom of it, could not be, till redemption was accomplished, the veil rent, the Son of Man gone on high, and the Holy Spirit come down. Till then life was not known “abundantly.”

“And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.” There is another part of Scripture, that the spiritual mind instinctively turns to, in connection with a statement like that, and you will find it in the second chapter of the book of Genesis. There we are confronted with the record of Scripture as to the way in which man was started on his course in this world. You have the detailed history of the creation of the first man, the first Adam. We learn, in Genesis 1, that God had simply caused other creatures to be produced, as the result of the fiat of His word—the mere expression of His power. He had said, “Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so” (vs. 24). He had also said, “Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven” (vs. 21). Thus creation was furnished with the lower animals, by the simple expression of the word of God—the power of God. But when man was to be placed on the earth, over which he was to be lord, God goes into solemn counsel over his creation. “Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Gen. 1:26-27).

In chapter 2—where the Lord God comes into relationship with His creatures—fuller details are given. “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (vs. 7). God breathes the breath of life into his nostrils, and man is immediately a responsible creature. I know very well that there is a theory abroad that man has been developed from a lower organism. Such a theory is truly dishonoring to God, and equally dishonoring to man. Far be the thought. It is but the sophistry of the devil, using man's unregenerate heart to introduce a theory that will account for man's progress, and get rid of God altogether.

Let us turn from man's theories, and listen again to the inspired record of how man was formed. “The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.” That is why, in Scripture, man is called the son of God. Here you have the source of his immortality. Man, as the offspring of God, is immortal. Wicked man is immortal. Immortality is connected with the origin of man. Eternal life is that which can only come from, and be found in, the Lord Jesus Christ. I know perfectly well about another fatal, latter-day theory, called “the larger hope.” It is only infidelity, gilded infidelity if you like, but sheer infidelity, and an attempt to blot out the testimony of God, as to the immortality of man, and the eternity of the punishment of the wicked.

Any who have been led aside in this way, have failed to see the analogy between Genesis 2, and what the twentieth of John brings out. You have in one passage the perfect analogy of the other. In Genesis 2 you have the first man starting in life here below, where he was to be head and lord, but where he has failed, sinned, and fallen. In the twentieth of John you are introduced to another, the second Man—the last Adam—God's eternal Son, come into this scene, and become man. In His death, and grave, has closed, for God, and for faith, the history of the first man. The history of the first man ended in the cross of the Saviour, and now the ground is cleared, for the display of “the last Adam, a

quickening spirit," as the fifteenth of 1St Corinthians puts it. As risen from the dead, "he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost."

"He breathed on them" His own resurrection life, communicated by the Holy Spirit. Although symbolizing the gift of the Holy Spirit, He was not yet sent, for Jesus was not yet ascended on high, but He was communicated as the power of life by the risen Saviour. They live in the life of the risen Saviour. The divine life that had been communicated to them, by the action of the Holy Spirit, through the Word, as the new birth, now takes its full Christian character. The Holy Spirit is here viewed as life. It is as if the Lord had said, You have come to, and have Me, for your life. You are quickened with Me. You have life in association with Me. You are alive from the dead, in association with Me, in all that I am risen into, and are to possess it in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the unfolding of the true character, and position of the Christian, who is a man in Christ, through the energy, and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let me now ask you to turn to a scripture, which undoubtedly greatly elucidates the truth contained in this passage. It is in the epistle to the Romans, where you have detailed the way in which man is brought to God, in righteousness. There we read, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (8:1). Why no condemnation? Because the condemnation, due to the believer, has already been borne by Christ. It does not say, There is no condemnation for those whose sins are forgiven. It is careful to say this of "them which are in Christ Jesus." And where is Christ Jesus? On the other side of death, on the other side of condemnation; of the cross, and of the grave! Condemnation must reach Him before it can reach those who are in Him. Notice, it is with a victorious, triumphant Saviour we have to do. Then we read, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death. You have in this chapter the Spirit of God presented in two ways. Up to verse 11 The Holy Spirit, in the believer, is the Spirit of life, of liberty, of moral power in Christ. Thereafter—that is from verse 12 to verse 27—it is the energy of the Holy Spirit, personally indwelling the Christian, and, as a Divine person, acting in him. It is the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is our life. As the Apostle Paul elsewhere says, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). Again, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory" (Col. 2:4). What is the Christian's life? Christ. And where is Christ? He is in acceptance, and in favor. And where is the Christian? In the same acceptance, and in the same favor and relationship, because He says, "My Father and your Father, my God and your God." The point is this, Christ has taken this new place, as the risen Man, before God, and now He can bring those into that place, who belong to Him. And those who belong to Him are those who believe in Him. If you believe in Him, you belong to Him.

Again, turning to Romans 8, we read, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (vs. 3). I am not waiting for the judgment seat, by-and-by, to bring out sin in the flesh. No, God has already exposed, and condemned it, in the cross, and the believer is in the position of knowing, that instead of still being a child of Adam, responsible, and open to judgment, he has, by the death of the cross, met his judgment, and died out of the place, and state, to which he belonged; and Christ being risen, he is risen in Him. He, risen from among the dead, is therefore my life, and there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ. God has "condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness (the righteous requirement) of the law, might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

Hence it is a new life, a new character, a new order of things altogether! "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh,"—you cannot get anything out of flesh but flesh—"but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit." You may ask the meaning of this? It is the Spirit of God, acting characteristically as the spirit of life, and liberty, and moral power in Christ. Observe what follows: "For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded"—is what?—"life and peace." "The mind of the Spirit is life and peace." It is the normal Christian state, in which the one "in Christ," is set by the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." If I am "in the flesh" I cannot please God. You will find two things are in contrast here, namely, being "in the flesh" and "in the Spirit." I was "in the flesh" as a child of Adam. I am "in the Spirit" now, as being a believer, a child of God, and in Christ. Again, being "in Christ" is in contrast with being "in the flesh."

If I am not in Christ, then I am still "in the flesh," as to my state before God, but if I am "in Christ" I am "in the Spirit." It is not, mark you, at all a question of progress, or experience. It is the true Christian position, in which I am, as surely as I have received the Holy Spirit. Christ is in me, and I in Christ, therefore the mind of the Spirit is "life and peace." This the next verse fully states, "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (vs. 9). If you have the Spirit of Christ, you will delight in the things that are Christ's, and "if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness." Here it is the Spirit as life. It is a new life, a new position, a new place altogether, in which we are set now, as Christians, before God, and of which the Holy Spirit is the power. This chapter supposes you to have received the Holy Spirit. In the seventh chapter you have brought before you the man, who has not the Holy Spirit, and therefore groans in bondage. In the eighth of Romans you have the truth of being in Christ, as the new standing before God. While finding help thus in the two ways in which the Holy Spirit is presented to us in Romans 8 to illustrate the difference between John 20:22, and the gift of the Holy Spirit personally at Pentecost, it is important to observe, that though historically one was before the other, that is the Holy Spirit as the power of life, before He was given to dwell in us, yet now that Christ has actually ascended, and the Holy Spirit has been given, one cannot be without the other in our case.

There is only one word more I will add as regards the twentieth of John. The Lord follows up what we have been considering with "Whose soever sins ye remit they shall be remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." I know a great many Christians are troubled over this passage. There has been great warfare over the meaning of the verse, but I think it is as simple as daylight. Of course, I am well aware, that it has been thought to give ground for the figment of an apostolic succession, who shall have power to remit sins. Bear in mind again, that it is not an apostolic company to which the Lord is speaking. It is the general Christian company. It is not an apostolic company, and therefore, you see, such a thought is at once refuted by that statement. While Ritualists and Romanists have drawn out of this verse, that man has the power to forgive sins, Protestants, on the other hand, have been frightened at it, and have declined to admit the thought of men forgiving men in any shape or form. I believe the latter have erred on one side, as the former on the other. What then are we to learn from our Lord's words?

The Lord is going away, leaving a little company, that love Him, behind, and He says to them, You go on with My work, and whosesoever sins ye remit, they shall be remitted; and whosesoever sins ye retain, shall be retained, Fifty days after this, Peter, the beloved fisherman, had a wonderful haul of fish, on the day of Pentecost. Three thousand souls were converted in one day, and what did the hundred and twenty, who were that day baptized with the Holy Spirit into One Body (though the revelation of this came not yet, nor till Paul was raised up to bring it

out), and formed God's assembly on earth, do, as they were gathered in the Lord's name? They remitted their sins. They allowed these three thousand to join them, and take their place in the bosom of the assembly. They did not, of course, remit or forgive their sins eternally—that God only could do—but the three thousand, knowing they were forgiven, sought admission to the assembly, and by them were administratively forgiven. This forgiveness, be it observed, is only a matter of administration in Christ's name.

Again, in the eighth of the Acts, Philip was baptizing many already converted souls at Samaria. Peter and John came down, and prayed that they “might receive the Holy Ghost,” and when Simon the sorcerer, who professed conversion, saw that the Holy Spirit was given, through laying on of hands, he wanted to purchase this power, and offered them money. Peter said to him, however, “Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter.” His sins were retained on him. The assembly in Samaria refused to receive him.

The next case of this administrative forgiveness is that of the terrible persecutor, Saul of Tarsus, turned, in a moment, to the Lord, in Acts 9. Three days of deep exercise follow, and Ananias is sent by the Lord to him. He says to him, “Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way, as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.” What is the next scene? Saul stops certain days with the disciples, but afterward goes to Jerusalem, and wants to join the assembly, but the brethren are “all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple” (9:17,26-27). Hereon Barnabas takes him up, and brings him to the apostles. What next? “He was with them,” we read. What does the assembly do there? They remit his sins, they receive him into their midst, as a man pardoned of the Lord. It is only a matter of administration upon earth.

It is the responsibility of those who are Christ's to thus act for Christ, and observe, in the assembly, there ought not to be an unsaved person. In God's assembly are found only the saved. The Christian assembly is to be composed only of really saved persons—not a mixture of converted, and of unconverted people together. Further, those who walk unworthy of the Lord are bound to be put outside. In the fifth chapter of 1St Corinthians, we read of one whose ways were ungodly, and the saints were instructed by Paul to put him from amongst them, and they did so. What was that? It was simply the assembly doing what the Lord enjoins in John 20:23—the man's sins were retained on him. In the Second Epistle to the Corinthians we find, that this same man was utterly broken down, and the apostle advises them to forgive him. They then let him in again, and thus “remitted his sins.”

Many people have a little difficulty about this, but depend upon it, the wisdom of the Lord is manifest in this instruction; and it is an immense comfort to the soul to have the judgment of others about itself. It is the responsibility of the assembly—acting in the name of the Lord—to receive everyone who has received His forgiveness, and we ought to be able to recognize those who have been blessed of Him. I know people will say, You may be deceived. True, but the Lord can give us His mind, and will, if we are only humble, and wait on Him for it. I know a real sovereign when I hear the ring of it. So too can we learn the ring of a true soul. We may be deceived, but in the main we are not deceived. We are told to receive the brethren, not the unconverted. And what about the unconverted? Get them converted! For if you remain unconverted, my friend, you will be damned. If you go on, unconverted, there is nothing but eternal condemnation before you. Be sure of that. The storm of divine wrath overhanging this world, will soon burst, and the man who goes hence unconverted, is only going to meet judgment. You had far better go to Jesus, and be saved, and get forgiveness, and receive the Holy Spirit, and the Church of God will give you the right hand of fellowship, with the greatest joy.

The outcome of this twentieth chapter of John, then, is this—the Lord is a living man at the right hand of God now, and to that Man, alive from the dead, the believer is united, in life, and by the Holy Spirit, and the place of Christ, the privileges of Christ, and the position of Christ, are those of the Christian. Likewise the Holy Spirit has come down to make his abode in the believer, and to give him, experimentally in his heart, the knowledge of what he possesses, and of the place where he will soon see Jesus face to face.

Forty Days of Scripture, Resurrection Scenes: the Appearing in the Upper Room: The Lord Jesus' Forty Days

(John 20:19-25)

Of all the appearings of the Lord to His disciples in resurrection, there is none that eclipses the one that I read of tonight, in general interest, and likewise in the far-reaching character of the truth that is unfolded on that occasion. What a wonderful thing for the First-born from among the dead to appear in the midst of a company whom He owns as His “brethren.” Next to His birth, and His death and resurrection, I think I might say it was the most wonderful scene that ever happened on earth. Think of it for a moment. The First-born from among the dead, the First-born of many brethren, is seen in the midst of His brethren; but on no account would I call Him our Elder Brother. No! My soul shrinks from that expression; because, although, in His infinite grace, He calls us His brethren, it ill becomes us to call Him Brother. He is our Lord; I think the lesson of the next Lord’s Day may teach us that, when Thomas says to Him, “My Lord, and my God” (John 20:28).

Now I do not doubt that it was Mary Magdalene’s testimony, as has often been said, gathered the disciples together. They did not believe her, to begin with; but through the day evidently credence sprung up that Jesus was risen. In the evening, therefore, when it was dark, and I suppose nobody could see them, they came together. They learned on that resurrection day that Christianity, if they then understood at all what it was, was a thing altogether apart from the world. That is a great lesson to start with. And with doors shut “for fear of the Jews” and to shut out the world, we find them together. The Holy Spirit lets us know that what really filled their hearts was fear, but, thank God, it was not very long before the fear of man was cast out by the peace of God. When Jesus came in, it made all the difference. And it is true to this hour, when He comes in everything is altered.

Now the way that John presents the truth here, I need scarcely say, is most beautifully in keeping with the character of his Gospel. Luke records things that occurred this wonderful evening that John does not allude to. I do not want you to miss the meaning of each record. That is easily done by taking the statement God has been pleased to give us, by each evangelist, out of its place. Each is perfect in its place. In these addresses, however, I am not unfolding to you the particular character of each Gospel, but just seeking that we may see the whole situation from all its sides, as God has presented it.

God’s object in recording these scenes is to give us a deeper knowledge of the Christ whom you and I know. I do not say you all know Him. There are many believers today who do not seem to know Him. They would not deny His existence, His love or grace; but still I meet many a saint who is not at home with Christ. Their walk, ways, conversation, and whole manner of life show that they are at home in a different scene altogether. I believe the great point of these manifestations in resurrection is to impress upon our souls the blessed truth that an unchanged Christ is before our hearts. If you have traveled with Him through the gospels, you will have learned much of His character. I will ask you, Have you done it? I do not ask you, Have you read your Bible, but, Have you traveled with Christ through the gospels? Do you read them so as to put yourself in His company? You will never know Him otherwise; because the Spirit of God is not going to make revelations of Christ to you and me if we are lazy in perusing the record He has already given us of Him. I do not believe it for one single moment.

There is one thing God cannot do for us. God will not read the Bible for you, young brother. And God will not read your Bible for you, young sister. You will have to read it, and I shall have to read it, if we are going to learn Christ. Ah, you say to me, “But Christ is now in a new place.” I know. Christ is glorified. He is a Man in glory. As Man there in righteousness, He now shares with us all the blessedness of that place, and the Holy Spirit has come to dwell in us and carry our hearts to Him where He now is. But I believe the more I learn what Christ was as He passed through this scene the more the Spirit of God will give my heart to know Him where He now is. All that God has given us in these precious gospels, as well as the Acts and the epistles, is to make our hearts acquainted with Himself. If I want to know you, I must live with you. And if you want to know me you will have to live with me. And it is exactly the same with the Lord. We have to keep His company.

Let us now see what took place this first evening. There are three evangelists who record this appearing of the Lord. In the last chapter of Mark’s Gospel you have it simply referred to. There is no detail, and it is only Mark that tells us they had gathered together for an evening meal. “Afterward He appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen” (Mark 16:14). Mark tells that the Lord rebuked them because of unbelief. That is to say, what was natural to the heart had come out, and the Lord rebuked it. The great lesson is this, the Lord Jesus does not like unbelief. He likes faith. That is what I get out of Mark’s pen as regards this appearance.

There is a great deal more of the human side of things with Luke than with John. That is perfectly in keeping with his Gospel. You have the divine Person of the Son in John’s Gospel, and truth connected therewith. In Luke we read that when the two returned from Emmaus and entered the upper room, they “found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them” (Luke 24:33). That is an important verse, because immense ecclesiastical fabrics have been built in Christendom, with an utterly rotten foundation, namely, that this company was only apostolic.

