

## A Devotional Commentary on the Gospels

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

By Favell Lee Mortimer

(1802-1878)

### AUGUST 1

#### Luke 17:11-19. *The ten Lepers.*

How touching are the words, "Where are the nine?" The Lord keeps an account of the number that he blesses, and he expects to see them at his feet, giving him thanks. He knows how many he has lifted up from the gates of death since the last setting sun. Some called on him *yesterday* out of the depths of distress; he heard them, and *today* disease is subdued, and danger is averted. Parents who feared *yesterday* that their absent children had met with some fatal accident, have heard *today* that they are safe. People plunged in deep poverty, who feared that they should soon perish with famine, or pine in a prison, have received gifts *today* that have extricated them from all their troubles. Are those people today pouring forth their thanks at their Redeemer's feet? It is to be feared that the Lord still says, "Where are the nine; the nine *hundred*, the nine *thousand*, the nine *million*, that I have delivered from distress?"

We are astonished at the ingratitude of the lepers; but no doubt they had some plausible excuses to make for their conduct. The Lord had said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." As they were going they were cleansed. They still followed the direction that had been given them, and pursued their way. But gratitude ought to have turned their steps back again. If they delayed to go to Jesus, they might never enjoy another opportunity of thanking him; for he was on his way, and would soon be gone. *One*, however, followed not the example of his companions. When he felt the glow of health in his veins, and saw the hue of health upon his hands, he did not hesitate how to act—he returned *alone*, and with a loud voice and in an humble attitude, glorified God. And this man was a *Samaritan!* He belonged to an ignorant nation, to a nation whom the Jews despised, and whose religion the Lord disapproved. This instance shows that among the most ignorant there are some whose hearts God has prepared to love him. Those who visit the abodes of misery in crowded cities find some of the poor outcasts ready to receive the truth. Missionaries find some in heathen lands who, as soon as they hear the Gospel, embrace it. But there are only a *few* in this

state. The mass of mankind in all countries care for the gifts, and not at all for the giver. The human heart is naturally ungrateful. Men are disposed to be ungrateful to their fellow-creatures. They feel humbled under the weight of great obligations, and seek an *excuse* for not being thankful. But they are far more ungrateful to God than they are to any other being. His mercies are considered matters of course. People like to imagine that all things happen by chance, and that God does not trouble himself with their little concerns. By these ideas, they relieve themselves from the burden of gratitude.

There is a charge that will be brought against sinners hereafter, which will involve them in the deepest guilt. It is this—they knew that the Father had given his only Son to die for them, and they were not *thankful*. Even devils will not have *this* black crime to answer for. Are there as many as *one* in *ten* in this Christian land who have *heartily* thanked God for the gift of his Son? who have thanked him as heartily for it, as they would thank a fellow-creature who had saved their lives at the risk of his own? or even as heartily as they would a friend for showing them common kindness and hospitality?

## August 2

### **Luke 17:20-24. Christ prepares his disciples for his absence.**

When the Pharisees asked questions the Lord disappointed them by his replies. They made inquiries in the hope of entangling him, but they themselves were confounded by the answers they received. They asked when the kingdom of God should come. The Lord, instead of acquainting them with that great secret, taught a more important truth. Jesus will one day be declared "King over all the earth;" but even now he reigns in the hearts of true believers; therefore he said to the Pharisees, "The kingdom of God is *within* you." It was useless for them to be looking for the appearance of the Lord in his glory, while they had not received him into their hearts.

The Lord would not converse on this subject with his *enemies*; but he turned to his *disciples*, and gave them much instruction concerning his second coming. He said, "The days will come when you shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and you shall not see it." What did he mean by *one* of the days of the Son of man? Was not the day in which he was speaking *one* of the days, and is not the day in which he will come again *another* of the days? The Lord prepared his disciples for his approaching departure, and foretold that when he was gone away they should long to see him again—that is, they should desire to see *one* of his days. Were not these words fulfilled? How earnestly John, when banished to the Isle of Patmos, desired to see the glorious day of the Son of man! Almost the last words he wrote were these—"Come, Lord Jesus." And do not all the disciples of the Lord long to see his day of glory? This is one of the marks by which they are distinguished—they "love his appearing." (1 Tim. 4:8.)

They pray for it constantly in the words, "Your kingdom come."

But though they do not know *when* it will come, they do know *how*—for Jesus has told them that "as the lightning that lights out of one part under heaven, shines unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in *his day*." This promise is a great comfort to all his disciples. It would have disturbed their minds, if they had thought it possible that their Lord might return to the earth without their knowing it. They would have been interrupted in their holy pursuits by the idea, "He may now be at Jerusalem, or in the desert, or in some hidden chamber, or in some retired spot." But they now feel sure that when he comes, they shall see him, wherever they may be, or whatever they may be doing. Only a *few* disciples saw him ascend in the clouds from the Mount of Olives—but *every eye* shall behold him when he comes again. How exceedingly great will be the brightness of that day! When the Lord Jesus appeared to the persecuting Saul, the light was beyond the brightness of the sun at noonday, and its dazzling splendor blinded the eyes of the astonished man. (Acts 26:13.) But when he comes again, the light will spread over the whole world; saints will be strengthened to gaze upon the scene, and will be changed into the image of their Lord; while impenitent sinners will find the day of *brightness* a day of *darkness* to them. How striking are the words of the prophet Amos on this subject! Amos 5:18-20—"Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord—to what end is it for you? the day of the Lord is darkness, and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?"

### August 3

#### **Luke 17:25 to end. *Christ prepares his disciples for his sudden return.***

Though the Lord did not inform his disciples *when* his kingdom should come, he told them of one event that must happen before that glorious day arrived—that event was his own death. "But *first* he must suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation." His disciples also would suffer many things, and be rejected by generation after generation. The history of their sufferings to the end of time is to be found in the Revelation. That book is a book of *warnings* (as well as promises) to the church of God. It prepares them for enduring much tribulation before their Savior appears to their comfort, and to the joy of their enemies.

But the Lord has concealed both the *time* and the *place* of his second appearing. When the disciples inquired, "Where, Lord?" he replied by a proverb, "Where the *body* is, there will the eagles be gathered together." We need not seek to know the place, for we shall be gathered to that *place*, whenever the time arrives.

There is another most important circumstance which the Lord has *not* concealed.

In what state will the world be when Jesus comes again? In the same state as it was before the flood. The book of Genesis, as well as the book of Revelation, is a book of warnings; for though it reveals events long *past*, they are types of events yet to come. The flood, and the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah, are types of the destruction of the wicked when Jesus comes again. *One family* only was saved when the flood came, and *one family* only was saved when the cities were burnt; and *one family* only will be saved when Jesus comes again. It is his *own* family, the people that he has chosen, and called to be his children. But in that one family, who were saved when Sodom was destroyed, there was a person who is held up as a warning to all who profess to belong to Christ. "Remember Lot's wife." She was *almost* saved—but yet—she was *lost*. And why? Because her heart still clung to the possessions she had left in Sodom. The Lord bids us beware of hankering after worldly goods. "In that day he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away." This direction was *literally* observed by the disciples when Jerusalem was besieged by the Romans, but it is to be *spiritually* observed to the end of time. Occasions will arise when the people of God must sacrifice all they possess rather than be false to their Master's cause. "Whoever shall lose his life shall preserve it."

It was painful to Lot to leave his wife a pillar of salt upon the plain of Sodom. Such separations as Lot then endured will take place when Christ comes again. Some who are living in the closest intimacy will be forever separated. The believer will be taken away from the side of his unbelieving brother, and transported into the presence of his Lord. None can imagine the despair of those who shall be left, or the horrors that will await them. Who is there who has not a believing relation? How could we bear the idea of seeing that holy person soaring away, and leaving us behind? *Now* he often invites us to walk with him in the ways of God—sometimes he prays *with* us, and more frequently still FOR US. It may seem impossible that an affectionate father, or a tender mother, should leave a child behind to be consumed by the ungodly; but when the righteous are borne by angels into the presence of God, none will be able to mount their fiery chariots, but those for whom they are sent. God is willing to save *all* of us. The way is open, and the invitation is free. "Whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." (Rev. 22:17.)

## **August 4**

### **Luke 18:1-8. *The parable of the unjust judge.***

This parable has been a great comfort to Christians while waiting for the second coming of the Son of man. The Lord had told his disciples that he would soon be absent from them. Eighteen hundred years have rolled away, and still the church is as a widow, and still Satan, her great adversary, is permitted to harass her. But has God been like an *unjust* judge? No, but he has *appeared* as *if* he did not

hear his people's prayers for deliverance from their enemies. His widowed church has cried day and night to him, saying, "Avenge me of my adversary," but God has not yet answered this prayer. He has not yet bound Satan with a great chain, and shut him up in the bottomless pit. Still our adversary goes about seeking whom he may devour; still he endeavors by various wiles and devices to destroy the people of God. And shall he always be permitted to do this? No! the day appointed for deliverance shall come. God will *not* say, like this unjust judge, "My church troubles me; I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me." The Lord is never wearied by the supplications of his people, for he has said, "The prayer of the upright is his delight." He will say, "I will now avenge my own elect, which cry day and night unto me, though I have borne long with them." Then He will send his Son from heaven to deliver his people, and to consume their enemies.

"Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?" Shall he find that his people have believed that he was coming? Will it not be as it was in the day of the resurrection, that even those who loved the Lord remembered *not* his promise? The angels said to the woman, "He is risen, as he *said*." *Then*, and not until then, those women remembered his words. Before Christ comes again many will be inclined to say, (like the two disciples going to Emmaus,) "We *trusted* it had been he which should have redeemed Israel."

While waiting for that day, we may go to our God in *every* hour of distress. He can bring to nothing (as it is expressed in the Liturgy) all the devices which the craft or subtlety of the devil or man works against us. We always shall find that in the end He will say, "Shall I not hear my afflicted child who cries day and night unto me?" This is one of the comforts of his children, that they have a God to whom they can go in time of trouble. He is on their side; He takes their part. Whether it is disease or death that threatens them, or whether it is the persecutions of wicked men, or the temptations of Satan that harass them, the Lord is greater than their enemies, and is able to subdue them. He would hear his children at *first*, only he knows that waiting will exercise their faith. Therefore he bears long with them. Why did he return answers that appeared severe to the woman of Canaan? Why did he not heed the *first* summons of the sisters of Lazarus? Why did he permit Job to pine with long sickness and sorrow? Was it not that he designed to teach his beloved this hard lesson, even that he hears them when he *seems* to disregard?

This is a lesson that is not understood by the little ones in Christ's school; they cannot bear delays, and think they are denials; but as their love increases, they can bear *apparent neglect*, and even *repulses*, without suspecting the loving-kindness of their heavenly Father. They know that God is love, and they can reason upon his love, and say, "He who spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all, will he not with him also freely give us all things?"

## August 5

### Luke 18:9-14. *The Prayers of the Pharisee and of the Tax-collector.*

There are thousands of prayers offered up to God every day; there have been thousands offered up this day. Have they all been accepted? No! there are prayers which are not accepted. Are we anxious to know whether the prayer we offered up alone this morning was accepted or not?—or did we offer none?

What was that made the Pharisee's prayer so hateful to God? It was the pride of his heart. His prayer was in truth no *prayer* at all. He *boasted*, instead of praying; but he deceived his own heart by putting his boast in the form of a thanksgiving. He did not *feel* thankful when he said, "God, I *thank* you I am not as other men." Had he felt thankful, he would not have despised the poor tax-collector. How different were the feelings of Paul, when he said, "By the grace of God I am what I am!" When we are thankful, we are filled with *compassion* (not with *contempt*) for those who are less blessed than ourselves.

How many offer prayers like the Pharisee's, while they use the *words* of the tax-collector! It is possible with all the pride of a Pharisee to smite upon the heart and to say, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner!" But the tax-collector *felt* what he said. He *thought* himself unworthy to lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven. He stood afar off from the Holy of holies, as unfit to enter the presence of God. He knew not what we know of a Savior's love; but he must have trusted in the *promises* of pardon to penitent sinners through an atonement, or he could not have offered up this humble prayer. With what joy penitent sinners like this tax-collector receive the tidings of a Savior! There were such publicans in the Savior's days, and they came to Jesus, and heard his word with thankfulness.

