

## A Devotional Commentary on the Gospels

Arranged for family devotions,  
for every day in the year

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### APRIL 1

#### **Luke 8:1-3. *The women who followed Jesus.***

In these verses we have a description of our Savior's diligence, of his poverty, and of his humility.

His *diligence* was unwearied. He went as an itinerant (or a wandering preacher) from place to place. He knew the value of the souls of men, and the danger in which they lay; and being full of love, he delighted in declaring the glad tidings of salvation.

Though all are not called to *preach*, as he was, all are called to promote the salvation of their fellow-sinners. Yet how many, far from endeavoring to convert others, are themselves content to remain unconverted! They are too *slothful* to inquire earnestly, "What shall we do to be saved?" though they are often eagerly asking, "What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" How strange it seems to spend so much anxiety upon a *dying* body, and so little upon a *never-dying* soul!

While Jesus was upon earth, there were some women who accompanied him from place to place to hear his word. They were bound to him by ties of gratitude, having been healed by him of various infirmities.

Mary Magdalene, or Mary of Magdala, (the town from which she came, as it is supposed,) had once been possessed by seven devils. We should not conclude from this circumstance that she had been peculiarly wicked. The possession of devils seems to have been an *affliction* rather than a sin; for we never find that Jesus rebuked the *people* who were possessed, but only the *devils*. Many have supposed that Mary Magdalene was the woman who washed the Redeemer's feet with her tears; but there is no evidence to prove this opinion to be true. Yet Mary loved Jesus with the same devoted affection as that poor weeping sinner did; she followed him to his cross, and shed tears at his grave, and had the honor

of being the *first* to behold him after his resurrection.

Another woman, who followed him, was the wife of Herod's steward. The bad examples of Herod, and of Herodias, had not hindered her from embracing that Gospel which her superiors despised. She also continued faithful to Jesus at his death, and at his grave.

Such was the *poverty* of Jesus, that he permitted these holy women and many others to contribute to his support. "They ministered unto him of their substance." Surely we think it *was* an honor to be allowed to give to him, who gave them all things. It is an honor that we may share with them. Though we may have little to give, yet, if we bestow that little in a spirit of love upon the least of the saints, we give unto Jesus himself.

Observe the *humility* of Jesus in accepting alms. That independent spirit, which the world so much commends, proceeds from pride of heart. It is right to desire to work for our own subsistence, rather than to receive charity; but when reduced to poverty, it is wrong to feel pain in accepting gifts from those who are richer than ourselves. Jesus *could* have turned *stones* into bread, but he chose rather to *receive* bread from his creatures. Thus he set us an example of humility.

It is supposed that it was about this time that a circumstance recorded by Mark took place. "They went into a house, and the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him, for they said, He is beside himself." (See Mark 3:19-21.) It seems probable that Jesus went into this house that he might rest his wearied frame and refresh himself with bread; but the multitude, anxious for his presence, induced him to resume his fatiguing labors. His friends, perhaps his unbelieving relations, (for some of them did not believe on him,) thought that he was mad, because he complied with the people's desire. They knew not his *motives*, and *therefore* they thought he was beside himself. When a person acts in a manner for which we can see no *motive*, we think that person must have lost his reason. If a person were to rush into this room, uttering loud cries, we would conclude he was mad; but if we found that the house was on fire, we would no longer wonder at his behavior, for we would think a house being on fire a sufficient *motive* to justify his earnestness.

The world are astonished at the earnestness of devoted Christians, because they cannot understand their *motives*. The believer beholds by faith a glorious heaven, and a dreadful hell; a gracious Savior, and a malicious tempter; immortal souls, and approaching judgment. He must therefore be earnest in attempting to save his fellow-sinners from perdition. The world beholds none of these things, and naturally wonders at the conduct of the Christian. Does the earnestness of devoted Christians astonish *us*? Do we say, "What is the need of all these exertions? Why cannot people be religious without pressing their opinions upon others?" If we think thus, is there not reason to fear that we know not the value of

souls, and that we believe not in the wrath to come?

**April 2**

**Matt. 12:22-30. *Christ disproves the Pharisees' blasphemous accusation.***

How dreadful was the accusation which the Pharisees ventured to make against the Savior! They were not able to deny that he had performed an astonishing miracle; therefore they accused him of casting out devils through the power of Beelzebub, (or Satan,) the prince of the devils. We see from this instance, that wicked men will always find some excuse for not believing in God. Sometimes they say that there is not sufficient proof that the Bible is true; but if their objections are answered, still they refuse to believe, and find some other excuse, however absurd, rather than give up their sins, and come to Christ for pardon. But we ought not to be impatient with those that oppose themselves to the truth. We should imitate Christ, who calmly answered the Pharisees. Jesus sometimes spoke severely to them, but never in answer to their reproaches against himself. He always behaved meekly when reviled by his enemies; thus setting us an example, that we should follow his steps.

He gave *two* reasons to prove that he did not cast out Satan by Satan's help. In the *first* place, he said that Satan would not assist him to injure his *own* kingdom; and in the *second* place, he asked the Pharisees by whom their children cast out devils; for there were certain people among the Jews, called exorcists, who *professed* to be able to cast out devils, though it is not certain whether they could *really* do so or not. Sceva, mentioned in Acts 19, was one of those "exorcists." Jesus knew that the Pharisees would never acknowledge that their own children, or friends, cast out devils by Satan, and therefore he declared that it was unreasonable to say that *he* was assisted by that evil spirit.

Then He related a very short parable to describe the work he was doing in the world. He compared himself to a man come to take possession of a house, and of the things in it. This house was the world, and the goods in the house were the souls of men. Jesus came to rescue these precious souls from Satan's power. He compared Satan to a strong man, who was in the house, and who tried to prevent him from coming in. Jesus came down to earth, and became a man that he might first bind Satan, and then spoil his goods; that is, redeem the souls that had been taken captive by the wicked one.

Jesus is still engaged in releasing captives. He calls upon all whom he has rescued to join in the mighty work. Can there be any so base and ungrateful as to hesitate to obey the summons? Those who hold back are counted by Jesus as his enemies. What an dreadful declaration there is in verse 30! "He who is not with me is against me; and he who gathers not with me, scatters abroad." None can remain neutral; all must be on one side or the other.

Great injury has been done to the Redeemer's cause by not speaking in its favor. When missionaries first proclaimed the gospel in Tahiti, they received this answer from some of the heathens! "Were these things true, would not Captain Cook have told us of them long ago? But neither he nor his sailors spoke about the religion that you teach." Thus we see that ungodly mariners, by not gathering with Christ, scatter abroad.

Some people imagine that if they do no harm *themselves*, they may go to those places where *others* speak and act wickedly. But there is a promise to him who shuts his eyes from *seeing* of evil. (Is. 33:16.) Those who love their crucified Savior cannot stand by and hear his name profaned, and see his laws broken. Instead of being amused, they feel as Moses did when, coming down from the Holy Mount, he found Israel engaged in the worship of the golden calf.

**April 3**

**Matthew 12:31, 32. *He warns against the unpardonable sin.***

This is a very dreadful part of our Savior's discourse to the Pharisees. There is a sin which cannot be forgiven, and it is a sin of the tongue. Certain *words* which may be spoken against the Holy Spirit, are called, "Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit." There is a mystery in this subject which we would not presume to attempt to remove. Yet we may form some idea of the nature of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, by examining the conduct of those whom Jesus now addressed. The Pharisees seem to have been convinced by the miracles of the Savior, that he was a true prophet; but though convinced, they were determined to reject him, and to set the people against him also. In this dreadful state of mind they accused him of working miracles by the power of Satan, and not by the Spirit of God. Had they *really* supposed he was assisted by Satan, their sin would not have been so enormous; *then* they would have sinned, as Saul of Tarsus did, "ignorantly, in unbelief;" but now they sinned against the convictions of their conscience, and with deliberate malice.

That man has reached the highest pitch of wickedness, who, though himself convinced of the truth of the gospel, endeavors to persuade *others* to disbelieve it. We hope there are not many who act so daring a part. It is probable that infidels are generally deceived themselves, before they attempt to deceive others. Such a state of unbelief, dangerous as it is, is far better than conviction of the truth, accompanied by determined hatred against God. Such is the condition of devils, and of all the lost spirits. They cannot doubt the power of God; but while they believe and tremble, they vent blasphemies against his holy name. Is any soul distressed with the fear lest he should ever have committed the unpardonable sin? let him take comfort. His fears prove that he is not sealed up in final impenitence. At the same time, let us all beware of the deceitfulness of

sin. Though every sin is not *unpardonable*, every sin is *dangerous*. Many who have never been guilty of the unpardonable sin, will nevertheless die unpardoned. Who can conceive how dreadful it is to feel you are dying, and that you are not pardoned. Some impenitent sinners die resting on *false* hopes; but others die in despair. Those who have stood by their death-beds, have declared that the sight of their agonies was too horrible to be endured.

Pardon, so little sought for by sinners while they live, is not always obtained when they are dying. The Hon. Francis Newport, an infidel, who died in 1692, in his last illness was heard to say, as he looked upon the fire, "O that I was to lie upon that fire for a hundred thousand years to purchase the favor of God, and be reconciled to him again! But it is a fruitless, vain wish; millions of millions of years will bring me no nearer the end of my tortures than one poor hour." This miserable man had not faith to come to the blood of Christ to wash away his sins. The understanding may be convinced, while the enmity of the heart against God is not removed.

#### April 4

#### **Matthew 12:33-37. Jesus warns against idle words.**

Behold an instance of the severe terms in which the meek and gentle Jesus sometimes rebuked sinners. He called the Pharisees a "generation of vipers." Thus he declared them to be the seed of the old serpent, and the children of Satan. They had accused him of casting out devils through the power of Satan, while they themselves belonged to the family of the wicked one. It is to be expected that the children of the devil should utter blasphemies, even as a bad tree brings forth bad *fruit*.

Though all have not reached the same height of wickedness as these Pharisees, yet all have by nature wicked hearts, that cannot bring forth really good fruit. If our hearts were in a right state, our *words* would be good. The tongue was given to man to bless God. David for this reason calls it his *glory*. "Awake, my glory." The tongue would indeed be the glory of man if his heart were right with God. What a noble use the angels make of their tongues! they unite in a never-ceasing song of praise to God. Adam, when first created, doubtless used his tongue for the same glorious purpose. But since the fall, the tongue has become the outlet of the abominations of man's heart—the evil treasure of his heart—his pride, his malice, his envy, his deceit—flow forth from his tongue. His heart is the black *fountain* of sin; his words are only the *streams*. We must be born again before we can utter words acceptable to God.

At the last day our words will be produced as the *evidence* of our state before God. It is true that many have said, "Lord, Lord," who have not loved God; but will *their* words be considered proofs of love? By no means; words *insincerely*

spoken will be regarded as crimes. Those who *said* what they did not *feel*, whether to God or man, will be pronounced *liars*, and we know that liars shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. It is only good words that have proceeded from our *hearts* that will then justify us, or show that we were born again and washed in Christ's blood. If, then, we feel that we are not fit to stand this test, let us entreat God to bestow new *hearts* upon us. Then our common discourse will be tintured with the love of God. Just as an affectionate parent is often *speaking* of his children, because he is always *thinking* of them; so, when we love *God*, we shall be disposed to be often speaking of his power, and wisdom, and goodness, because we shall be often *thinking* of them. The daily duties of life will not interfere with our thoughts of God, any more than they prevent a loving mother thinking of her children. Everything will remind us of our God. The beauties of creation, and the events of Providence, will lead us to think and to speak of Him; for in everything we shall see his hand. What the world calls "good luck," we shall call "great mercy;" and what the world speaks of as unfortunate accidents, we shall own to be "loving corrections." But most of all shall we differ from the world in our expressions concerning the Son of God and his believing people. That Savior we shall call "precious," his people "happy." It is true, those living in a Christian land seldom dare speak openly against Christ, but they show their real feelings by the contemptuous names they bestow on his most devoted servants. Their contemptuous words are *noticed* and *noted* down by God in his book, and shall be produced against them another day to their everlasting shame. "By their words they shall be condemned."