The eleven were there most certainly; but the added word in Luke’s Gospel, “and them that were with them,” shows that it was the general company of the disciples. I am inclined to think it was a large company, though perhaps not more than “one hundred and twenty,” which is the number the Spirit of God tells us were gathered together for prayer in the first chapter of Acts. It was not, however, only an apostolic company, and that is a point of prime importance to bear in mind. That company had been gathered together from many parts, the disciples having heard, from Mary, the message sent to His brethren that morning by the risen Lord. Into their midst come the two from Emmaus with their news, and they are met by the testimony, “The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon” (Luke 24:34). It was manifest that Simon had seen Him, and had let the brethren know. But resurrection is a strange thing to the human mind; it is so out of the ordinary. Christ risen from the dead was a totally new thought to the disciples. To them Jesus was about to appear, in the same body in which He laid down His life, but now in a new condition altogether.

And now we read, “And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you” (Luke 24:36). That undoubtedly is the same apparition recorded in John 20:19. He comes into their midst, and the first word is, “Peace unto you.” Ah, brethren, what a blessed thing it is to have the sense in our souls that there is a new era inaugurated, an era of peace. The first note struck among the company that belongs to the risen Christ is, “Peace unto you.”

I daresay you have been struck with the way peace is spoken of in the New Testament. If not, notice the testimony with regard to the Lord before He was born? Just go back to the first of Luke for a moment. Zacharias, filled with the Holy Spirit, says, the effect of the visit of the dayspring from on high would be “to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:79). That is the great thought before the mind of the Spirit of God through the mouth of Zacharias. Light and peace were coming in Christ. When He was born, as recorded in Luke’s second chapter, you get, “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:13-14). What was specially connected with Christ was peace.

Then you know He was rejected, but, if you turn to the nineteenth chapter of Luke’s Gospel, you will see how the subject comes out again. When the Lord was on His way up to Jerusalem, yea, to death, we read, “And when He was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest” (Luke 19:37-38). In the second chapter it was “Peace on earth.” But that day has not come. The Lord has been rejected, and now the Spirit of God leads our souls to the spot where He is. “Peace in heaven.” And that is the truth for today.

What is the next thing? The death of Christ laid the righteous basis of eternal peace. That wonderful work of redemption having been accomplished by the blessed Lord, we read of His “having made peace through the blood of His cross” (Col. 1:20). Let me here ask you, Have you peace? My dear friend, you are not in the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of God is not in you, if that is not the case. Why? Because we read, “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 14:17). What marks the kingdom of God? The blessed rule of grace, love and goodness. “It is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” And if you have not peace, you are not in it. “Am I not then a Christian?” you ask. That is not for me to decide; I am only telling you where you are not. If you have not peace you are not in the atmosphere of resurrection. You have not touched what Christ came to effect and to proclaim.

He rises from the dead, and the very first word He says to the company is, “Peace unto you.” It is a reign of peace, for He is the Prince of Peace, hence we read, “He came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh” (Eph. 2:17). Again, Peter speaks of “preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (He is Lord of all)” (Acts 10:36). In Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection I see that sin is put away, the power of the enemy broken, the history of the first man ended, and death left behind, completely annulled. As connected with Him

risen we enter a new scene. It is the atmosphere of the Father's House. It is the holy sphere where the Son dwells. He says, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you" (John 14:27). What had filled His heart all through the pathway here? Peace. What is the first thing He says after He is risen from the dead? "Peace unto you." How do you get it? "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). Christ is it. On the cross He made it. Risen, He proclaims it. In faith you receive it, and in the power of the Holy Spirit you enjoy it. Not having yet received the Holy Spirit, the disciples at the outset did not enjoy peace that day, for we read, "But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit" (Luke 24:37). There are many believers, alas, today terrified and affrighted. Why so? They have not got Christ simply before them. "And He said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?" (Luke 24:38). The grace of the Lord here is excellent. Are you troubled in your mind? Listen to what He says. Have you any ground for it? Have you any occasion for it? "Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? "Ah, brethren, this is Christ's way with the troubled. We see others troubled, and perhaps say, "Poor souls," but leave them still in their misery, making no great effort to help them. In all this we are not much like Christ. No, He ever stoops to put a troubled person at peace.

Do you think the Lord wants a person with a troubled mind in His presence? Never. And if you get thoroughly into His presence, you will neither have troubles, nor will "thoughts arise in your heart." Ah, my dear brother and sister, there is the secret of all our troubles. Instead of being simple, childlike, and resting in the calm of His presence and the perfect exhibition of His love, what a tempest do "thoughts" often produce. But when you are in trouble, and have these thoughts, how Jesus loves to draw near and say, "Peace unto you." He brings in, I repeat, a reign of peace.

Now carefully notice what He said to His disciples. "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I myself." He invites them to be assured it is really Himself. Whenever you know His voice, and are sure that it is the Lord Himself that is dealing with you, depend upon it, your soul will get sweet peace too. "Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have" (Luke 24:39), is then His command. Not a word about His blood. Oh, no. That precious blood, that life-blood of His had been given in atonement. As we read, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17:11). Yes, His precious life's blood has flowed forth in death, the blood that cleanseth from all sin. That blood has glorified God. Well may the Spirit of God call it "the precious blood of Christ" (1 Pet 1:19), for, indeed, it is blood whose far-reaching value has no limit. For the believer it quenches the flames of the lake of fire and opens the doors of heaven. That blood brings us nigh to God. We cannot over-estimate the blood. Do not let us forget the untold value of the blood of Christ in this day, for the tendency all round about us is to make light of that blood. God forbid that you or I should fall into so grave an error, so deep a sin!

It was when the Lord Jesus was dead upon the cross that His precious blood flowed forth. It was the expression of sullen hate that led the Roman soldier to pierce His side; but the point of his spear brought out the precious blood of the blessed Son of God, which was the expression of His deep and wondrous love to us. That blood "speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Heb. 12:24), and it made peace. "A spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have," expresses the risen condition of the Lord. His blood He has given for us. The reason that His Church can, by the Holy Spirit, be united to Him in glory is, that He has given His life's blood for it, He has purchased and redeemed it, and everything is based upon His blood. Testimony to the blood runs, like a scarlet line, right through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. It begins with "the coats of skin" (Gen. 3:2) and closes with "the blood of the Lamb." There will be a renewed company in the millennial day who will fill the earth with praise, for they "have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14), just as we can now sing, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Rev. 1:5).

The call of the Lord on His disciples to handle Him was to convince them of the identity of His Person, that it was indeed just Himself, risen, and again in their midst. "And when He had thus spoken, He showed them His hands and His feet" (Luke 24:40). This is very touching. Here were the marks of the nails. Here in His side was the testimony of death. "And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, He said unto them, Have ye here any meat?" (Luke 24:42). The object before His mind was plain. Wonder and joy were mingled in their minds, and I can understand the mixed state of their hearts. They were thrilled with joy, while hampered with unbelief and wonder. His words, "Have ye here any meat?" made the reality of His presence absolute to them. "And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And He took it, and did eat before them" (Luke 24:41-42). All was now clear. Every mist of doubt rolled away as they saw Him eat.

It is very touching to notice the way God puts things in His Word. When the Lord was going to give them the most conclusive testimony as to the reality of His Person, He eats the broiled fish and honeycomb, which they had provided for themselves, to assure them it is really Himself. When you come to John 21, again there was broiled fish, but it was provided by Him to assure them that He cared for them. How rich and deep is the grace that ever provides that which will confirm our faith, and feed and sustain our souls.

Now why have we these details so specifically related to us? What does all this mean? It is the irrefragable proof that the Jesus of the gospels and the risen Jesus is the same. And though eighteen hundred years have rolled by, He is the same in His tender love, sympathy, and grace as He was that day. Oh, to know Him better. You will find Christians today with a good deal of doubt, and with many "thoughts" in their hearts. I do not think, beloved friends, that such Christians are marked by great joy. Do you find them with an inward spring of joy always bubbling up? I cannot say that I do. Christ is not well known, because His company is not cultivated. The joy of His presence not being coveted, the sense of His boundless love is not known.

Now, my dear friends, I need not say these things ought not so to be. May God give you and me, therefore, to live more in the sunshine of His presence. We should seek to be like the little girl that got the prize for her rose-tree. She lived in an alley — poor little cripple — but strange to say she got the prize.

Somebody was very much surprised, and came to see how it was. "Oh," said she, "I will tell you how it is. My room has three windows. I always put the rose-tree at that window in the morning which first gets the sun, and when the sun comes round, I put it in this window, and when it goes round to that window, I put it there. I always keep my rose-tree in the sun." Sensible child! My friend, you get into the sun of Jesus' presence and stay there. Keep in the sunshine of His love and grace, yes, keep yourself always in the sun. My young fellow-Christian, do not you be thinking of fruit, or leaves, or anything else. You think of Christ, all will come right then.

Let us turn now to John 20 again, and see what came out there. I do not doubt that God gives us there a picture of the Assembly on earth. We reach heaven in spirit, but as a matter of fact we are still on earth; God gives us there in a most beautiful way that which presents to us the Assembly as under the eye of God. It was the testimony of the truth that gathered them together. The Lord had said to Mary, "Go to my

brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God." She carried the message, and its effect was that they were gathered together. We read, "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you" (John 20:19). The disciples were gathered together, and observe, none but the disciples. There was not a Judas there, and Thomas also was not there. I think he missed the finest meeting of all by being absent. Do you know what kept Thomas away? I do not, but very little trifles often keep you and me from gathering together before the Lord. A very paltry thing will keep us away from a meeting. And that is often the time when the Spirit of God gives the most blessed view of Christ to the gathered ones. Thomas missed a grand opportunity. It is a lesson to you and me never to miss an opportunity of gathering with the saints of God if we have the opportunity.

The central truth of this first gathering is the glorious fact of their having Jesus in their midst. And that is just the Assembly. Perhaps some of you have not thought much about this. Where are you going next Lord's Day? I am going to hear so-and-so preach. Do you think that is what we have here? It bears no resemblance whatever to it. What I find here is this, a little company of those who were the Lord's gathered together, and the Lord Himself in their midst. Then He makes Himself known in a wonderful way. First of all He brings in peace, and then fills their hearts with joy. "And when He had so said, Hhe showed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord" (John 20:20). There we get the secret of joy. There are four great things in John 19 and 20. The death of Christ, which is the basis of all blessing; then His resurrection, which is the proof of His victory over the enemy; then the Lord in the midst of His own people, saying, "Peace unto you;" and then the next thing is joy. On His side were death and resurrection: on our side are peace and joy.

All this is hinted at in John 14-16. In John 14:27 He gives them peace. In John 15:11 He gives them joy. In John 16 He says, "A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me: and, Because I go to the Father" (John 16:16). Their joy no man was to take from them (John 16:22), and their peace was to be as abiding as Himself, for He says, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace" (John 16:33).

And now we further read, "Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). God expects us to be a peaceful company. If we go out in this world, we should have our "feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:15). And does not God also expect us to be joyful? Assuredly, "Rejoice in the Lord alway" (Phil. 4:4), is the Spirit's command, "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10). Show me a joyful Christian, and I will show you a vigorous, healthy one. But supposing I find a Christian that is an everlasting complainer, that person is not happy, and has not his feet shod with peace. Where, on the other hand, a saint is going on in the gladness of the Lord's love, there is a powerful testimony. There is nothing like abiding joy flowing from the knowledge of Christ, to affect those round about you.

And now observe the character of the commission the Lord gives His own. "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). Where had He come from? The Father's house — the very atmosphere of peace and joy. Ere He died He had said to His Father in His wonderful prayer: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth. As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:16-18).

How did the Father send Him into the world? To be the expression of all the love, grace, tender goodness, and holiness too, of which the Father Himself was the spring. "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you," are wonderful words indeed, and it is an immense thing for each believer in the Lord Jesus Christ to bear them in mind. Remember He spoke them not to an apostolic company, but to all His own. You say, "I am going to heaven." It is quite true. Did you ever get the truth in your soul that you have come from it? This truth comes out in Acts 10. There Peter saw a great sheet coming down from heaven, and it went up again to heaven. What Peter saw inside that sheet was very wonderful.

In that sheet were "all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air" (Acts 10:17). That is just a figure of what you and I have been. But, touched by God, and born of God, we have come from heaven, even as through infinite grace we are going there. I do not doubt it is all a question of association with Christ; Christ is there, and we are quickened with Christ, and then, by the Holy Spirit, united to Him. Nevertheless it is a wonderful thing for the Christian to discover, "as is the heavenly [Christ], such are they also that are heavenly [Christ's]. And as we have borne the image of the earthy [Adam], we shall also bear the image of the heavenly [Christ]" (1 Cor. 15:48-49). Hear it again. "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." Now do not you tell me that this is an apostolic charge. That is an easy way to avoid privilege as well as responsibility, and get away from the truth. Let us rather seek to get into the joy of our Lord's words. We come from heaven, and we are going to heaven. The Christian is a heavenly being. You most probably have heard the following story regarding the late Mr. J. N. Darby. A worldly Christian once said to him, "What is the harm of hunting?" "Let me ask you a question before I answer yours," said this venerable servant of God. "What would you think if you saw an angel on horseback in a hunting field?" "Oh, that would never do, an angel is a heavenly being," was the immediate reply. "Exactly so," said J. N. D., "that is what I am, and what every Christian is. He belongs to heaven."

This is a most important principle. It is not the question, Is this wrong, or is that wrong, but this — Is that the kind of thing that suits a heavenly person? On the other hand, it is not that you have to go round trumpeting that you are heavenly. Those who do so usually illustrate the proverb, "The legs of the lame are not equal" (Prov. 26:7). The person that is in the enjoyment of what is heavenly, always has the deepest sense in his soul of how little he practically expresses this truth. The nearer we are to the Lord, the less we are in our own eyes. But the further away from the Lord we are, the bigger we become in our own eyes. Let us not forget this, "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you."

"And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (John 20:22). Now what have you here? Of course it was not yet the day of Pentecost, so it could not be the Holy Spirit as a divine Person come to dwell in them. What was it then? Christ the risen Man was here taking His place as the second Man, the head of a new race. He was from heaven, and here He is the last Adam. God made the first man, Adam, "of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). That was for the earthly pathway here. Here is the last Adam, the second Man, alive from the dead. He had already told Mary to say to His brethren, "I ascend to My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God" (John 20:17), that is, He was going to share His place with them. And now, what does He do? He carries into effect what He had promised them in chapter 14: "Yet a little while, and the world seeth Me no more; but ye see Me; because I live, ye shall live also, At that day ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you" (John 14:19-20). He breathes His own triumphant risen life into them. It is the life of the risen Man, imparted, and to be enjoyed by the

Holy Spirit. As the second Man, the last Adam, He imparts His own life.

He is the Firstborn among many brethren, and they are one with Himself in His new place. It is all effected by the Holy Spirit. Here we get His breathing on them, and then the absolute gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. “Both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Heb. 2:11). But it is Christ Himself here associating His brethren with Himself, and communicating to them His own life and place before God as the risen Man. Hence we can understand the words “when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory” (Col. 3:4).

If you will now turn to Romans 8 for a moment, you will find that chapter gives us a great deal of instruction about the Spirit of God, which I would like to indicate to you. I have no doubt the truth that is taught by the Lord’s breathing on them and saying, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost,” is that which is unfolded in the first eleven verses of Romans 8 It is the Spirit as life. It is not yet the Spirit as power. This chapter gives you the two sides of the truth, with regard to the Spirit of God, the Spirit as life, and as power. It is the Spirit as life, nature, and moral power, in Christ, up to the eleventh verse, and then onward you have the Holy Spirit as a divine Person dwelling in the Christian, as power far the enjoyment of the new relationship with God, known as Father, and for all the pathway of holy life here below.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom. 8:1-6). Mark these last words. It is not the peace of the fifth chapter; that is, that sins are all forgiven and blotted out. But it is this, in the Holy Spirit we have life and peace. That which is true of us in Christ objectively is made true in you and me subjectively. He said when here, “I am the truth” (John 14:6). Why does it say elsewhere, “The Spirit is truth”? (John 5:6). Everything that belongs to me as a believer is true of me in Christ. That is the objective side of the subject. But the Spirit dwelling in the Christian makes it true in him experimentally, and Christ is really formed in him, and comes out of him in practical ways. Christ is my life, my peace, my joy, my redemption, my sanctification, yea, everything. Further, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus is our God and Father too, consequently, “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal. 4:6). There the Holy Spirit is seen as a divine Person dwelling in the believer.

But here the Lord breathes on them, for they are to have life in the Spirit. In the second of Acts the Holy Spirit comes down and dwells in them, and makes everything good in them. Fifty days had to elapse before these disciples knew that wondrous blessing. I do not know that fifty minutes must necessarily elapse in your case and mine, after really believing in Jesus, before we receive the Holy Spirit. This is clearly seen in the case of Cornelius (see Acts 10). The Spirit of God gives us to know what it is to be forgiven, and to know that Christ is our life; and that He comes and dwells in the one who believes. The Spirit is life in you, and the Spirit is power likewise.