In what different states the Pharisee and the tax-collector returned from the temple to their own houses! The tax-collector went down a pardoned sinner, accepted for the sake of Christ. The Pharisee returned with the guilt of his sins upon his head, and that of the proud prayer he had offered, added to his former guilt. Pride is the most flagrant sin in God's sight. It has ruined multitudes of our fallen race, and it has even sunk angels into the bottomless abyss. In what state did we come down from our chambers this morning? Did we come down justified, or not? Have we ever made such humble, fervent supplications to God as the tax-collector did? Are we ashamed of ourselves and of our sins? Have we earnestly implored the infinite mercy of God in Christ? It is a dreadful thing to be unjustified or unpardoned. To rise up unjustified, to lie down unjustified—to go out—to come in—unjustified! To be exposed to death every moment, and yet—to be unjustified! But this is the state of everyone who has not repented of his sins, and obtained pardon through the merits of his Savior.

## August 6

### **Mark 10:17-22. *The rich young ruler.***

It is impossible not to feel interested in this young inquirer. The *respect* he paid to the Lord was rare in a man of rank and property. "He kneeled to him, and said, Good master." It is pleasing to see a *young* person anxious to learn the way of salvation. This youth came *running* to inquire what he should do to inherit eternal life. Though multitudes applied to the Savior for the cure of their diseases, few inquired how they should obtain *salvation* for their *souls*. This young man's course of life appears to have been correct, and his disposition amiable. We are already disposed to love him, when we read, "The Lord beholding him, *loved* him." Though no doubt Jesus loved all his disciples, and though we know that he loves even sinners, yet this expression is scarcely used on any other occasion. There was a disciple of whom it is said that Jesus loved him, and there was a family at Bethany concerning whom the same is recorded. But they were his devoted followers, while this youth was not even a believer. Yet as the Lord was *man*, as well as *God*, he may have loved those qualities that attract *our* regard, and are called "amiable." Nothing is more amiable in youth than a teachable disposition, a respectful demeanor, frankness of manner, and earnestness of spirit. All these the youth possessed. Even when he received a command that he would not obey, he still behaved in an *amiable* manner, and showed no angry *resentment*, but only deep *sorrow*. No doubt the Savior was touched by his grief; but he spoke not a word of consolation. He, who comforted all who were cast down, saying, "Weep not," permitted this mourner to go away un comforted. And why? Because there was no comfort for his sorrow. He grieved because the gate was too strait, and the way too narrow, that leads to eternal life. There can be no consolation for this grief, either in time or in eternity.

This young ruler did not know he was a sinner, and he did not feel his need of a Savior. Neither did he look upon Jesus as a *Savior*, but only as a *teacher*. When the Lord said, "Why do you call *me* good? there is none good but God," the young man ought to have replied, "You are the *Son* of God." But he believed not in Jesus. He wished to find out a way by which he might save *himself*. Therefore the Lord showed him his own heart by giving him a commandment that he would not choose to obey. He said to him, "Sell all that you have, and give to the poor." This commandment was given as a test whereby to try the youth, to see whether he would do *all* the Lord required. Once God tried Abraham, by commanding him to offer up his only son Isaac. Abraham stood the test, and proved that he loved the Lord above *all*. The young man did not stand the test. He might have stood an *easier* test; he might have been willing to part with *half* his possessions; he might have been willing to part with *all*, had his possessions not been so *great*—but to part with *all* his *great* possessions was more than he could bear to do. Some may feel inclined to wonder why the Lord imposed so hard a condition upon a young inquirer. They may say, "Is it not written that he does not quench the smoking flax, nor break the bruised reed?" This is true. When an afflicted father said with tears, "Help my unbelief," the Lord did not discourage him, for he

was as smoking flax. When a sinful woman washed his feet with tears, he did not repulse her—for she was as a bruised reed. But this young man was not as smoking flax, or as a bruised reed. He had no love for Christ—no sorrow for sin—no desire for pardon. The most open transgressor, who is conscious that he deserves to be condemned, is nearer salvation than such a self-righteous character as this young ruler was.

It may be that some of us, like this youth, desire to go to heaven. We think we are sincere. God may cause some event to happen that shall try our hearts, and prove whether we are ready to give up all beside, rather than relinquish our hope in Christ. *What* the trial may be cannot be foretold. It will be suited to our particular state. Orpah, as well as Ruth, professed great attachment to Naomi, her mother-in-law; but only Ruth clung to her, and to her God, in the midst of poverty and desolation. Many say to Christ, "Lord, Lord," who would not follow him to prison or to death. Those who have not felt their need of his blood to cleanse their sinful souls, may think that silver or gold, or friends, or fame, is more precious than Christ.

## August 7

### **Mark 10:23-27. Christ declares the danger of possessing riches.**

Is it indeed so very hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, and yet are men so anxious to become rich, and so much disposed to envy the rich, and to count them happy? Are parents so desirous to heap up treasures to leave to their children, and to see them occupy a higher station than themselves? Surely men do not *believe* this declaration of our Savior. Even the disciples were exceedingly astonished at it. Jesus then *explained* what he had said, and declared that it was those who *trusted in* riches who could not enter heaven. But how hard it is to possess them, and *not to trust* in them!

Let us inquire *what* it is to *trust* in riches. It is to feel them to be our *own*, and not the *gift* of God. Whether we have earned them by our industry, or inherited them from our parents, they are not our *own*, but only *lent* to us, and therefore they ought to be used in promoting God's glory. But the rich are apt to be proud, and to forget who gave them all they possess.

To trust in riches is to look to them for happiness. The favor of God alone can make us really happy. Outward things cannot do it,—neither friends, nor children, nor houses, nor lands—nor all the pleasures, comforts, and honors in the world. Even a child has been heard to say, "*Things cannot make people happy.*" And how do saints now in glory estimate those possessions on which men set their hearts? Do they not regard them as *rocks* upon which *souls* are shipwrecked—as *snares* in which they are taken, and pierced through with many sorrows? It is true that riches might be converted into blessings. But how much *grace* does it

require to use them aright! And how much *more* grace to *feel* aright when conscious of having great possessions! Great riches make people forget that they are great sinners, and lead them to neglect the great Savior. The rich have many *friends*, and often they do not feel the need of a heavenly and almighty Friend. They have great *possessions below*, and often they are satisfied without an inheritance *above*. A rich gentleman once said to a day-laborer, "Do you know to whom those estates belong on the borders of the lake?" "No," replied the laborer. "They belong to me," said the rich man. "And the wood and the cattle—do you know whose they are?" "No." "They are mine also," continued the rich man; "yes, all, all that you can see is mine." The peasant stood still a moment, then pointed to heaven, and in a solemn tone asked, "Is *that* also yours?"

How apt the rich are to forget to look upwards, and to ask, "Is heaven mine?" Silver and gold cannot purchase it; nothing but a Savior's precious blood. If an angel were commissioned to preach on earth, would he not rather speak to *peasants* than to *princes*—for angels must know that they are seldom called to rejoice over a penitent clothed in purple and fine linen. When the Gospel is proclaimed in hovels, and even in prisons, it has far greater success than when it is spoken in courts. A *few* indeed in the highest stations have been subdued by the power of divine grace; a *few* honorable counselors, such as Joseph and Nicodemus, have believed; a *few* honorable women, such as the Viscountess Glenorchy, and the celebrated Countess of Huntingdon, have devoted themselves to the service of God; a *few* mighty sovereigns, such as our wise Alfred, and our youthful Edward, have honored the King of kings, and the Lord of lords; but the greater part of those who have possessed lands, and riches, who have worn crowns, or coronets, have been satisfied with an earthly portion, and have not sought to obtain a crown of life, and an inheritance that fades not away.

## August 8

### **Matthew 19:27 to end. *Christ promises rewards to his faithful followers.***

Had Peter spoken in pride when he said, "We have forsaken all," he would have received *rebuke* instead of *encouragement*. He had seen the rich young man go away grieved—he had heard the Lord's declaration respecting the danger of riches—and his mind reverted to the period when he had been called, and had obeyed the call. What occasion was there for gratitude when the disciples thought of the time when they first resolved to give up all, and to follow Jesus! There is no season in life upon which the believer looks back with such joy, as on that season when he first determined to engage in his Redeemer's service. Whether he gave up much or little, he knows that in *heart* he gave up *all*. He felt *willing* to give up *all* whenever duty required the sacrifice; and he actually gave up what is dearer than possessions—doing his own will, and trusting in his own righteousness.

The Lord's reply to Peter contains two glorious promises. The first was addressed to the *apostles* only; the second to *everyone* who had acted as they had done. The apostles had left *fishing-boats*, and they were promised *thrones*. Such is the gracious and astonishing manner in which God rewards! When was this promise to be fulfilled? In the regeneration, or the new birth of the *world*. That time is spoken of in Rev. 21:1, where the apostle John declares, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away." This glorious time is called in Acts 3:21, "'the time of the restitution (or restoring) of all things.'" It appears that the apostles will then be distinguished by peculiar honors, and that they will be appointed to judge or rule over the tribes of Israel and the saints. But though we speak of these things, we understand them very dimly, because we see "through a glass, darkly."

The *second* promise that Jesus made is addressed to *all* who forsake any worldly good for his sake. Multitudes have lost their possessions, and have been separated from their families, because they chose to obey God rather than men. And *how* has God rewarded them? Has he given them the *very* things they renounced? No, not always; but he has given them more happiness, even in this life, than earth could have afforded them. They have indeed suffered "*persecutions*," but their joys have been greater than their sorrows. (Mark 10:30.)

Worldly things are only desired, because it is supposed that they can confer happiness. If any person were convinced that greater happiness could be obtained by any *other* means, surely he would not lament the loss of worldly comforts. How many saints have witnessed, that in the hour of outward sorrow they have tasted the purest inward joy! Such was the experience of Rutherford, when imprisoned in Aberdeen. In his letters he declared that since he had been in prison, he had discovered a sweetness in Christ that he had never conceived before. Such was the experience of Dr. Payson. When racked with pain in his last illness, he asserted that he felt more satisfaction than he had ever known in health. He said, "God has used a strange method to make me happy. I could not have believed, a little while ago, that in order to render me happy, He would deprive me of the use of my limbs, and fill my body with pain. But he has taken away everything else, that he might give me HIMSELF." And the apostles bore the same testimony when they said, "As the SUFFERINGS of Christ abound in us, so our *consolation* also abounds by Christ." (2 Cor. 1:5.)

Are there any here who have never yet found happiness? Are you willing to try the experiment, and to see whether God can make you happy? Sin has its pleasures, but they are for a *season*, and they leave a *sting* behind. Have you not experienced this? But God bestows on his children a calm, a deep, a settled, an abiding joy, which is called PEACE. It cannot be described, for it is not only unspeakable, but it passes *all understanding*.

**August 9**

**Matthew 20:1-16. *The parable of the laborers in the vineyard.***

Our Savior himself tells us what is the meaning of this parable. This is the explanation he gave—"The last shall be first, and the first last; for many are called, but few chosen." Those who are *first in their own eyes*, will be *last* in the great day of reckoning; and those who are *last in their own eyes*, will then be *first*. This seems to be the meaning of the parable. We have no reason to believe that *all* will have an *equal* reward in the last day—the parable of the talents seems to prove that there will be different degrees of glory in the world to come.