## April 5

### **Matthew 12:38-42. He refuses to give a sign to the Pharisees.**

It was *not* with a *sincere* desire to be convinced of the truth that the Pharisees wished for a *sign*. They had already witnessed so many miracles that they could not avoid knowing that Jesus was the Son of God. This was their great sin, that when they *knew* the truth they would not *confess* it. As our Savior afterwards said, (in John 15:24,) "If I had not done among them the works that no other man did, they had not had *sin*—but *now* they have both seen and hated both *me* and my Father."

The Pharisees were *determined* not to believe in Jesus. Whatever miracles he might perform, whatever signs he might show, they had made up their minds already; they would not believe on him themselves, nor let *others* believe on him. It is evident that this was their state of mind from their conversation when together. (See John 11:47, 48.) "Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man does many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him, and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation." Did not these words betray a dreadful state of mind? It was worse than *unbelieving*; it was *malicious*. It is in this spirit

that Satan himself opposes the kingdom of God.

And *what* was this *sign* from heaven for which the Pharisees asked? Probably it was one of those displays of glory that God once made on Mount Sinai, when He spoke from the midst of the fire, surrounded by clouds and darkness, thunderings and lightnings. Christ could easily have manifested his glory in the same manner, and he will do so when he comes again to judge the world. But he refused to grant the Pharisees' arrogant demand, and told them that they should have no other sign than the *sign* of the prophet *Jonas*. And what was that sign? It was his own resurrection; for Jonah's burial in the midst of the whale was a type of his burial in the heart of the earth; and Jonah's escape through the mouth of the fish, was a type of his bursting the barriers of the tomb.

It may surprise us to know that Jesus would be *three* days and *three nights* in his grave, seeing he only lay there from Friday evening to Sunday morning. But the Jews had a peculiar way of reckoning time—they considered a day and night as *one* period, and they counted a *part* of this period, as if it were the *whole*. Therefore, as Jesus was *part* of three days in the grave, he was there three days and three nights, according to the Jewish mode of speaking.

The Savior well knew that the Pharisees would not acknowledge him to be the Son of God, even when he rose from the dead; and so it proved; for when he did rise, and when the history of his resurrection was repeated to the chief priests and elders, how did they act? They bribed the soldiers who had guarded the tomb to deny the fact, and to say that the disciples had stolen his body away while they slept.

Well, therefore, might Jesus contrast the men of Nineveh with the Pharisees. The Ninevites repented when Jonah declared that in *forty days* their city should be destroyed. It is remarkable that in *forty years* from the time of our Savior's resurrection, Jerusalem was destroyed, because the Jews repented not. The Pharisees despised the Ninevites on account of their being Gentiles, yet these Gentiles were far better than themselves.

The Lord then brought forward an instance of another *Gentile* who acted in an opposite manner from the Pharisees—it was the queen of Sheba, who came from a distant country to receive instruction from Solomon. There have been heathens in later days who have resembled this ancient sovereign in her desire to obtain heavenly wisdom. Some years ago, two natives of Ceylon left their spicy isle, and came to dwell for awhile in our cold climate, that they might learn the gospel of the blessed God. When they were about to return home, a friend presented to them a magnificent mirror, but they refused to accept it. They said to their venerable teacher, Dr. Adam Clarke, "Tell our friend we cannot accept the mirror. We will take nothing home with us but the Bible you gave us and the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. To learn that gospel we crossed the ocean, and with it alone will we cross it again."

How unlike these unselfish Cingalese are those who for worldly reasons forsake the preaching of the truth! Whatever may be the advantages for which they give up that joyful sound, they make a poor exchange. Happy are those who can say with David, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." (Ps. 27:4.)

**April 6**

**Matthew 12:43-45. *The parable of the unclean spirit.***

It was in this alarming manner that our Savior concluded his rebukes to the wicked Pharisees. We can scarcely call this short history a *parable*, because it appears to be a literal account of an event that has taken place. Still it is a parable, because it is partly figurative—the heart of a man is *likened* to a house. And is it really true that unclean spirits make the hearts of men their habitation? How can we doubt what our Savior has so plainly declared?

Sometimes an evil spirit *forsakes* his habitation. This devil having left his house, traveled far through dry, or desert places, but found no rest. It seems probable that in the course of his wanderings he found no opportunity of injuring souls. Our enemy, we know, walks about seeking whom he may devour. Sometimes there is a restraint laid upon him, and he *cannot* perpetrate the evil that he desires; for he can do nothing without the permission of God. Perhaps this devil had left the man, hoping to make new conquests, and to increase the number of his victims; but when disappointed, he thinks of returning to his old abode. He says, "I will return unto my house, whence I came out." He claims the heart as his own property; he says, "*My* house." He returns and finds no obstacle to regaining possession of the soul he once inhabited. The house is not the less acceptable to him, because it is swept and garnished, or adorned. Nothing pleases Satan more than a show of piety in a wicked heart. The unclean spirit is not satisfied to dwell *alone*, but finds seven of his fellows to share his spoil. He selects some *more* wicked than himself, as his associates. There are *degrees* of wickedness even among *devils*, and no doubt pre-eminence in wickedness is their glory. It had been better for this miserable man, if the first inhabitant of his heart had never left it. But O! how infinitely better would it have been for him, if, when the devil had left him, he had opened his heart to the gracious Savior! Jesus is willing to come whenever he is invited; often he stands and knocks, and no man opens the door, and at length he withdraws, no more to return. Then the wretched soul must become the prey of demons. Even as a house forsaken by man soon becomes the habitation of beasts and birds, so does the heart, when Jesus is absent, become the habitation of the spirits of hell.

The greater part of the Pharisees did not profit from the warning Jesus gave

them; they grew more and more wicked; they crucified the Lord of glory, and persecuted his apostles. But let *us* profit from it, and never count ourselves safe, except Jesus reign in our hearts. Saul, the King of Israel, appears to have been such a man as our Savior described in this parable. The evil spirit that once tormented him, departed for a *season*, but soon returned and rendered him more wicked than before. All the evening of his days was spent in malicious persecutions of the innocent David, until he filled up the measure of his iniquity by consulting the witch of Endor.

Real conversion of the heart is the only preservative from Satan's malice. True believers alone are secure. There are evil days, days of peculiar temptation that come upon them, but neither seven wicked spirits, nor seventy times seven, can harm the heart fortified by the towers and bulwarks of *faith*. It is written, "He who is begotten of God keeps himself, and that wicked one touches him not," (1 John 5:18.) And how does he keep himself? He remembers his Lord's command, "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation."

## April 7

### **Matthew 12:46 to end. *He describes who are his mother and his brethren.***

Such were the gentle words which our Savior added to a discourse containing many severe reproofs and dreadful warnings. The former discourse, recorded in Matthew 11, also ended with sweet encouragement—"Come unto me, all you that are weary and heavy laden." But the passage we have just read is still more condescending! Who can value enough the honor of being mother, brother, and sister of the Lord of heaven and earth! How wonderful it is that sinners like ourselves should be raised to the enjoyment of such a privilege!

What was the occasion on which the Savior uttered the blessing to which we have just alluded? His mother and brethren desired to speak with him, but were unable to approach on account of the crowd that surrounded him. By the term "brethren," we must understand not only those whom we call brethren, but also more distant relations. It is probable that they wished from motives of affection to interrupt his labors, which appeared too severe for his strength. Why would not Jesus comply with their request? Because he saw multitudes of precious souls thronging around him, eager to hear the words of eternal life. Instead of admitting his relations immediately to his presence, he pronounced a blessing on his own disciples; saying, "Behold my mother and my brethren."

We must not suppose that he felt no regard for his mother, or for any of his relations, for we know that he bore to his mother such affection, that when hanging on the cross, he commended her with his expiring breath to the care of his beloved disciple. But by this expression, "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?" he taught us, that those united to him in *spirit* are nearer to him than

those related to him in the *flesh*. His mother, indeed, was *spiritually* connected with him, for she was a true believer. Before the birth of her divine Son, she said, "My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior;" therefore he loved her both as his mother, and as his own redeemed. But he did not love *her alone*; he loved all those who did the will of his Father in heaven.

It was to do his Father's will that he came down from heaven; as he said, "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me;" (John 6:38;) and he always did it *perfectly*. On one occasion he declared, "I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." How different is the state of the world! Every one by nature does his *own* will. Children soon betray their evil nature by striving to do their own, and not their parents' will. When they grow older, and hear the commandments of God, naturally they show no inclination to obey.

As soon as a person is converted, he begins to desire to do God's will. The 119th Psalm shows us how earnestly David sought to please his heavenly Father—"O that my ways were directed to keep your statutes," (verse 5.) "Behold I have longed after your precepts; quicken me in your righteousness," (verse 40.) But why did David utter these prayers? Because he felt that he could not of himself do God's will; therefore he prayed for grace from on high.

The holy apostle Paul could say, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." Yet the sin of his nature troubled him. He said, "I see a law in my members, warring against the law of my mind." All the children of God endure the same inward struggles that Paul and David endured. Each of them can say,

"Though I fail, I weep;  
Though I halt in pace,  
Yet I creep  
To the throne of grace."

But though they do not keep the Father's commandments *perfectly*, as Jesus did, they are comforted by knowing that He loves them.

It must have been delightful to hear him say on *earth*, "Behold my mother and my brethren!" How endearing was his attitude when he stretched forth his hands, to point out the objects of his love! The day will come when he will enclose his redeemed family in his everlasting arms, and declare, "Behold my mother and my brethren."

**April 8**

**Matthew 13:1-18. Christ relates the parable of the sower, and explains why he spoke in parables.**

We have much reason to rejoice that our blessed Savior explained the parable of the Sower; for had he not done so, many different opinions respecting its meaning would have been held, but now the signification is fixed and certain. We will, however, defer the consideration of it until we read our Lord's explanation.

After Jesus had finished his *public* discourse, he conversed privately with his disciples. In this conversation he declared some truths which have been much objected to by the world. His disciples inquired why he spoke in parables. In his reply, their Master unfolded some of the secrets of his Father's government. Can anything be so interesting as the ways of God towards man! In this passage some light is shed upon them.