We now come to a passage that has in my judgment been sadly misunderstood. On it Rome and some of her daughters have built monstrous claims as to forgiveness of sins for eternity being in the hands of the Church so called — really the clergy. On the other hand Protestants have shrunk from its plain and simple teaching, and utterly neglected its use. The Lord said on this occasion to His gathered people, “Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained” (John 20:23). Now, that carries you of course a little further than the twentieth of John as to actuality. I do not doubt this instruction is both individual and collective. He so to speak says, “I will leave you in this scene to act administratively for Me.” This, first of all, is connected with the testimony as to the forgiveness of sins which was to be preached in His name. I believe that not only those who heard the Lord speak were responsible, but that individually, you and I are equally responsible to carry to men the sweet knowledge of the forgiveness of sins. It is not a question of our remitting them for eternity. God alone can do that. It is this, we are in the scene where Christ is not, and knowing what He has accomplished, the evangelist is to go out, and every Christian should be such in heart, and proclaim the good tidings of forgiveness to men. Notice that this testimony is not put in the hand of preachers only. It was not a question of preachers that night. It was the Lord saying to the whole company, “Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.” When you know forgiveness yourself, you can speak of it as well as any other.

But there is more than that in, “And whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.” The Church — the Assembly as such — has the administration of this. Carefully notice that which happened in Acts 2.

Upon the one hundred and twenty disciples gathered together, the Holy Spirit came down on the day of Pentecost: Peter preached the same day, and said, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). What happened? Why, three thousand people received the word, were baptized, and then came to the hundred and twenty, and practically said, “We would like to take our place with you,” and they manifestly remitted their sins, that is, took them upon the ground that they were forgiven of God, and gave them the right hand of fellowship. In the fourth chapter we find there were five thousand. Here was a small company upon earth — the Church of God — born of the Spirit, washed in the blood of the Son of God, indwelt by the Spirit of God, and so baptized into one body. They knew forgiveness and enjoyed peace, and when three thousand came and said, “We would be with you,” they received them in the name of the Lord, they were brought in, and thus the Church of God was added to daily (Acts 2:47). Of the newly forgiven disciples we read that “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). They walked in unity, joy, and gladness, which describes to us what was fellowship in that day.

It appears to me that the instructions of the Lord here might be administered to an individual, through an individual, or collectively by the Assembly, who on the one hand could say, “Come in,” or on the other say, “No, we will not let you in.” Illustrations of this are found plentifully in the Acts of the Apostles. When you come to chapter 8, Philip doubtless thought he had got a great convert in Simon the sorcerer, and would have brought him in; but when Peter and John came down, they read his true state, as having neither part nor lot in the matter, and kept him out of the Assembly. The name of the Lord Jesus is the title for the simplest and lowliest that believes in His name, and seeks to walk worthy of it, to enter the assembly, gathered to His name, and that name is the warrant for keeping outside its precincts every one that is not really walking in godliness.

What we have had passing before us manifestly describes what was a wonderful moment for the disciples. It was a great thing when they could go home and say, “We have seen the Lord.” It is equally so for us. If we have seen the Lord, and got our hearts attached to Him, we shall be well fitted to pass through the scene for Him. And mark, it is that which lies open to every one of us. It is not a question of preaching.

It is this, you have come from heaven, for, as a child of God, you belong to heaven, and you are commissioned by your Lord in this scene to be here for Him, and to carry to others the sweet news of His love and grace. My brethren, may the good Lord help us to spread them as we pass through this scene. If you and I fail to walk with our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, you may depend upon it, we shall lose blessing for our own souls, and be of little use to others. The Lord teach us, and lead our hearts more to Himself.

Forty Days of Scripture, Resurrection Scenes: Mary Magdalene and Her Message: The Lord Jesus' Forty Days

(John 20:1-18; Acts 1:1-3)

The “Forty Days” which we are now to consider are the last of the series presented in Scripture. They are full of the actings and words of a Man risen from the dead, who has accomplished redemption, and is about to pass into the glory of God, and 1 should like to say a little tonight, and for some nights to come, of the manifestations of the Lord to His disciples during the forty days He was on the earth after His resurrection.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ was the precious and blessed evidence of the completeness of that atoning work which He had come to effect. He has passed into glory now, and that is where you and I know Him, but His various and many appearings on earth were necessary, in the ways of God, to attest the fact of His resurrection, and by “many infallible proofs” it was wonderfully proven. The position which the Lord took up during those forty days, that of a Man who had died out of this scene, and yet who was alive unto God here upon the earth, moving and speaking by the Holy Spirit, is the just expression of what Christianity is for you and me now. He was a Man alive from the dead upon the earth, and He spoke and acted in the Holy Spirit. And what is a Christian? A Christian is one who has died out of this scene, in the death of Christ, and yet now lives. As Paul says, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Gal. 2:20). But everything is by the Holy Spirit.

I quite admit that the day of the Holy Spirit did not come during those forty days when the Lord was here. He went on high, and after ten days had rolled by, the Spirit of God came down on the day of Pentecost. But what one sees here is this, a Man alive on the earth in the full power of the Holy Spirit. It is thus the Acts of the Apostles opens, when Luke says, “The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after that He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen” (Acts 1:1-2). Now Christianity takes pattern from Christ always, and I believe that here we have the pattern before us of what a Christian is. Christ was then a Man alive from the dead, walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, in relationship with God; and you and I, fellow-believer, are now privileged to enter into the same blessed and wonderful relationship, a divine position into which we are brought in virtue of our association with Christ.

One of the most blessed things about these “forty days” is this, that on the very day He rose from the dead, the Lord appears to one of His disciples, and brings out this most precious truth in a way that is absolutely charming to the soul that gets hold of it. To Mary Magdalene He said, “Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and to My God and your God” (John 9:17). This was the most wondrous message that ever came through mortal lips, and Mary uttered it that day. Never before could that have been said, but, redemption accomplished, the moment had arrived for bringing out the new and heavenly place into which those whom the Lord Jesus called His brethren, as associated with Himself, are introduced. They are to be now in relationship with God, known as the Father, in virtue of His death and resurrection.

In all these appearings of the Lord we get very blessed and precious truths presented to our souls. He loved to assure His own of His identity and His love, “To whom also He showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). The knowledge of the Father was to mark the sphere of which He Himself is the Center and Head, and He was bringing His disciples, in these resurrection scenes, into fresh touch with Himself, and connecting their hearts with Himself. These scenes, therefore, I need not say, will have a very peculiar interest to every heart that loves Him.

I wonder how many times He was seen after He rose? When the Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians to prove His resurrection and meet their Sadducean folly, he only cites five instances, though of course there were a great many more. I judge that we have eleven occasions given to us in the Scriptures where the Lord was seen on earth in resurrection. I will indicate them; although tonight I shall only speak of the first.

He appeared first to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9); then to her Galilean friends (Matt. 28:9); then to Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5); then to the two going to Emmaus (Luke 24:15); and last of all to a company in the upper room (John 20:19). Thomas was not there then. That gives five on the day of His resurrection. The next Lord’s Day He appeared again to the apostles when Thomas was with them (John 20:26). Later on He appeared to seven of them, down in Galilee (John 21:1). That was the seventh time. I know it was the seventh, because Scripture says it was the third. “That is a very curious thing,” you say. Well, it must have been the seventh, because He was seen five times on the first day, then again the next Lord’s Day, the sixth, and now this is the seventh. Then He appeared to the eleven disciples down in Galilee at the mountain side (Matt. 28:16, 17). That is the eighth. Then we are told He was “seen of above five hundred brethren at once” (1 Cor. 15:6). That was the ninth. Then He was seen of James (1 Cor. 15:7). That is the tenth. “Then of all the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:7). That was the time, I apprehend, when He led them out to Bethany, as recorded in Luke 24:50. That is the eleventh. There was also a twelfth, for Paul says, “And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time” (1 Cor. 15:8), but this was in glory. That is to say, the close carries you to the spot where Christ now is. These gracious appearings of the Lord to His disciples on the earth, carry with them very sweet and touching lessons for us. May we profit by their consideration.

Now, let us turn for a little to the history of the one to whom He appeared first. In the last chapter of Mark we read another, and rather different account of Mary Magdalene, from that given by John. “Now, when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven devils. And she went and told them that had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. And they, when they had heard that He was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not” (Mark 16:9-11). There you have very shortly told what were the facts with regard to Mary, and what was the effect of her testimony. She was not believed. Now there is something very solemn in that, if we bear in mind the message which the Lord gave her in John 20 Nothing could be more blessed than the message she carried. It is so

solemn to feel it was not believed. And it is not believed today. There are very few believing souls today that have the faith of the message that Mary Magdalene carried at that time.

We may here inquire the reason why the Lord Jesus appeared to her first. I believe it was because of her devoted affection to Him, for nothing is more sweet to Christ than that. It may have been ignorant affection, but it was deep. She never forgot what and where she was when Jesus first met her. Her heart had been the abode of seven devils. Their expulsion became the opportunity for her to enshrine Jesus therein, and when He was crucified her love had lost its all. You know that her name has been connected with Magdalene Institutions, from the supposition that a profligate early life of sin had been connected with the “seven devils” which Jesus cast out. There is no hint whatever of this in the evangelists. I think the whole thing is groundless and gratuitous assumption. There is nothing in Scripture stated of her beyond this fact, that she was possessed of seven devils. I know that she has been confounded with the woman in Luke 7, who is stated to have been a sinner, and who washed the Lord’s feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. We are not told who she was. But evidently she was not the Mary who anointed His head, as recorded in Matthew 26, Mark 14, and again in John 12. The house in which the woman wept over his feet, and anointed them too, in Luke 7, was that of Simon the Pharisee. Whereas we are told distinctly in John 12 that Mary of Bethany anointed the Lord in the house of Simon the leper.

Neither of these two women must be confounded with Mary Magdalene. Who, then, was Mary of Magdala? I conclude that she was a noble lady of means. In the eighth chapter of Luke you find what is very interesting regarding her. “And it came to pass afterward, that He went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with Him, and certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto Him of their substance” (Luke 8:1-3). Jesus had ministered to their spiritual wants, and they ministered to His bodily wants. They were, in plain language, devoted and attached to Him, and followed Him, as His blessed feet took Him into every hamlet telling out God’s glad tidings. What, then, marked Mary Magdalene was this, her deep-rooted and blessed attachment of heart to Christ. Cultivate this, beloved friends, for there is nothing can take its place. I believe the Lord cares more for that than anything else. You may tell me she was not intelligent. She was affectionate, which is far better. You may think that you are very intelligent. Possibly you are, but, after all, how little we all know. But I do not think that intelligence ranks very high with the Lord. It is not that I make light of it, but when there is affection there will be intelligence sooner or later, though the reverse is by no means assured. When we come to the twentieth chapter of John’s Gospel, we shall find that the most intelligent person on earth was Mary of Magdala. And I do not think anybody would dare say she was not the most affectionate.

Why does the Lord Jesus single her out for His first appearing? It was her affection put her in the place where the Lord could reveal Himself to her, as He does. She had been fully possessed by satanic power, but Jesus had cast the seven devils out, and from that hour the sense of the glory of her Deliverer, and the recollection of what she owed to Him who had delivered her, bound that dear woman’s heart to the Lord Jesus in a way that you and I might well emulate. God give us, every one, to have a little more of the love for Him personally, that marked this dear woman.

On the day of the passover Mary had seen her tenderly loved Deliverer ruthlessly slain. She had stood by His cross, along with her friends, “who also, when He was in Galilee, followed Him, and ministered unto Him” (Mark 15:40-41; John 19:25). Together they heard His last words, and then, having seen where He was laid (Mark 15:47), they returned to Jerusalem and “prepared spices and ointment” (Luke 23:55-56), “that they might come and anoint Him” (Mark 16:1). When the Sabbath was past, they went out, when it was yet dark, their only thought being that He was to be kept in death. Did Mary Magdalene go with the same thought? Most probably and therein lay her ignorance. Had she not, as well as others, heard that He was to rise again? I could scarcely say that. What she felt was this, that the world was, to her, completely empty. But indeed there was something emptier than the world. What was that? Her heart, without Christ. There was where the void was, and it completely isolated her. Consequently, although some of the Gospels would lead you to think she was in the company of other women, I have no doubt, from the twentieth of John, that her affection carried her out to the Lord’s sepulcher alone, early in the morning.

“The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulcher” (John 20:1). From what is told us in Matthew 28:1, it is quite possible that the others may have gone out with her, on what we call the Saturday evening, and carried with them the spices they had prepared to embalm Him. But before the daylight of the first day of the week came in this woman is there alone by herself. She does not care for company. And when she thus comes, she finds an empty tomb, and the stone rolled away from the sepulcher. Scripture says, “Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter.” Love made her heels fleet that day. And to whom does she run? Simon Peter. Why? You know there is a saying that, “A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind.” She knew the void in her own heart, and she knew also what had taken place with regard to Peter, and it made her feel — There is one at least who will understand, if the rest do not. So she “cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved.”

I have little doubt that was John. It is the way he speaks of himself all through his Gospel. And had the Lord a particular love for John? I do not doubt the ways of John pleased Him, but the point for you and me to learn is this, he speaks of himself not by his name, but as the one who knew that he was loved of the Lord. Can you tell me the disciple today whom Jesus loves? Ah, do not look round, please. I do not think you will see him if you look round. I tell you what it is, if you have not got the sense in your heart of being “the disciple whom Jesus loves,” you have not touched the kernel of Christianity yet, and you are out in the cold, instead of being in all the warmth of the affection of the blessed Lord. What John knew was this, “I am loved of the Lord.” You and I should go about with this thought exhilarating our souls, “I am loved by Jesus.” I think every Christian should be able to take up that place in the history of his soul. Anyway John did.

Well, Mary runs and says, “They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him” (John 20:2). The effect is this: “Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulcher” (John 20:3). It is very striking the way the Spirit gives us all these details. “So they ran both together; and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulcher” (John 20:4). Now I think that, if I had been asked which of these two was the most stalwart, I should have said Peter. I would have expected him to have been the fleeter of the two. Surely he would outrun John. No, he is outpaced this time. Do you know why? Peter carried with him an awful load that day. There is nothing that puts such a drag on the feet as a bad conscience. Peter was not happy, and if you are not happy, you are not going very fast, dear fellow-Christian. Are you rejoicing in the Lord’s love? If not, you may depend upon it, your pace is not very rapid.

We are told that John outran Peter, “And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in” (John 20:5). You may say, Why did not John go in? He was a Jew, and he had doubtless a Jewish feeling, that, if he went in, he would defile himself. And so this

spiritual man, John, for the moment stops. He had not yet learned that Christ having come, everything is taken out of type and shadow now. Old impressions fill his mind and hold him back. “Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulcher” (John 20:6). He goes in, heedless of any consequence. The remembrance of his ways and words in the high priest’s palace, and his denial of his Lord, spurred him to enter. It led him to risk everything, and lose sight of everything. What availed his position as a Jew, if he had lost Christ, after having grieved Him, and wounded Him.

Impelled by the urgency of his own feelings, Peter enters the sepulcher, “And seeth the linen clothes lie, and the napkin, that was about His head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself” (John 20:7). There had been no tumult there. All was calm and quiet. Like one who has passed the night in peaceful slumber, risen in the morning and laid aside the clothes, here the Lord lays aside the death clothes. What is the lesson? He has done with death. He had set aside everything that relates to death, the fruit and wages of sin. The napkin folded and laid aside tells of the reign of death being over forever. Resurrection glory is to replace death. These details have indeed a meaning for the heart. I see He has gone into death and annulled it. He is risen now. Resurrection power and resurrection joy are to flood the scene. Everything now is in resurrection for the Christian, for being in Christ he is on the other side of death. I do not say that Peter and John learned this wondrous lesson then. Have you and I learned it? Ah, brethren, it is easy speaking, but the question is, where are we in the history of our souls? Are our souls really linked with Christ where He now is? What they saw was the proof of His wondrous victory.

And now John goes in. “Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulcher, and he saw, and believed” (John 20:8). Believed what? I do not think exactly that he believed in Christ’s resurrection. He believed surely that the Lord was gone. The tale that Mary had brought of the Lord being gone he believed. “For as yet they knew not the scripture, that He must rise again from the dead” (John 20:9). Up to that moment the great and glorious truth that He must rise from the dead, which He had pressed on them again and again during His life-ministry, never seemed to have got into their souls. There is nothing we are slower to reach than resurrection ground. When He came down from the mount of transfiguration, He said to them, “Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead” (Matt. 17:9). But spite of that, the great blessed truth, which is the backbone of the gospel, resurrection, they had not at that moment reached.