In the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, there is a representation of the *feelings* of self-righteous Pharisees toward penitent publicans. They were enraged at the idea of open sinners partaking with them of heavenly bliss. Self-righteous people, who have led a correct life, imagine that they are better than those who turn to God *late* in life. They think they deserve great reward for their self-denial. How much will they be astonished at the decisions of the last day! Then they will see open sinners, who have *repented*, admitted into God's presence, and they themselves thrust out! Little do they think that even a *murderer*, who *truly* repents in his last hour, is loved of God, while professors of religion, who have *never* repented, are hateful in his sight! Such impenitent people will not be received into heaven. But they will have the torment of beholding those whom they despised, welcomed by saints and angels, arrayed in white robes, and adorned with golden crowns. How much *more* exasperated will they be at *this sight* than the envious laborers were at the sight of the wages given to those who had worked but one hour! When they see penitent sinners received and rewarded, they will expect to be still more favored and still more honored. But they will be bitterly disappointed. They will then find that there is no mansion prepared for them in the celestial city.

The Lord's *true* servants are not like the murmuring laborers. If called *early* to work in his vineyard, they rejoice the more. They are not *proud* of having spent their youth in the service of God, but *thankful* for the great mercy shown to them. They pity those who were groaning under the bondage of Satan, while they were rejoicing in the liberty of Christ. How different from theirs was the spirit of those laborers who said, they had borne the burden and heat of the day! Those who do not *love* God, find his commandments grievous; but those who have experienced his pardoning mercy, call his yoke easy and his burden light. Do we think those the happiest who spend their lives in sin, and who, like the dying thief, are pardoned in their expiring moments? Or do we esteem those happiest who serve the Lord, like Joseph, from their youth, or like Samuel, from early childhood?

**August 10**

**John 11:1-6. *Christ receives a message from Martha and Mary***

The conduct of our blessed Redeemer towards the beloved family at Bethany, sheds light upon his dealings with his saints now upon earth. Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, were firmly attached to their Lord, and they could stand trials that weaker saints could not have endured.

The Lord did not delay to heal the nobleman's son, nor Jairus' daughter, but he delayed to speak the word on behalf of Mary's brother. What was the reason for this difference? Mary and her sister knew their Lord well; they had experienced his faithfulness in times past; they could trust his love, even in the midst of apparent neglect.

When Lazarus was taken ill, his sisters deeply regretted the absence of their Lord, but they knew where he was, and they sent a messenger to acquaint him with their grief. The words of the message were few and touching, "Behold he whom you love is sick." The sisters did not request that Jesus would come; they laid their case before him, and left it to his never-failing love to act as he saw fit. Here is an example for our prayers. It is a comfort in distress to spread our wants and woes before the Lord; but it is best to leave it to his wisdom to decide *how* to relieve us.

The answer Jesus gave to the message was very encouraging. "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." Yet it seems probable that Lazarus died before the message could be delivered to the weeping sisters. It must have come too late to give them comfort.

But the dying chamber, the funeral scene, the days of mourning, were all appointed "for the glory of God." We naturally imagine that God is most glorified by *preventing* evil; but we know from his own declarations that he is *more* glorified by *redeeming* from evil. The fall of angels and of man will in the end bring more glory to God than would have arisen had these evils been prevented; for then the wonders of *redemption* could never have been displayed. It is a delight to the righteous to promote the glory of their heavenly Father. They would willingly endure sufferings for this purpose. We heard a little while ago of a man who was *born* blind, that the works of God might be made manifest in him—we now hear of one who *died* for the same end. Believers even now die, not as a punishment for sin, but in order to promote the glory of God. Christ has suffered for their sins, and borne all their punishment, but he appoints that they should die, that at the last day he may raise them all for his own glory. When he shall say, "Come up here," then great fear will fall on those who behold them ascending in a cloud to meet their Lord in the air.

Theirs will be a more glorious resurrection than that of Lazarus, for he rose to die again; but those who are made alive at the last day will die no more.

**August 11**

**John 11:7-16. *Christ sets out for Bethany.***

It seems amazing that though the disciples had lived with the Lord three years, they continued to misunderstand his words. They supposed that his motive for not going to heal the afflicted Lazarus, was fear of the Jews. For when he said, "Let us go into Judea again," they expressed their surprise. He replied by a short parable. He compared himself to a man who walked in the day, and who walked safely, because he enjoyed the light of the sun. He himself was light, and therefore could never fall into *unforeseen* danger. He knew that his hour was come, and that it was *time* to work his most stupendous miracle. When his hour was *not* come, he took pains to conceal his glorious works, that he might not too *soon* exasperate his enemies; but now he desired to fall into their cruel hands, that he might *finish* the work his Father had given him to do.

We do not possess foreknowledge; we do not know what things will happen to us in any place to which we are going; yet if we follow Jesus, we do not walk in darkness. It is true we are blind, but our *guide* is not; therefore we are as safe as if we ourselves possessed eye-sight. When we are going to take a step in life, if we find that the word of God pronounces it to be right, and that the providence of God opens the way, we need not fear evil. How safe were the disciples while conducted by their Master from place to place! Yet they knew not their own security. Thomas seems to have said with a wavering faith, and a fearful heart, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

How was it the disciples did not comprehend their Master when he said, "Our friend Lazarus *sleeps*?" He taught them by this figurative language many sacred truths. He showed them that the commonest actions (such as sleeping) represent spiritual truths. Jesus was patient with his dull scholars, and explained his meaning, saying, "Lazarus is dead." These words could not be misunderstood—but those that followed were mysterious. "I was glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent *you* may believe." The raising of Lazarus was to effect more than *one* purpose. It was intended not only to *convince unbelievers*, but also to strengthen the faith of *believers*. The disciples were on the brink of an event that would call for the exercise of the strongest faith. Soon they would see their own Lord lying in his tomb. Never since the beginning of the world were the people of God exposed to so great a trial of faith, as the disciples then endured. To see *Him* on whom all their hopes for eternity depended, to see *Him* a breathless corpse—was there ever any trial to be compared to this? Therefore, before the trial came, the Lord by every method sought to strengthen the faith of his poor weak disciples.

He foresees our trials, and often, before he inflicts a severe stroke, he prepares us for it by various and wonderful methods. Sometimes he prepares us by leading us to the sick bed of a sufferer, and by letting us hear him tell how the

Lord sustained him; sometimes by shading one of our props without removing it; and sometimes by bestowing great and astonishing mercies. The whole process cannot be understood now, but it will be made plain to the saints in glory. What delight it will afford above to trace the Lord's dealings with our souls, and to discover the secret causes of the events of his providence!

## August 12

### Mark 10:32-34. Christ again predicts his sufferings.

As we read the history of our Savior, we are continually struck by the union of courage and of tenderness in his character. He was now on his way to comfort two weeping sisters, by raising their beloved brother from the grave. He was also on his way to the place of his *own* execution. Bethany was a village very near to Jerusalem. What different scenes were soon to be witnessed at those two places! In Bethany the Lord would restore *another's* life; in Jerusalem lay down his *own!* But though he knew the painful trials that awaited him, He went *willingly* to the appointed spot, while his fearful disciples followed him *reluctantly*. Had we seen them on their journey, we might have supposed that one of them was going to receive honors, and the rest to endure sufferings. Whereas it was *He* who went boldly before, who was to be the victim, while those who followed trembling were to escape.

The Lord Jesus took his disciples *alone* by themselves, to unfold to them the history of his approaching sufferings. He took them *apart*, because he did not choose to declare before his enemies the deeds which they would commit against him; for such declarations would have emboldened them in wickedness. But to his own disciples he revealed even the *particulars* of the dreadful transactions. On this occasion it is recorded for the *first* time that he spoke of his deliverance to the Gentiles, and of the insulting *spitting* of his enemies. These degrading circumstances were now unfolded to his disciples, who revered him as the Son of God. Had they understood the meaning of their Master's words, their feelings would have been outraged, and harrowed up to the utmost pitch. Yet the words seem so plain that we can scarcely conceive how they could have been misunderstood. But, perhaps, as the Lord often used figurative language, the disciples supposed that his prophecies concerning himself were figurative; perhaps, though they often understood him *literally* when he was speaking *figuratively*—they thought he was speaking figuratively when he was speaking literally. This is still the great difficulty in the interpretation of prophecy—to distinguish the figurative from the literal; and perhaps future ages will show that the church in these days has fallen into some of the same errors as the apostles.

Great was the loss they sustained in consequence of their slowness of understanding. Had they been *prepared* to see their Lord bleeding on the cross, they would not have forsaken him in the hour of distress; and had they kept in

mind the promise of his rising again, they would have been spared the bitterest tears they ever shed. That day of bitter tears during which the Prince of Life lay in his tomb, would have been to them a day of bright hopes, had they remembered his words. With what joy would they have hastened to the grave on the dawn of the third day, if they had expected to hear that he was risen!

In looking back on our past lives, can we not remember many *seasons* which would not have been so sad had we remembered the Savior's gracious promises?—seasons of doubt and perplexity—seasons of suspense and anxiety—seasons of disappointment—seasons of bereavement— seasons of darkness and of the shadow of death? When those seasons have been past we have felt, "O had I from the *beginning* of the trial, and throughout its course, remembered my Lord's words, 'Fear not, I am with you,' and many *similar* words, what bitter pangs should I have been spared!" In all our troubles here below there is one promise that ought, above all, to cheer us. It is his promise, "I will come again, and receive you to myself." The words are plain. "He will *come* again!" he will actually come in a glorious body, and our eyes shall behold him. Come, Lord Jesus! come quickly.

### **August 13**

#### **Matthew 20:20-28. *The request of the mother and sons of Zebedee.***

Was it a *right* request that the sons of Zebedee made when they asked to sit at the right and left hand of their Lord in his glory? Was it right in their mother to plead that this honor might be conferred on her children? A desire to be *first* is natural to the human heart in its fallen state; but this desire is the cause of the greater part of the anxiety and discontentment that prevail among men. *All* cannot be first; therefore if all *desire* to be first, all *but one* must be disappointed. And will that one be happy? None are so miserable as the proud.

Nebuchadnezzar, the first monarch of his day, was a miserable man. What an account we read in the prophet Daniel of his fears, and tremors, and rage! On one occasion his spirit was troubled by his dreams, and on another through his fury the form of his visage was changed. No creature can be happy from his own greatness—but only from knowing the greatness of God. The angels are happy, because they delight in seeing God upon his throne. Adam and Eve were happy in the garden of Eden until they desired to be as gods; then, ceasing to delight in the glory of their Creator, they became miserable. When the Holy Spirit enters the heart of man, he begins his work by casting down "every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God." (1 Cor. 10:5.)

Yet true believers are troubled, as long as they remain on earth, with sinful feelings; though, as they grow in grace, they grow in humility. The apostles, at their last supper with their Lord, disputed who should be greatest. Let us be on our guard against the secret workings of ambition. We have perhaps ceased to

desire the great things of this *world*. We have perhaps no desire to shine in *worldly* circles, or to be commended by *irreligious* people. But do we cherish a wish to be thought much of by *religious* people? to be commended above our fellow-Christians? to be more noticed, more admired, more honored? Whereas we ought to esteem others better than ourselves. Our Savior has set the most wonderful example of humility by coming into this world to *minister* to us, and even to give his own precious life as a ransom for our sinful souls. Yet with what gentleness he answered the two brethren! He knew they had forsaken all to follow him; he knew that they would prefer shame and suffering *with* him, to any honor or joy *apart* from him; therefore he treated them with tenderness, though he did not promise to grant their request.

The words in ver. 23, "It shall be given to them," are written in italics to show that they were inserted by the translators in order to make the sense clear—yet, perhaps, if they were omitted the sense would be more clear—for Jesus did not say that it was not in his power to give the most honorable seats to whom he would. We know that whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. (John 5:19.) This is what he said—"To sit on my right and on my left hand is not mine to give, *but* for whom it is prepared of my *Father*." The Son will bestow honor according to the decrees of the Father.