Jesus said to his disciples, "Unto *you* it is *given* to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not *given*." We learn from this declaration that heavenly knowledge is the *gift* of God. All men by nature are without the knowledge of their Maker, as it is written, "There is none that understands; there is none that seeks after God." When Adam sinned, he lost the knowledge of his God, and all his children are born in this state of ignorance. They are not only ignorant of God—they have no *desire* to know him. There are many things of which we may be ignorant, yet which we should much like to learn. If a man well skilled in some useful art were to offer to teach gratuitously all who wished to learn, many would flock around him and become his scholars—for we naturally desire to learn useful arts. But though God offers to teach all who are willing to be instructed, very few come to him and say, "Teach me to do your will." Nor would *any* come and make this prayer, unless God first, by his Holy Spirit, put the desire into the heart. When this desire is *felt*, then the prayer is made, and the longing soul is taught. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "Whoever *has*, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance." There is an interesting account contained in a tract called "Jejana," of a little Hottentot girl who earnestly desired to know God. A black man, who knew but little himself, directed her to make this prayer, "Lord, help me; Lord, teach me." This prayer she often uttered when she knelt alone in some thicket. Such was her simplicity, that she added, "For David says you will." The pious black man's name was David. And did God fulfill his promise to this poor child? Assuredly he did. She became known to a faithful missionary, who took her into his service, and fully instructed her in the gospel of Christ.

Such is God's goodness towards those who desire to know him. The Pharisees, far from having this desire, were determined to reject the warnings of the Savior; therefore God gave them up to the blindness and deafness that they loved. Every warning they rejected closed their eyes in deeper night.

How dreadful was their condition! But all are in danger of falling into it, who are not obeying the gospel call. Those who hear the Bible read from day to day—who listen to the preacher's earnest entreaties from Sabbath to Sabbath—and

who yet make no effort to go to Christ, are becoming more hardened and more difficult to be converted. How blessed might our eyes be, for round us the true light shines! Yet how doubly cursed will these eyes be, if we wilfully close them against that light.

**April 9**

**Matthew 13:18-21. *The explanation of the former part of the parable of the sower.***

There is one circumstance which renders this parable peculiarly interesting. It describes the characters of *all* people who hear the gospel; therefore it must describe *ours*. Let us endeavor to discover by the help of God to which class we belong.

First—there are the wayside hearers—these seem to be careless people, whose minds are so trifling that though they *hear* the words of the preacher, they do not *reflect* upon their meaning. We know that the seed represents the word of God, whether spoken by faithful ministers and parents, or instructors or friends, or in whatever way conveyed to the mind. But though the seed is good, it does not spring up in every heart. Why does it not? Because every heart is not *prepared* to receive it. As a beaten path is a soil not prepared to receive seed, so a heart full of trifling thoughts is not prepared to receive the gospel. Such a heart finds religious instruction a weariness, and rejoices when the sermon is over, and the chapter is finished.

It is to be feared that every congregation contains many of these careless hearers, who hear the sermons with little interest; but even on the wayside, a seed might occasionally spring up, were it not for the passers by who tread it down, and for the birds who pick it up.

How can we calculate upon the amount of good that is prevented by those spirits that throng the air! They are all marshaled under one experienced commander, even that old serpent who tempted our first parents. Satan knows how to choose the most favorable opportunities for exerting his power. It is after faithful sermons have been preached that his hosts are on the alert to efface any impression that may have been made. The people who lie most exposed to his attacks are the inconsiderate, who have offered up no prayers for a blessing on the instructions they have received. What havoc is made every Sabbath night and every Monday morning in the paths where the faithful preacher was seen sowing just before! If Satan found people endeavoring to fix the sermon in their hearts by prayer and meditation, he would not have such great success. But is it surprising that he succeeds, when he finds so many who neglect secret prayer!

The next class of hearers appear at first sight more hopeful than the wayside

hearers. The seed sometimes falls on stony ground, where there is a little light, though dry earth; it soon springs up, but is soon withered by the heat of the sun.

The stony ground hearers receive the word with joy. When they hear the gospel, they attend, they remember, they are delighted, they determine to be Christians; they begin to do many things that are right, but when they find difficulties in their way they change their minds, and become as worldly as before. What is the reason of this? It is that their hearts were never softened by the Holy Spirit. They never were convinced of sin, they never *repented*. Repentance is the beginning of religion. Our Savior's first sermon was, "Repent." If we think we can be Christians without repentance we are mistaken. We *must* be brought to see what ungrateful creatures we have been to our best Friend. We must be led to mourn over such ingratitude, and to entreat for pardon and grace. Paul sat three days after his conversion fasting, before Ananias came and said, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins." Christians may feel different *degrees* of grief; but they all *grieve*. Those who have felt no godly sorrow will easily be induced to return to the world; they will never consent to make any great sacrifice for Christ's sake. They *cannot* resolve to give up a brilliant prospect, or to lose an advantageous situation, or to forfeit the favor of honorable people. No! they will sooner give up their religious profession, lose their hopes of heaven, and forfeit the favor of the glorious God.

## April 10

### **Matthew 13:22, 23. *The explanation of the latter part of the parable of the sower.***

Let us now consider the two latter kind of hearers which our Savior has described.

One is the thorny ground hearer—the soil of his heart is not so dry and barren as that of the stony ground hearer. The word sinks into it, and springs up, and blossoms, and buds, and produces fruit; but, alas! not good fruit. What is the reason of this failure? Thorns have grown up with the good seed, and have injured the heavenly plants. The thorns may have appeared very small and insignificant when first the seed was sown, but they increased in strength, and at length destroyed the hopes of the husbandman.

We cannot be at a loss to discover what the thorns represent; for our Lord distinctly declared them to be cares, riches, pleasures, and the lusts of other things. There are some people, who, when they hear the word, are arrested, touched, convinced, persuaded. They acknowledge they are sinners, they see Christ is the only Savior; they feel the value of their souls, and they desire to lead a religious life. But their affections are drawn off from God by worldly things. The *stony* ground hearers were induced to abandon their profession through fear of

persecution; the *thorny* ground hearers, while they continue to make a profession of religion, are enslaved by the love of the world. They attempt to serve God and mammon. What must be the result of such an attempt? Destruction. "For if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

The world wears many different forms, and tries to win us under various disguises. According to our age, our dispositions, and our circumstances will be our temptations. Pleasure allures the young, and care entangles the old—reputation is the desire of one, ease is preferred by another; but each of these is a thorn, and will prevent the good seed flourishing in the heart. What then can we do to avoid making a fruitless profession? We must apply to God to take the thorns out of our hearts; we cannot do it ourselves, but God is willing to do it for us. He can quench every inordinate desire, he can overthrow every earthly idol; he can come with sovereign power, and reign in our hearts.

No heart by *nature* is an honest and good heart. "There is none that understands and that seeks after God." Every heart of nature is like the wayside, the stony ground or the thorny ground. God alone can prepare sinners to receive his word. He can plough up the wayside, can take away the stones, and can pluck out the thorns.

There is a gracious promise in the Scriptures that He desires us to remember—"I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." Let us plead this promise in prayer. There is abundance of good seed scattered all over this land—thousands of Bibles, and millions of tracts. Why are not more souls converted? The hearts of men are unprepared.

Has God graciously prepared *our* hearts? Have we received the word, and brought forth fruit? If it be so with regard to any of us, to Him be all the praise who softened our hard hearts. Perhaps we can remember the time when sermons made no impression upon us, when holy counsels were disregarded, and even a mother's entreaties despised. And how did God prepare our hearts? Did He make us eat the bitter fruits of our works, until, like the prodigal, we said, "I will arise and go unto my Father?" Or did He subdue us in a sudden manner, as He did Paul, when He stopped him in the midst of his wicked career, ploughing up his heart by the Spirit, as the seed was cast in, "Saul, Saul, why persecute you me?" Or did He lead us by gentle and gradual methods to seek his face, watering the ridges of our hearts, settling the furrows, making it soft with showers, and then blessing the springing of His word? (Ps. 65.)

**April 11**

**Matthew 13:24-30. *The parable of the wheat and tares, with the explanation contained in ver. 36-43.***

The parable of the wheat and tares in some respects resembles that of the Sower of the seed, but it differs from it in this respect. In the parable of the Sower we heard only of *good* seed; here we read also of *bad* seed. While Christ, by his faithful ministers, sows good seed, or the pure gospel, the devil by his servants sows *bad* seed, or false doctrines.

The good seed, where it takes root and prospers, produces the children of the kingdom, or true believers, while bad seed produces hypocrites, formalists, heretics, and other wicked characters, who are the children of the devil. We here behold the great danger to which we lie exposed, of having *bad* seed sown in our hearts. If we receive not the gospel, we shall receive some false doctrine. We all must have *some* kind of religion, and if we do not receive the *truth* in the love of it, we shall cling to our own foolish imaginations, or to some errors that we have heard; and shall flatter ourselves with the hope of reaching heaven by some other way than the Scriptures have revealed.

The bad seed is sown *cunningly* by the great enemy. Often he employs people who *appear* religious to sow it; so that the hearers are deceived, and fancy that they are receiving *good* seed. But no seed is good but the doctrine of Scripture. How carefully we ought to study the Scriptures! reading them daily, endeavoring to understand their meaning, asking the help of pious people; above all, upon our knees entreating to be taught of God. We ought to believe no doctrine that cannot be clearly proved from the Scriptures; for, if it cannot be found there, it must be bad seed.

We see also from this parable, that the wheat and tares often resemble each other so much, that it is difficult to distinguish between them. For *why* did the lord of the field forbid his servants to pull up the tares? It was for fear lest they should mistake, and pull up wheat instead of tares. The servants represent ministers; they cannot always distinguish between true and false believers. It is God alone who knows the heart; he knows them that are his, and he alone knows it with *certainty*. The disciples did not know that Judas was a devil; but Jesus knew it from the beginning. When Saul of Tarsus was first converted, the disciples at Jerusalem did not know that he was sincere, and were for some time afraid to receive him. We should not therefore be too much delighted with the approbation of our fellow-Christians, nor too much disturbed by their suspicions. We should come to God, and entreat him to examine our hearts. Like David, each should say, "Search me, and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

But though true and false believers may appear so much alike in this world, the hour will arrive when their true characters will be made known. There is really the greatest difference between the character of the *weakest* child of God and the most *plausible* hypocrite. The hypocrite may appear even *better* than the child of God; but there is a difference in their *hearts*, which will cause them to be separated from each other to all eternity. God will give his angels wisdom to

discern between the righteous and the wicked—they will separate many who have partaken of the same ordinances and lived in the same family.

The wicked shall be bound in bundles. Perhaps this expression is intended to show how they will add to each other's misery by mutual reproaches. The righteous will shine forth as the sun without one spot of sin to darken their brightness. It has been well said that three things will surprise us, if we enter heaven—first, to see so many there whom we did *not* expect to see; secondly, to miss so many whom we *did* expect to see; and thirdly, to find ourselves there; yes, ourselves, we who are so unworthy—lifted up from the dust, and exalted to a throne. O! may this surprise be ours! for there is another surprise that awaits many seeming Christians, who will confidently cry out, "Lord, Lord, open to us." Now, therefore, let us judge ourselves, that we may not be condemned with the world.

## April 12

### **Mark 4:21-29. *Jesus encourages his disciples to communicate the word.***

This is part of a *private* conversation between our Lord and his apostles. If our minds were in a right state, how much more deeply should we be interested in such scenes than in the worldly trifles that surround us.