Hence, what we find is this, “Then the disciples went away again unto their own home” (John 20:10). And why to their own home? Because they had a home. They had spheres of interest, and to these spheres they go back. “But” — that is a wonderful little “but” — “But Mary stood without at the sepulcher weeping.” Why did not she go home? I do not think I am wrong when I say she had not one. She may have had a house but not a home. Where Christ had been was really the home of her heart. That sepulcher had held Him whom she loved so deeply, and therefore a home she had not. The fact was this, her world was gone, everything was gone, because He was gone. And oh, what a blessing it would be for each of us, if Christ were all to our hearts. Take away Christ, and all was gone for Mary. Desolation and an empty heart were hers, but as for home she had none. The home of her heart was away. She had lost the One who ravished her heart, who had first delivered her from Satan’s power, and then filled her with the knowledge of His own love and grace, and bound the affections of her heart round Himself, for after all, there is nothing like love, and love produces love. You cannot force it. It is reciprocal, and nothing will keep your mind so steady, and cause your heart to flow out with love to Him, as the enjoyment of His love to you.

And do you not think it was a joy to the heart of Jesus as He saw from the distance that weeping woman? You may depend upon it, the Lord noticed her that day with the deepest interest. Do you think He notices us today? Does He see where our hearts are? Is He not interested as to where the affections of our souls are traveling? Surely, for He is unchanged — “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever.” He is the same today as He was that morning. There was a blessed sight for Him to behold that resurrection morn — one person in this world who could not do without Him. Yes, that is very blessed.

“And as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulcher, and seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou?” That is all the length, you notice, they can go. They see her sorrow. They notice her tears. And they are interested sufficiently to inquire why she weeps. She gives them the answer, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him” (John 20:11-12). When she went to Peter and John, do you know what she said to them? “They have taken away the Lord,” because He was also their Lord. But now when the angels ask why she weeps, what does she say? “They have taken away my Lord.” How personal. How precious to the ear of Jesus to hear this — “My Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back” (John 20:13-14).

Suppose you and I saw two angels, what do you think we should do? Now, honestly own what you would do. Honestly, I think I should take a downright good look at them. And I should probably think I was a very favored person to see angels. I should not quite believe you, if you said you would not look at them. You do not know your own heart. Ah, but look at this woman. Angels had not the faintest attraction for Mary. She was not controlled by them, nor held by them. What does she do? She turns her back on them. Ah, beloved friends, what do we turn our backs on? I fear that something less interesting than an angel is sometimes apt to hold us. Is not that true? Look at Mary. “She turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus” (John 20:14). You may tell me she was blind. Well, sometimes love is blinded by its very tears. But anyway, though her love was blind, mark, friends, the love was there. She was evidently in deep distress since the object of her love was, as she thought dead, and now quite gone from her grasp. It was an agony of love.

And now we read, “Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?” You remember He had said somewhat similar words to two men before. The one was Andrew, and I am sure the other was John the evangelist. He did not get this question in John 20, because he had a home and had departed to it. But he once heard this same voice saying, “What seek ye?” He and his companion replied then, “Master, where dwellest Thou?” (John 1:38). That meant, Lord, let us know how to find your home. This day John missed that voice, but Mary heard it. Not “What seek ye?” but “Whom seekest thou?” is the Lord’s touching query here to Mary. The point is, nothing can satisfy the renewed heart but the Person of Jesus, and the enjoyment of the love of Jesus. The Lord knew that, and drew near to her, fully prepared to fill to the full the empty heart that deeply and truly loved Him. And I believe we may know the same. Nothing really fills the heart but the enjoyment of His own love.

We are reaching the climax of this deeply touching scene, as Jesus inquires: “Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away” (John 20:15). Very striking is the way in which, in Scripture, you get the gardener brought in. In the opening book of Scripture — Genesis — you have the gardener. He was the first Adam. He was put in Eden to till that garden, but failed. It is a garden here again, and in this garden

you have now a broken-hearted woman, who has lost her all, and that all, the Lord of Glory. She sees Him, but knows Him not. And now she says what to me is one of the most touching things that could possibly have fallen from her lips, and which must have affected the heart of the Lord very greatly. “Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away” (John 20:15). She offers, in her deep affection, to do that which her womanly weakness would have made an impossibility, namely, take Him away. She does not name Him. She does not lisp the title of the Object she is looking for. Her world was “Him.” So full was her heart of Him, that she thought everybody else must be thinking about Him too.

It has been often said, If I have a sick friend, and call to ask for him, I simply say, “How is he?” They know who I mean, because everybody in that house is thinking of the sick one. And so here. “Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away.” That is an absorbed heart. I have heard it said, she was culpably ignorant. Why do you not again and again tell me she was very affectionate? Are you as affectionate? I wish, indeed, that I were. Do you not think that reply of Mary’s that resurrection morning was like a cup of cold water to the tender, but hitherto oft-times deeply wounded heart of Jesus? I trust it was so indeed.

The closing scenes of the Lord’s earthly history are very beautiful from this point of view. Responsive affection is frequently seen to gladden His heart. In the early part of the Gospels He comes out like a magnet and attracts many sad and weary hearts to Himself. He satisfies and fills these hearts, and. among them Mary Magdalene’s. And now, when you come to the close of His career here, it is beautiful to notice how the Father works to draw out divine affections from these same hearts towards His blessed Son. Among others, God allows Mary to come and fill a cup, that which would give joy to His heart. Notice the action, just a week before, of Mary of Bethany. How she refreshed His heart as she broke her box of ointment over Him. And do you not think the testimony of the dying thief on the cross was like a cup of cold water to the blessed Lord? Again, Nicodemus coming out boldly and owning Him after He was dead was suited and right. And was it not timely and divinely perfect that there should be one to meet Him, that resurrection morning, whose attitude said, “You are everything to me, and I cannot do without You.”

I do not know whether you or I ever spoke to Him in this way. And if Mary did not put this sentiment into words, I know what the Lord took out of her words. What but this? — “That heart finds everything in Me, and cannot do without Me.” Do you think He talks that way about you and me? Ah, we may well ask ourselves. Do you think he would thus speak to us, “Whom seekest thou?” Suppose He got upon our track today and just asked us: “What are you seeking? Is it Myself? or is it something here?” What would our answer be? We are often so taken up with the things of this life, with what concerns our home and business. It was not so with her. Her Lord absorbed her heart and controlled her. What a joy to the heart of Jesus!

It is at this moment that the Lord reveals Himself to her by one word. She cannot do without Him, and she shall not for a single second more. “Mary” falls upon her ear. That is all. “Jesus saith unto her, Mary.” He had said before, “And He calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out; and when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him: for they know His voice” (John 10:3-4). Do you and I understand what it is to be thus called of the Lord by name? And do we answer Him just as she did that day? Oh! what a revelation to her soul. “She turned herself, and saith unto Him, Rabboni: which is to say, Master” (John 20:16). Why does the Holy Spirit tell us she turned herself? We saw just now that when she saw angels she turned her back on them. Now she sees a man, and she turns her back on him. It was Christ she was looking for, but she had not at that moment found Him. But all is revealed to her in one word,

“Mary.” She had heard that blessed voice before, in the day when He delivered her from the sevenfold power of the devil, and in a moment she turns herself. The truth is out. He is there. She has found the One whom her heart desired above all things.

I do not doubt, in the impulse of her affection, that Mary was just about to do what her Galilean friends did afterward touch the Lord. She is checked by the word, “Touch Me not.” And why may she not touch Him? He tells her,” For I am not yet ascended to My Father.” She was going to take up relationship with Christ on the old ground. That would not do. She was henceforth to know Him in a new place altogether. Where do we know Him? At God’s right hand. We know not Christ after the flesh, but as the risen, ascended, and glorified Man. “Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father: but go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God” (John 20:17). Mary here had the most wonderful message given her that ever was committed to human lips down here to carry to others.

You might ask, Why did the Lord refuse Mary’s touch, and yet let the Galilean women touch Him? I will take that up and fully answer that question at another time, God willing, only saying now that an earthly people will yet know and have Christ in their midst as the living Messiah. But Mary prefigures the heavenly saints, and illustrates what is the truth for us. She was only to know Christ as we know Him, i.e., as gone on high. I think when He said, “Touch Me not, for I am not yet ascended to My Father,” a thrill of disappointment would go through her heart, which meant: “Am I to lose Thee again, Lord? I lost Thee, and my heart was broken, and now I have found Thee.” His reply seems to say this: “No, Mary, you knew Me here, and you lost Me. Now I am going back to a spot where you can always find Me and never again lose Me.”

There is immense importance in His words, “Go to My brethren.” He could, on resurrection ground, now own all who believed in Himself as His brethren. His death had cleared away everything that lay between them and God, and He could now take up “His own” as being His brethren. He was here the true corn of wheat. He had said, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24). And here was the true unique Corn of Wheat alive from the dead, and He has His brethren in association with Himself. Hence He instructs Mary, “And say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God.”

If you will read the Gospel of John carefully, you will find that up to chapter 12 the Lord almost invariably says, “My Father,” though sometimes it is “the Father.” From chapter 13 and onwards He usually speaks of “the Father.” That would raise the question, whose Father is He? If He be the Father, of whom is He the Father? In reality the day of the Holy Spirit is anticipated, as He speaks of God as being the Father. But now, redemption being accomplished, death annulled, and Jesus in resurrection, God is revealed and made known to us as our Father. He, as it were, says to Mary: “You thought you had lost Me. No, no, you have got Me, and you go and tell My brethren this. I had a place up there that was always peculiar to Myself. I was the delight and the joy of My Father’s heart, but I was alone. I have come down from that scene of life and joy, and gone into death for My own, and settled every question. I have cleared the whole scene, and now I am going back, but not alone. On the ground of the work I have accomplished, I am going to take My brethren with Me. I will now share all with them. Go tell My brethren that My Father is their Father, and My God their God.” This was the glorious message Mary’s love to Him had secured for her — a

message unique in its nature and import.

Now, my friends, do you believe that message? Had Jesus not already said, “I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it”? (John 17:26). He had. The same resurrection music is found in one of the Psalms: “I will declare Thy name unto My brethren” (Psa. 22:22). The sorrow of death over, Jesus hastens to declare the Father’s name to His brethren. Note well that we have not touched Church ground here yet; but you have now the declaration of the Father, and that leads to it. And remember, beloved, that this is all individual. You will never know the joy of what it is to be an integral part of the assembly unless you get the sense, His Father is your Father, and His God your God. As a believer in Him, and having received the Holy Spirit, I am entitled to know that I am on the same identical ground before God as that risen, triumphant, blessed Man. In plain language, Christ’s place is our place, and Christ’s relationship our relationship.

God’s object, in Christianity, is to bring us into complete association with Christ. Absolute identity with Christ, where He now is, as risen from the dead, and glorified, is our portion through infinite grace. He was once absolutely identified with us where we were in death. Once He was the solitary Corn of Wheat, which, except it fall into the ground and die, abideth alone. But in order to bring forth much fruit, He has died, and now there is a wonderful crop. Around that risen Center, see the untold numbers of the grains of wheat. They are His brethren. The feeblest, simplest believer in Jesus has now the same place before God as that glorified Man at God’s right hand. For mark, we must have either Christ’s place, or no place. This is just what we read elsewhere: “For both He that sanctifieth (Christ), and they who are sanctified (all who are Christ’s), are all of one; for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren; saying, I will declare Thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto Thee” (Heb. 2:11-12).

Humanity is now glorified at God’s right hand, and the place Christ has now taken there in resurrection, is the place He has secured for you and me. That place of holy joy and blessedness in the Father’s love and presence He shares with all “His own.”

Wondrous indeed was the favor conferred on Mary Magdalene to carry such news to the disciples. Love to the Lord Jesus personally secured her this immense boon, and we can well conceive the joy that filled her heart, when, in obedience to His behest, “Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things unto her” (John 20:18).

To this simple affectionate woman is granted the immense favor of carrying this message to those who were the Lord’s brethren, and eventually form the nucleus of His Church, Why had she this honor? Because she was devoted to Him. Among all the appearings of the Lord in resurrection to those who loved Him, be sure of this, that Mary’s was not the heart least devoted to the Lord. Further, among the thousands of Marys who will be found in glory, a peculiar place will this Mary have, as the one who gratified the heart of the Lord that resurrection morning as none other did, and then became His messenger of, without exception, the most wonderful communication that mortal lips could utter. What could be more wonderful than for a sinner, delivered from Satan’s power, and redeemed by grace, to learn that she was absolutely identified with that blessed One, who came down alone, and then went back to heaven and took a company with Him, and be entrusted with the exposition of the scripture, “Behold I and the children which God hath given Me” (Heb. 2:13).

Well, so much for devotedness. And now why do not we more often carry sweet messages to comfort souls? I think it is that we are not devoted enough, we are not near enough the Lord to get from Him the word for souls round about us. May we all be more devoted, and may the Lord give us to know more and more what it is to be so near to Him, that we may be suited vessels whom He can use to carry sweet tidings of grace to others. You cannot tell me, after what we have been considering, that Mary of Magdala had no intelligence. Tell me any one more intelligent. John was not in it, and neither was Peter. The only one at the moment who was really intelligent was Mary, and her love undoubtedly led her up to the intelligence. God make you and me more like Mary of Magdala, for His name’s sake.

Simon Peter: His Life and Letters, Conversion

John 1:19-42

This scripture in the fourth gospel without doubt gives us the moment when Simon Peter, the fisherman of Bethsaida, first met, and got to know the Lord Jesus, whom to know is life eternal. No more important epoch in a man’s history could possibly be than this — the moment when he is brought into personal contact with the living Saviour. Hence there is a most important question which each one of our hearts should ask, and answer before God — Have I been brought to have to do with this living Saviour?

If you have not yet been brought to Jesus, give me the joy that Andrew had in his day, as he led his brother to Jesus — give me the joy of bringing you to meet that Saviour in this day. This is the evangelist’s work in the gospel.

Let us see now what led to this warm-hearted man, Simon the son of Jonas, being brought to the Lord, for the links in the chain that lead to conversion, whether his, or yours, or mine, are ever very interesting.

The Lord had sent to Israel at this moment a servant who roused the people from end to end of the land. No smooth-spoken prophet was John the Baptist. He spoke to people of their sins, and of their need, and multitudes were aroused and gathered round him (see Matt. 3:1-12), until he, as it were, shook them off at the feet of the Saviour. John preached repentance. “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” was the clarion note that reached the conscience of the multitudes that heard him. Thoroughly awakened by his preaching of coming judgment, John plainly told them, in answer to their query, “What shall we do then?” (see Luke 3:1-14), all that they should do, or should not do.

To the publicans the Baptist preached, “Exact no more than that which is appointed you;” to the soldiers he said, “Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages.” He said, moreover, “Now also the ax is laid to the root of the tree;” and if an ax be laid to the root of a tree, down it must go. In a way, therefore, John foretold the ruin of the nation. If the ax were laid to the root of the tree, moreover, it would show what was inside the tree, and it might be rotten to the core. If the ax of God’s Word lay open — as it does — the heart of man, it shows it to be rotten to the very core (see Mark 7:20, 28).

It was strong language John used as the multitudes came out to him. “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” fell not only on the ears of the common people, but also on “many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism.” How they

were going to escape the damnation of hell was urgently sought of them, as I would ask it of you, too, my reader. It is a query that must be faced, alike in John's day, and in ours.

John could not give his hearers pardon, nor preach forgiveness, but he told them that if truly repentant they would go down under the waters of Jordan, and be baptized, confessing their sins; and they did so. As he was thus baptizing, there came to him a Man whom John knew to be the sinless One. He had no sins to confess. He was the only sinless man there ever was in this world, but He asked to be baptized of John — took His place, though sinless, with the remnant that was turning round to God, and, as He came up out of the water, the Spirit of God came down upon Him, like a dove, and a voice from heaven proclaimed, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17).

After this John sees Jesus one day coming unto him, and he gives this lovely testimony of Him, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.... And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God" (John 1:29-34). John got the sense in his soul, Here is the One who can really bless man. You get the atoning work of the Lamb of God first, and then that He is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. We must learn these two things, first, that Jesus is the One that can take away our sins, and then that He is the One who gives the Holy Spirit, and blesses. The Lord puts away sin in two ways — He puts away the sins of His own people by dying for their sins upon the cross, and then for those who, alas! refuse Him, He baptizes them with fire — that is, judgment sweeps the whole scene. Oh, come to Him, my unsaved reader, while you can get the forgiveness of your sins, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and escape the certainly coming baptism of fire, the judgment which is rapidly nearing.