Though the Savior concealed from the apostles what they desired to know, he told them some things that must have been strange and unwelcome. He revealed to them that they must partake of his *own* bitter sufferings. This is the first time in which it is recorded that he spoke so openly of the sufferings of his *apostles*. The terms in which he spoke of their future trials were suited to sweeten them to their affectionate hearts. It was out of his *own* cup the two brethren were to drink, and in his *own* baptism they were to be baptized. It is this thought that has sustained many believers under persecution, and has strengthened them even to endure the burning flame, or the bloody cross. But not *martyrs* only—*all* true Christians suffer with their Lord. There is *no* sorrow that we can ever experience that our Lord has not tasted *first*; and he has tasted it, not only that he might take away our *guilt*, but also that he might sympathize in our *grief*. He knew all that James and John would be called to endure; and he knows also what each of us will be appointed to bear. He could have told James that the sword of Herod would cut short his days before those of any of the other apostles, and he could have told John that the cruel decree of Domitian would banish him in his old age to the Isle of Patmos, to dwell among convicted criminals. And he *could* tell each of us what losses we shall sustain, what pangs we shall suffer, what death we shall die. But he forbears to tell us more than that through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom of God. Who shall occupy the places at his right hand and at his left he has revealed to none; but though their *names* are secret, their *characters* are manifest—they will be *humble*. Whether they will be missionaries, or martyrs, or whether they will be beggars or slaves, we know not; but this we know, they will be self-denying and self-abased followers of their lowly Lord.

**August 14**

**Mark 10:46 to end. *Blind Bartimaeus.***

In the history of earthly princes we do not often hear of the poor and afflicted, but of brave generals and wise senators. In the history of the Prince of peace we meet continually with anecdotes of beggars and outcasts. Those whom men overlooked and spurned were the objects of his most tender regard. The blind, as among the most helpless, received signal tokens of his favor. On one occasion we read of a blind man who was brought to him by his friend. (See Mark 9.) Bartimaeus appears to have had no friends to assist him; if he had a friend, it was that blind man who sat with him begging, and was as helpless as himself. Far from being encouraged to come to Jesus, he was rebuked by the multitude, and told to hold his peace. Many people anxious about their salvation have been placed in the same circumstances. No friend has offered to lead them to the Savior, while many have rebuked them for their concern about their souls.

On another occasion the Lord passed by a blind man, and restored his sight without waiting to be asked, for that blind man knew neither the Savior's name, nor his power, until they were revealed to him by the Lord himself. (See John 9.) Bartimaeus, far from being noticed by the Lord, could obtain for a long while no answer to his earnest entreaties. His case was more trying than that of the woman of Canaan; for *stern* answers were less discouraging than *no* answers at all. Besides, she could follow Jesus with her cries, while Bartimaeus from his blindness was unable to find his way to his Lord. Jesus was passing by—would soon be past—might never pass that way again, (as indeed he never did;) it was a *short* opportunity; it seemed likely it would be the *only* one. All things were against the poor blind beggar; but instead of being disheartened, he "cried the more a great deal." There are some who leave off praying without having suffered as much discouragement as poor Bartimaeus. If their cold and careless prayers do not receive an immediate answer, they are ready to give up the case as lost, and to try no more. But those who persevere in fervent prayer shall be blessed with blind Bartimaeus.

At length Jesus stood still. Thus he honored the beggar in the presence of the surrounding crowds. He commanded him to be called. Those who had before rebuked him, must now have felt ashamed. The blind man was evidently agitated and distressed, for those who called him said, "Be of *good comfort*, rise; he calls you." What a joyful moment was this! With what *haste* the poor man obeyed the summons! He cast away his outer garment, that it might not slow his movements, and approached his compassionate friend. Though the Lord well knew his desire, he induced him to express it in his own words—for he loves to hear the petitions of his people. Not only did he bestow sight on Bartimaeus, but he pronounced these words of commendation—"Your *faith* has made you whole." This assurance must have been dearer to the poor beggar than even his bodily sight,

for it implied a promise of eternal blessedness. Though the Savior said, "Go your way," yet the grateful man followed his deliverer.

Thus as the Lord journeyed towards Jerusalem, he gathered in his train fresh monuments of his power. The march of earthly conquerors is tracked with blood; smoking villages and mangled corpses mark the way which they have trodden, while weeping captives are chained to their triumphal chariots. But the Savior left joy behind him wherever He went, and collected new trophies of his mercy. Thus will He come at the last day. He will bring his saints with him; he will be attended by those whom he has rescued from the darkness and blindness of sin and death, from the grave and its corruption, from hell and its horrors. Shall we belong to that triumphant band? Has Jesus opened the eyes of our minds? Do we *now* follow him in the way?

## August 15

### Luke 19:1-10. *Zaccheus.*

In this history we find an instance of a *spiritual* cure wrought by the Lord. Opening the *eyes* of Bartimaeus was not so great a work as opening the *heart* of Zaccheus. Though the Lord was continually healing the lame and the blind, yet it was *not* to *heal* them he came into the world. For what did he come? Hear his own declaration—"The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost." But men in general (not being aware of their lost condition) did not apply to him for *salvation*, as they did for the healing of their *bodily infirmities*. Zaccheus did not cry for mercy as Bartimaeus did. His desire was to see this wonderful prophet, of whom he had heard so much. For this purpose, being little of stature, he climbed into a tree. It is probable he would have been satisfied had he obtained a good view of the Savior, as he passed beneath. How much astonished he must have felt when the Lord, upon coming to the place, looked up and said, "Zaccheus, make haste and come down, for today I must abide at your house!" He must have been ready to exclaim, as Nathanael once did, "How do you know me?" It was evident the Lord knew not only his *name*, but his *circumstances*. He knew that he had a *house* in which he could receive guests. He knew *more* than this; he knew his *heart*—he was sure that Zaccheus was *willing* to entertain him beneath his roof—He must have known it, for He Himself had made him willing. On no other occasion is it recorded that he entered without invitation the house of a stranger.

It was indeed a singular honor that was conferred upon Zaccheus. It was his privilege to show hospitality to his Lord at the very *beginning* of his acquaintance with him; and he seems to have been conscious of the greatness of the privilege, for he came down the tree with *haste*, and received him *joyfully*. Whence arose his joy? Though *curiosity* may have been his only motive for ascending the tree, yet some higher principle seems to have actuated him before he descended. Like

Nathaniel and the woman of Samaria, he may have felt that none but the true Messiah could have such knowledge of him and of his circumstances. No wonder he rejoiced in the prospect of an opportunity of conversation with Him who knew all things.

Very interesting communion must have taken place beneath the roof of Zaccheus; but very little is recorded. In a short space of time, the master of the house had learned so much of the will of his Lord, as to stand up and make public declarations and confessions. He declared he would give half of his goods to the poor—he confessed that he had by false accusations (or by overcharging when he gathered the public taxes) defrauded some people—he promised to restore to them *four* times what he had taken. It is a good sign when those who are impressed with religious truth *begin* by making restitution, asking pardon of those whom they have offended, and adopting an entirely new course of life.

The gracious Savior was not slow to honor the good resolutions of Zaccheus. He gave him the title of a son of Abraham; thus showing that it was his *faith* that had produced his holy determination. Had the honorable young ruler possessed the *faith* of Zaccheus, he would not have refused to part with all his possessions at the command of Christ. But, notwithstanding his attractive qualities, he was destitute of that precious grace. Zaccheus possessed it, and would have held back nothing from his Lord that he had been called to give up. No doubt he would have gladly followed him in the way; but it seems he had duties to discharge at home. It was his part to endeavor to bring every member of his household to the knowledge of his Savior. Could he forget the encouraging assurance, "This day has salvation come to this *house!*" Those who belonged to his family might henceforth count themselves blessed. The visit of their divine guest was to them the earnest of eternal bliss.

There is a period in the history of some families when true religion *first* finds admittance. Various are the *means* by which it gains entrance—sometimes it is through a godly friend, and sometimes through a godly servant—in some cases the family are led to hear a faithful minister, in others—to read a holy book—but whatever are the *means* employed, that period is memorable indeed when the *first* member of a family turns to the Lord with all his heart. That member will not rest satisfied with serving God *alone*; he will offer prayers, and use persuasions, until his children or his parents, his brethren and his sisters, unite in the same blessed service.

## **August 16**

### **Luke 19:11-19. *The first part of the parable of the ten pounds.***

This parable was related to correct a mistake into which many of the Lord's disciples had fallen. They thought that the kingdom of God should *immediately*

appear. They were not wrong in supposing that the kingdom of God would one day be established upon the earth; for it will be set up with power and great glory; but they were wrong in supposing that the time had *already* come. There will be great voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." But before those acclamations will be heard, many events must take place. The Lord had already prepared James and John for enduring *sufferings*, before they could be exalted to honor; and now he prepared all his disciples for performing services before they could partake of *rewards*. Zaccheus had just shown his willingness to serve the Lord, by making promises of restitution to the injured, and of liberality to the poor. *His* spirit ought to be the spirit of all the followers of Christ. Though we can only be saved by free grace, yet we must show our gratitude for this free salvation by our *works*.

The Lord Jesus compared himself in this parable to a nobleman who went into a far country, to receive a kingdom from his monarch, and who returned to that kingdom to take possession of it. It was in this manner that Judea and Galilee were bestowed by the Emperor of Rome upon those noblemen who ruled over them. The rulers were invested with their power at Rome, and when invested they returned to the countries they were appointed to govern.

Before the nobleman in the parable departed, he entrusted each of his ten servants with a pound. Thus, before the Lord ascended to his Father, he charged all his disciples to serve him faithfully until the day of his return. It was not the *apostles* alone who received this charge. All who believe in Christ are bound to devote themselves to his service.

The pound represents those various ways of doing good which God has placed within our reach. Though in this parable each servant had the *same* sum committed to his keeping, yet another parable shows us that all Christians do *not* enjoy *equal* opportunities of usefulness—but all enjoy some, and all are required to improve those they possess.

In the days of the apostles believers were endowed with miraculous powers, which they were bound to use in the service of their Lord—as Paul declares, "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." (1 Cor. 12:7.) In these days, though miraculous powers are no longer possessed, there are many ways in which good may be done.

By gifts, by instruction, by example, and by prayer, Christians may promote the glory of God.

Those who possess property can bestow bread on the hungry, and scatter food for the soul by distributing Bibles and tracts, and by promoting the preaching of the gospel all over the world.

But some who are not able to *give* much are able to *instruct*. A word dropped in season, even by a child, has sometimes saved a soul.

*Example* is still more powerful than instruction. Those who would be offended by advice, are often convinced by a holy life, a meek demeanor, and a forgiving spirit. Therefore the apostle Peter charges those women who have unbelieving husbands, to endeavor to win them by their Christian *behavior*. (1 Peter 3:1.)

There is another mode of doing good, which, though the most *secret* of all, is the most *effectual*—it is *prayer*. The good that *prayer* has done will never be known until the last day. Then it will be seen that those who could be useful in scarcely any other way, brought down blessings by their prayers. It is recorded of a poor man, who was for a long season confined to his bed by sickness, that he made it his daily employment to pray that light might enter the various dark villages in his neighborhood. Every one of those villages for which he thus separately prayed, enjoyed, in the course of a few years, the light of the Gospel. It will often be found that conversions are answers to the prayers of some pious relation. Delightful discoveries will hereafter be made concerning our obligations to those who prayed for us.

It may well astonish us to think the Lord will reward the imperfect services of his sinful creatures. Even our prayers are mixed with sin. Every good action has some alloy of evil in the *motive*, some defect in the *performance*, and is too often followed by self-complacency in the *recollection*. The same precious blood which blotted out our *sinful* deeds, is needed to cleanse our *righteous* deeds from all their pollutions. Never will the faithful servants of Christ feel more abased in their own eyes than when they hear their Master say, "Well done." Even the *angels*, who have done the will of God without fault since the creation, count it a privilege to be permitted to serve him. What, then, will those who have served him so imperfectly, feel when they are exalted to posts of honor, and entrusted with authority and power!

