

A Devotional Commentary on the Gospels

Arranged for family devotions,
for every day in the year

By [Favell Lee Mortimer](#)

FEBRUARY 1

Matthew 4:8-11. The third temptation of Christ.

Though Jesus had resisted two temptations, Satan was not dismayed. Here we have an instance of the persistence of our great enemy. Though he may have failed in one attempt to injure us, he will make another, and sometimes he succeeds better the second time than he did the first.

Balaam resisted the first temptation, and refused to go with Balak's messengers; but he was tempted a second time, and then he yielded. The man of God from Judah refused the invitation of Jeroboam, but was enticed by the solicitation of the old prophet. Satan was not discouraged when Job was patient under his first trials—he asked God to permit him to assault him again; but that second time he still failed to tempt Job to curse his God. We ought to learn, from these facts, to be very watchful after we have overcome one temptation, and to be ready for another attack.

There is one circumstance in the third temptation which may surprise us. Satan proposed a more glaring sin to our Lord than he had proposed before; for it is a much more glaring sin to fall down and worship Satan than to turn stones into bread, or to run unnecessarily into danger. How could Satan suppose that when Jesus had refused to commit those sins, he would consent to so flagrant a transgression as worshiping the devil? Perhaps he saw that it was vain to try to deceive our Savior; therefore he declared his purpose, and hoped to persuade by the greatness of the bribe. He had not offered him such a reward before, as the kingdoms of the world—he had ruined the first Adam by promising him a reward for disobedience, and he hoped to ruin the second Adam by the same means.

What is that character of the kingdoms of the world which Satan displayed before our Lord?

It may be divided into three principal points—pleasure, profit, and praise—these tempt men to forsake God's service. It is not true that Satan can give them to whom he will. When Satan offered them to Christ, he offered what it was not in

his power to bestow. In saying that he could bestow them, he acted in his own character of a liar and the father of lies. It is, however, true, that God often permits the servants of Satan to enjoy the vain delights of this world—thus we read in the Psalms, that the wicked are often in prosperity.

How did Jesus overcome the last temptation? By the word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit. He spoke openly to Satan, and declared that God had commanded that men should worship him alone. He did not dispute with the tempter, or tell him that the world was not his to bestow, or that it was a perishing portion, but he simply appealed to the command of God. Thus we are taught how to meet Satan's temptations. We ought not to stand questioning; but we should remember the command of God, and not take any step in life, or follow any course which will lead us into sin. How many warnings are there in the Scriptures against the love of the world, its pleasures, its profit, and its praise! This is what the Scripture says of worldly pleasure, (1 Tim. 5:6,) "She that lives in pleasure, is dead while she lives."

One of our most faithful female missionaries, Mrs. Judson, was first awakened when a vain and worldly girl, by reading this sentence. Afterwards she went to the East, and suffered great persecution for the truth's sake, and now she is with God, drinking rivers of pleasure at his right hand. And what does the Scripture say against the love of profit, or of money? 1 Tim. 6:10. "Which, (that is, money,) while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

Now hear what is said of those who seek human praise. We read in John 12:42, 43, of some who believed in Christ, and yet would not confess him, lest they would be put out of the synagogue; "for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."

Satan will offer these things to our acceptance, (not all of them, but little portions of them,) upon condition that we worship him, that is, do his will in some respect; for he cares not for knee-worship; he knows that we are really the servants of him whom we obey, and not of him whom we call Master. May the Lord give us grace to resist, through our Captain, who has overcome, and has sat down upon his throne.

How soon the blessed Savior found obedience to be sweet! The angels came, and fed him. Thus God will more than make up to us, even in this life, all we give up for his sake. When he has filled our hearts with the peace which passes all understanding, we shall not regret the loss of any earthly thing!

February 2

John 1:19-34. The record of John concerning Christ.