What did our Savior say in these confidential moments? He compared his disciples to a candle which he had lighted by his instructions, and was going to make burn still brighter by his explanation of the parables he had related in public. For what purpose did he give them light? that they might *conceal* it? No! but that they might set it upon a candlestick, and in *public* proclaim their Lord's *secret* communications. Jesus said, "There is nothing hidden which shall not be manifested." He hid many holy truths under parables, but these truths were to be made manifest by the apostles' preaching. This command was fulfilled after his ascension. *Then* the apostles could say, that their sound had gone forth to the ends of the world. *Then* was fulfilled the prophecy, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good tidings." *We* hear these glorious secrets—they are contained in the epistles, where the secret counsel of God is revealed. Do we attend to these things? Do we look into them, as the angels do? or are we indifferent? Have we need of the rousing command of our Savior? "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear."

The Lord encouraged his disciples to preach the truth, saying, "With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again." If they meted out, or gave the truth which they had received, abundantly to others, they should themselves receive abundantly from Christ, spiritual blessings. And so it is now—"He who waters others, shall be watered also himself." In trying to do good to others, we gain a blessing on our own souls.

Our Savior then related a short parable to encourage his disciples still more to sow the seed of the word. He spoke of a man who sowed seed, and who slept and rose night and day; that is, who, after sowing the seed, went about his usual business, sleeping at night and rising in the day; and who, after some time, found the seed had sprung up, but not by his *own* power, for he could not even tell how it had sprung up. God, who had made it spring up, made it grow also without his assistance, until it was ripe and fit to be cut down.

Thus a minister, after sowing the seed of the word, is obliged to leave the success with God; for he cannot make it spring up in the heart, neither can he even understand *how* souls are converted; for the manner in which men are born of the Spirit is even a greater mystery than the way in which the seed is quickened in the earth. Yet the hearts of ministers are often rejoiced by seeing the effects of the words they have spoken. Sometimes, however, the seed they sowed does not spring up until after their death; nevertheless, at the harvest of the last day, souls who heard their words shall be their crown and rejoicing. Now is the time to sow, though in tears, knowing we shall reap in joy.

Let all who *know* the word seek to *sow* it also, though it be only in the heart of a little child; for sowers on earth shall certainly be reapers in heaven. But let us remember that the seed sown does not come to perfection *immediately*—first, the blade appears, then the ear, at last the full corn in the ear. We must, therefore, be patient with young converts. If we ourselves know anything of Christ *now*, do we not feel that we have been grown very slowly?

It is refreshing to behold a Christian who is like full corn in the ear. Perhaps we have had the privilege of seeing such a person. It may be some poor destitute creature, lodging in a garret, has breathed a spirit that we longed to imbibe, and we have felt, while listening to her heavenly words, "It is good to be here." Do we *desire* to grow in grace? It is a good desire. The Lord will answer prayer, and give us more faith and love, and every heavenly grace, and then treasure us up in his eternal garner.

## **April 13**

### **Matthew 13:31-35. *Parables of the mustard-seed and of the leaven.***

We will now consider several short parables that our Savior related, but of which he gave no interpretation; still we may endeavor from other parts of Scripture to discover their meaning. The seed of the mustard-tree is smaller *in proportion* to the size of the tree it produces, than any other seed. In eastern countries the mustard-tree has immense spreading branches, which afford a fit shelter for the birds.

The religion of Christ was very small in its beginning. Behold the stable in Bethlehem, and that weak babe sleeping in the manger. From him shall spring a multitude that no man can number, of glorious saints, who throughout eternity shall surround the throne of God. These his spiritual children shall exceed the stars in multitude. Already how wonderfully has the Christian religion spread! though preached at first by twelve poor unlearned men—the kings of many nations profess to believe in it. It shall spread yet further, until men shall not merely *profess* the name of Christ, but until all shall praise him with sincere lips—until all shall know the Lord from the greatest unto the least.

The next parable, of the leaven that leavened by degrees a large quantity of meal, much resembles the parable of the mustard-tree, and it has been generally supposed to have nearly the same meaning. There is one great difference between the parables; the growth of the mustard-tree is *open*; the effects of the leaven in the meal are *secret*. Some people have thought that while the growth of the mustard-tree represents the progress of the gospel in the *world*, the leavening of the meal shows its influence in the *heart*. The leaven is generally considered to signify the word of God, which works gradually and silently in the heart, as leaven works in meal.

But a learned writer, Rev. Alfred Jenour, has lately *suggested*, that as leaven is used in other places to represent wickedness, it may represent it here also. Paul says, in his epistle to the Corinthians, "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that you may be a new lump." (1 Cor. 5:7.) And Christ once said to his disciples, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees;" by which he meant their false *doctrine*. (Matthew 16:12.) If leaven represents wickedness in this parable, then we learn from it how artfully Satan corrupts the pure religion of Christ; just as he sows tares among the wheat, so he mixes falsehood with truth.

By relating parables, our Lord fulfilled the prophecy of the seventy-eighth Psalm—"I will open my mouth in a *parable*; I will utter dark sayings of old." If we refer to that psalm, we shall find that it contains a history of the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, and of their passing through the wilderness. Was this history a parable? Yes, it was a parable, or dark saying, for all that happened to Israel had a hidden meaning. The apostle Paul, speaking of the afflictions of Israel, declares—"All these things happened to them for examples; and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come." (1 Cor. 10:11.) There is one event especially that took place in the wilderness, which is full of the richest instruction. That event is the lifting up of the bronze serpent. Few, perhaps, understood at the time what it signified. But we see in that serpent the image of Jesus in the likeness of sinful flesh, crucified for our iniquities.

The Bible is full of dark sayings like this. Men naturally love mysteries and wonders. Why do they not love the Bible? Why does it lie neglected, while many foolish and hurtful books are eagerly devoured? Because men love sin, and the Bible speaks against it. Therefore Paul exhorts us to lay aside all malice, and

deceit, and hypocrisies, and envies, and evil speakings, that as new-born babes we may desire the sincere milk of the word. We cannot relish the Bible while we delight in sin.

**April 14**

**Matthew 13:44-46. *The parables of the hidden treasure and of the pearls.***

We should be much astonished if a man were to show such eagerness to possess a common field, that he was willing to give *any* price for it. But if we afterwards found that he had discovered in it a mine of precious ore, we should not be surprised at his anxiety to obtain the field, even at a very high price.

Now it is in like manner that the world wonders at the eagerness of the believer to secure heavenly blessings. They see no such attraction in religion as to account for his earnestness, and they are ready to consider him a fool and a madman. But they have not discovered the *treasure* which he has discovered. Not that he *hides* it from them, (as the man in the parable did,) but he cannot persuade them to believe his testimony. In vain he assures them that true joy is to be found in Christ alone; they reply that religion is full of gloom and restraint, and that it is only fit for the sick, or the sorrowful. The believer knows well that the favor of God is of infinite value; he buys the field, he secures the treasure, and rejoices in his possession. Now is the time when the field may be bought. That time will soon be past. Dreadful and endless will be the regrets of those who neglected the opportunity of laying hold on eternal life.

In the next parable, a man is represented *seeking* goodly pearls. By nature we all seek for happiness; but we can never find it, except in the knowledge of Christ; nor can we find it there, unless we are willing to renounce all sinful pleasures for his sake. Augustine, the African bishop, (who lived four hundred years after Christ,) endured many sharp struggles before he would consent to part with his sins. But at length the grace of God subdued his stubborn heart. He cast himself down before the Lord under a fig-tree, and prayed, saying, "How long, Lord, will you be angry? Forever? Remember not my old iniquities. How long shall I say—'To-morrow?' Why should not *this hour* put an end to my slavery?" God, by whose Spirit this prayer was suggested, answered it and revealed Christ to Augustine's soul. Then this man, once so miserable, could say, "How sweet was it in a moment to be free from those delightful vanities, to love which *had been* my dread—to part with which—was *now* my joy! You did cast them out, O my true and highest delight—and then, O sweeter than all pleasure, entered in their room. How was my mind set free from the gnawing cares of sinful passions, and I conversed intimately with You, my Light, my Riches, my Savior, and my God." Surely this penitent sinner had now found the Pearl of great price. Can we say that Jesus is precious to our hearts? Upon a dying bed we should feel that none but He could comfort or save us—what should we do, if we had not found him

then?

**April 15**

**Matthew 13:47 to 52. *The parable of the fishing-net.***

The parable of the net cast into the sea was calculated particularly to interest the disciples, many of whom were fishermen. They were accustomed, after the toils of the day, to sort the fish they had taken. This employment affords a lively image of the distinctions that will be made at the last day. The net represents the word of the Gospel, which is preached to *many*, and which *many* profess to believe. The disciples were shortly to begin the work of preaching it. Great success would accompany their endeavors; but yet that success would be attended by much disappointment. Many to whom they preached would prove hypocrites. *Some* of these would be detected in their lifetime, but *others* not until the judgment-day.

Unbelievers have urged, as an objection against the Christian religion, that hypocrites are found among professed believers! But this is rather a *proof* of its truth, than an objection. If no hypocrites existed, how could we account for our Savior's declaring that they would arise in the church?

A striking instance was afforded of the truth of our Lord's words in the history of seven missionaries who labored many years ago in Tahiti. Would you not have concluded that men who had sacrificed country and friends in order to instruct savages, must have been true Christians? But out of these seven *two* proved reprobates. The force of temptation brought their real character to light. Had they remained in their own country, it is possible that no temptation might have arisen strong enough to entice them into open sin; but surrounded by savages, they became immoral in their lives, and, it is to be feared, continued impenitent until death. What a lesson does this fact afford! Should it not lead us to examine ourselves, and to call upon God to search us and try us, lest we should deceive ourselves by a mere *form* of godliness? Such a deception can last but a short time. The great sorting day approaches; then angels will divide the good from the bad, the true believer from the empty professor.

When our Savior had concluded his parables, he asked his disciples whether they understood them; for he had not interpreted them ALL. They replied, Yes, Lord. Then he reminded them of the *use* they should make of the things they had learned; they should store them up in their minds, that they might have them ready upon every occasion; even as a master of a family provides all things necessary for different circumstances, and produces them when wanted. The teachers among the Jews were called Scribes. The disciples were to become teachers, and would need a great store of truths for the instruction of others. Some of these truths might be called "*new*" truths, because not known to them before, and some might be called "*old*" truths, because already familiar to their

minds.

We ought to be storing up in our minds the things we have heard, gaining fresh knowledge of the Scriptures and deeper insight into their meaning. We cannot tell how soon we may need them for our own support in trial, or how useful we may find them in enlightening the ignorant, in strengthening the tempted, and in comforting the afflicted. It is very distressing when we see those we love sinking under trouble, to feel that we are not able to give them solid comfort. An affectionate child has sometimes beheld a parent groaning under a burden of woe, and has felt, "I know there are consolations that might assuage her grief, but I cannot impart them; for I have neglected the word of God." Then let us for the sake of *others*, as well as for ourselves, store our minds with the holy truths of God, that we may produce them when most needed.

## April 16

### **Mark 4:33 to end. *Christ sleeps in the storm and awakes to still it.***

It was in this manner that the Lord Jesus ended a day of great labor. His friends in the midst of it had desired him to desist, but seeing multitudes assembled to hear the word, he continued to teach. In order to be seen and heard more conveniently, he removed into a ship. The parable of the sower, and many others, were spoken by Jesus while he sat in a ship on the lake of Gennesaret. (See Mark 4:1.) Afterwards, he had a private conversation in the house with his disciples, when he explained his parables. In the evening he crossed the lake in a ship.

Doubtless he knew of the approaching storm, though it appears that there were no signs of it observed by others, for *many* little ships accompanied him on his voyage. But he was not deterred by his knowledge of the coming storm from setting out, for he intended by it to teach his disciples an important lesson.