John's first testimony to Jesus seems to have had little effect — no one followed the Lord — hence we hear his voice again raised as he says, the day following, "Behold the Lamb of God." I do not think John is exactly preaching here; he loved his Master, and saw His moral beauty, and as he stands and says, "Behold the Lamb of God," he becomes the channel of introducing to the Bridegroom the nucleus of the Bride, as two of his own disciples were detached from himself, and followed Jesus.

I grant you the Bride, the Church, was not formed till afterward, but I have no doubt you get here the nucleus of that which becomes the Bride. One of the two who heard John speak was Andrew, and I am inclined to regard the other as the man who wrote the gospel, the one who does not name himself save as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," John the son of Zebedee.

The Baptist spoke in a lovely, meditative manner, as his eyes rested upon that incomparable Man, the One whom he knew to be Jehovah, the One who came to take up the whole question of sin; and as he says, "Behold the Lamb of God," those two disciples turn, and, leaving John, follow Jesus. And thenceforward John disappears, and Jesus fills the whole scene.

Jesus turning saw these two disciples following, and said to them, "What seek ye?" Searching question! Is it fame you are seeking, my reader, knowledge, power, or riches? The Lord asks you this from the glory today. Can you answer Him as these two did? "Master, where dwellest thou?" that is, We only want you, we want to know where we can be always sure of finding you. "They came and saw where he dwelt." Capernaum is the place called "his own city" (Matt. 9:1), the place in which His most mighty works were done, and concerning which, at length, he is fain to say, "And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained unto this day; but I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee" (Matt. 11:23-24). The higher the privilege the more terrible the judgment when it falls on those who have not answered to that privilege.

"They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour," that is, there were two hours of the day left. Oh those two hours with Jesus! I ask you, Have you ever spent two hours with Jesus? I am sure if you have, you have come out, and tried to take somebody else back to enjoy what you enjoyed. These disciples did. There comes out at once individual testimony, and let me tell you that quiet personal testimony is often worth far more than public preaching. That quiet man, Andrew, of whom we hear no more, save that he companied with the Lord till the end, became the means of the conversion of the most prominent man of the twelve, the record of whose life and ministry has such a large place in the Scriptures, and who at Pentecost was himself the means of the conversion of three thousand souls in one day.

It is beautiful to see how Andrew goes at once to testify of the One he had found, and he begins at home. "He first findeth his own brother Simon." He begins from the center, and works out to the circumference.

Andrew not only finds Simon, but "he brought him to Jesus." Happy service! Have you, my reader, been brought to Jesus yet? If not, let me lead you to Him now. Come to Him now!

I think I hear that stalwart fisherman speaking that day, and saying to his brother "We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ; come to Him, Simon," and he came.

It is not a question of having an immense amount of knowledge here, but it was a Person who was known, and to Him Andrew brings his own brother Simon. "And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone." This was a wonderful moment in Simon's history. He gets into the presence of the Lord, and what does he learn? He learns that the One whom He had never seen before, and, as far as he knew, had never before seen him, knew all about him. Jesus knew what Simon was, and He knows what you are, my reader. He knew that Simon was a sinner, needing a Saviour, and He knows that you are a sinner, needing a Saviour too.

The Lord, addressing the new-comer, says, "Thou art Simon, the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone." What does this changing of his name mean? In Old Testament times the changing of the name was very frequent. God changed Abram's name, and Sarai's; He changed Jacob's too; Pharaoh changed Joseph's name, and Nebuchadnezzar Daniel's, and the King of Egypt changed the name of the last King of Judah.

The changing of the name, then, implied that the one whose name was changed was the vassal, the subject, the property of the one who so changed it. The Lord said, as it were, Simon, you are Mine, spirit, soul, and body, and I shall do what I like with you. "The hour is coming, and

now is when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live," was being fulfilled in the Galilean fisherman's history. Simon heard the voice of the Son of God then, and though, perhaps at the time, he did not know the meaning of what He said, yet when he wrote his first epistle afterward he had found it out, for he says, "To whom coming, as unto a living stone,... ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house." What is a stone? A little bit of a rock. And what is a Christian? A little bit of Christ, for he is a member of Christ.

Believers now in the Lord Jesus Christ are linked with, yea, united to Him. Peter was learning this truth, slowly I admit, but the necessity and blessedness of it are apparent as, by-and-by, we hear him saying, "To whom coming as unto a living stone, ... ye also, as living stones, are built up" — that is, Christ communicates that life which is His to us, and we become an integral part of that house which God is building; and is not being a living stone a very different thing from being a dead sinner? Do you ask, How am I to get this life? You must get into personal contact with Jesus. Andrew brought Peter to Jesus, and Jesus said to him, "Thou art Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone" — you are a living stone, Peter, and you belong to Me from this moment. And will not you, my reader, belong to Him today, will not you trust Him now?

The whole question of sin is settled by the death of Christ. He went into death, and annulled it. He destroyed him who had the power of death.

He took sin upon Him, and put it away; and now at the right hand of God, He says, "Look unto me, come unto me." If you come, He will give you eternal life on the spot, and make you a living stone. Peter then, that day, had life communicated to him from the Son of God. He "passed from death unto life" as he stood before the Son of God that day; his soul was forever linked with the Lord from that day. I do not say that he followed the Lord then, but here you get the moment of Peter's conversion, he is quickened with the very life of Jesus, and becomes "a living stone." This then is the account of his conversion.

Seekers for Light, Grace - What Is It?

(John 1:1-17)

You will observe in the 17th verse that the Spirit of God says, "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." On a previous evening we were occupied a little with Christ as the Truth. Tonight I want to say a few words on Grace. Both came by Jesus Christ, and therefore I know not the truth, nor have tasted grace, nor have you, unless we have to do with Him. The question raised must be, "Have you had to do with Him?" You know not the truth, nor apprehend what grace is, unless you have.

"The law was given by Moses." And what did the law do? It convicted, and condemned man. That is all the law can do — convict a man, and condemn him. "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ," and grace is a wonderful thing. Would it not be a wonderful thing if grace picked you up, converted you, and turned you to know the living God, and made you a present and everlasting witness of God's goodness? That would be grace. It would not be a question of desert, because grace is always the activity of the love of God, when sin is present. The moment you hear of grace, you must recognize the fact of sin. I know people do not like to talk about sin, they do not like to think about sin, and they do not like to admit sin. They try to deny it; but mark this — deny sin, and you shut out grace. The man who is not content to own himself to be what Scripture affirms about him, knows not what grace is.

You ask me, What is grace? I do not know that I can exactly explain it. I know it; I have tasted it; I have enjoyed it; and I wish you to enjoy it too. Grace is God's coming to a man that has sinned, and taking him out of the condition in which his sin has placed him, a condition out of which he cannot by any possibility extricate himself by his own efforts. Now I was saying once before to you that you could not say that God was the truth. God is true; but Christ is the Truth, because He is the perfect revelation and exhibition of what God is. I do not read in Scripture that "God is grace." I read that "God is love." That is what He always was, before man was on this scene at all, or before man fell. God is love. That is what He is in His eternal existence. And God is light. These are the two absolute terms by which God is described. Love is His absolute character of goodness. Light is more relative to evil. He cannot tolerate evil. After man sinned, what do I find? That God stepped into the scene where man had sinned. Grace is the love of God putting on a new color, and a new character, entering the scene where man has sinned, and entering for the purpose of blessing the man, who, by his sin, had put up a barrier between himself and God.

Now there is no good blinking the matter. You and I are both sinners. You may deny sin, but you cannot deny its consequences. The Word of God says, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Elsewhere we read, "The wages" — the consequences —"of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). You cannot deny death. It is all round about you; and I will tell you more, it is the thing you least like. There is nothing a man dislikes so much as the thought of death. It is a strange thing. You never saw a dog afraid of death. I have seen hundreds of men afraid of it. No beast, no animal, is afraid, of death. The only creature that is afraid of death is man; and why? Because man has a conscience, and has a deep inherent consciousness that there is something after death. Said a wretched man lately, "If it was not for what comes after death, I would have committed suicide surely." Scripture tells us what it is, "But after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). Yes! God must deal with sin. He must judge sin, and we have all sinned. The Holy Spirit has said, in the plainest possible language, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). That takes you and me in.

But you may ask, What is sin? Scripture does not leave us without a definition of what sin is. "Sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4 RV) — that is, the creature doing his own will. Now, I think I cannot go beyond the truth in saying that every one of us likes our own way. There is not a man in this audience but likes his own way. The Spirit of God in describing our condition, says in the Old Testament, "All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned, every one to his own way" (Isa. 53:6). One man takes his way — it is the wine-cup, and shameless orgies; another, the race-course, and dissolute company; another, the card-table, and the gambling-hell; and another, the billiard-room, and its concomitant waste of time and money. Sin may take any shape you like. It may take the shape of what men would term "innocent pleasures," but which they would not care should come out in the light of day. The point is this, you and I like our own way. I acknowledge it. I liked my own way, ay, and I took it too. What happened? I am thankful to God for it, He stopped me. How did He stop me? He stopped me by the revelation to my heart of what His grace was — the grace that came by Jesus Christ.

"The law was given by Moses." It came, and made claims upon us. It made claims for the right reason that the law is a revelation of what the creature ought to be. As I gaze on the ten commandments I see what I ought to be. My conscience tells me that I am not it. Consequently I am condemned by the law. It naturally condemns me whenever I learn its spirit and its power. But what does the gospel do? It brings the

revelation of what God is, not what man ought to be. The chapter we are looking at tells beautifully how God has come into this scene in the Person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It says, “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.” And who is that Word? The opening verse tells us, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” I want you to look at this, “In the beginning was the Word.” Then the next thing is, that “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.” By “the Word” what am I to understand? The Eternal Word of God! It is Jesus — the Son of God entering into this scene and becoming a man. Men have said, “God was made flesh.”

Scripture does not say so. It says the “Word was made flesh”; and the reason is very simple. If I think of God as given to me in the Bible, I have presented to me the Triune God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If I say, “God was made flesh,” then I should not express the truth, because the Father was never incarnate, and the Spirit of God was never incarnate; but the Son of God, the Word, “became flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The Eternal Son has come into this scene, humbling Himself, and becoming a man, in order that, in the form of a man, He might reveal to us the heart and nature of God; and moreover, that God, in the condition in which He was found as a man, might find all He looked for in man. That is the charm of these beautiful words, “full of grace and truth.” The law Moses might bring, but “grace and truth” came only by the Son of God.

Now I admit that the truth will convict a man. The first effect of truth on a man is to trouble him. I do not think the first effect of the gospel will be to make a man happy. Oh! you say, I thought the gospel would make him happy. Nay! The first effect of the truth is to make a man serious before God, in the conscious sense, I am a sinner; I am an undone sinner. I will tell you more — If you ask any one who is in this hall tonight, who is a converted man, how he got on at first, what his experience was, he will tell you, that while the gospel is now filling his soul with joy and gladness, yet when the truth first met him, it did not make him happy, but made him serious and thoughtful. Why? Because the truth that he was a guilty undone sinner entered his soul like a red-hot iron.

Truth, then, will convict a man. When I am convicted by truth, what is the next thing? Grace wins me. Grace attracts me, and I turn to Him, in whose presence I find myself to be a poor, ruined, good-for-nothing sinner. I turn to Him, and learn that I am unfit for God. I learn also in that blessed Man, who is the image of God, and the eternal Son of God, in His life and death, what grace is — grace personified. I learn how the love of God can go out after a good-for-nothing, ungrateful, sinful, and self-willed man, until it has overtaken him, and poured blessing into his soul. Many a man in this audience tonight can tell you the same thing. I was pursuing a course of self-will until arrested. My friend, you must be arrested sooner or later. The day of your arrest is at hand. Sooner or later! Infinitely better is it to be arrested in this moment, when grace is active, when God in grace is blessing man — when God in grace is coming out to meet us, than be arrested by-and-by in your sins, when righteousness can only condemn you. Now God, in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, comes to meet us in grace, with a view to our present and eternal blessing.

Grace, then, is the activity of the love of God to us, after we have sinned, and before the day when He deals with our sins as the righteous, moral governor of the universe, because God must judge sin. He would not be God if He did not judge sin; He would be no better than us if He did not judge sin. I know perfectly well that men try to get rid of the judgment of God; but the truth is this, God judges sin, and must do so, because He is God, and is infinitely holy. But what has He already done? After you and I have sinned, and before the day of judgment, when He must deal with men about their sins, He has stepped into this scene, in the Person of His own beloved Son. Grace has come in, and what do I find? That the very One, who is going to be judge by-and-by, anticipates the day of judgment, enters into the scene, dies in the room of guilty man, bears his judgment, and delivers him, not only from the consequences, of his sin, but brings him into the enjoyment of the love of God, makes him a child of God, and makes him the happy possessor of the forgiveness of sins, and of eternal life.

That is what Christ does. That is love. What was He in Himself? He was the expression of perfect grace. Track Him where you will, during His lifetime on earth, and you will find nothing but grace. Ah, but you say, He exposed the hypocrites. Yes, He did. Do you think Christ would do anything else? It was absolute grace that exposed hollowness. Do you think it would be gracious of me, if I knew you were thoroughly false, not to tell you? No. It was so with Christ. It was His grace that exposed those who came near Him. It was righteousness also; but Christ was the Truth, and the Light, and nobody who came into contact with Him could fail of being exposed. That is why men do not like Him, and will not come to Him, because, if they come to Him, their true condition is necessarily made manifest to themselves, and that they dislike.

After the truth convicts us, grace meets us perfectly. Have you ever tasted that the Lord is gracious? The Lord is abundantly gracious. Take any illustration you please from the history of His pathway through the world. Look how His grace went forth to that poor guilty woman caught in an act of the most heinous sin (John 8:2-11). The law could only condemn her, and her crime should be visited with death. You know what took place? The scribes and Pharisees brought the woman, taken in adultery, to Jesus, and said, “Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned; but what sayest Thou?” They sought to put Him on the horns of a dilemma. That was their wickedness. They thought to have occasion to accuse Him. If He said, “Let her go,” He would be acting in defiance of the law of Moses; while if He said, “Stone her,” they would have turned on Him, and asked Him what had now become of His doctrine of grace, for He was dealing in judgment. Jesus was the light, and He said, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast the stone at her.” You know what took place. They all went out. The light drove them all out, and the woman was left all alone with Jesus. “Woman,” He asks, “where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more.”

That was grace. Christ was acting on the ground of that which He Himself was going to accomplish; He anticipated the atoning effect of His death. Grace can only be active now, save on the ground of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. The wages of sin is death, and just because of what He is, God must judge sin. There was nothing binding on Christ, save His purpose to glorify God; but, in grace, He took the place He did, and He who knew no sin, became sin for us, and the Just died for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. The spotless One took the sinner’s guilt, and died in the room and stead of the poor sinner. What then? God raised Him from the dead, and in another part of Scripture that speaks of grace — where the Spirit of God, by the pen of Paul, is unveiling the way in which God now justifies, and saves men — I read this: “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:20-21).

Now observe this, grace came in the Person of Christ, and as the consequence of His death what do I find now? I find grace is reigning. Who is on the throne today? Christ. By-and-by He will be the judge. The day of judgment has not come yet. Who is on the throne today? If I may use the figure — Grace. The apostle is careful in this same chapter to point out that sin and death have reigned. Death and sin reigned, and I might add another — Satan. There was a fearful triumvirate of evil reigning — Satan, sin, and death — up to the coming of Jesus. What since

then? They have been deposed. Grace has entered the scene, and now reigns “through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.” Is sin abounding? Who will deny it? Has it not abounded in your history and mine? How blessed then to know that “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.”

I heard lately how grace abounded in a remarkable case. It was the custom of a certain family to meet all together about Christmas time. It happened one year, that the meeting took place in the house of the eldest son Henry, who at the time was an infidel. When the whole family had gathered there, the old gray-haired father, who was a pious man, as he sat at his son’s board, returned thanks for the meal they were about to partake of. The son angrily said to his father: “You have no right to say that in my house; you have no right to give God thanks. I bought that food, every bit of it; and I will not have you thanking God for what I bought and paid for. There is no God. I don’t believe there is any God at all. Look here! If there is a God I’ll give Him a chance. I will give Him five minutes to cut me down.” He took out his watch, and put it on the table. The whole family sat aghast. They knew what God could do, but would He? was the question. Is there an atheist here tonight? My friend, yours is a poor creed. One minute went by, two, three, four, and five, and the defier of God was not cut down. “There,” said he, “where is your God? He has had His chance, and lost it.” “Ah, my son,” said the old man, “when you put the watch on the table, I began to pray to the Lord for you. When you were a child I gave you to God, my son, and I have never taken you back. I believe God will save you yet, my lad.”