During the time of the Lord's temptation, John was preaching in the wilderness. Many supposed he was the promised Savior; for though he did no miracle, (John 10:41,) he was evidently a very wonderful prophet. There were in Jerusalem seventy chief men, who met together to consult about public matters, and who were called the council, or the Sanhedrin. These Jews were proud and unbelieving. They sent a company of priests and Levites to ask John who he was, probably supposing that he would readily answer people who filled holy offices, especially as he himself was a priest. But he did not wish men to honor him, and he plainly told these priests he was not the Christ. Then they wanted to know whether he was Elijah; for Malachi the prophet had declared that Elijah would come before Christ came, (4:5, 6.) But though John had come in the spirit and power of Elijah, he was not Elijah himself. The priests then asked him whether he was that prophet. What prophet did they mean? They meant to ask whether John was any one of the old prophets risen from the dead. He declared that he was not, and then told them who he was—A voice crying in the wilderness. But these priests were not satisfied with the answer—they wanted to know why he baptized, as if he were some great person, and had great authority. As they were of the sect of the Pharisees—those formal self-righteous people—they must have been much offended with John for having once called them a generation of vipers. John took this occasion to praise the Lord Jesus, and to speak of his greatness. He even told them that he stood among them, though they knew him not.

The next day John was able to point out the unknown Savior to the people who surrounded him; but we are not told whether these priests were still near or not. How remarkable is the name by which he called his Lord! "The Lamb of God." Why did he give him this name? Was it because he was meek and gentle? Not chiefly for that reason; but because he was to be sacrificed for the sins of men. A lamb was offered up at the temple every morning and evening; its blood could not take away sin; but there was a Lamb whose blood could take away the sins of the world!

Consider how immense the sum of the sins of the world must be! The sins that one of us commits in one day are very numerous. If all our proud thoughts could be known, and all our rebellious feelings against God could be exposed, how vast would be the amount! But consider what millions of millions of men have lived on this earth; what treachery, what blasphemy, what murders, what idolatry, have defiled it in every place, at every moment. Yet all these multiplied crimes Jesus can take away; so great is the power of his blood. O that all the world would come to the Lamb of God, that they might all be cleansed from their innumerable transgressions.

February 3

John 1:35-42. Andrew leads Simon to Christ.

It was with great delight that John the Baptist pointed sinners to the Savior. He had no greater joy than to see men leave him to follow Christ. On one occasion he saw the Lord, probably at some distance from the place where he stood, and he pointed him out to two of his disciples; for John had disciples, or people who followed him to learn his doctrine. He was more pleased that they would follow the great Master, than that they would stay with him. Behold in John the spirit of true religion! The faithful minister does not wish to be admired himself, but tries to persuade all to admire Christ.

Who were these two disciples? One of them was called Andrew—but we are not informed of the name of the other. Perhaps the other was that John who was afterwards called the disciple whom Jesus loved. One reason for thinking so is, that he wrote this account, and it is usual with him not to mention his own name, when he refers to himself.

It signifies little, however, to us, what were the names of these disciples. Let us imitate their blessed examples. See them following Jesus. At first his back was towards them; but he knew well they were following him, and soon gave them kind encouragement. He said, "What do you seek?" They replied, "Master, where are you staying?" It was not from curiosity they desired to see his abode, but that they might know him and converse with him. How sweet were the hours which they spent with their Savior in his lowly dwelling, his cottage in the wilderness!

Would he welcome us, as he did those disciples? Yes; he says to us, as he did to them, "Come and see." Are we willing to go? Do we desire to know him, and to taste his grace? He will meet us in secret prayer, and make himself known to our hearts. But does he ever find us in prayer? or are we so taken up with the world, that we have no time to seek the Lord?

Let us observe the conduct of one of these disciples after he had found the Savior. "He first found his own brother Simon." How anxious he was to bring his dear brother to the knowledge of his precious friend! He tells him what a treasure he himself has found, and invites his brother to share it. Are we acting thus? Are we trying to persuade our family and our friends to come to Christ? What pains some have taken to bring brothers or sisters to Christ! they have sent them letter after letter—they have visited them in sickness; have persuaded them to hear faithful ministers—have prayed without ceasing to bless their efforts. David Nasmith, the founder of town-missions, sent a letter every week to his ungodly brother, until at length he brought him to Christ.

As soon as Simon approached the Savior, he received encouragement. Jesus gave him a new name, to describe the new character he would bear. He called him Cephas, or Peter, which the one in Hebrew, and the other Greek, signifies "a stone."

And why was Simon to be called "a stone?"

The Lord intended to build a great temple of living stones, that is, of believers, and he chose Simon to be one of the foundation-stones. He purposed to make him a great preacher, so that many would believe through his word, and thus be built upon him; therefore he compared him to a "stone."

The scriptures declare that the saints "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together grows unto a holy temple in the Lord."—Eph. 2:20, 21.

Jesus knows each of us as well as he knew Simon. He knows whether we are living stones in this glorious temple, or whether we are like the rubbish lying round the building, to be swept away when it is finished.