They knew little of their Master's *power*, and still less of his *love*. The storm ought not to have alarmed them, because they were with *Him*. God *intended* to alarm Jonah by the storm that arose on the way to Tarsus, for the prophet was fleeing from his presence. We must not suppose, because difficulties and troubles arise, that we are doing wrong. Before we take any important step in life, we should examine the word of God with prayer, and ask pious people to help us to discover from the Scriptures, whether it is a *right* step; and if we feel assured that it *is*, no difficulties in the way ought to alarm us. Christians have observed that they have met with most hindrances in setting about those works which in the end have been most richly blessed. A vessel laden with missionaries has been captured by the enemy. Was that calamity a sign that God disapproved the holy purpose of his servants? Assuredly not. Those who are walking in the commandments of the Lord, may walk without fear, and say in the midst of

troubles, "None of these things move me."

Our Savior was displeased with the disciples' behavior in this storm. He was displeased by their want of *faith*. They doubted his love, and said, "Care you not that we perish?" Because He slept, they thought he was indifferent to their distress. These are the thoughts that too often arise in our minds. Conscious that we are apt to forget the Lord, we fear that He has forgotten us; for we naturally attribute to others the feelings that we ourselves experience. Now his delivering mercies are intended to remove these unbelieving thoughts, and to convince us of his exceeding power and love. For this purpose, he brings his children into straits, and to the very edge of destruction, that he may appear to their rescue in the last moment, and thus force them to believe in his fatherly tenderness.

This is the meaning of the apostle in Rom. 5:3-5—He says that he glories in tribulations. *Why?* Because they work patience, and patience, experience. Experience of *what?* Of God's power and love. And experience works hope. God's deliverances are intended to strengthen our hopes of his mercy, and to convince us that he *never* will forsake us. And shall this hope be disappointed? No! *this* hope makes not ashamed; it shall never prove vain.

The stilling of the storm on the lake of Gennesaret is calculated to lead our thoughts to another scene, and to remind us of that storm of God's wrath against our sins which Jesus stilled, not by his *word*, but by the *sacrifice* of himself. If we are enabled to trust in him, as our Savior from *hell*, we need not fear any storm that can arise. Let us never say, or even think, "Care you not that we perish?" It is a sin to entertain such a thought of *Him* who endured the cross that we might not perish forever and ever. He cares for us more than we care for ourselves; he numbers the hairs of our heads, and watches over us with unceasing, unwearied love.

**April 17**

**Mark 5:1-20. *Christ delivers the demoniac who dwelt among the tombs.***

The history of the poor demoniac affords a striking instance of the malice of devils, of the power of Christ, and of the wickedness of man.

How great was the malice of the devils that assaulted this poor man! They led him to dwell in solitary places among the tombs; for in those days tombs were generally made in lonely spots, among barren hills and rocks. Cut off from the company of his fellows, he spent his miserable days in crying, and cutting his own flesh; and when his friends mercifully bound his hands in chains, and his feet in fetters, he burst through these restraints and again escaped to his desolate abode. Thus he became a terror to the neighborhood, and a torment to himself.

This is the state to which devils would reduce all men, if they were permitted to vent their malice. They do reduce numbers to a spiritual state which resembles that of the demoniac, tempting them to flee from God and his saints, to dwell among the wicked, and urging them to resist all attempts to do them good, and make them happy.

Nor is the malice of devils confined to men. They love to torment even the brutes. These devils earnestly desired to enter into the swine, and then hurried them over the precipice, and plunged them in a watery grave. By this act they showed what they *would* have done to the *man*, had they not been restrained; they would gladly have hurled him into the pit of eternal destruction. There is not one single soul that could escape perdition, if it were not for the *power of Christ*. Even the devils were obliged to acknowledge his power. They believed and trembled. They could do nothing without his permission. They saw in him their future judge, who would at last condemn them to imprisonment in the lake of fire. In the mean while they had great wrath, knowing that they had but a *short* time in which to vent their malice, (as we read in Rev. 12:12.) That *short* time is shorter now, and Satan continues to be diligent in using this short space in making efforts to enlarge his kingdom.

We see in the conduct of the owners of the swine an instance of the wickedness of man. Untouched by the sight of him, who, lately a spectacle of terror, was now become gentle and peaceful, they only thought of the loss of their property.

Does not the same disposition prevail now? People will often show zeal for religion, as long as it does not interfere with their gains; but as soon as they are in danger of suffering the slightest loss, through the spread of the gospel, they complain, and would sooner let souls perish than become poorer.

Jesus was not *astonished* at this dreadful instance of human depravity; for he knew what was in man. So great was his compassion for these wicked men, that he bade the poor creature he had delivered, endeavor to reclaim his unfeeling countrymen. With the same compassion ought we to view every proof of man's fallen nature. Have we not ourselves in times that are *past* desired Jesus to depart from us, fearing lest he should interfere with our worldly schemes? How patiently has he borne our insults! If now we feel the value of our souls, we are dismayed at the remembrance of those days when we preferred a prosperous earthly lot to heavenly knowledge. And if we now love the merciful Savior, we cannot bear to think of the time when we cared not for his presence—for *that* presence which we now esteem our supreme happiness.

**April 18**

**Matthew 9:9-13. *The calling of Matthew and the tax-collector's feast.***

We have great reason to be interested in the calling of Matthew, for it was he who wrote the history of our Lord which we are now reading. It is supposed that his calling took place some time before the events we have lately considered; but we have deferred noticing it, because the feast to publicans and sinners was given at *this* period of the history; and it seemed most convenient to consider the calling and the feast at the same time.

The other name of Matthew was Levi, and *that* name is used by two of the evangelists. He was a tax-collector, or tax-gatherer. People of this class were detested by the Jews; because, as the taxes were paid to the Romans, by whom the Jews had been conquered, none but the worst kind of people would undertake the odious office of collecting them; and these people rendered themselves still more hateful by their dishonest practices. To this despised order of men, Matthew belonged at the time Jesus called him. He was found sitting by the sea-shore, receiving the duties upon the goods that were landed or embarked. Jesus saw him at the table, which was covered with moneys, and inclined his heart to obey his call, to leave all and follow him.

And why did he choose a *tax-collector* to be one of his apostles? Did he not, by exalting those whom the world despised, intend to stain the pride of all human glory?

Matthew made a feast to his old companions in office, (and who were probably his companions in *iniquity* also,) that they might partake in the high privilege of hearing the Lord converse. Nor did that gracious Lord turn away from these guests, polluted as they were by long habits of unrighteousness. The proud and envious Pharisees scoffed at him for keeping such company. But he answered their taunts by a divine lesson and reproof. He taught them in a short parable his *object* in associating with men; it was *not* to please *himself*, but to save *them*.

How does he save them? By healing their spiritual diseases; therefore he is called the Physician of souls. Would we obtain his notice, we must come and spread our sins before him. A good physician will not waste his time in visiting the healthy, however honorable, but flies to the relief of the poorest creature that is dangerously ill. Neither will the Lord grant his presence to the self-righteous, however high in man's esteem; but he will come and bless the humble and contrite soul, however deeply stained by crime, and degraded in the eyes of his fellow-creatures.

Do we understand what *that* means? "I desired mercy and not sacrifice," (6:6.) It is a verse in the prophet Hosea. The Pharisees knew the words well, but they understood not their meaning. Their *behavior* showed they understood it not. They blamed Jesus for showing *mercy* to perishing sinners; and instead of showing any themselves, they only gave God *sacrifice*, or outward service. And why did they act thus? Because they *thought* they were righteous. If they had

*really* been righteous, they would have felt compassion for sinners. The *angels*, those spotless beings, take a deep interest in our fallen race, and rejoice over each sinner who repents. Though they have never felt the working of evil in their own hearts, yet they do not turn away from us with contempt and disgust. But men never feel compassion for their fellow-sinners, until they discover the wickedness of their own hearts. When David was deeply humbled by his transgressions, he felt anxious to save perishing souls. This was his prayer, "Restore unto me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with your free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors your way, and sinners shall be converted unto you."

The missionary Vanderkemp gave a beautiful example of the same spirit. Not only did he go out as a missionary to the heathen, but he desired to make the voyage to Africa in a convict-ship. His wish was granted. He went with a depraved troop; but many of their hearts were melted during their voyage—some who had secretly filed off their chains, confessed what they had done, and quietly submitted to have them again riveted upon their hands and feet. Thirty-five died of putrid fever on the passage. Vanderkemp attended them in their last hours, and saw not a few, before they departed, full of joy and peace through believing in a crucified Savior.

## **April 19**

### **Luke 5:33 to end. *Christ explains by parables why his disciples did not fast.***

This is a difficult passage, and it has been explained in different ways; so that we can scarcely forbear wishing that our Savior himself had given an explanation of these parables. Yet surely he would not have left them unexplained, if it were not possible by attentive consideration to unravel their meaning.

It was the disciples of that imprisoned saint, John the Baptist, who inquired why the disciples of Jesus never fasted. The Pharisees fasted often. As one of them boasted in his prayer, "I fast twice a week." These fastings were part of that righteousness by which they excited the admiration of the people, and by which they hoped to purchase heaven. John the Baptist had not taught his disciples to fast with such views. It was in grief for their sins that they fasted; and it was with the same holy feelings John himself fasted. Jesus, however, did not fast *openly*—how much he may have fasted in *secret* we know not; but he was seen to eat and drink in the usual manner, and on that account was called a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber. We know this accusation was false, and that the holy Jesus set an example of temperance, as well as of every other virtue. Once, when very weary, he refused to eat, saying, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." And at other seasons he "had no leisure so much as to eat," (Mark 6:31.)

The Lord related several little parables to explain his *reasons* for not teaching his disciples to fast. In the first parable he compared himself to a bridegroom. This was a title that John himself had given him, saying, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom." The Church was the bride—Christ was the bridegroom. The disciples, the ministers, were compared by Jesus to the children of the bride-chamber, or to the friends of the bridegroom, who could not mourn at the wedding. The disciples were too full of joy to fast when they were following their Master from place to place, witnessing his miracles, and listening to his discourses. But the days would come when they would no longer enjoy the presence of the bridegroom, and when they would be called to endure heavy trials, to suffer hunger and thirst, and to be in fastings often.

Jesus prepared his disciples, just before he left them, for the afflictions that awaited them. He said, "The time comes that whoever kills you will think that he does God service," (John 16:2-4.) And he added, "These things I said *not* unto you at the *beginning*, because I was with you." In the same manner he often now protects a *new* convert from heavy trials. It is very common to find the *entrance* upon a religious course fraught only with delight—the new convert is sometimes inclined to think that he shall weep no more, but pass his days in a course of uninterrupted usefulness and joy. But trial comes at last.

The homely employment of mending garments was the subject of one of the Lord's parables. Everyone who has ever repaired woollen garments, knows that it would be unwise to mend them with stiff unprepared cloth. Another parable was taken from the eastern custom of putting wine into bottles of *skins*. These skins, when they were old, were unfit for *new* wine, because they were then too weak to bear its fermentation. These two parables seem to have a similar meaning. Did they not allude to the present weakness of the disciples? They were new converts, and not able yet to suffer great trials. For though garments and skin-bottles are strong at *first* and weak *afterwards*, it is just the contrary with believers; they are weak at first and strong afterwards. Peter was so weak at first, that he was induced by a few scornful speeches to deny his Master; but he was so strong afterwards, that he was able to bear crucifixion for his sake.