## **August 17**

### **Luke 19:20-28. *The last part of the parable of the ten pounds.***

This parable contains a most solemn warning to the professed servants of Christ. Not to live to God's glory is a *fatal* sin. To make no efforts to please our heavenly Master is a sign that we do not *love* him. Did that servant love him who hid the pound in a napkin? His *language*, as well as his *conduct*, proves that he did not. What a character he ascribes to his Lord! He calls him an austere man, one who is rigorous, exacting, and severe. Who could *love* such a Master! Those who think in this manner of God do not try to please him. They give up the attempt in despair. They say to themselves, "If I were to give away large sums, perhaps I should only waste my money and do no good. If I were to labor from morning to

night in teaching and exhorting, perhaps I should only waste my breath; no one might attend to my instructions. If I were to pray without ceasing for the conversion of my fellow-creatures, perhaps God would not grant my prayers."

It is very wicked to entertain such thoughts, for God has given gracious promises of success to those who labor in his service. He has said, "Cast your bread upon the waters, and you shall find it after many days." (Eccles. 11:1.) He has said again, "He who goes forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him." (Ps. 126:6.) He has said again, "Whatever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive." (Matthew 21:22.)

If, notwithstanding all these promises, we persist in thinking that God might leave us to labor in vain, we make him a liar. Sometimes God does not grant *speedy* success, but he remembers what each does for his name's sake, and he will acknowledge every effort at the last day. In general he blesses the labors of his servants beyond their highest expectations. Ask aged believers who devoted themselves early to his service, whether they expected, at the beginning of their course, to reap so rich a blessing as they have reaped. The words of the dying Count Zinzendorf are memorable. He said, "I expected to bring but a *few* heathen to the knowledge of the Lord, and, lo! *thousands* have believed." Mr. Charles, of Bala, little thought, when he was seeking a method by which to supply *Wales* with Bibles, that his desire would lead to the formation of a Society which should fill the *world* with Bibles. The last day will fully show what abundant showers of blessings have attended the labors of the faithful. Some who have scattered innumerable tracts, and who have not known what became of them, will then learn the histories of those silent messengers, to their own unspeakable joy.

But what will be the overwhelming sorrow of those who have done nothing for their Lord! The pound they possessed will be taken away from them. No further opportunities of glorifying God will be granted to them. In hell there is no possibility of serving Him. But in heaven there will be opportunities of glorifying Him through the ages of eternity. The saints will not find their rest less refreshing, because it will be spent in the worship of God, and in labors of love.

The last words of the parable contain an allusion to those enemies whom the Lord was going to encounter at Jerusalem—those enemies who said, "We will not have this man to reign over us." How wonderful was the courage with which the Shepherd led his little flock towards the scene of his own painful death! He went *before*, ascending up to Jerusalem. How insignificant are all the *services* which we can perform to *please* him, when compared with the sufferings he endured to *save* us!

**August 18**

**John 11:17-27. *Christ converses with Martha at Bethany.***

How mingled were the feelings with which Martha went to meet her heavenly Friend! *Joy* she must have felt because he had come at *last*—*grief* because he had not come *sooner*. It appeared to her an unfortunate coincidence that her brother should have been seized with a fatal illness at a time when Jesus was absent. She expressed this feeling as soon as she beheld him, saying, "If you had been here my brother would not have died." But what appeared an *unfortunate coincidence* was in truth a *divine arrangement*. The Lord himself viewed these circumstances in a different light, when he said to his disciples, "I am *glad* for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent you might believe."

But why did Martha say, "*If you had been here.*" Was not Jesus always there and everywhere? Yes; but she knew it not. She needed not have sent a *messenger* to inform him of her brother's illness—a *prayer* would have reached him from the furthest end of the world. He witnessed the expiring agonies of Lazarus, and told his disciples when he fell asleep. There is not one of his numerous family that has occasion to say with a sigh, "If you had been here." When those we love droop and die, it is not because Jesus is not near, but because he designs to bring *us* nearer to himself by separating us from the creature.

It was natural that Martha should have hoped for the restoration of her brother, when she had heard of so many being restored to health who were not reckoned among the friends of Jesus. It seemed hard to her that one he so tenderly loved should not participate in those benefits. Some faint hope was lingering in her heart when she said, "But I know that even *now* whatever you will ask of God, God will give it you." Though she does not appear to have understood fully the power of Jesus, yet she understood one important truth that he continually taught to his disciples. It was this—that the Father loved his Son, and granted all his petitions. The Son of God is the channel of the Father's mercy. Whatever we desire we must ask in his name, for we can only receive it through Him.

The Lord's reply was suited to fill Martha's heart with joy, "Your brother shall rise again." Had Jesus added the words "THIS day," the sorrowing sister would indeed have rejoiced—but she was unsatisfied with the *distant* prospect of the resurrection at the *last* day. She wanted her brother's company to cheer her while she lived; and she was not willing to wait until all the just should rise to enjoy eternal life. The gentle Savior did not rebuke the human weakness betrayed in the hour of sorrow. But he made use of this opportunity to instruct her concerning spiritual truths. Had she in former days, like Mary, sat at his feet, perhaps she would have been more familiar with divine doctrines.

How many hearts have thrilled, in hearing these words uttered when the beloved form of a child or a parent, a brother or a sister, has been carried to the grave! "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."

The Savior taught by these declarations, that none really *live*, except those who believe in him; and that none really *die*, except those who do *not* believe. To breathe—to move—to feel pain or pleasure,—that is not to *live*—to know God—to love him—to be like him,—*that* is to *live* indeed. To lie for a time in the tomb while the spirit rests above—*that* is not to *die*; to be cast into the lake of fire—*that* is to *die*. Do WE believe this? *Then* are we happy indeed, if we can say with Martha, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." If we really believe this, we live now the only happy life that can be enjoyed on earth; if we really believe this we shall never *die*, but only fall *asleep* in Jesus.

Many on their dying beds, when they have been asked whether Jesus was precious, have replied, "Never so precious as now." But it is not only on our *own* dying-beds that we may hope to feel him precious. When we see the eyes we loved closed in death, then we feel that we owe all the peace we shall henceforth enjoy to Him in whom the dear departed sleeps securely; then we feel, "Were it not for Jesus, I should have no hopes of seeing my friend, my child again; nor any assurance that he is happy while absent from me. But now, when I lie down, I think *his* spirit needs no rest; and when I rise up, I think, while I have been resting, his spirit has been uniting with the angels—

Who all night long unwearied sing  
The praises of their heavenly king."

## August 19

### John 11:28-36. *Christ goes to the tomb of Lazarus.*

No other words could have conveyed such joy to Mary's heart as those that Martha whispered in her ear, "The Master has come, he calls for you." Yet her joy was mingled with bitter regrets that she had not heard the welcome tidings *before* Lazarus died.

Martha called her sister *secretly*. Perhaps she did not wish that the Jews who sat around should accompany them to meet their Lord, for many of those Jews did not believe in him. The presence of unbelievers is felt to be a painful constraint by those who desire to open their hearts to Jesus. It will be one of the delights of heaven to feel that everything there sympathizes in all the communications that take place between the saints and their Savior.

But these Jews appear to have been much interested in Mary's grief; and when they saw her arise they followed her, thinking she was going to weep at her brother's grave. They little imagined how wonderful a scene they would soon behold. They must have been astonished to see Jesus waiting on the road. Mary then fell down at his feet, and uttered the very same words that Martha had used

before, "If you had been here my brother had not died." This was all that Mary could express. It appears that her grief was more overwhelming than her sister's. We do not hear that Martha fell down at the Redeemer's feet; nor that she wept as Mary did. Some spirits are more bowed down by grief than others. The Lord knows the frame of each of his creatures, and what each is able to bear. We are apt to pass harsh judgments upon one another; sometimes calling those *unfeeling* who sustain sorrow with composure, and looking upon others as *rebellious* against God who faint beneath its weight. But the Lord deals gently with the sorrowful—instead of reproving Mary's tears, he shed tears also.

Next to the history of his shedding his *blood*, this is the most touching, which tells us of his shedding *tears*. These tears were the tokens of deep trouble within. Before he shed them, it is said that "he groaned in spirit, and was troubled." Though he knew that Mary's grief would soon be assuaged, he felt for her actual sorrow; and not for *hers* only, but for the sorrow of the *unbelieving* Jews that accompanied her. There is nothing that so much solaces a mourner as to feel that he does not mourn alone. There is not one who has heard how Jesus shed these tears who ought to think he mourns *alone*. Even if he does not love the Savior, yet that Savior *feels* for him, because he is the work of his own hands.

But it was not *sympathy* alone that he bestowed upon the weeping train; he hastened to remove the *cause* of their sorrow, saying, "Where have you laid him?" Even we (selfish as we are) have experienced the sweetness of giving pleasure, especially to those we love. But who can conceive the delight the Redeemer felt whenever he caused his children to rejoice! This was the bright color in his sorrowful life; he created more joy than any being has ever done that has dwelt upon earth. How his gracious heart must have glowed with the anticipation of the approaching scene, as he advanced towards the tomb of Lazarus! And now, as years roll on, our Redeemer sees the day approaching which is to be the *happiest* that ever yet has dawned upon this world. It was a *happy* day when the foundation of the world was laid, for then the morning stars sang together for joy. It was a *happy* day when Adam and Eve first beheld this fair creation, and sang their earliest anthem to its great Creator. It was a *happy night* when the shepherds heard the angels announce the birth of the Babe of Bethlehem. It was a *happy morn* when the women who visited the sepulcher heard angels say, "The Lord is risen." But no day nor night has yet been seen as *happy* as that last day will be, when the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads. Of all the happy multitude then assembled, not one will feel so vast a tide of happiness springing up in his soul as the Redeemer himself—as He, who will be the fountain of all the joy flowing in every bosom. Then he will behold the travail of his soul, and be *satisfied*—*satisfied* that he left his throne of glory; *satisfied* that he trod this sorrowful earth; *satisfied* that he bled upon the cross; *satisfied* that he loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.

**August 20**

**John 11:37-44. *The resurrection of Lazarus.***

When Jesus was on earth how little was his conduct understood by men! Those Jews who, seeing his tears, said, "Behold how he loved him!" were mistaken in supposing that it was grief for Lazarus that caused them to flow; but those were more mistaken who harbored suspicions of his faithfulness. Some ventured to hint that he might have prevented the death of Lazarus. "Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" It is not surprising that *unbelievers* should entertain such thoughts. But how is it that *believers*, in time of trouble, ever indulge the same? When they are overtaken by calamities, they are often tempted to inquire, "Why did God permit these afflictions? Surely He *could* have preserved me from this evil. What have I done to offend him that He has exposed me to such sharp trials?" But all the while that these thoughts are going on in the mind, the Lord is pursuing his own gracious purposes. Perhaps deliverance is near at hand; if not deliverance from the *temporal* evil, yet deliverance from still *greater* evil.

Unbelief is the great obstacle in the way of the Lord's gracious designs. When he gave the command, "Take away the stone," unbelief interfered. Martha had once said, "I know that even *now*, whatever you will ask of God, God will give it to you." Yet now she hesitates to consent to the removal of the stone. How gently the Lord expostulates with her! "Did I not say to you, that if you would believe, you should see the glory of God?" He warns her against shutting herself out of the blessedness he was preparing for her. The Lord loves to show us his glory in delivering; but he cannot do it if we will not confide in him. Martha listened to her Lord's admonition. She consented to the removal of the stone.

What a moment that was when Jesus, with uplifted eyes, stood before the open tomb! All was still *within* the cave, for death was there—and surely all was still *without*, while the Son of God prayed to his Father in heaven. The first sentence bespoke his *faith*. "Father, I thank you that you have heard me." The next showed his confidence in his Father's love—"I knew that you hear me always." The last displayed his *own* love to sinful men—"Because of the *people* which stand by I said it, that *they* may believe that you have sent me." He knew their unbelief. He knew that some accused him of doing miracles through Satan's power, and he desired to convince them that He and the Father were One. Who can conceive the breathless expectation that filled every heart when he uttered the words, "Lazarus, come forth?" Had that voice *not* been obeyed, it would have been a little thing that the sisters had never again beheld their brother—the hopes of *all* the *dead*—the hopes of *all* the *living*,—the hopes of generations yet unborn, were suspended on the event of that moment. Had no movement been heard in that house of death, then *all* the dead would have slept forever. But now we know that all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth—those who have done good unto the resurrection of life. They shall *come*

*forth* as Lazarus did—*not* like him to die again, but to live for evermore. They shall *come forth*, not bound in grave-clothes, but arrayed in white robes—not with covered faces, but with countenances shining like the sun in his strength. John has not described the meeting of Lazarus with his sisters and with his Lord; it is left for us to conceive the rapturous greetings, and it is *possible* for us to conceive the joy of that loving family; but it is *impossible* for us to form any idea of the meeting of the saints above, with each other and with their Lord. Lazarus found his sisters the same as he had left them, and they found him the same mortal creature as before. But hereafter every saint will regard his companion with delighted astonishment.