February 4

John 1:43 to 51. Philip leads Nathanael to Christ.

It is very interesting to know how holy men were brought to the knowledge of Christ. In this passage we have an account of the means by which Philip and Nathanael were first led to their Savior. Jesus himself found Philip, and said, "Follow me." Have we heard the voice of Jesus thus speaking to our hearts? He does thus call to us from heaven. May we have grace to reply, "Lord, I will follow you." When David heard the Lord say, "Seek my face," he replied, "Your face, Lord, will I seek." (Ps. 27.)

Philip acted as Andrew had done before; he endeavored to persuade his friend to come to Jesus. He behaved openly and frankly to Nathanael; he did not conceal from him that the Lord he had found was called Jesus of Nazareth. Nathanael was prejudiced against Nazareth because of the bad character of its inhabitants, and naturally exclaimed, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip did not stop to argue with him, but said, "Come and see." He was full of hope that the same word which had such power with him would convince Nathanael also. Philip sets us an example how to behave to our relations and friends. It is better to say, "Come and see," than to argue much with them. Let us try and persuade them to read the Bible which has taught us to pray to that God who has had mercy on us. If we can only induce them "to come and see," to apply to the Lord themselves, we may feel sure that they will be brought to the knowledge of the true Savior.

With what great kindness did the Lord treat Nathanael! He knew that he had doubts, and he removed them. He did this in a very remarkable way. When he

saw him coming he described his character. "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit." By saying this, he showed Nathanael he was acquainted with his secret thoughts. He declared that Nathanael was a sincere man—this was great praise. Jesus had seen many hypocrites, but he had seen few sincere people.

It is very uncommon to be sincere. Most people think they are sincere. They will say, "Though I do not pretend to be religious, yet I am not a hypocrite—I am sincere." But these people deceive themselves. Let us consider what it is to be sincere. It is to be really anxious to find out our sins, and to forsake them. The sincere man says, with David, "Search me, O God, and know my heart—try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Ps. 139:23, 24. The sincere man desires that every evil thought may be taken away; he longs to have his heart cleansed; therefore he is often in prayer to God, confessing his sins. As soon as he suspects that any of his practices are wrong, he inquires whether they really are sinful; and if he finds they are contrary to God's word, he forsakes them, however much he may lose by giving them up. Is this a common character? Is this our character? Do we thus walk with God? Does Jesus say of you or me, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit?"

Nathanael was surprised to find that Jesus knew him, but he was more astonished still when he discovered that he had seen him under the fig-tree. No doubt he had been confessing his sins beneath the shade of a thick fig-tree, where no human eye could see him. God had answered his prayers, by leading him to the Savior. Nathanael could no longer doubt; he acknowledged Jesus to be the Son of God, the King of Israel.

Then Jesus promised that the day would come when he would see angels ascending and descending upon the Son of man. To what day did he refer? Was it not to the day when he will come again in the glory of his Father with all his holy angels? Both his enemies and his friends will then perceive that he is the Son of God. Every eye shall see Him, (Rev. 1.) Some shall wail when they see Him whom they despised and neglected, sitting on the throne of judgment; but some will rejoice when they behold Him to whom they often prayed under fig-trees or in closets, sitting on his throne of glory amid ten thousand times ten thousand angels. Are there any here who often pray to Christ in secret? Is it not a comfort to you to think that he sees you, and that he will acknowledge you as his children at the great day?

February 5

John 2:1-10. Jesus turns water into wine.

The Lord Jesus began his ministry by a miracle. Several of his disciples beheld this display of his power. It is probable Nathanael was one of them; for though he is not mentioned in the list of the twelve apostles, it is generally supposed that Bartholomew, the apostle, was the same person as Nathanael.

When Jesus had been three days in Galilee he went to a marriage feast. It is plain, therefore, that there are some feasts to which it is not sinful to go. We are sure, however, that Jesus would not have gone to a feast where there was profaneness, drunkenness, or rioting; nor would the newly-married have invited such a holy guest, if they had intended to give an unholy feast. Wine was the common drink of the land of Canaan, and was not so strong as the wine used in this country, which is mixed with brandy. As grapes grew in the fields of Canaan, wine was so cheap that even poor people could afford to drink it. It is probable that the newly-married were poor, because Jesus himself, as well as his disciples, was poor, and he had not yet become celebrated as a prophet. Poverty may have prevented them from providing sufficient wine for the company.