The Lord concluded his discourse with another parable—"No man also having drunk old wine, immediately desires new—for he says, The old is better." The gospel is like the best wine. Jesus gave this wine to the weeping penitent, when he said, "Your sins are forgiven you." He gave it to his beloved disciples when he said, "In my Father's house are many mansions—I go to prepare a place for you." He gave it to the dying thief, when he said, "Today shall you be with me in Paradise." Has he given it to us? He has *offered* it to us. These are his words—"Look unto me and be you saved, all the ends of the earth," (Is. 45:22.) If we have obeyed this call, and believed in Jesus with our hearts, then we have tasted the best wine; then we enjoy true happiness, and shall enjoy it forever; for "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." To whom does this

blessedness belong? Not to those who are striving by their good works to gain God's favor, but to those who "believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our *justification*."

**April 20**

**Luke 8:40-48. *Christ heals the woman who touched him in the throng.***

Though the Gadarenes desired the Lord Jesus to depart out of their coasts, there were others who gladly received him. So it is now—while some find religious privileges a burden, there are others who are longing to possess them. While some occupy seats in the house of God, and count the service a weariness; there are others, confined at home by various causes, envying, as David did, the happiness of the swallow, who builds his nest on God's altars.

The people on the opposite coast of the lake soon found the advantage of having the presence of Jesus. A ruler bows before his feet, laid low by sore distress respecting his only child.

On his way to the ruler's house, people thronged around the blessed Savior. How patient was the love that led him to submit to every inconvenience! Each step he took was encumbered by an oppressive crowd; yet he complained not of the heat and the noise of the throng. As he went, very *many* touched him, but only *one* did so in faith and with *intention*. Even so it is now; thousands offer prayers, yet few offer them with *intention* and with *expectation* of relief. Yet no other worshipers are noticed by Jesus. No other *touch* was noticed by him but that of the poor woman who said to herself, "If I may but touch his clothes, I shall be whole." Is it in this spirit we come to Jesus? Do we *expect* an answer to our prayers?

Our case by nature is desperate, like that of the woman. She had applied to many physicians, and had reduced herself to poverty, yet had obtained no relief; and having now spent all her money, her hope of human assistance must have failed her. Thus some people who have been convinced of their sinful state, have tried to obtain relief by multiplied services, and good works, but have never found peace until they came to Jesus.

Let us observe the Lord's condescending approbation of *true* faith, however *weak*. There was much ignorance mixed up in the faith of this woman. She thought that she might touch Jesus *unperceived*. She knew not that he saw her thought afar off, and that her inward groaning was not hidden from him. But Jesus does not despise *weak* faith, or quench the smoking flax.

Though he healed the woman upon her *secret* application to him, he desired her to make a *public* acknowledgment of her cure. He desires every sinner to do the

same. "With the *heart* man believes unto righteousness, and with the *mouth* confession is made unto salvation." The woman willingly made this confession, when she found it was required by her benefactor. Gratitude to Jesus should overcome every other feeling in our hearts, and make us willing to acknowledge what he has done for our souls, and from what a *depth* of misery he has delivered us. The saints above are not ashamed to acknowledge their obligations to the Savior. They are willing that their past sins should be known, in order that his power and love may be exalted. The song of the blessed is, "You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your *blood*." They own that blood was required to atone for their guilt. If we join that happy throng, we shall appear among them as *sinners* saved by grace. We shall not desire to conceal from our heavenly companions that we were once polluted. We shall only desire that the wonderful power of our Redeemer may be made known among the assembled multitude. The thief who repented on the cross will extol the grace of his crucified Lord, who atoned for his flagrant crimes. And though we may not have committed the *same kind* of sins as that thief, we have all committed sins which, but for faith in the blood of Christ, must sink our souls into everlasting woe.

**April 21**

**Mark 5:35 to end. *He raises Jairus' daughter.***

With what eagerness the ruler must have watched the Savior's progress towards his house! It must have been a trial to him to see the steps of his deliverer retarded by the surrounding crowd. But what a blow it was to hear his child was actually dead! Those who brought the message thought that Jesus *could* not *now* relieve the poor father. They said, "Why trouble you the Master any further?" Yet why did they speak thus? Is there anything too hard for the Lord? If he could *heal* by his power, could he not also restore *life* by the same power?

Probably the ruler partook of the doubts of the messengers; for Jesus immediately encouraged him, saying, "Be not afraid, only believe." How apt we are, though we know that Jesus is almighty, to think, that while he can relieve us in a *small* trouble, he cannot help us in a *great* one! How apt we are to imagine that there are some cases too *hard* for him. Does not this show that our faith is very weak? The truth is, that God delights in showing the greatness of his power by delivering us out of the most overwhelming distresses. If we *believed* in him more, we should see more of his wonderful works. And though he does not now raise the dead, it is not because the work is too great for his power, but because the time is not yet come.

When Jesus came to the ruler's house, he shut out of the room the scoffing attendants, and only permitted the parents of the child and three of his apostles to witness the miracle. There are wonders of his love and power, which Christ displays to his believing people *alone*. The parents would not have been

admitted into their daughter's chamber, had they been disposed to scoff at the Savior's words. Their sorrowful hearts must have been looking and longing for deliverance.

How many who have expected deliverance in trial, have received it! A way has been opened in a manner least expected. Thus Abraham, when he had lifted up the knife to slay his son, believed that God could raise him; and his faith was rewarded. He called the mount Jehovah Jireh; or, "in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen;" that is, "the Lord will see, or provide;" thus leading all believers to look for similar deliverances in the hour of extreme distress.

Can the parents who beheld the glorious deed have regretted the sufferings they had endured? If they had suffered less, they had seen less of the power of the Lord. When Christians come out of their afflictions, they have wonderful histories to relate concerning God's faithfulness, which they would never have known had they remained at ease. But there are proper *seasons* in which to relate these histories. The time was not yet come for publishing abroad the miracles that Jesus had wrought. When he himself had risen from the dead, then it was the duty of his followers to declare all they had seen. His wonderful works have been recorded, and handed down to us. Do we believe that Jesus will raise the dead at the last day? Then we can lay our beloved ones in the tomb without that distracting, hopeless sorrow, which the unbelieving world experience.

## April 22

### **Matthew 9:27-34. *Christ gives sight to two blind men, and speech to a mute man.***

It appears that the Lord Jesus put the faith of the two blind men to a short trial; for he did not cure them as soon as they asked him; he waited until he was come into the house before he granted their petition. But how well they were rewarded for waiting, by their conversation with their Lord in the retirement of the house! The blind men spoke but little—"Yes, Lord." Those were their words; but these simple words pleased Jesus, for they were sincere words. What could we reply, if the Lord were to ask us whether we believed that he was able to do everything? Could we reply, "Yes, Lord." Let us in times of trouble remember that Jesus can do everything.

After the Lord had left the house, he cured a mute man. This miracle he performed publicly, in the presence of his enemies. The poor man was an object of great compassion, for *he* could not (like the blind man) plead for himself—others brought him to Jesus. Should not this teach us that we should pray for those who, through the power of Satan, are mute unto God, and cannot pray for themselves? This cure excited much astonishment, and caused men to exclaim, "It was never so seen in Israel." There had been other prophets, such as Elijah

and Elisha, who had done miracles, but not such great, or numerous miracles as Christ performed.

Jesus now performs wonders on men's souls, which cause many to exclaim, "It was never so seen before." The gospel produces effects, which nothing *but* the gospel can produce. What has it not wrought in the South Sea Islands! It has changed thousands of blind idolaters and murderers into sons of truth and peace. In England, the preaching of the gospel has oftentimes transformed the most abandoned characters into holy men. Yet these wonders do not silence the enemies of Christ. The Pharisees were so wicked as to exclaim, "He casts out devils through the prince of the devils." They knew that they spoke falsely, but they hated Jesus so much, that they used any means to hinder the people from believing on him. There are still people to be found who will slander the servants of God even when they know them to be innocent. There lived in the last century a pious curate named Maddock, who converted many souls by the preaching of the gospel. Those who hated his doctrine invented slanders concerning him, and so shook his spirits, as to cause him to fall ill and to resign his curacy. But some time afterwards two of his bitter enemies relented, and acknowledged that the reason of their wicked conduct was, that they could not endure the doctrine he had preached to them; and that they had never believed the reports they had spread. And what were the feelings of this holy man upon the occasion? He wrote in his journal, "Now my enemies have confessed their enmity against God, and his word, and against me for preaching it. O Lord, by this confession you have greatly eased my mind. You have made my enemies confess that they have persecuted your servant out of malice. Remember, I beseech you, their blindness and ignorance, and pardon them freely for your dear Son's sake." Like his blessed Master, this pious minister pursued his work in other towns and villages, and continued to the end of his days to heal sin-sick souls.

## **April 23**

### **Mark 6:1-6. *Christ's second visit to Nazareth.***

This is the *second* visit that we read of Jesus making to Nazareth after he had begun his ministry.

In his *first* visit there he had been shamefully treated, for his countrymen had attempted to hurl him headlong from the hill; yet he was so forgiving that he made a *second* visit to the ungrateful city. Jesus does not hastily give up any sinners whom he once has favored. Even when the first offer of mercy has been rejected, he vouchsafes another, and perhaps another still; for He is the God of patience. While he was preaching, very contemptuous thoughts arose in the people's hearts. None could deny that he had done mighty works, and that he spoke with extraordinary wisdom; but yet, because the people remembered him as *the carpenter*, and because they knew his relations to be poor people, with

whom they were familiar, they would not listen to his words. What an instance their conduct affords of the greatness of human folly!

As it was *then*, even so it is *now*; people are apt to consider, not so much *what* is spoken, as by *whom* it is said. The servants of God are still despised when they are poor and unlearned, and their message is often rejected on these accounts; but those who despise them sin against their own souls. How foolish we should consider that person, who, though dying of thirst, refused a draught of water, because it was contained in a common earthen cup! No thirsty person ever acted in so absurd a manner; but many ignorant souls have displayed still greater folly. When faithfully warned by a true believer, they have taken no heed to his words, because he did not possess the learning, or honors of this world. They have said, "How should this man be able to teach me?" Yet perhaps that man had been taught of God. Such people would surely have despised their Savior when he was upon earth.

Great was the loss that the men of Nazareth brought upon themselves by their conduct. They would not even come to Christ to be healed; that was the reason that Jesus *could* do no mighty work there. He *marveled* at their *unbelief*; as he had once marveled at the *faith* of the centurion.

The Nazarenes abused *singular* privileges. They had beheld for a long period the spotless example of the Son of God. They had witnessed the lovely qualities that adorned his childhood, and which grew brighter and brighter during the years of his youth and early manhood. Could they refrain from loving a being of such perfect excellence, and whose excellence they knew so well? Yes. His faithfulness in reproving sin caused them to hate him. Hatred produced contempt, and contempt confirmed them in unbelief.

We never can expect to meet with a human creature faultless like the Lord Jesus; but all Christians in a degree resemble their Master; and some resemble him more than others. It may have been our privilege to know some eminent saints. They may now be in their graves; but the very remembrance of them is blessed. We shall meet them again at the judgment-seat of Christ. If we rejected their counsel while living, let us attend to them now they are departed, that we may not incur the guilt and misery of the men of Nazareth.