Though no resemblance we can trace,  
We may believe we see  
The dear companion of our race,  
From sin and death set free.

We may believe that shining head,  
Adorned with rainbow wreath,  
The same that sank upon the bed  
Damp with the dews of death.

Those lips that smiles seraphic wear,  
Were once with pain compressed;  
That face than summer sea more fair,  
Was once with care distressed;

Those eyes that now with glory beam,  
We often have seen to weep;  
That form we now an angel's deem,  
In dust we saw it sleep.

Too little thought I of this hour,  
When weeping o'er your grave,  
I saw you crushed by death's dread power,  
And no arm near to save.

But then your flesh was purified  
From every earthly taint,  
That here with Christ you might'st abide,  
And shine a glorious saint.

**August 21**

**John 11:45-52. Caiaphas proposes that Jesus should be slain.**

Some of our Savior's prayers have not *yet* been fulfilled; but the prayer he offered up at the tomb of Lazarus was granted *immediately*. He prayed not only that he might raise Lazarus, but also that the miracle might cause the *people* to believe that his Father had sent him. Here is the answer to the petition—"And many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, *believed* in him." In the end, *all* the intercessions of the Son of God shall receive their accomplishment.

But some of the Jews went their ways to the Pharisees and told them what things Jesus had done. What an instance their conduct affords of the hardness of the human heart, when not softened by divine grace! It will not believe, even when one is raised from the dead. Perhaps these unbelieving Jews shed the tear of sympathy in the house of Mary—for there are many who are tenderly attached to their friends, who are full of enmity against the Son of God.

The Pharisees eagerly listened to the reports of these malicious informers, and convened a council to consider the subject.

It was in this assembly, that the most dreadful crime was suggested that man has ever perpetrated—the murder of the Son of God. It was suggested by the person who filled the most *holy* office in the world. The High Priest reproached the Pharisees for their perplexity, saying, "You know nothing at all; nor consider that it is expedient for us that *one* man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."

See how he veils the wickedness of his scheme by a specious pretext. He dares not say, "Let us shed innocent blood; let us rid ourselves of the object of our envy; let us *falsely* accuse him, and put him to death *unjustly*." Satan teaches men to hide their wickedness from their *own* eyes, lest its deformity should cause them to start back with horror. But God sees men's actions as they really are; their *secret* sins are set in the light of his countenance. It would astonish us to know by what gentle names wicked men have called their blackest actions. Let us watch lest Satan get an advantage over us, and *impose* some *sin* upon us by giving it the name of a *virtue*.

But though the high priest spoke *hypocritically* when he proposed that one man should die for the people, he also spoke *prophetically*. His words were lying words in the sense he used them; but they were *true* in *another* sense, which he knew not of. While his *heart* was under the power of Satan, his *tongue* was under the direction of God—"He spoke not of himself." As the Lord put *words* into the mouth of Balaam, so also did he put them in the *mouth* of Caiaphas, though it was *Satan* who put *feelings* into his heart. Yet his words only expressed a *small part* of the truth, for Jesus died not for *that* people only, but he died that he might gather into one *all* the children of God scattered abroad.

It is the *desire* of all his children to be *with* their Father, and it is the *desire* of their

Father to have all his children with him. Sin, like an oppressive tyrant, has scattered his family abroad. Death divides them from each other, and even divides their souls from their bodies. But the death of Christ has taken away the guilt of *sin*, and has destroyed the power of *death*. At the sound of the last trumpet, the bodies that lay mouldering in the tombs, or forgotten in the depths of the sea, shall be glorified and united to the happy spirits of the just. Those who were born in different ages of the world, or who were separated by vast oceans, shall behold each other for the *first* time in their Father's everlasting home. And all these blessings shall flow from the dreadful crime suggested by the high priest. Well may the plan of redemption be called, "The *mystery* of His *will*." (Eph. 1:9.) It is a *mystery* that the will of God should be accomplished by the *wickedness* of *man*; that the purpose *formed* in *heaven* should be *executed* by *hell*. But herein the wisdom of God is displayed. The author of sin, even Satan, is compelled to lend his hand in destroying his *own* works, and his *own* kingdom. He knew not that the blood of the cross would make peace, and would reconcile all things to God, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven; he knew not that even his *own* servants, when sprinkled with that blood, would revolt and become the servants of God. (Col. 1.) Had he known it, he would not have suggested to Caiaphas the guilty expedient of causing one man to die for the people.

## August 22

### John 11:53 to end. *Christ retires to Ephraim.*

The wicked suggestion of Caiaphas was immediately acted upon. The Pharisees took council together to put Jesus to death. Acceptable advice is soon followed. How great is the guilt of the man who *suggests* a wicked scheme! All the dark deeds that have ever been committed, were suggested by some man. A *word* may be the beginning of a train of horrors, from the view of which the soul recoils. What woes to the Jewish people flowed from the crime that Caiaphas proposed!

The Lord (who knew all things) knew of the consultation which his enemies had held, and of the scheme which they had formed; and as his hour was not yet *quite* come, he retired for a short time to a small town called Ephraim. It was so small a place that its name is scarcely mentioned by any writer; but it is supposed that it was situated in a valley full of corn, about eight miles from Jerusalem. Here the disciples enjoyed another season of confidential communion with their Lord, such as they had once tasted on the banks of Jordan. How doubly precious would this opportunity have seemed to them, had they believed they must so soon part with their Divine Teacher! It is seldom that we know when we are enjoying, for the last time, the society of a beloved friend. With what feelings a child remembers the last prayer a parent offered up in the presence of his family, while, perhaps, neither the parent nor the child knew it was the *last!*

While the Lord was hidden in his retreat, the Jews were assembling to keep the Passover at Jerusalem. To judge from the numbers that flocked there, one would have supposed that they were a very religious people. They came from distant parts of the country, and they arrived at an early period, in order to go through various purification and washings commanded in the law; but they did not, like David, wash their hands in innocency, before they approached the altar of their God. (Ps. 26:6.) There may be a full attendance at the house of God, and even at the Lord's supper, while there are but few spiritual worshipers. Such religious acts obtain for those who perform them a *name* to live among men; but they may be performed while the heart is *dead* before God. Never were the Jews in a more dangerous state than when, having ceased to worship engraved images, they observed with strictness the ceremonies of the law.

The people who stood in the temple, inquiring whether Jesus was come, and wondering whether he would come at all, little knew what deed they would perpetrate before they left the holy city. *Now* they were full of enthusiasm for the Prophet of Nazareth; *now* they extolled him as the greatest that had ever appeared; *now* they were ready to receive him with hosannas, and to proclaim him king; but they had no true faith and love rooted in their hearts. The Lord would not trust himself in their hands, and therefore hid himself until his appointed time was come.

There is a *kind* of faith which will not stand the day of trial! there is a *kind* of love which is put out by the breath of slander. Some imagine that they are godly, because they delight in listening to an eloquent preacher. Let us remember how anxious the Jewish people were that Jesus should come to the feast, and how they treated him during that feast. Do we know Him as our Savior from *sin*? Do we feel that He loved us, and gave himself for us? Then we shall never *cease* to love him. Though the disciples sinfully forsook him in the hour of danger; yet nothing quenched their *love*; for it was founded not on *admiration* of his *power*, but on *gratitude* for his *mercy*.

## **August 23**

### **John 12:1-8. *Mary anoints the Lord Jesus.***

We have now reached the *last* week of our Savior's life. On the Saturday evening the Jewish Sabbath was over, and the new week began—the most *eventful* week that had been known since the beginning of the world—the most *suffering* week that the Son of man passed upon earth—and the most *sorrowful* week that his Church has ever seen. But though it was to be full of suffering and of sorrow, it opened with a scene of peace and love; for Simon the Leper made a supper for the Lord at his house. If we observe the dealings of God, we shall find that a *cordial* is often granted to us before a *trial* is sent, and that we are permitted to enjoy some unwonted refreshment before we are called upon to drink a cup of

unusual bitterness.

How must the gracious Savior have delighted in the scene he now beheld at Bethany! The tears that had touched his heart were now dried; the sisters saw their brother, who was so lately sleeping in his tomb, seated at table with their Lord. Martha testified her love and joy by waiting on the blessed company. It is probable that she superintended the arrangement of the supper, and gave directions to the servants. We know that such an office was suited to her active disposition. Mary, who seems to have been of a more thoughtful, and sensitive, and retiring character, found another way of expressing her love and joy. She brought an alabaster box full of very precious ointment, and poured it on the feet of Jesus. It seems as if she came *behind* him as he reclined upon his couch at supper, and sought to perform the loving office in *secret*. But she could not be hid, for the house was filled with the odor of the ointment. Its exquisite fragrance attracted attention, and led the guests to discover who had poured it forth. Should we not have conceived that in *such* a company the love that Mary had shown would receive the highest praise? But Matthew records, that not only Judas, but the *other* disciples said, "Why was this waste of the ointment made?" How could they thus insult their Lord? Was there anything too precious to be dedicated to the Son of God? Did the wise men who came from the East think so, when they laid gold, and frankincense, and myrrh, at the infant Savior's feet?

We know the *motive* that led Judas to make the unfeeling inquiry—it was covetousness. He was disappointed to think that so rich a treasure as this alabaster box should have been kept back from his dishonest hands. But why did the *other* disciples unite in his complaint? It might be that some secret envy of Mary's surpassing attachment to their Lord, may have prompted their censure. But if for one moment the gentle and diffident Mary felt cast down by their disapprobation, she must soon have been consoled by hearing her Master's defense of her conduct. High, indeed, was the commendation he bestowed on her—"She has done what she could!" These words imply, that as she *could* bestow a *precious* gift, she would not be content with presenting an *mean* one. Had Mary been *poor*, she *could* not have anointed his feet as she did. She *could* do *much*, and she *did* much. She anointed her Lord with a costly perfume, that was worth nearly ten pounds of our money. May it not be more often said of the *poor* than of the *rich*, "They have done what they *could*?" Too often the *rich* give no more to the service of Christ than the crumbs that fall from their table.

Though the *disciples* blamed this act of love, yet Jesus declared that in *distant* countries, and in *future* ages it would be commended. For he said, "Wherever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this, also, that she has done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." (Mark 14:9.) Mary had not sought for *human* praise; but even *that* was to be awarded her. Who has ever read the account of Mary's offering, and has not inwardly approved it? Where is the believer who has not wished that he enjoyed the same opportunity that Mary did, of showing his love to the Lord?

When once a poor sinful woman washed the feet of Jesus with her penitent tears, a Pharisee reproached the Lord for permitting one so wicked to touch him, and thus tacitly accused the weeping sinner of *presumption*. But did the *Lord* deem her *presumptuous*? Mary, who bore an honorable character, was not accused of *presumption*, but of *extravagance*. But did the *Lord* deem her act of love *extravagant*? Does the church of God *now* accuse *either* of these devoted women of presumption or of extravagance? Let us judge nothing before the time. If actions of such devoted love were blamed in former days, similar acts may be blamed *now*. Even true Christians are apt to censure those who go beyond themselves in zeal, in feeling, and in self-denial; but the Lord will never think we can love him, adore him, or honor him too much.