When the supply was exhausted, the mother of Jesus spoke to him as if she expected her son to provide more wine by a miracle; she said, "They have no wine." The Lord's answer may appear disrespectful, but it was not so. In the Eastern countries "woman" is as respectful a title as "madam" would be here; and even princesses are thus addressed. When Jesus said, "Woman, what have I to do with you, my hour has not yet come;" he meant to show his mother, that though he had obeyed her commands in common things, he could not be directed by her in his heavenly Father's business. He had told her this when he was a child, and was found by her in the temple. The Roman Catholics, therefore, much mistake when they entreat Mary to command her Son to bestow blessings on them.

And do not we also mistake when we venture to dictate to Jesus?—when we think he ought to give us any blessing, or remove any affliction? When we thus think in our hearts, let us hear Jesus addressing us in these words—"What have I to do with you; my hour is not yet come." Perhaps He may intend to do what we desire; but we must not hasten him, his own time is the best.

The mother of our Lord still expected that her Son would do some wonderful deed, and she said to the servants, "Whatever he says to you, do it." This was a safe command to give. We may say this to each other at all times. "Whatever he says to you, do it."

You know that the Jews had many customs about purifying or washing themselves—some of these customs were commanded by God, and some were invented by men. They always kept large jars for water in their houses. These jars Jesus desired the servants to fill; they obeyed without questioning, and even drew out the water to hand to the ruler of the feast, without knowing what they

presented. The jars were filled to the brim, so that it was certain that no wine could be added secretly to the water.

The ruler of the feast was a man who had the management of it entrusted to him by the bridegroom. He was surprised to taste such excellent wine, and calling the bridegroom, expressed his surprise that he would have kept the good wine until the last, when men usually give the best wine first, as the flavor is most relished at the beginning of a feast. In this speech the ruler bore witness, without intending it, to the excellence of Christ's works, and gave his testimony to the perfection of the miracle.

How benevolent a miracle this was! It showed forth Christ's tender concern for our comfort even in the smallest matters; though he would not turn the stones into bread to satisfy his own hunger, he turned water into wine to supply the guests at the marriage feast. But his chief purpose in working this miracle was to show forth his glory as the Son of God, that his people might believe in him to everlasting life. He can bestow upon us that wine which will make our hearts glad throughout eternity.

All who come to him will find reason to say, "You have kept the good wine until now." It is his method to keep the best things to the last—but it is Satan's method to do the reverse. The children of this world have their best things first. They find life grow darker and darker as they advance; their youthful days are their happiest, (they confess this themselves;) cares soon overcloud them, disappointments depress them, infirmities overtake them; the gloom continually increases, until it ends in the darkness of the grave. Such is the worldling's portion. Satan gives the good wine first, and then that which is worse. What a miserable portion is the world!

Christ deals just in a contrary manner—"The path of the just is as the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day." Every truly holy person finds his happiness increase with his age; so that he would not be as he was once, no, not for the sake of again possessing youth, and health, and relations, and comforts, which he may now have lost. The more holy he becomes, the more happy he finds himself. Even upon earth he begins to say, "You have kept the good wine until now." What then will he say in heaven, when he drinks of the fruit of the vine with his Savior; that is, when he partakes of the sweetness of redeeming love in all its perfection! This happiness is offered to us. Shall we reject it, and prefer looking for our happiness from a world which is withering in our grasp?

February 6

John 2:11-17. Christ purifies the temple.

After working his first miracle, the Lord Jesus went to Capernaum, a city in Galilee, but he did not take up his abode there at present. Highly favored city, to be so early and so often visited by the Son of God! Truly she was exalted unto heaven, so great were her privileges. Do not we also enjoy very great privileges—we, who hold the word of God in our hands? May we profit more from our privileges than Capernaum did from hers!

Shortly after visiting this city, the Lord traveled up to Jerusalem, to keep the passover. In the gospel of John, all the passovers from this time until the Lord's death are recorded. It is by counting them, that it has been discovered how long Jesus exercised his ministry, and at what age he died. He became a minister at thirty, his ministry lasted three years and a half; and he died at the age of thirty-three years and a half.