**April 24**

**Matthew 9:35 to end. *His compassion for the multitude.***

The Lord Jesus was permitted to teach in the synagogues, but he did not confine himself to them; nor did He preach only on the Sabbath. He taught in all *places* and at all *times*. There have been faithful men, who have closely copied his example, and have proclaimed their Master's name with an untiring zeal. They

have been much despised, but they have turned many sinners unto the Lord; for the *preaching* of the gospel is the most effectual means of converting souls.

Great multitudes followed Jesus from place to place. When he beheld them he was moved with compassion. What constant proofs we find of the tenderness of his heart! He could not see the multitude fainting from hunger and weariness without feeling for their *bodies*; neither could he consider their destitute spiritual condition without feeling still deeper compassion for their *souls*. They seemed to him like sheep without a shepherd. There were indeed appointed teachers in every city and village; but these teachers were unfaithful, and did not feed the sheep with the knowledge of God, but misled their minds by false explanations of the Scriptures. Such teachers Jesus would not acknowledge to be true shepherds; for they only poisoned the flock.

He then made another comparison. He likened the people to a field of corn ready to be reaped, and he declared there were few reapers prepared to reap it. There were *many* people ready to come into the kingdom of God, and but *few* able to lead them into it; therefore he desired his disciples to entreat the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into the field. The world is still in the same case—there are but few laborers compared with the number of people willing to be taught. In some countries, the people have cast away their idols, and are longing and praying for teachers.

When Christ ascended on high, he gave *gifts* unto men. And what were those gifts? Apostles, teachers, pastors. It is not only blind idolaters who need their instructions. Israel of old needed teachers to stir up their hearts to love God. All of us require the exhortations of faithful ministers, lest we be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Those who try to live without the blessing of a good minister, (when they can obtain one,) suffer greatly from the attempt; their souls grow cold, their steps turn aside, and, even in old age, they often slide into error.

What gifts to perishing sinners can be so great as the gift of faithful pastors? To patients in a hospital, no boon could be so great as able physicians. Do we ever pray to God that he will raise up faithful ministers to feed his church? If we felt the compassion that Jesus felt for immortal souls, we should pray earnestly and constantly that ministers might be sent to show them the way of salvation. It is God alone who can send forth faithful laborers; He alone can make men able to teach others.

**April 25**

**Matthew 10:1-7. He sends out his twelve apostles.**

The Lord Jesus had exhorted his disciples to pray that God would send laborers into his harvest. He had scarcely given the command before he answered the

prayer by appointing these twelve disciples to preach the word. He sent them forth by two and two, that they might have a counselor, a companion, and a friend upon the journey. It is well not to enter upon difficult undertakings *alone*. We are creatures that need sympathy. Fellow-laborers in Christ's vineyard have often found great comfort in each other, and become mutually endeared. None but Christians know the love that binds those together who work, with a single heart, in the same spot for the same Master.

It must have been a time of great anxiety to the twelve when they were called to leave their gracious Master's side, and enter without him upon the labors of the ministry. Hitherto they had been sheltered beneath his wing; but now they were to encounter the enemy alone; yet not *alone*, for though invisible, they would still be watched over by their ever-present Lord. Jesus endowed them with a measure of the same powers that he possessed himself; for having a *new* message to deliver, it was necessary that they should confirm it by wonderful works. Yet sometimes they could not exercise these powers from want of faith. We do not know whether they ever raised the dead until after Jesus was ascended on high.

Before they set out, their Master gave them some counsels. How deeply these counsels ought to interest us! they are full of the wisdom of God, and show us his mind and will.

Jesus first told the disciples to *whom* to go—to the *Jews* only, not to the Gentiles, or to the Samaritans, (who were a mixed people, descended from Jews and Gentiles,) but to the Jews. What was his reason for this command? Did He not *afterwards* desire his apostles to preach the gospel to *every* creature? It appears that he chose to give the *first* call to the Jews; because they were beloved for the fathers' sakes. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had been the sheep of his fold. Their sinful children had wandered from that fold; therefore the Savior viewed them as *lost* sheep. Our God is very slow to give up those whom he has once favored. It is not until after repeated provocations, and the most obstinate negligence, that he forsakes them. Has he granted us, as He once did the Jews, many spiritual privileges? Then he will not lightly leave us. He will dig about the fig-tree before he cuts it down; he will trim the lamp again and again before he puts it out in obscure darkness. But O! terrible will be his wrath when once it is aroused; for he will then execute strict justice upon those who have rejected abundant mercy.

Jesus directed his disciples, not only to *whom* to preach, but *also* *WHAT* to preach. They were to say, as *he* had said, and as John the Baptist had said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." These words contained a solemn warning; they signified that the opportunity of entering the kingdom was afforded, and might soon be over. A door was opened, the promise of pardon and of grace was offered, and all might enter in by this door to escape the judgment due to their sins; but it would at length be closed, and then, woe to those who had lost the precious opportunity. It is *still* true, that the kingdom of heaven is at hand; an

opportunity of obtaining life is afforded to us—"Now is the accepted time; *now* is the day of salvation." Ministers proclaim with uplifted voice, and sometimes with tears which they cannot restrain, the unbounded mercy of our God. They entreat us to accept his offers of pardon through the blood of Christ. Some listen to their entreaties, fall down before the Son of God, and call upon him to save them. Have we thus humbled ourselves, and pleaded for mercy? Here is a gracious promise for our encouragement. God has said, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and *trembles* at my word." (Is. 66:2.)

## April 26

### **Matthew 10:7-15. *He directs them with whom to abide during their journey.***

Before the twelve disciples set out on their journey, their Master gave them many directions respecting their conduct. He desired them to make no provision for their wants, to take no money in their purses or girdles, no food in their scrips or bags, and no new clothes to supply the place of the old when worn out. How then were they to be supported during their travels? Jesus appointed that the people to whom they preached should supply their wants; for "The workman," he said, "is worthy of his meat." Pious people would consider it a privilege to supply the wants of their teachers. The apostles, by accepting their gifts, would imitate the humility of their Master, who, though he *could* have turned stones into bread, and *did* turn water into wine, chose rather to accept the gifts of his pious followers. How many of God's most devoted servants in all ages have been placed in circumstances of dependence! But God has never forgotten his children when reduced to deep poverty. He has always put it into the hearts of some charitable people to help them in their need, or by some other means He has supplied their necessities.

It is recorded of an excellent minister, who lived nearly two hundred years ago, that once when obliged by persecution to leave his family, he set out without any money in his pocket, and not knowing where to go. He suffered his horse to take its own course, and towards evening he found himself at the door of a small farm-house. He requested the mistress to allow him to take shelter beneath her roof, but frankly told her he had no money with which to reward her hospitality. Both she and her husband kindly entertained him. In the course of conversation they inquired after a minister, named Oliver Heywood, whom, they had heard, was persecuted with great bitterness. After some time, the traveler acknowledged that he was the very person they spoke of. Great was the joy of his pious hosts. They called their neighbors in, requested their honored guest to speak to them from the word of God, and afterwards made a small collection to help him on his way.

In this manner God has often unexpectedly relieved his suffering servants. No doubt the apostles, during the course of their journey, experienced the same

providential care.

But though the Lord promised to provide for their wants, he warned them against indulging a covetous disposition—"*Freely* you have received, *freely* give." He forbade their making a gain of their power to heal. They might easily have amassed large fortunes by their cures; but riches so acquired by ministers of his word would have been a curse.

Jesus directs his apostles to *whom* to go in each city—"To the most worthy." They were to make inquiries respecting the character of the inhabitants of each place they visited. Probably the neighbors would speak most highly of the most upright and benevolent inhabitants of the village. In general, it would be found that the person who bore the best character was also the most godly. What a blessing *he* would enjoy who would obtain the company of the apostles, and have the opportunity of hearing their instructions! It is considered an honor to entertain princes; but it is a far higher honor to receive the servants of God. When they have departed, the remembrance of their words, and of their spirit, leaves a holy fragrance on the mind. But sometimes the apostles would enter the door of an *unworthy* host, perhaps of some hypocritical Pharisee, who had succeeded in establishing a good reputation among men. Still they were to pronounce the blessing of peace upon the house. But that blessing would not descend upon an unworthy head. No! it would return into the bosom of those who uttered it. Thus we perceive, that if we are deceived in the characters of others, and bless those whom God has determined not to bless, yet still the blessing shall not be lost.

The Lord prepared his apostles to find some who would refuse to hear their message. It would be their duty solemnly to warn these despisers of the dreadful guilt they incurred. The sin of rejecting the gospel is far greater than any sin that the heathens *can* commit. *Men* may think that the idolater who leaves his aged parents to starve, or who cruelly slaughters the innocent children of his enemies, is the most wicked of the human race. But the Bible declares that the man who refuses to accept the merciful offers of the Son of God, is far worse than any of the heathen, and that he shall suffer the hottest wrath of his insulted Redeemer. Shall God speak, and man refuse to listen? Shall God stretch out his hands in merciful entreaty, and shall man turn away and despise the gracious invitation? How dreadful is the threatening denounced against such scorners. "I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear comes." (Prov. 1:26.)

**April 27**

**Matthew 10:16-26. *He prepares them for persecution.***

Our Savior fully prepared his disciples for the treatment they would receive from the world. He compared ungodly men to wolves, and his apostles to sheep, He

described the manner in which these wolves would treat his sheep—in *thought*, *word*, and *deed*. The thoughts of ungodly men towards the apostles would be thoughts of hatred. Jesus said, "You shall be *hated* of all men." (verse 22.)

The world has ever hated the children of God. There is nothing more painful to our feelings than the ill-will of our fellow-creatures. No abundance of possessions can make amends for hatred; while love can console in the midst of trials. Jesus therefore warned his disciples against being turned back from him by the hatred of the world, saying, "He who endures to the end (in spite of these trials) shall be saved."

The hatred men felt in their hearts would lead them to utter hateful *words* against the disciples of Jesus. They had called the Lord Jesus himself Beelzebub. Ought his disciples to expect better treatment? Was it not enough if the servant was not worse treated than his Lord?

Christians have always been slandered; they have been accused of hypocrisy, as well as of secret crimes. Jesus comforts his disciples under their accusations by this assurance in verse 26—"There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; nor hidden, that shall not be known." Would it not comfort those who are falsely accused, to know that the day is coming when the truth would be made known? Such comfort all Christians possess, when slandered by their enemies.

Men would not only speak *words* against the disciples, but would commit cruel *actions* against them. They would imprison them and scourge them, and even cause them to be put to *death*. Yes, parents would turn against their own children, and persecute them in the most unnatural manner.

All these trials did not come upon the disciples during their *first* journey; but as Jesus knew they would come upon them after his ascension, he directed them how to behave under these trials. They were to do everything to avoid persecution, *except* concealing the truth. In their characters they were to resemble serpents and doves; *serpents* in caution and prudence, *doves* in gentleness and inoffensiveness—they were not to be *malicious* as serpents, or *silly* as doves, but *wise* as serpents, and *harmless* as doves. Yet notwithstanding all their endeavors, they would be persecuted for preaching the gospel.

One great advantage would arise from their being brought before kings and judges; they would have an opportunity of declaring the truth to those high personages; as Paul did to Felix, who trembled on his judgment-seat. Jesus bade his disciples *take no thought what* they should speak when examined by their judges. Though they could not foresee what perplexing questions would be put to them, they were not to be disturbed with the fear lest they should not be able to answer well; for God would assist them with his Spirit.