## August 24

### **John 12:9-19. *Christ is honored and hated the more on account of Lazarus.***

It was on the Saturday evening that the Lord Jesus supped at Bethany, and was anointed by Mary. The next day was *not* the Jewish Sabbath. That Sabbath began at six o'clock on Friday evening, and concluded at six o'clock on Saturday evening. It was on Sunday, the first day of the week, that the Lord entered Jerusalem, riding upon a donkey's colt, and accompanied by the joyful multitude. On the first day of the *next* week he rose from the dead. Between these two joyful days there was a dark interval—a week of unexampled sorrow and suffering.

The acclamations of the multitude on the day the Savior entered Jerusalem, increased the envy of the Pharisees. They said to each other with alarm, "Behold, the world has gone after him." They could not *deny* that he had raised Lazarus from the tomb; therefore they were determined to blast his growing reputation by violence. They desired not only to put *him* to death, but *Lazarus* also—because he was a living monument of his power. But had they accomplished their design, how easy it would have been for the Prince of Life to call him a second time out of his grave!

The sisters little knew, when they applied to Jesus for help in their hour of sorrow, that their *brother's resurrection* would lead to their *Savior's death*. They little thought, when they saw that brother seated at the supper at Bethany, that on that day week, his deliverer from the grave would be sleeping in his own! But in the end, they had reason to rejoice, for the *death* of their Lord was the forerunner of the most joyful event that has happened since the beginning of the world—*his resurrection*.

Nor was it Lazarus alone that provoked the enmity of the wicked. Mary, by her act of love, was the occasion of stirring up Judas to commit an act of treachery.

He was so indignant at the disappointment he sustained, and at the rebuke he received, that he offered, four days afterwards, to betray the Lord into the hands of his enemies. Truly did Mary anoint the Lord for his *burial*. It was his *only* anointing, for he was hastily buried, and the ointment that the women prepared was too late. Thus we perceive that the family of Bethany unconsciously roused the indignation of the two chief instruments of the death of their Lord. The service *Mary* rendered led Judas to propose his *betrayal*; and the benefit *Lazarus* received led Caiaphas to suggest his *murder*.

Such was the mysterious arrangement of God. He who brings real good out of seeming evil—brings seeming evil out of real good. Good deeds are often followed by consequences that *appear* evil. But the servants of God have no reason to despair, when their attempts to honor their Master increase the malice of his foes. Though Satan may succeed in casting some into prison, or in causing others to be slain, he can never succeed in casting one believing soul into his *own* prison—the bottomless pit—or in causing him to be hurt by his *own* death—the second death.

We may conceive what grief Mary would have felt had she *known* that Judas was incited by her act of love to betray his Lord; yet, when she saw that Lord risen from the dead, would she have grieved then? No doubt it has often happened that the piety of new converts has awakened enmity against their minister, and has even led to his execution. Those converts must have felt acute anguish when they saw their beloved teacher consuming in the flames; but their anguish would be turned into joy could they see him standing before the throne clothed in a white robe, with a palm branch in his hand; or on the sea of glass, with the harp of God; or with the Lamb on Mount Zion singing the new song.

## August 25

### **Matthew 21:1-9. *Christ approaches Jerusalem, riding on a donkey.***

Had every scene in our Savior's life been like this, it would not have been written, "He came to his own, and his own received him not." But this day of triumph was in reality only a preparation for the day of slaughter. The Lord of glory chose that for *once* his name should be publicly exalted in his own city of Jerusalem. As his hour was now come, he no longer hid himself from his enemies, or restrained the grateful praises of his disciples. At the *beginning* of his ministry he did his mighty works in secret, and desired his disciples to tell no man that he was the Christ. But at the close of his ministry, he made a triumphant entry into Jerusalem, as the King whom God had chosen to reign over that city. Yet the manner of his entry was unlike that of *kings*. He rode, *not* in a chariot drawn by horses, but on a donkey—even on a *colt*, the foal of a donkey.

We know that his *principal* reason for this act was that he might fulfill the

prophecy of Zechariah, and give all who beheld him an opportunity of knowing, by another sign, that he was the Messiah of whom the prophets spoke. Yet, even his own disciples did not observe, at the *time*, the fulfillment of the prophecy. But was there no other reason why it was *appointed* that the Lord of all should enter his own city in so humble a manner? Did not the manner of his entry show that he was not a *war-like* monarch, but the Prince of *Peace*—not a *proud* monarch, but the *meek* Savior, not a *rich* monarch, but one who had become *poor*—so poor that he *borrowed* the donkey on which he rode. Yet his divine wisdom and power might be discerned through the veil of humility in which he was clothed. No king, however wise, could have foretold those minute circumstances concerning the finding of the donkey, which Jesus described. No king, however *powerful*, could have made an unbroken colt obedient to his *word*.

He was the glorious Son of Man, spoken of in the eighth psalm, of whom it is said—"You made him to have dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things in subjection under his feet,—all sheep and oxen—yes, and the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea." As God gave all the creatures to the *first* Adam, so also he gave them to the *second* Adam, of whom the first was only a type. The beasts who were obedient to the *first* Adam in the garden of Eden, did not resist the power of the *second* Adam. *Man* rebelled against his authority, but the *donkey's foal* acknowledged it.

How wonderful was the condescension of the King of Israel in entering his own city in so humble a manner! The purple and scarlet of earthly monarchs, the prancing horses and splendid chariots may dazzle the *eye*, but the majesty and meekness of the Son of God impress the *heart* with admiration. He knew that he should be soon exalted to his Father's right hand, yet he condescended to ride upon a *donkey*. He knew that white-robed elders would soon cast their crowns at his feet, yet when the multitude spread garments and strewed branches in the way, he accepted these meaner honors.

Ought we not to approach with confidence so meek and gentle a Savior? If, in the days of his flesh, he was pleased with every feeble attempt to show him homage, ought we not to believe that he will be pleased with *our* humble efforts? We cannot testify our feelings by spreading garments or strewing branches in the way. If we would honor him, we must bow our hearts and bend our wills to his royal scepter. When he comes again in power and glory, he will remember us. For this is his promise to his faithful servants—"The Lord their God shall save them in that day, as the flock of his people." (Zech. 9:16.)

## **August 26**

### **Luke 19:37-40. *The chorus of praise on Mount Olivet.***

The burst of joy that was heard on Mount Olivet, affords a faint picture of the

raptures of heaven. On Mount Olivet the whole multitude began to praise God with a loud voice, for all the mighty works that they had seen. In heaven an innumerable multitude shall praise Him with a louder voice, for a still mightier work than had ever been seen in Israel.

But even a saint on *earth* sometimes feels overwhelmed when he reflects upon all the glorious deliverances and unmerited mercies he has received. There are moments, especially towards the close of his pilgrimage, when he sees at one glance the mysterious train of events by which his life has been marked, and when he cannot forbear exclaiming, in the words of David, "How excellent is your loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of your wings."

There were *few* among that vast multitude on Olivet who had these warm feelings of grateful love; for the greater part, before the week expired, joined in the cry, "Crucify him, crucify him," But there were a *few* who praised the Lord with their whole hearts. Was there not among the crowd blind Bartimaeus, who had followed him on the way? Did not the beggar, born blind, go forth to meet him? He had been cast out of the synagogue for his sake, and when he had heard he was the Son of God, he had replied, "Lord, I believe." Was not that courageous and grateful man among those who most heartily praised his name? Was not Lazarus there, who had been raised from the dead? Was not Mary there, who, the evening before, had anointed her Lord with fragrant spikenard? Were not Salome and Joanna there, and Mary Magdalene, and all the faithful little band who had followed him out of Galilee? Was his blessed mother there? Did she behold Him whom, when a babe, she had laid in a manger, acknowledged as the King of Israel?

These inquiries we *cannot* answer; we know the names of none who composed that joyful company, excepting those of the apostles. But this we know—there were some present who hated to hear the praises of the Son of God. These Pharisees said, "Master, rebuke your disciples." Had they heard the songs that once delighted the shepherds at Bethlehem, they would have desired to stop the angelic chorus. But the Savior would not check the overflowing feelings of the multitude, but replied, "I tell you that if *these* should hold their peace, the *stones* would immediately cry out." Were not the Pharisees more senseless than stones, for they had seen the most glorious miracles, and yet refused to honor Him who had wrought them? How unfit were they to enter heaven, where no tongue is mute in the Savior's praise! *All* are unfit for that blessed place who delight not in magnifying the Lord Jesus Christ.

Are there not many who have experienced his goodness from their earliest infancy, and who yet *praise* him not, *thank* him not? Are there not many who have heard of his dying love, who "hold their peace" on this glorious subject, and neither thank him in public nor in private? Are there not lips that have *never*, with warmth and sincerity, blessed the holy name of Christ the Savior? Are any of us

among the number of those silent, ungrateful, and guilty creatures, who never thank their Lord, their Redeemer? While angels rest not day nor night in worshipping the Lord, shall a sinner for whom Christ died, refuse to utter *one* note of heartfelt praise?

## August 27

### Luke 19:41-44. *Christ weeps over Jerusalem.*

The world in which we live has been often called a "valley of tears." Each of us has shed tears, and will shed them again. But what are the circumstances which draw forth our tears? Do we not often weep for some trifling cause, some selfish reason, some sinful feeling? There are the tears of mortified pride, the tears of discontent, the tears of rebellion. All these are *sinful* tears. There are the tears of disappointment, of anxiety, of pain, and of grief. These are *natural* tears. There are the tears of *sympathy*. Jesus shed those when accompanying the mourners to the tomb of Lazarus. There are the tears of *penitence*—these the Savior *could* not shed, for he was not a *sinner*; but he delights in these tears, and with them he once permitted a weeping penitent to wash his blessed feet.

But the tears that he shed over Jerusalem were the tears of *generous love*—*love* for his *enemies*. Have *we* ever shed such tears? There are Christians who have so imbibed the Spirit of their Master, that they retire to pray, and even to *weep* for those who hate and revile them, and who will not pray, nor weep for themselves. But all true Christians have not attained to this height of divine compassion.

How strange it must have appeared to those who were singing his praises, and adorning his path with green and flowery branches, to see the Redeemer stop and gaze and weep! In the midst of their joyful hosannas, the sorrowful tones of his voice were heard, saying, "If you had known, even you, at least in this your day, the things which belong unto your peace!" Thus he spoke to the *daughter* of Zion, (for cities are often compared to *women* in Scripture, and the inhabitants are called their *children*.) Truly we may say, "Behold how he loved her!" He did not weep because he saw, from the top of Olivet, the place of his own sufferings; because he saw at its foot Gethsemane, that doleful garden where the *first* drops of his blood would fall; nor because he saw beyond the city, Calvary, that dismal spot, where the *last* drops would flow at the touch of the soldier's spear. He wept because he foresaw the calamities that would overtake his murderers. Though now the city sat majestically upon her seven hills, yet soon he knew she would lie prostrate in the dust. How grand and beautiful she appeared when viewed from the heights of Mount Olivet! Her lofty rocks, her massive towers, and, above all, the glittering dome of her snow-white temple, generally excited *admiration*; but now they called forth *lamentation*. It was in these defenses she trusted, instead of in the living God. But neither her rocks nor her towers, nor even her holy temple, could save her when the Romans came and besieged the city. Her God

had departed from her. Then her walls were thrown down, her temple burnt, and more than one million of her inhabitants destroyed by famine and pestilence, by fire and sword.

At this moment the Savior knows the fate of *every city* upon earth. He knows what will befall London, and Paris, and Rome. Every city that, like Jerusalem, trusts in her own strength, and refuses to obey Christ, must fall, as she has done. Those who love their native land ought to use every effort to spread the Gospel among their countrymen.