The meeting broke up, and very soon after the old father died. Is your father dead, and gone to heaven? Then you had better follow him. Henry took his own way. He knew better than his father. Most young men think so; and he went into courses of evil and sin. He became a frequenter of public-houses. You often find infidelity and atheism are joined with dissipation and debauchery. After fifteen years he was seen walking in the street with tattered garb. He had his last shilling in his pocket. “What shall I do with it?” he thought “I will have two glasses of whiskey, and carry home a bottle of beer with me.” He turned to go to the nearest gin palace, but when he was quite near it the recollection of the family scene struck him, and an arrow of conviction from heaven entered his soul. He exclaimed, “O, Spirit of God, have mercy upon me, and answer my dear old father’s prayer!” He did not go into the public-house. He went back to his house and wife, and got down on his knees before God, and cried for mercy. God answered his dear old father’s prayers, and blessed him. He was saved. That was grace! That is like God.

Oh, you say, I expected you would tell us he was cut down. That is what you or I would have done. That is the way of man. But God did not cut him down. He spared him, and then saved him. Grace so wins its proudest victories over its foes. Ah, the grace of God would like to save you this evening. It has saved me. It has saved many who are in this meeting tonight. It can save you. Did you ever hear that remarkable expression, “The grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men hath appeared” (Titus 2:11). Righteousness will bring judgment by-and-by. Grace brings salvation just now. “Where sin abounded grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.” Mark, it is grace — sovereign grace. I hear a man say, “Surely to get salvation I must labor for it. Are there not some works to be done?” I have often heard a man say, “I will turn over a new leaf.” It is easy, if you have been careless, and heedless of the things of the Lord in the past, to say you will turn over a new leaf for the future. But observe, though you turn over a new leaf it is still the old book. What about those old pages blotted with the sins of bygone years? Blotting no more will not erase the existing blots. You do not want reformation, you need reconstruction. You need exactly what the apostle gives you here, “Grace reigns, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.” It is a new life communicated, given-not some patching up of the old life. You have to learn that “eternal life is the gift of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 6:23).

But, again, I hear some one say, “Must not I do something towards salvation?” Well, I will read to you a scripture from the fourth of Romans: “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom. 4:3-5). That is a very remarkable scripture, is it not? I will read it to you again. “To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” If I pay a man a professional visit, I do not think it an act of grace that he should pay a fee. It is a question of righteousness. If a man does a week’s work for me, it is no act of grace on my part if I pay what is the proper amount for the week’s work. I am in the laborer’s debt until it be paid. How was Abraham justified? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” It was faith on Abraham’s part, and grace on God’s. But carefully note, “Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” I hear some one say, “I thought God would justify the godly.” No, He justifies the ungodly, in absolute grace, on the ground of righteousness, that is, the atoning work of His Son. It is only God that can do this.. It is His own work, and He rejoices in it. I know perfectly well the thought usually comes into a man’s mind that he must do something — he must work. Profound mistake.

I was very much struck lately with a passage in the eleventh of Romans: “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more of grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Rom. 11:5-6). How then am I saved? By pure sovereign grace. So wrote the apostle. Paul to the Ephesians: “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). It is the blessed, precious, sovereign grace that has come to all of us in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. What we need, as sinners, is salvation. That salvation the grace of God has brought to us. If grace then has brought salvation, what have I now to do? I have to avail myself of that which God brings to me in the Person, and through the work, of the Lord Jesus Christ — in plain language, I have to accept, by faith, the eternal salvation, which grace brings to me.

The death of the Saviour is the only foundation and basis of acceptance of every one before God, because, in the cross, we have God’s judgment of sin, executed on His sinless Son. There I see Him, who knew no sin, made sin for us. There I find that “all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way: and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” The cross is God’s righteous way of delivering our souls out of the difficulty and danger into which sin had plunged us. The cross, whereon Jesus died, is the expression of the love of God, as well as the demonstration of the fact that “God is light.” If, without bringing in the cross, He had condemned man, where were His love? And if He had passed and glossed over sin, without judging it, where were His holiness? The cross of Christ meets both difficulties. It is a great thing to see that the truth of Christianity rests upon two solid pillars, love and light, that is, what God is in His own nature. He must judge sin, but, to save the sinner, He has given His own Son as the expression of His love, to bear his sins, and to die in the room of those upon whom the sentence of death and judgment rested. The whole superstructure of revelation rests upon these eternal buttresses of truth. Light displays man’s sin, and love removes it. Man had sinned, and was going on to the righteous judgment of God; but God steps in, and

gives His Son, who becomes a man, that He may be enabled to die as the substitute, and in the room of guilty man.

We have God demonstrating His love, in giving His Son, and manifesting His righteousness and holiness, in that His Son, when bearing sins, and made sin, was judged on the cross. Christ owned and felt the weight of that terrible load of sin, as, on the tree, He says, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” As the righteous consequence of that atoning work wrought by Jesus, God declares that whoever believes on Him receives eternal life. That man has the gift of God. That man receives forgiveness of sins. That man gets salvation. That man gets pardon, and the blessing of the Lord. If you want an illustration, just look at the dying thief. That man got salvation. “Lord,” he says, “remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom.” You know what Jesus said, “Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.” He was saved by the sovereign grace of God. Light entered his soul, and he trusted Jesus, and deep joy must have filled it as he heard where he was to go that day, and in what company.

But whom was Jesus dying for? For sinners, therefore He died for me. Do not you believe that He died for you? If you have been ashamed to confess Him hitherto, my friend, away with that cowardice. Ashamed of Jesus! Ashamed to confess Him! God forbid! Oh, may you have grace to believe in Him, and confess Him too. If you believe in His vicarious death for you, you will get what I have got — eternal life, through His precious name. You and I die because we are sinners. He became a man, that He might die, and meet the claims of God. As man, triumphant over sin, death, the grave and Satan’s power, He is sitting there in glory, as a living Saviour, and He says, “Look unto Me, and be ye saved.”

Grace wins wonderful victories — victories over sinners like you and me. Those victories consist of winning careless hearts, turning them to Christ, who in His grace blesses, and saves us. Well do I remember how God won one of your fellow-students once. I do not think his match is in this hall tonight. I knew him during all his course at Edinburgh University. He was the finest cricketer of his day, and the best football player in the University, and had a cupboard full of prizes. He was foremost in his classes, and everywhere else, and became resident physician in the Royal Infirmary. He was the son of a widow, a fine handsome fellow, and a general favorite. I had often spoken to him about his soul. He did not much like it, but when he was sick he would always send for me. It was a curious thing that, though he did not want me to talk to him about his soul, he sent for me when sick. I recollect perfectly well one Saturday night getting a little penciled note from him, “Will you come up to see me in the Infirmary? I am very ill.” He had been playing football, and in a tremendous melee had fallen and injured his knee. Plucky fellow that he was he attempted to carry on the game, but fell down in a dead faint. He was brought up to the old Infirmary, where he was still a resident physician, and had been three weeks ill before I knew of his accident. When I got to him that Saturday night, I found him in bed suffering from one of the worst attacks of rheumatic fever I ever saw. Two nurses were with him, one during the night, and the other by day, busily employed mopping the perspiration that formed on his brow.

He had lost all power to turn himself, except the moving of his head, and knew very well that eternity was in the distance. I was very sorry to find him in such a condition, and asked him what I could do for him. “I want you to write to my mother,” then living in the West Indies. He gave me certain instructions, and then I said, “And may I tell her that you have found the Lord?” “I wish I could say that, I would give all the world, if I had it, to find Him; but I fear it’s too late now.” I assured him that was a mistake, and then he said, “But it would be a shabby thing to come to Jesus now, after neglecting Him so long.” “Never mind,” I said, “He will bless you, and save you now, if you will believe Him.” I put the gospel before him, and left, with further instructions, to tell his mother that he was now “anxious to be saved.”

One Sunday, four weeks later, I got a message again asking me to come. I went up, and saw plainly enough that death had marked him as its victim. The dew of death was on his brow. I sat down by the dear fellow’s bedside. He was truly anxious to be saved, and I went over the story of the prodigal son with him, the history of the dying thief, and then quoted, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief” (1 Tim. 1:16). Presently, when I had stopped, I saw his lips moving, and I knew he was praying. It is a wonderful moment when a man prays — when God can say, “Behold, he prayeth.” At length he said: “My life has been a misspent life, but I believe Him now, I can trust Him now. I see it all.”

I spent that night with him. To his nurse he said: “I was not too great a sinner for Jesus to save. I am dying, and I am not afraid to die. I am dying happy.” To me he once said, “Do you think He will let me slip at the last?” “Oh, no” I said, “it is not like Him. Do you think He would care for you, and die for you, love you, and then drop you at the last? Hear his own words, My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27-29). “Comfort my mother tell her I am going to be with Christ,” fell from his lips, and his last words were, “IF I DIE, ALL IS WELL.”

That — was sovereign grace, was it not? Thank God! it was grace. That same grace will save you tonight, if you have never tasted it before.

“The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” Will you trust Him now? I think some of you will. If so, we might well sing that hymn—

“Jesus, I will trust Thee, trust Thee with my soul;

Guilty, lost, and helpless, Thou can’st make me whole.

There is none in heaven or on earth like Thee;

Thou hast died for sinners-therefore, Lord, for me.

Jesus, I may trust Thee, name of matchless worth,

Spoken by the angel at Thy wondrous birth;

Written, and forever, on Thy cross of shame,

Sinners, read and worship, trusting in that name.

Jesus, I must trust Thee, pondering Thy ways,

Full of love and mercy all Thy earthly days;

Sinners gathered round Thee, lepers sought Thy face–

None too vile or loathsome for a Saviour's grace.

Jesus, I can trust Thee, trust Thy written word,

Though Thy voice of pity I have never heard:

When Thy Spirit teacheth, to my taste how sweet–

Only may I hearken, sitting at Thy feet.

Jesus, I do trust Thee, trust without a doubt:

Whosoever cometh, Thou wilt not cast out'

Faithful is Thy promise, precious is Thy blood–

These my soul's salvation, Thou my Saviour God! "

Seekers for Light, Truth - What Is It?

(John 18:36-38.)

Pilate's question, "What is truth?" is, I believe, the great question of the moment. It is of vast importance to have the truth. It is a profound mistake not to have it, if it is to be had. Many a man has it not. The Christian has it. The believer in Christ has it. I remember many years ago one of the Professors of this University, with whom I was very intimate, and at whose house I was one evening, after a long conversation, turned, and said to me, "Look here, doctor, I am earnestly seeking after the truth." "I have got it, sir," I replied. "What do you mean?" "I mean this, I have Christ, and He is the truth."

Christ is the truth, and I want to draw your attention tonight to these precious words of the Saviour which I have read — uttered by Him when surrounded by everything that the enmity of man could bring against Him, when betrayed, denied, blindfolded, and passed on from one careless high priest to another, and then trundled away to the judgment-seat of a godless man, as Pilate undoubtedly was. Yet in the face of all this, what was His attitude? Look at Christ! Look how quiet, how calm, albeit how sad. Then it was He said: "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." Pilate carelessly says "What is truth?" and then turns his back on Truth personified. Ah my friends, there is many a man doing that today. Pilate is not the only man who has turned his back on the Truth.

What I greatly desire, in this course of meetings which I will hold with some of you, is that the truth, God's truth, may simply pass before us, and I shall make no apology for Scripture. I believe it to be the Word of God. I believe it to be a revelation from God, of His mind, of His thoughts, of His purposes, and of His counsels; that we have in the Scriptures the truth written, and that in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ we have truth incarnate. The result is, that the man who receives the truth of Scripture, in the power of the Holy Spirit, will invariably be brought into contact with Christ, who is the Truth.

First then, you may ask me, "What is truth?" I do not know that I can make it plain to you; but so far as I can grasp the meaning of truth, it is this: Truth is the exact, the perfect, and absolute expression and delineation of that which is. It is the identity of the statement and the fact stated. I could not say, that God was the Truth. He is true. God is true, but of the Lord Jesus Christ it is said, "That grace and truth came by Him" (John 1:17). Nay, more, He Himself has said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). He was the Truth; and I hope to show you that He was the truth about everything — the truth about God; the truth about man; the truth about the heart of God, the nature of God, and the claims of God; and the truth, moreover, about man in every possible relation of his being. He was no mere man, for He was verily God; nevertheless He was a real, true, perfect man. Get hold of that, I implore you. That Jesus, whom we have read about, was a real, true, perfect man, as much a man as I am standing here before you this evening, sin alone excepted. As man He was in this scene to declare God, and to divinely meet man. "To this end," He says, "was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." None could reveal God, none could unveil the love of God, or declare the heart of God, other than He who came from God. There was none who knew the claims of God, and could meet those claims, except the One who came from God. He must come from God, if He is to bring God to me, and He must be a man, a veritable man, to bring me to God; because I am a sinful man, a sinner. So are you. Sin carries its consequences and merits judgment, and the truth as to this alone is seen fully in Christ.

In the Lord Jesus Christ the absolute truth about everything is beautifully blended. The perfect and whole truth about everything is seen in every part, and not one side of the truth more than another. We get the truth that "God is love," for instance, and see the reality of the truth of God's love in Christ's self-sacrifice, for He gave Himself that He might unveil the heart of God to us, and bring us to God by His death.

In the scene before us Pilate is in the presence of Jesus, the Truth, and, when He speaks, turns his back upon Him. I trust you will not imitate him; because we live in a day when men are slighting Christ. I find many young men who are Pilate's followers; in fact I speak the truth when I say that perhaps nine young men out of ten whom I meet are not believers, but, alas! are serious doubters. I want to know if they are happier, if they are better, or if they are holier men; I have never found it to be so yet. I can recollect, when I was an unconverted young man, and when the truth was unknown to me. I know, too, what I was after I was converted. I know what a wonderful change came over me when I came to know the Truth, and was brought into contact with the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence I want you to get into contact with Christ.

Now observe this, if Jesus be not what He said He was, if He be not what He declared Himself in the Gospels to be, you must repel Him, and everything about Him altogether. Jesus said that He was the Son of God. Was He the Son of God? He says, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." Only the Son could make the Father known. Surely, as He Himself says, "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven" (John 3:13). This claim must either be accepted or rejected. I must either own what He says, I must acknowledge the truth that He came from heaven, or

refuse absolutely to believe it, and proclaim Christ to be not an impostor, but One who knowingly spoke what was not true. If He said a single word which was not true, then He cannot be the Truth. I do not mince matters, for I must either own Him to be what He said He was, or else deny Him all right to the allegiance of my heart and conscience.

Although I thus speak, I delight, to acknowledge, and heartily believe that He is what He said He was; and I have proved Him to be what He said He was — a Saviour. If you have never known Him as your Saviour, let me now urge you to put Him to the test. You accept the truth of that which He says concerning Himself, and then you will find out that you need a Saviour, and that He is that Saviour, and He alone. I know well that men would like to set aside His claim on the ground that they do not need saving. But you have to meet God, and where are you going to spend eternity? How are you going to meet God? You have to go into eternity! Where will you spend it? Serious questions these! Again, are you tonight fitted to meet God? Is your conscience purged? Are your sins purged away? Are you fitted to pass into the presence of a God of infinite holiness? I tell you frankly you are not, unless you have had to do with Christ. If you have had nothing to do with Him, you are not ready. “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth,” said the Lord Jesus, and then He adds immediately, “Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.”

I come therefore to the question, an important one for you and myself — Have I got the truth? If I am not of the truth, I have not heard His voice. The man who has not heard the voice of the Son of God does not possess the truth. You can hear other voices; for there are plenty of voices nowadays. The voice of the truth is that of Him, who could say, “I am the truth,” and who could say to the man, who told Him, he had power to put Him to death, “Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above; therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.” He it is who says, “Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.” Then, have you heard His voice?

Well, you say, I do not know that He exists. You would soon know that He exists if you heard His voice. Oh, but, you say, I was never brought into contact with Him. More the pity; because He says, “Every one that is of the truth hears my voice.” The confession of a man, that he has not heard the voice of Jesus, is a tacit confession that he has not got the truth. Now, I say again, above all things get the truth. I do not care what things I lose, or what I have not got, if I have got the truth. Give me the truth — the truth about everything, about God, about myself, about righteousness, about the claims, and the heart of God. “God is love!” How do you know that? you ask. He gave His Son. “God is light!” What is the meaning of that? Light reveals all that is unlike, or opposed to itself; it touches the root of things, because light makes manifest. “God is love.” The birth of Jesus, and the cross — the death of Jesus, prove the love of God. They are the demonstrations of that wonderful truth. “God is light.” Will He pass over sin? Impossible! The Word of God is simple and plain upon this point. “All have sinned”; furthermore it says, “The wages of sin is death.” People try to explain death away, but you cannot. You may gild your hearses, drape your coffins with costliest flowers, decorate your graveyards, and put up magnificent monuments on your tombs, but you cannot get rid of death; and death, we are told, entered into the world by sin (Rom. 5:12) — the sin of the first man — Adam.