Peter and John were the first among the apostles who were brought before rulers for their Master's sake. It is written, that when Peter was called upon to defend his conduct in healing the lame man, he "was filled with the Holy Spirit." He spoke with such power, that his judges could make no reply. "When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled." (Acts 4:13.)

In later days many poor uneducated men have been questioned by learned judges, and have been able to give answers which have quite confounded their enemies. In Foxe's Book of Martyrs, there are accounts of many such men who suffered death in this country, because they would not worship the Virgin Mary and the saints, or profess to believe Roman Catholic errors. And it has been remarked, that some of the *least* learned of the martyrs spoke with the *greatest* power; because they relied most simply upon the help of God, and appealed only to his Word.

Though we may never be called upon to stand before an earthly judgment-seat, yet we must be willing to confess our faith whenever an opportunity occurs. It is written in the first Epistle of Peter, "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." We may trust in God to teach us on such occasions how to reply. Let us lift up our hearts to Him before we speak, and our answer may be made the means of converting the unbelieving inquirer.

## **April 28**

### **Matthew 10:27-39. Jesus encourages them to be faithful.**

The Lord Jesus had declared that his disciples would be exposed to great sufferings through preaching the gospel—that they would be scourged, imprisoned, and even put to death. Would not this prospect be a great temptation to conceal the truth? Yes, it would; therefore Jesus taught them by commands, warnings, and promises, to preach the gospel *openly*.

First, he gave them a *command*. He said, "What I tell you in darkness, that speak you in light; what you hear in the ear, that preach you in the housetops." He had told his disciples many doctrines *privately*, that they were to preach *publicly*. How anxious Paul afterwards was that he might open his mouth *boldly*, and speak the gospel as he ought to speak it, concealing no *part* of the truth, however men might dislike to hear it!

Jesus not only gave a command, he added warnings, reminding his disciples that God was able to kill both their bodies and souls in hell; declaring that he would

deny them before his Father, if they denied him before men; and asserting that "he who finds his life shall lose it;" that is, that he who saves his life by forsaking Christ, shall perish. But perhaps some may ask, "Did not Peter deny Christ? Will Christ deny him before his Father?" Assuredly not; for Peter repented of his sin, and obtained mercy, and no sin repented of and forgiven, shall be punished at the last day.

Christ also gave *promises* to his disciples to encourage them to preach his gospel. He told them that their hairs were all numbered, and that they themselves were of more value in God's sight than many sparrows. He did *not* promise that his disciples should be preserved from sufferings or from death by their heavenly Father; but he assured them that their trials were all appointed by a loving parent. The ungodly will sometimes say in trouble, "It is all for the best;" but it is *not* all for the best with those who do not desire to please God; sufferings only add to the guilt of those who do not repent of their sins. The children of God *alone* may feel assured that all that befalls them is for the best; sickness and health, riches and poverty, life and death, are all made to promote their everlasting welfare. "We know," says the apostle Paul, "that all things work together for good to *them that love God.*" (Romans 8:28.)

Jesus prepared his disciples for occasioning a great deal of confusion by the preaching of the gospel. He said, "Do not think that I am come to send *peace* on earth." It was natural that the disciples should suppose that he came to send peace. Isaiah had called him the Prince of Peace. At his birth angels had sung, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth *peace.*" He did, indeed, come to bring peace in the *end*, but persecution and confusion *first*. It would be wicked men who would create this confusion by their hatred of the Savior. How many families have been divided by the gospel! one member has become religious, has turned to God in earnest, and the rest have turned against him. But should these trials prevent any from coming to Christ? O no! we ought to love the Savior better than our dearest relations—better than father or mother, son or daughter. Nor must we in anything disobey him, in order to please a dear friend, or connection. There are many children who are unkindly treated by their parents on account of their religion, and there are many parents who are despised by their children for the same reason. It is a great temptation to an affectionate parent to indulge children by allowing them to taste pleasures which are forbidden in the holy Scriptures. But to do this is to be unfaithful to God. We should always remember that Jesus is nearer to us than parent or child can be. He is our *God*. The Lord said to Abraham in ancient days, "I will be a GOD unto you." This is more than if He had said, "I will be a *Father* unto you." David said unto the Lord, "You are my God!" (Ps. 140:6.) When any who are near and dear to us would entice us to forsake Him, let us remember that He is our *God*.

**April 29**

**Matthew 10:40 to end; 11:1. *He pronounces blessings on those who show kindness to his disciples.***

The Lord Jesus had forbidden his apostles to take anything with them in their journey, either bag, (that is, bag of provisions,) or money in their purses; and He had desired them to go to the house of the most worthy person in each town, though that person might also be the poorest. It must have been a great comfort to the apostles to know that a rich blessing would rest upon those who received them into their houses, and that their kindness would be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

Paul felt this comfort when the Philippians sent gifts to him in prison. *He* could not repay them, but he said, "My God will supply all your need according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:19.)

But is it not possible that a wicked man might receive a servant of Christ and treat him kindly? Yes, doubtless it is possible. Would *he* receive a heavenly reward? We must consider the  *motive*  of every action, before we can pronounce it to be good or bad. It is only those who receive a prophet in the  *name*  of a prophet, (that is,  *because*  he is a prophet,) who shall receive a prophet's reward. He who receives a prophet  *because*  he is an admired preacher, or an amiable man, or an old acquaintance, he will not receive a prophet's reward for his hospitality. The  *motive*  in receiving him must be,  *because*  he is a servant of Christ. If  *that*  is the motive, all faithful prophets will be treated with kindness, and not only some favorite prophet. The blessing, we perceive, is pronounced not only on those who receive prophets, but also on those who receive  *righteous men*  who are  *not*  prophets; and also on those who are kind to Christ's little ones, or to the weakest believers.

In these days it is often difficult to discover whether any kindness we show to God's people proceeds from the right motive. It is now so easy a duty, that many practice it, who would not incur any danger, or make any sacrifice for the sake of Christ and his people. In former days the case was different. Then it was often dangerous to show kindness to true Christians. Those who visited them in prison, or who harbored them in their houses, drew upon themselves persecution. Even in this country, at the time people were beginning to turn from popery, both men and women were often put to the rack to induce them to confess the names of those who had been kind to them. If a person were known to have sent money to a poor prisoner, or if he were seen giving him a loaf through the prison bars, the enemies of the truth would send to apprehend him. It was not an easy duty in those days to befriend the people of God. Few, if any, would do it who did not love Christ sincerely.

But even in these happier days,  *some*  of the saints are held in general contempt. If we countenance and encourage  *all*  those who serve our Master, we also shall be despised. But if we would be faithful to Christ, we must not consider to what

sect or party men belong, but only, "Do they serve our Lord?" and if they do, we ought to receive them, and help them; we ought to defend their characters when aspersed, to bear with their infirmities, and to forgive their offences. This will be a sign that we should not have despised the Lord Jesus, if we had lived when he was upon earth. The feelings of the true believer are well expressed by a Christian poet, in the following lines—

Your people by the world abhorred,

I for my people take,

And serve the servants of my Lord,

For their dear Master's sake.

### **April 30**

#### **Mark 6:12-29. *The death of John the Baptist.***

Very little is related concerning the events that happened while the apostles were absent from their Lord. This however we know—Jesus continued to preach, and to perform miracles. His fame was so great that it reached the ears of Herod, the governor. It may appear surprising that Herod had not heard before of his miracles; but the great are often ignorant of the things passing around them among the poor; and sometimes they do not even know the names of the most eminent of God's servants.

When Herod heard of the miracles of the Lord, he supposed that John the Baptist was risen from the dead; and though John in his *lifetime* had performed no miracles, he imagined that if risen from the dead, he could do mighty works. Amid all his splendor and his power the wicked monarch could not forget his faithful reprover. He had silenced the *prophet* long ago by committing him to prison; but he could not silence his own *conscience*, which upbraided him with the murder of the holy man. If *before* sin was perpetrated, it could be known what would be the state of mind *afterwards*, many would tremble to do the deed.

Herod was a miserable man; for he had a guilty conscience and an impenitent heart. His crimes were so flagrant, and so presumptuous, that they haunted him in his palace. But they were not followed by repentance. If Herod had really lamented his wickedness, he would have desired to acknowledge it to *him*, whom he supposed to be the murdered prophet. He would have found in him the only being who could take away his guilt, and give peace to his conscience. But when at last he did see Jesus, it was to insult him, and to array him, just before his crucifixion, with a gorgeous robe, that ill-became his wounded, bleeding form.

And by what steps did Herod sink into this depth of depravity? Once he had heard John the Baptist gladly, and had attended to his words, and had reformed many parts of his conduct. But he had indulged one darling sin; he had refused to part with Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; and had imprisoned the man who rebuked his wickedness. This act hardened his heart, and prepared him for greater crimes. While the prophet languished in a gloomy prison, the unfeeling tyrant revelled in his palace. The elegant dancing of Salome enticed him to make an imprudent promise. He *intended* not to murder the prophet; perhaps he intended some day to release him from prison; at all events, he was reluctant to shed his blood. But having made an oath, he feared lest his guests should despise him if he broke it. He dreaded their scornful *smile* more than the angry *frown* of an offended God. But he soon experienced that it is a dreadful thing to provoke the Almighty. We learn from history, that Herod, with his idolized Herodias, was at length expelled his kingdom, and that he died in banishment and disgrace.

For a moment it seemed as if the devices of a malicious woman had prevailed against God's faithful servant. But was not early death a welcome boon to the holy Baptist? Was not the executioner an acceptable visitant in his prison? The messenger who fetched Joseph from his dungeon to the presence of Pharaoh, was not so welcome as the executioner who removed John from his prison to the presence of his God. He had done the work which was appointed for him to do; he had announced the coming Savior to rebellious men. The servants of God have various posts assigned to them. Each has some commission to perform, and when it is executed, he is recalled. It may *appear* that he has died in the midst of his work; but this cannot really be the case. God will raise up others to carry on his labors; even as He appointed the apostles to continue to preach that gospel, which John the Baptist had begun to proclaim.

The disciples of the martyred prophet were permitted to enjoy the melancholy satisfaction of burying his headless corpse; for Herod, who would gladly have spared his *life*, did not withhold his *body* from them. They must have viewed the early, sudden, and cruel death of their revered Master, as a mysterious event. To lose a friend by the hand of violence is far more bitter than to lose him through disease or accident; for it is more difficult to see God's hand in the loss when man's cruelty has had a share in it. With bursting hearts, these bereaved disciples went and told Jesus of their trouble, (Matthew 6:12.)

He could have explained the dark perplexing event. He knew that John was taken away from the evil to come, and was spared the sight of his own ignominious death. But we do not know what He said to comfort these mourners. None can sympathize with the sorrowful as the Son of God can. He came "to comfort all that mourn." His sympathy is not only tender; it is *powerful*. He is not only *touched* with the feeling of our infirmities, he can *support* us when tempted. He can pour consolation into the heart. No wound was ever really healed, except by His touch. He declares, "I wound and I heal." Though the death of John the

Baptist was his appointment, yet He alone could comfort the bereaved disciples. Israel in her distress applied to a foreign king. But did she obtain relief? God said, "Yet could he not heal you, or cure you of your wounds." (Hos. 5:13.) But the saints can say, "He heals the broken in heart, and binds up their wounds." (Psalm 147:3.)

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