But Christ not only knows the fate of every *city*; he knows also the fate of every *individual* in every city, and village, and hamlet. Sometimes, perhaps, when we see a person in the enjoyment of riches, and health, and honor—surrounded by smiling children, and admiring friends—we are ready to cry, "If I were in your place, I should be happy." But is this person forgetful of his Savior? Then it may be that Christ is saying to him, "If *you* had known, even *you*, at least in this your day, the things which belong to your peace." *We* behold the *present* scene, but *Jesus* beholds the *future* also. He sees—not only the table amply spread, but the dying bed that will succeed; he hears—not only the voice of merriment that *now* prevails, but the faint groan that will close the scene. Can he count those happy, whose misery is every hour drawing nearer? Surely the compassionate Savior feels for all who soon will exclaim, in another world, "If *I* had known, even *I* in *that* my day, the things which belonged unto my peace, but now—they are hidden from my eyes!"

## August 28

### **Matthew 21:10-13. *Christ casts the buyers and sellers out of the temple.***

When the Son of God entered Jerusalem, where should he go but to his Father's house? He went to the temple. In what a state did he find that sacred place! It shone bright in earthly splendor—it was undefiled by images of wood or stone—it was frequented by crowds of worshipers; but yet it was a den of thieves. In its outermost court, called the court of the Gentiles, there were men engaged in buying and selling beasts and birds for sacrifices, and others in changing money, brought from distant places, into the coin of the country, and in supplying half-shekels for the yearly tribute. This court had been assigned by God to the Gentiles, that *all* nations might worship him; according to the words of the prophet Isaiah, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for *all* people." (Isa. 6:7.)

The *priests* alone were admitted into the temple itself; *Jews* only into the court that enclosed it; women of the Jewish nation were permitted to enter the next court; and Gentiles into the outermost—that is, those Gentiles who worshiped the God of Israel. No such distinctions now exist; for in Christ Jesus there is neither

Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, but all are *one* in him. (Gal. 3:28.) Christ by his death has broken down the middle wall of partition that separated Jew from Gentile, and has made both one. (Eph. 2:14.)

But it was not the *animals* that defiled the court of the Gentiles so much as the *men* who sold and bought them, for they were *thieves*. It is probable that they considered themselves honest men, for it does not appear that they committed those *kinds* of robberies which are considered disgraceful; but they were *thieves* in God's sight, for all who make unfair gains, and tell falsehoods when they buy or sell, are counted thieves by him. Such actions were especially offensive to Jesus when committed in his Father's house. To see that holy place converted into a den in which iniquity was committed with impunity, vexed his holy mind. At the *beginning* of his ministry, three years before, he had driven out the offenders with a scourge of small cords, and now at its *close* he cleansed the sanctuary a second time.

Though so meek towards those who reviled him, he was ardent in his opposition to wickedness. He is the *Judge* of all, as well as the Savior of all; and when he comes again he will manifest his hatred against sin. If in the days of his flesh the wicked fled before him, whenever he exerted his divine power, how much more will they tremble when he comes in his glory with all his holy angels! Who will be able to resist when he shall send them forth to gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity, and cast them into a furnace of fire!

It is supposed that the buyers and sellers in the temple *returned* to their wicked practices after the panic was over; but those who are cast out of the heavenly kingdom will never more *return* to pollute the service of God. Though the gates of the celestial city shall never be shut, yet there shall in no wise enter anything that defiles, neither whatever works abomination, or makes a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Rev. 21:27.)

## **August 29**

### **Matthew 21:4-16. *Children praise Jesus in the temple.***

When Christ came into his temple, he *cast out* some, but he *received* others. The buyers and sellers he cast out; the blind and the lame he received. It must have been an affecting sight to see those helpless creatures hastening from all quarters to meet their benefactor. They did well to come *then*, for those hands whose touch was health, would soon be stretched upon the cross.

Blindness is a calamity very common at the present day in Jerusalem, and some who love the Jews endeavor, by medical art, to heal their benighted brethren. But there is no Son of God now, whose touch will unveil the eyes. Even in *this* country it is calculated that two in every thousand are blind; and, therefore, that

London and its suburbs contain two thousand blind people. Christians have had pity upon them, and have instituted *one* society for visiting them, reading to them, and leading them to God's house; and *another* for teaching them to read and write, and labor for their own living—and both of these societies seek to save their immortal souls.

How interesting it must have been to see the blind and the lame enter the temple! Here perhaps was a blind old man led by the hand of a little grandchild, and there a father who could not walk, borne in the arms of affectionate sons and daughters, whom he had once borne in his.

We know that there were children in the temple when the Lord healed these afflicted creatures. Some of these children *may* have been leaders of the blind, or even supporters of the lame. This at least we know, they were children who loved Jesus, for when they sang his praise, he was pleased. *Once* He blessed children, and *now they* blessed *him*. Those that were brought to him on a former occasion, seem to have been very little ones, perhaps unable to speak, but those who sang in the temple were old enough both to speak and to understand. Their artless songs irritated the priests exceedingly. No doubt they had been exasperated by the casting out of the buyers and sellers. But they were too much afraid of offending the people to oppose the Lord openly. They did not even venture to *command* the children to be silent, but appealed to Jesus and said, "Do you hear what these say?" And what had the children said? They had called him "the Son of David." As the *Son* of David he had a right to the *throne* of David. The little children acknowledged Him to be their King. No doubt many children were wicked in those days as well as in our own, but we never *hear* of any who spoke against Christ. It is not said that they joined in the cry that their fathers uttered, "Crucify him, crucify him." May we not rather hope that they followed their mothers, even that company of women who bewailed and lamented Him?

How ought the young to rejoice in the Savior's answer to the priests and Scribes! "Yes, have you never read, out of the mouths of babes and nursing infants you have perfected praise?"

Who could have thought that He who listens to the songs of thousands of angels, should be pleased with the lisping accents of a child! But when a little one offers up a simple prayer from his *heart*, the glorious Savior bows down from his heavenly throne to listen. The children in the temple did not care for the frowns of their proud enemies, while they enjoyed the smiles of Jesus. Those wicked men must have looked upon them with still more anger than before, after the Savior's reply. They cannot have forgotten the words that followed those Jesus quoted from the 8th Psalm, "That you might still (or make silent) the enemy and the avenger." The praises of children often do *silence* the enemy and the avenger. When a wicked man who hates God sees a little child who loves Him, he sometimes feels ashamed of his wickedness, and wishes he was like that simple babe. Swearers have sometimes left off swearing at the request of a child;

prayerless men have learned to pray from the example of a child.

There was a father who was called to visit the dying bed of his little daughter. Moved by her entreaties, he knelt down by her bedside, but said he could not pray. She prayed *for* him—her prayer was heard in heaven. He became a holy man. When he had buried his child, he gathered his household around him, and began, from that day, to call upon the name of that Lord who had loved and saved his child.

## August 30

### John 12:20-26. *Some Greeks desire to see Jesus.*

Who were these Greeks that desired so much to see Jesus? They were Gentiles, brought up in the Greek religion, but who had forsaken it for the worship of the true God. We cannot wonder that they longed to see the great prophet of Nazareth, with whose praises all Jerusalem resounded. It must have been more than a *sight* that they desired. Zaccheus desired only a *sight*, when he climbed the sycamore tree, but these Greeks appear to have wished for an *interview*. They desired to converse with the Lord. It was not easy to obtain access to one who was always surrounded by a crowd. Who would make way for *Gentiles* to approach him—for *Gentiles*, who were considered as the dregs of the earth by the proud and bigoted Jews? These Greeks, therefore, applied to Philip the apostle. It appears that he was doubtful whether the Lord would receive them; for we find he consulted first with Andrew, who was his townsman, and that afterwards he and Andrew together told Jesus. No more mention is made of these Greeks; but we know too well the love that Christ bore to poor Gentiles, to doubt how he would receive them. Had they ever conversed with the Roman centurion, or the woman of Canaan, they would not have feared a repulse. The centurion would have said, "I thought that I was not worthy that he should come under my roof, and, lo! he received me as a *son*." The Canaanite would have said, "I was content to be a dog, worthy only to eat the crumbs that fell from the children's table, and, lo! he called me his *daughter*." None who knew his condescending love, would ever fear a cold reception from the Friend of sinners.

His answer to Philip and Andrew was calculated to encourage the Greeks, as well as the Jews, to trust in him. When he said that a corn of wheat, if it die or corrupt in the ground, will bring forth *much fruit*, did he not allude to the salvation of *Gentiles*, as well as Jews, through his death? Seed is sometimes cast into the ground and *never* springs up—sometimes it springs up, but produces only a *little* fruit—but Jesus died, and was buried, that he might rise again and bring *many* sons and daughters to glory. It would not satisfy the Son of God to save a *few* souls—he knew before he suffered, that he should redeem from *eternal* misery a multitude that no man can number. But he knew also that this multitude must suffer much tribulation. Therefore he continually exhorted all who approached

him to be faithful unto death. With what affection he promised that his fellow-sufferers should be his companions in glory, saying, "Where I am, there shall also my servant be!" The Greeks had desired a passing interview with Jesus, but here was a promise of his presence forever and ever. We have never seen the Son of Man, as he appeared upon earth in the days of his humiliation; but, if we *love* him, we *shall* see him—see him *not* as he *was*, but as he *is*—see him as described in Revelation 10, "Clothed with a cloud, a rainbow upon his head, his face as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire." And when we see him as he is, we shall be *like* him. Those who saw him as he *was* were not made like him by the sight. But he has made this promise to his servants, "They shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads." (Rev. 22:4.)

## August 31

### John 12:27-33. *The Father answers his Son from heaven.*

How wonderful a scene was this! The Father and the Son speaking to each other in the presence of men. Surely there must have been silence in heaven while this solemn communion was held! Such sounds had not been heard by an assembled multitude since the day that God had delivered the ten commandments from Mount Sinai. Man had forgotten his Father's voice. None knew it but the Son himself. He knew it well. But he needed no *voice* to assure him of his Father's love. That voice was heard, that *man* might know that the Father loved the Son; that *man* might know that the Father had heard his prayer, "Glorify your name." The more we consider that short prayer, the more we must admire it. What courage, what obedience, what love were displayed in those few words, "Glorify your name!" At the moment they were uttered, all the terrible future lay open before the Son of God. The scourge, the thorns, the cross, the cruel mockings of men, and the hidings of his Father's countenance, all, all were present to his view. Yet, instead of praying, "Father, save me from this hour," he prayed, "Father, glorify your name."

Is it *easy* for a sufferer to make this prayer? Let those answer who see the objects of their tenderest love begin to droop. Is it *easy, then*, to say, "Father, glorify your name; if it be necessary for your glory that I should lose my dearest comforts, I resign them into your hands." Let those answer, who linger from month to month under the tortures of some inveterate disease. Is it *easy* for them to say, "Father, if it be for your glory that I should still endure these agonies, let them continue?" The soul who can make this prayer is prepared to join the multitude that came out of great tribulation.

But no child of God was ever exposed to such trials as those that were coming upon Jesus, when he said, "Father, glorify your name." He saw the prince of this world, even Satan, advancing to meet him in battle. He had suffered much from his temptations in the *wilderness*; but he would suffer more from his assaults in

the *garden*, and on the *cross*. Yet he drew not back from the terrible conflict, because he knew that by the conquest of Satan his Father's name would be glorified. It was on the *cross* that he overcame the prince of this world. No conqueror's sword has ever done so mighty a deed as that despised cross. No monarch's throne has ever seemed so glorious in the eyes of angels as that shameful cross.

There are *many means* by which men are converted from sin to God—some are impressed by the means of books, others by conversation, and more still by preaching. But there is only *one doctrine* by which they are converted; it is the *doctrine* of the *cross*. Every pardoned sinner now on earth, or in heaven, could bear witness to this truth. It was the love of a dying Savior that drew him out of darkness into light. Had Jesus refused to die, how many tongues now singing to the glory of God the Father would have been forever mute! But who can tell how many more will swell the heavenly chorus in ages yet to come! Not one of them was forgotten by the Son of God when he uttered, "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." The thought of their united songs cheered his soul in the hour of his trouble. His own sufferings darkened the view on one side, but the glory that his Father would receive from a multitude without number of redeemed sinners, of *all* nations, and kindred, and people, and tongues, enlightened the prospect with an overwhelming splendor, and drew forth the prayer, "Father, glorify your name!"

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