But death is not the end of man. If death were the end of man, then there would be no resurrection; but, I have learned the truth of the resurrection, through Christ The man Christ Jesus, for God’s glory, and the blessing of sinners, reached death and the grave as the end of a pathway of perfect obedience and dependence. God could not do otherwise than raise, and glorify Him, and He has done it. The first man reached the grave as the fruit, and penalty of sin, and if you go into death, you will lie there, just because you are a sinner. But I know a Man, who went into death, and came out of it.

I hear His voice tonight, saying, “Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.” I have also heard Him say, “The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead” [in their sins of course] “shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live” (John 5:25). Oh! what a wonderful thing this is, a man springs into life, into eternal life, by hearing the voice of the Son of God!

The first great truths I learn then, are these, that, “God is love,” and “God is light” All is made manifest in Jesus. The end Christ had in view is here stated. He comes down into the scene, and finds man a sinner in his sins, under the sentence of death, and passing on to it, and He passes into death for him, that he might be saved.

Supposing death were to overtake you, what then? You may not be terribly afraid at the thought of death, but what comes after death? No man can tell that, you say. I beg your pardon, I know what comes after death. I know One who has been into death, and has come out of it. The Christian — if he die — departs to be with Christ, who has been into death, and is now at the right hand of God, a living mighty Saviour, who leads the one that trusts in Him, into eternal life, and sets him down in the glory, where He now is. Every one who is of the truth hears His voice. That is it. It is very simple. Until I hear His voice, it is quite clear, I have not got the truth.

Now let us inquire, What is the truth about man? Man is a sinner. “The Son of Man is come to seek, and to save, that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Is it true that man is lost? It must be true, or Christ has told a lie. He says, “The Son of Man is come to seek, and to save, that which was lost.” You might turn to me, and say, But who are lost? All, without exception. Have you heard His voice? Have I heard His voice I If not, I am yet lost; you are yet lost. You may say, But surely you do not put us all down as lost? The Son of God says it, and He makes no mistakes.

Not long ago, a friend of mine was preaching in this town to a very large audience. At the close of the meeting, I came in contact with an excessively intelligent, and withal earnest young fellow, one of your own set. I got into conversation with him, and asked him if he were saved. He said, “How can I know?” “Well,” I replied, “I know that I am saved, thank God. Don’t you know it?” “No,” he replied, “but I am doing my best to live a proper, moral, straight, and square life.” “Quite right,” I said, “that is exactly what you should do.” “Won’t that have some weight with God?” he asked. “Won’t that curry favor with God?” “Well,” I said, “Stop a moment. Will your life compare with the life of Jesus?” He thought a minute, and then said, “What do you mean?” “I mean this — Do you think your life will compare with the life of Jesus?” After thinking a little, he replied, “I could not say that. I am doing my best to live a moral, proper, and square life, but I cannot say that it could compare with that of Jesus.” “Well then,” I said, “you won’t do for God; because only one man will suit Him, and that is Jesus; He is the Truth. He is what a man should be. A man should be holy, spotless, sinless, undefiled, absolutely devoted and true to God. That is what Jesus was.” He thought a moment, and then turning round sharply to me, said, “If what you say is true, every man is lost” “Yes,” I said, “you have hit the nail on the head this time. That is exactly what Scripture says. Every man is lost, and ‘the Son of Man is come to seek, and to save, that which was lost.’”

So you see, my friends, Christ brings out the truth as to our state. We are sinners; and, if sinners, we are under sentence of death, and lost. If you will turn to another portion of Scripture, where, in parabolic guise, the Lord brings out the truth, whether it be the shepherd who sought

his sheep, the woman who lost her money, or the father receiving his son, you will find that the one word He uses is “Lost.” The sheep was lost, the silver was lost, the prodigal was lost. It is man’s state before God, and, what I urge upon you is, that He comes to you this evening, and bears witness to the truth of the condition of man — hence your condition.

Pilate turns from Jesus with the question, “What is truth?” Contemptuously, he turns his back upon Him, who is the Truth. Pilate certainly desired to save Jesus. He did not want to put the Lord to death. I do not believe he had any animus against Christ; but, mark, Pilate got an opportunity of knowing the truth, and missed it. That is the point. I do not say he was not touched. I do not say he was not roused. I think he was; he wanted to let the Lord off. He had a feeling of awe, a feeling that he had better not touch Him. At length, when he had made up his mind that He was guiltless, and three times had said, “I find no fault in him,” he pronounced sentence against Him. “I have found no cause of death in him; I will therefore chastise him and let him go,” gives evidence of how impressed Pilate was. But the Jews clamored for his death, so he gave way, and was about to sign his death-warrant, apparently, when there came a message from his wife, “Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him” (Matt. 27:19). After this, I think, he desired more strenuously than ever to let Jesus go. When he met Jesus, He gave him the opportunity of choosing the truth, but he failed to take it. He then thought he might release Him to the people, for at that time, as an expression of his clemency, he allowed a prisoner to go free. But the people would not have Him: “Not this man, but Barabbas,” they cried. They would not have Christ, and Pilate yielded to their demand, for he was afraid of the world.

I will tell you one thing, which would be most difficult for you to do, and that is, for you to stand up for Christ. You would fearlessly expose yourself to disease, you would lead a forlorn hope, and go boldly up to the cannon’s mouth, with the chance of having your head blown off; but you would find it next to impossible to stand up for Christ among your comrades. How do you know? I will ask you this question, Have you stood up for Christ? Has the Lord said of you, “There is a man, that is really for Me”? I will tell you, by so much, as we are influenced by the world, just so much are we under its thumb. Just, by so much, as one wants the favor of the world, so much are we governed by it. Pilate was going to let Jesus off, but the Jews, whom he professedly governed, really governed him, as they cried out, “If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar’s friend.” Ah! Pilate did not want to lose the patronage of Caesar. He did not want to lose the favor of the world. Satan knows the weak spot in every man’s heart, and knows how to touch it too. The world’s approval was worth more to Pilate than the possession of the truth. Caesar’s friends must side with Caesar, and Jesus’ friends must side with Jesus. Pilate preferred the friendship of Caesar, and, making up his mind irrevocably, parted with Christ. He got a splendid chance, but lost it. Do not you imitate him. You have the chance tonight of taking Christ’s side; you have an opportunity, every man in this hall has an opportunity. “Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice.” “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:9-10). The man who will take his stand for the Lord Jesus Christ will find what God’s salvation is.

Pilate then dooms Him to die. Jesus goes forth wearing a crown of thorns and a purple robe. He, who was the Truth, wore upon His head the emblem of the curse. One thing comes out clearly in the cross of Christ, and that is His self-sacrifice. He goes to the cross, and there Jesus brings out the truth as to God’s nature when sin is in question. He who knew no sin was made sin, and on that tree God forsook Him. We read elsewhere, “From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour, and about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli! Eli! lama sabachthani? that is to say, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:45-46). He was then bearing witness, as to what the truth regarding God’s judgment of sin was. It was this, that sin could only separate the soul from God. He was forsaken by God, when He was bearing the sins of many. In the very moment of bearing those sins He made atonement for them. He presented His precious life to God, and He who knew no sin, was made sin, that He might put it away by the sacrifice of Himself.

Then we notice Jesus cried out, “It is finished.” What was finished? By His death He met all the claims of God in righteousness, and consequently can meet all the claims of our consciences. “He suffered for sins once, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). Christ has accomplished redemption by His sacrifice. He has borne our sins, and put them away. He has annulled death, and met the claims of God. He, as man, went into the grave, and God has taken Him out of the grave; and He is now at the right hand of God, and the Holy Spirit has come down to tell us that He will quickly come again. Have you then heard and believed the gospel of your salvation? Have you heard the Word, believed the Truth, and received the gospel of your salvation? Oh! tonight may you hear Him. I have heard Him, and my heart bows down with gratitude when I hear that dying Saviour utter the words, “It is finished.” I believe it as I hear it. “Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.”

Well, I am brought down by the sense of my need as a sinner, and, as a sinner, look to Him, and get the knowledge of what He has done. It is all finished, and now the question is very simple, Is Christ to be your Saviour? Are you to be Christ’s, is He to be yours? Will you hear His voice tonight?” He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.” Oh! wonderful fact. He that heareth His voice is of the truth. What have I heard Him witness? To this — that man was lost, undone. And then I get the other side of the truth, the love of God has come out in the giving up of His only Son to become the substitute of sinners, that He might save every one who believes on Him. Do you think it is a poor thing to become a Christian? You never made a greater mistake in your life. It is the grandest thing in the world. Ah! but you say, “You are old and gray-haired.” Well, I was converted when I was twenty, and I am deeply thankful that I have known the Lord all these years. I never regret that I was won for Jesus when I was just turned twenty. You turn to Jesus just now. You could not have a better opportunity, and I implore you, hear the voice of the Son of God. Do not forget this, “Every one that is of the truth, heareth my voice.” Have you heard it?

Simon Peter: His Life and Letters, Feet-Washing

John 13

This chapter occupies a peculiar place in the gospel. The Lord’s earthly history is over, one might say, and He anticipates in this chapter, and the four that follow, the cross, and what were to be the legitimate results of the cross, on which He glorifies God fully. Here, when about to leave the earth, He introduces the disciples into association with Himself, into the new and heavenly place that, as man, He is about to take. They had thought of Him as the Messiah, about to set up the kingdom on earth: He the King, and they profoundly blessed with Him. That is

now all over, and here in the thirteenth chapter, as passing out of the scene, He intimates to the disciples what He would be to them, and what they were to be for Him. On earth He had been their companion; He could be it in this sense on earth no longer. He is going to show them how He can take them where He is going, and fit them to be there.

Jesus here takes on Himself peculiarly the place of a servant. He is perfectly their servant; He who was Lord of all. He is never going to cease to be the servant of His people. “Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end” (vs. 1). There is no end to the love of the blessed Lord; His circumstances may change, but there is no change in His love.

We have the Lord here as the perfect antitype of the Hebrew servant in Exodus 21. He might have gone out free, but then must have left his wife and children behind. “If the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free:... then his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him forever” (Ex. 21:5-6). He will not be separated from those He loves, and that really is the meaning of John 13.

Jesus is going to take His loved ones, to be with Himself, in the place to which He is going, on the ground of redemption. There is a noticeable point in connection with this paschal supper, and the feet-washing, namely, those who prepared it. Matthew informs us (Matt. 26:17-19) that the disciples inquired of the Lord where they should prepare for Him to eat, and He told them, but none are named. Mark, in relating the same occurrence (Mark 14:12-16), says, “He sendeth forth two of his disciples.” Luke supplies their names: “And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat” (John 22:8). John, who had been associated with Peter in this sweet service, with his accustomed diffidence and hiding of himself, makes no allusion to the preparation of the supper, in which he had had a hand, but records the touching fact — and he is the only evangelist that does — that are they partook, the blessed Lord Himself washed their feet, soiled doubtless in this very service, and, thus refreshed, rendered them the better able to enjoy it. Little doubt have I that Peter greatly enjoyed thus serving His Lord, though he shrank, as we shall see, from His lowly grace that sought to wash his defiled, and possibly wearied feet.

This supper scene is replete with the grace and love of Jesus. It is the evening before His death, and “supper being ended” everything was ready: even the base turpitude of Judas was consummated. Jesus knew He was going to depart out of this world, so rising from supper He performs an action most blessed and instructive. “He riseth from supper and laid aside his garments; and took a towel and girded himself,” — that is, He assumes the place of the servant — ”After that he poureth water into a boson, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded” (vss. 4, 6). It was the habit of the country that if a man bade you to his house, the first thing he would do was to provide water for the feet. In Genesis 18:3-4, Abraham did; in Luke 7 the Lord reproaches Simon that he did not. The Lord takes here the place of host, and provides the water, and He takes also the slave’s post, and washes their feet. The Lord of glory stoops down and washes the feet of these twelve men. It was perfect grace; He who was God stooping down and becoming a man, and then as man stooping to do an action few of us would have grace to do. Then, refreshed and comforted, He desired that His own should partake of the feast to which He had invited them. He ever desires to make His people profoundly restful.

Peter, true to his character, comes forward, and, speaking after the manner of men, says, “Lord, dolt thou wash my feet?” It was incomprehensible to him. It was lowering Himself on the Lord’s part: that was Peter’s thought, the thought of man, for we do not know how to stoop naturally — only grace, only real loftiness can do it. But Peter’s speaking out what was in his heart, becomes the means of developing, from the Lord, precious blessed truth. “Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter” (vs. 7). It was not till the Holy Spirit came down that there was the spiritual intelligence to learn the meaning of this action. All through the Lord’s life His words were misunderstood. Until there be the possession of the Holy Spirit there will never be the knowledge of the mind and ways of God. The possession of life does not mean power, and intelligence; it is the possession of the Holy Spirit that marks the difference between saints now, and those of bye-gone times.

The answer of Jesus discloses the spiritual meaning of what He was doing, a meaning Peter could not then understand, hence he says, “Thou shalt never wash my feet;” but “Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” You see man was in a condition of sin and ruin here, with which Christ could have no part. You must be dependent on me, He therefore says, to fit you to be in the place to which I am going.

Unless I am cleansed by the blood of Christ in the first instance, and know the cleansing power of the water, I have no part with Christ. He died to make me clean, and He lives to keep me clean. Unless washed in His blood first of all, there can be no link with Him, and unless there be the maintenance of this state, by the washing of the water, there can be no part with Him. Peter then says, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.” He is like many Christians now, they have been washed in the Saviour’s blood, and know it: are forgiven, and know it; but if the conscience gets defiled, then they think they must go back and be washed again in the blood; but that would reduce the blood of Christ to a level with the blood of bulls and goats in Old Testament history. Now the blessed truth is that, “This man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, forever sat down on the right hand of God” (Heb. 10:12). The efficacy of that blood always abides before God, and the possibility of the soul being re-washed in that blood is forever precluded. It was the imperfection of the Old Testament sacrifice that made its repetition necessary. It is the perfection of Jesus’ sacrifice that makes its repetition impossible. You say, What about the daily failure? That is what this chapter speaks of: that is the cleansing by water, not blood, and is by the Word of God. Water gives the sense of purification. Peter says, “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit” (1 Peter 1:22). I do not doubt that water is the Word of God applied by the Spirit; it carries the thought of purification by the Word of God, which comes to, and judges me thoroughly.

This is brought out in the Lord’s reply to Peter. “Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean” (John 13:10-11).

There are two different words used by the Lord here for “wash.” The first word carries with it the thought of cleansing by immersion in the great Roman hath, used in the morning for the whole body; but then, through the day, it was a constant and common thing to have the feet refreshed by being washed, and here the word used is that which applied to anything small.

The water itself, employed here or elsewhere as a figure, signifies purification by the Word, applied in the power of the Spirit. When one is “born of water, and of the Spirit” (John 3:5), then the whole body is washed. There is a purification of thoughts, and of the actions likewise, by means of an object which forms and governs the heart. This is necessarily connected with the work of Christ on the cross, and the blood of atonement. If a believer at all, you are cleansed by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ — and you start “clean every whit,” — whiter than the driven snow by the Saviour’s precious blood. You have been bathed by that which has removed every trace of defilement, so that Christ can

say “clean every whit”; but since we walk through a defiled, and defiling world, “he that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet.”

What do you understand by the feet? It is the walk. As we pass through this scene we do contract defilement. This does not suit God’s house, and must therefore be remedied. The love of the Lord supplies the remedy. He washes our feet. He uses only water to do it too. Once the soul has been converted it cannot be repeated; once the Word has been applied by the Holy Spirit, the work is done, and it cannot be undone, any more than the sprinkling of the blood can be repeated, or renewed. I cannot be born again twice, or be washed from my sins in the blood of Christ twice. “Once” is the word Scripture uses in this respect: but I may sin and defile my feet, and my communion with God may be interrupted. Then it is that the Saviour’s tender love is seen in restoration. He uses the basin and the towel now, although He is in glory.

How does He effect this? Always by the Word of God — water. How that Word may reach us is quite another matter. It may have been in private, when no eye was upon us but His own, and no voice heard but His, through the written page of Scripture; or, on the other hand, we may have been refreshed or comforted, or our consciences reached, through the public exercise of a brother’s ministry. Where has the word come from that has touched our hearts? From the Lord; it is the present ministry of Christ. We are more inclined to look at the vessel He uses, so to speak, that which holds the water, the basin, but it is really the Lord who is ministering to us. He has his eye on each sheep, and He knows just what each sheep wants, and He knows how to speak the word which shall refresh the heart, and remove defilement.

But perhaps someone will ask, “What is this thirteenth of John — this feet-washing — is it priesthood or advocacy?” The difference is important! Both offices have to do with Christ’s intercession for us. Priesthood is exercised that we may not sin, advocacy is for sins that have been committed, that communion may be restored. Here it is more the character of advocacy. It is the ministry of His perfect love that cannot rest unless He has His people near Him, and unless He removes everything that could keep them at a distance. Those you love you like to have near you, and your love is never more gratified that when those you love count on your love, and more, use it! For love likes to serve, and selfishness likes to be served. Love that serves always gets refreshed, and he that waters others gets refreshed himself.

The difference between the priesthood and advocacy of the Lord Jesus is very important to be clear about. Priesthood maintains the soul before God. It does not contemplate failure. I am maintained in all the strength of His shoulder, and the affections of His heart before God, in all the efficacy of the work that He did before He became a Priest, for he was not a Priest upon earth.

In 1 John 2 you find what an advocate is. It is the same word as is rendered Comforter in John 14, 15 and 16. The Christian has two Comforters, one in heaven, and one in earth. In heaven the Comforter, the Lord Jesus, is before the Father. On earth the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, dwells in the body of the believer in the Lord Jesus. The Lord never ceases to love, and the Holy Spirit never leaves the believer. If I think of the Lord on high, or of the Spirit on earth, both are busy with the interests and blessing of those whom they serve.

In John’s first epistle we read that we are not to sin “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye in not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). In the seventh verse of the first chapter, it says, “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” That is the continuously abiding character of the blood, that has made you clean, and keeps you clean. It is the blood that keeps you clean before God, in divine righteousness; it is the water that keeps you clean as to your conscience, and fits you for communion. “If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” If I say I have no sins, it is true, because Christ bore them and put them away; but if I say I have no sin, the truth is not in me, for that is my nature as a child of Adam, and the flesh is still in me. If it acts I at once have sins, of which God and the conscience are cognizant. How then do we as believers get rid of these daily sins? “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). That supposes the possibility of a Christian sinning, which necessarily interrupts his communion. What is the way for him to get rid of his sin? How can he get back? If he endeavors to go back to God, saying, as of old, “I am a lost sinner,” he will never got restoration that way. Why? Because he is not a lost sinner, he is a defiled child, a naughty child. That soul never gets right till it comes back in the acknowledgment of its true relationship, which, thank God, its sinful ways have not destroyed, and says, Father, I have been a naughty child. The man that is right before God confesses his sin and then he learns what forgiveness is.

Merely asking for forgiveness, and the confession of sins, are two different things. Confession involves real exercise, and brings with it blessing. The mere asking for forgiveness is often only akin-deep. Confession must be individual. It is the individual who has failed, and he confesses his sin to his Father. The man who says he has “no sin,” has not the truth in him. This should cause some latter-day perfectionists to call a halt, and see the solemn ground they are really on. The man who says he has “not sinned” makes God “a liar” (1 John 1:10), for He asserts that “all have sinned” (Rom. 3:28), and every person would do well to ponder this statement. But there is perfect relief here for the erring or backsliding saint, the one who has been a naughty child. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” He is faithful and just to Christ, who has died for these sins. The man who really seeks this relief says, “I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord;” and what did he find? “Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin” (Psa. 32:5).

But there is something further than this. We ought not to sin, and there is no reason that we should sin. The flesh in you does not give you a bad conscience, but if you let it act, it gives you a bad conscience. “He that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked” (1 John 2:6). The Christian’s life is Christ, and his power is the Holy Spirit, and Paul says, “I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:18). If I sin, the blessed Advocate on high does His intercessory work that I may be restored. He takes the initiative in grace, as we see in Peter’s own case later on. The result of His advocacy I believe is that the Holy Spirit puts the sin on my conscience, communion is interrupted, and not restored, until I confess it to the’ Father, and thus get my conscience relieved, and cleansed through the purifying effect of the Word. Communion with God is then restored.

Before Peter sinned Jesus prayed, and when Peter sinned and denied his Master, the Lord turned and looked on Peter. The procuring cause of Peter’s restoration was the Lord’s prayer, but the producing means of Peter’s restoration was the Lord’s look on him in Pilate’s hall.

The washing of the feet therefore is a service with which Christ is now occupied for us. If negligent — for which there is no cause, or excuse, or need — we defile our feet, are thereby rendered spiritually unfit to enter into God’s presence; Christ thereupon cleanses us by the Word, so that our communion with our God and Father may be re-established.

Having resumed His garments, we find the Lord urging on His disciples to “do as I have done to you.” “If I then your Lord and Master have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another’s feet” (vs. 14). That is we ought to be able and willing to help each other. It is not feet-washing to point out the fault of another. If you are going to wash another’s feet, you must get down low enough yourself. “If ye know

these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (vs. 17). I think the secret of a good deal of want of happiness lies in this. We are not doing this. If we were more desirous, in the spirit of meekness, to take the spot off some erring child of God, we should know more what this means. We are still called to wash one another's feet, to apply the Word in grace to the conscience of an erring brother or sister who needs it. But to really do this we must be in the humility of Christ, so blessedly shown in this heart-touching scene.

I am much struck with the way in which the history of Peter fills up the gospels, and how much of instruction, deep and blessed instruction, we owe to him. His questions, his mistakes, his assertions, and his varied impulsive actions, are all marked and striking means of drawing out from the Lord much that is blessed and profitable for us.

Some of these questions appear in John 13, but these, with others scattered through the gospel narratives, we will reserve for our next chapter.

Handfuls of Purpose, Personal Attachment

(John 1:35,42; 12:1-8; 20:10-18)

We have heard times without number, beloved brethren, that it is the loving heart that learns; and it is the loving heart that the Lord leads on. I just turn to these scriptures as illustrative of this precious principle. It is a question all through, you see, of a Person. It is an immense thing to know that Christianity is not a question of doctrines, but of a Person, and the heart being attached to a Person. It is not the head assenting to a scheme of truth, but truth wrapped up in the Person of a living Man, and the heart attached to that Person. There is a peculiar charm in looking at the Gospels, particularly John's Gospel, in this way.

No doubt God has recorded these simple narratives for our help, and to win our hearts to His dear Son, after a similar sort. You see in the early part of John's Gospel a beautiful display of Christ in this scene, and the various ways in which the Lord revealed Himself to many souls, and the way in which He attracted them to, and eventually attached them to Himself. You have the Lord attracting souls in the early part of the Gospel — like a magnet — drawing them out from one recess and another. He attracted hearts to Himself by the revelation of Himself, in a way that met the peculiar state of the soul He was attracting, and that is just what He is doing today. The work is peculiarly individual, and is done very quietly, whether it be in the case of Andrew and his fellow; Peter, Philip or Nathanael (chap. 1); Nicodemus (3); the woman at the well, and the nobleman (4); the paralytic of Bethesda (5); the woman in the temple (8); the man born blind (9); or Mary of Bethany (11); and they are but samples of many others of whom you read in the Gospels. They show the winsome way in which Jesus attracts souls to Himself, and ministers to them according to the skilfulness of His hands, and the integrity of His heart.

At the end of the Gospel you will see what a wonderful place some of these attracted ones have. You will find some of those hearts were able to minister to Jesus; were able, as it were, to present to Him a cup of cold water, as none else could, in the moment of His deep sorrow in this scene. It is a wonderful thing to be able to minister to the heart of Christ in this scene. It is like Genesis 24; the bride was chosen really by the Father; and the appointed servant took her to Isaac. Isaac loved her, and then in the hour of his sorrow — for his mother had died — it was by Rebecca that he was comforted. In Genesis 22 you have the story of the love of the Father to the Son. It is interesting to note that this is the first time in Scripture where you get love mentioned; the next time we find it spoken of it is the love of the Bridegroom to the Bride (chap. 24). He loves her, and she comforts him. That is exactly what you would expect to find in Scripture, the love of the Father for the Son first, and then the love of the Bridegroom for the Bride, he comforted by her. Yes, love is always personal, and reciprocal.

If you look at this scene where John opens his Gospel, it is beautiful. The Baptist sees the Lord, and says, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Now, observe that no one follows Him, as the fruit of that testimony. It was a good remark made here today, that, It is not merely a work, we have to present, but a Person. When the work was presented, no one followed Him. The next day John's eye rested on the Lord again, in a sort of contemplative way, and, as he gazed on Him, he exclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36). Immediately it detaches two of his disciples from himself, and they follow the Lord. The Lord turns and sees them following, and says, "What seek ye?" To them it was a suited query, for it raised the question as to whether affection really wrought in their hearts; but when the Lord speaks to Mary (John 20), He does not say, "What seekest thou? "No, angels may inquire, "Woman, why weepest thou?" but He says, "Whom seekest thou?" He has awakened in her soul affections that only Himself can satisfy, and He says, "Whom seekest thou?" Peter and John, after seeing the sepulcher, might go away home, but without Jesus Mary was homeless. Nothing could satisfy her but Himself.

No doubt the Lord begins with us often with "What seek ye?" but when love has its own way it is, "Whom seek ye?" "Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?" speaks volumes. Here He says to the two disciples, "What seek ye?" and the answer is very beautiful, "Master, where dwellest thou?" that is, Where is the place that we can always be sure of finding you? They really wanted His company. He says, "Come and see." They abode with Him that day. There were two hours left of the day. But what was the effect of those two hours? Well, I know that if you spent two hours with Jesus, in the enjoyment of His love and His company, you would be obliged to go and get some one to share it too. Saints sometimes say they cannot preach the gospel! You could not help it if you were to spend two hours with that blessed One. If you sat under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to your taste, you would be obliged to go, you could not rest till you had got some one else to share the banquet with you.

We only notice Andrew's voice thrice in the Gospels. First, he tells Simon of Jesus; next, he informs the Lord about the "five barley loaves, and two small fishes" (John 6:9); and lastly, he tells Jesus of the wish of the Gentiles to see Him (John 12:21-22). The first day he went off to get Peter. We hear very little after this of Andrew, but a great deal of Peter. Nevertheless, by-and-by, I think it will be very interesting to see the Lord's estimate of, and reward to the man who was the means of Peter's conversion. Probably he was not a great preacher, nor may you be; but he was a lover of Jesus, so brought his brother to Him. "Go, and do thou likewise." If you were the means of introducing some one to the Lord, who turned out like Peter, it would be a very wonderful day's work, though you did no more. Have you ever had two hours with Jesus? It would leave its stamp on you. I know if you had two hours with Him you would want three, and if you had three you would want four! and some one to share your joy and delight in Him.

I do not go into all the cases where the Lord attracts people to Himself. The man of the third chapter (Nicodemus) was drawn by a needy conscience; the woman of the fourth, by the achings of an empty heart; but in these and every other case it was the influence of His own Person. How blessed to see the Lord drawing hearts to Himself! That was the early part of His ministry. Towards the close of that wondrous life, God shows the other side of our subject, and He has been very careful to show it; but not till the last week of the Lord's life does it all come out.

In John 12 we have the touching scene of the supper at Bethany, "six days before the passover" (that is, the Lord's Day really, I suppose) and you get the moment when the Lord is "comforted," if I may use the expression. In the hour of His rapidly approaching sorrow, the Lord's heart — deeply feeling all that was coming — was met and ministered to by a heart long before attracted to Him. Mary is only mentioned three times. You have her first in Luke 10 Martha was busy about service, but Mary sat at His feet and heard His word. You always find her in the same posture, "at His feet." The Holy Spirit is careful to record it. In John 11 she is there again. The Lord loved her, and I conclude she knew it right well, for it says, "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." It is very sweet to know the love of Jesus — not merely His love of pity, which meets us in our needs — but the love of complacency and delight. The Old Testament is very full of it in figure. How sweet to know yourself loved by Him!

In John 11 we find Mary at the feet of the Lord in the moment of her sorrow. She then tasted the sweetness of His sympathy, and her heart got more firmly knit to Him than ever. Then when the moment of His sorrow hovered in the distance — when she saw how His death was desired by the Jews, with the intuitive perception of love (nothing is so keen-sighted as love), when the appointed supper-hour came, she brought her alabaster box of ointment and poured it on His feet. It has been well said that Mary's action was the only thing that was right and suitable at that moment. The heart that had learned the sweetness of His love, and the knowledge of His ways, alone had the mind of God for the moment. If you knew someone you loved was going to be cruelly murdered within six days, you would not make a feast. That is not the way you would express your love; so this heart that loved Him, that had heard His word, knew His fullness, and had learned His sympathy, intuitively felt the feast was out of place, but seized the opportunity of lavishing her love — her all — on the One to whom she owed everything. It was a comely act, never to be forgotten. He was alongside of her in her sorrow, she heard Him groan, and saw Him weep; now she is fitted, through affection, to be a comfort to Him in the moment of His sorrow, and to minister to His blessed heart as love alone can do, and, I am bold to say, she did the only thing that was suitable at the moment.

There was not one at that moment in the mind of God but this woman. She brings her box, and anoints the Lord with the ointment. She had kept it for His burial, but she had the sense — "If I wait till He is dead, I shall never break it over Him; the grave, out of which He took my brother, cannot hold Him." It was affection that acted so sweetly here. I do not suppose she could have told you in words why she did it. The brethren all looked down upon her. Do you think she wanted to draw the eyes of the brethren upon her, or to display her devotedness? I think, had you asked her, "Mary, why did you do that?" she would only have said, "I do not know why, but I just know I did it." It was the one right thing, and the Lord, as it were, throws His wing over her, and says, "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached... this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." There will be thousands of Marys in heaven, but, of them all, one will be known as the Mary who did the right thing, in the right way, and at the right time, and it was her simple love to Jesus that prompted and wrought such a "good work." If there is one thing above another that God appreciates in this scene, it is attachment of heart to His Son. Was not her act dear to the Lord? I could not trust myself to speak of what it was to Him, but you can infer His estimate of it by the eternal and world-wide publicity He declares her act shall have.

I now pass on to another Mary (John 20). She had not the intelligence of the first Mary, but she loved the Lord. The other disciples could go to their homes; Mary Magdalene had no home in this scene but the grave of her blessed Lord. He was gone, the light of her life was gone out with His death, and the world was a vast blank. Her heart was buried in the grave of her Lord. He had died. The angels greet her with "Woman, why weepest thou?" She replies,

"They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." She could say in the early part of the chapter to the disciples, "They have taken away the Lord; "now in this deep sorrow it is "my Lord." Was not that sweet to the ear of the Father? Nor is this all — angels in no sense detain her. Methinks many of us would have taken a good look at these angelic messengers; she turns her back on them. Nothing but Jesus can meet and fill her desolate heart. Turning her back on angels, she sees a Man, and then she hears a voice which says: "Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?" He alone knew how to do it, and wondrously does He touch a spring in her soul. "Tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away," was her reply. Do you not think that her answer was most grateful to the heart of the Savior? A little affection for Himself goes a long way. He loves to have the simple, unfeigned affection of our hearts.

He knew He had her heart's love, even though she loved Him dead; but it was Himself she loved. He says but one word, "Mary." It is enough. She hears the voice she has heard before; she is at His feet, and He brings out to her that wonderful unfolding of truth, the like of which was never presented to any before, as He says to her, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father: but go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God." He says to her, as it were, "You have had Me here, Mary, and lost Me; but I have a place up yonder that was always Mine; it was Mine from all eternity, but I was in it alone. Now I have come down, and died, and risen again, and I am about to return to that place of joy and rest with the Father; but I am not going back alone, I am going to share that place with others now." He stands on a new platform before God, and says, "I am going to share it with My brethren; go and tell them."

You cannot tell what a wonderful privilege it was for that woman to get that message from the Lord on that resurrection morning, and what a cheer to Him to get a heart really occupied with Himself! True, I repeat, she loved Him dead; but she loved Him. Was it not grateful to His heart? I believe it was deeply grateful to Him to find a heart that had not a single thing in the world but Himself. That was the first heart He met when He rose from the cold and silent tomb, and if He blessedly comforted Mary, be assured of it that her love was deeply prized by Him. Oh! to be more like her!

If the box of ointment in Bethany was like water to His thirsty spirit, and the dying thief's blessed testimony — who owned Him when all the world was against Him — was a similar cheer to His heart, was it not refreshing to Him to see, as He came alive in this cold scene once more, a heart that could turn its back on everything in this world for love of Himself? I verily believe it was.

But things are changed now. He has gone to the Father, and He says, "If ye loved Me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go to the Father." What a wonderful thing that He should care about the love of such hearts as yours and mine! We have heard much of His love today, the

Father’s love, and the love of Christ. May the result be that we each more simply and truly love Him, while waiting for Him. Then we shall see His face, and rejoice forever in His presence!

clickbible.org