When he was at Jerusalem at the passover, he made a public display of his power and holiness. The courts of the temple (not the very temple itself) were crowded by those who brought beasts and birds for sacrifices, and also by those who changed Roman money for Jewish coins, to be cast into the treasury. No doubt these traders in animals and money excused themselves for making God's house a place of trade by the thought of the holy use for which the animals and money were designed. But this excuse was not sufficient in God's sight. His temple was called a house of prayer, and it was made into a house of merchandise. He was displeased by the disturbance given to his worship, and by the disrespect shown to himself. And may there not be customs common among Christians which are displeasing to God? We may have excuses ready to offer for our conduct; but are they such as will be received at the day of judgment?

It was wonderful that the people selling animals and changing money submitted to the authority of a poor and almost unknown man, armed only with a whip, and unsupported by the rulers. But such divine power accompanied his words and his actions, and such terror from the Lord spread among the multitude, that the traders fled before him. At the same time, Jesus openly declared that he was the Son of God, for he called the temple his "Father's house." The disciples were much struck by their Lord's conduct; they were no doubt astonished to see one usually so meek and gentle, acting with so much boldness and courage. Then they remembered a sentence in the Psalms, describing the character of the expected Messiah—"The zeal for your house has eaten me up." (Ps. 69:9.) What is the meaning of this verse?

Zeal signifies an ardent desire. Jesus was full of zeal, but on what account? For God's house. By "house" we understand not only the temple, but God's service, his people, his commandments, and all that belongs to him. A zeal for God's house means an ardent desire for his glory. Jesus had so strong a zeal that it consumed him. It is common to say, "Such a one is swallowed up of grief." It might be said of Jesus that he was swallowed up with a desire for God's honor. This was his chief desire, his ruling passion.

How different from this zeal is the desire that fills us by nature. By nature, we are eaten up with a zeal, not for God's house, but for our own pleasure, and honor, and interest. This is the reason that we take up so hotly any insult given to ourselves, but are so indifferent respecting insults offered to God. If any person reproach us, or injure us, we turn in our minds how we can prevent his continuing to annoy us. We are uneasy and restless until we can defend ourselves. But how do we feel when we hear of God's commands being broken? Are we anxious to find out some way of stopping the evil? Do we feel as David did, when he said, "My zeal has consumed me, because my enemies keep not your law;" or when he said, "Rivers of waters run down my eyes, because they keep not your law?" O that such a spirit dwelt in us! If we love God, we do feel something of this grief already.

There are some among our magistrates and rulers who openly speak for God, and are ready to bear scorn and hatred for His sake; for all must be prepared for such treatment who endeavor to prevent the commission of sin. Faithful ministers, who oppose plays, fairs, and parties, and other popular amusements, and who speak in the pulpit against sabbath-breaking, intemperance, and all ungodliness, are generally hated on that account. Even Jesus was hated, because he testified of the world, that its works were evil. The reproaches of those who reproached God fell upon him. (Ps. 69:9.) May we hate evil as he did, though men would hate us also. If we sincerely hate sin, we shall hate it most in our own hearts, and ask God to cleanse them, and to render us vessels fit for the Master's use.

February 7

John 2:18 to 25. Christ speaks of the temple of his body.

How could the Jews desire a sign of Christ's right to clear the temple of the traders? What could have enabled him to send out these profane men but the power of God? Was not that a sign of his authority? Yet still the Jews, or the chief men of Jerusalem, desired a sign; but Christ refused to give them any, except that great sign of his own resurrection from the dead. This is God's constant way of dealing—he gives no sign to those who wish not to believe in him, and who only ask for a sign as an excuse for their unbelief.

What a remarkable name Jesus gave to his body!—He called it a temple. What is a temple?—the habitation of God. Christ's body was indeed a temple, for the Godhead dwelt in him. It is true, all real Christians form one great temple; for Paul says to them, "You are the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them." (2 Cor. 6:16.) But Christ was a temple in a still higher sense, for he and his Father were one.

When he said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," neither his friends nor his enemies understood him. Yet these words were not forgotten; they were brought forward against him by his enemies when he was judged, and they were remembered by his friends after his rising again. No doubt there are many things in scripture which we do not yet understand. Let us look to Christ to teach us what we find to be dark and difficult. In the day of sorrow God often reveals the secret meaning of his words to his children. Some texts, in which we now see little beauty, may be our rod and staff when passing through the valley of the shadow of death.

There were some people at Jerusalem, who, seeing the miracles that Jesus did, felt convinced that he was a true prophet, but they did not love him, nor desire his love. Now observe how Jesus behaved towards these people. "He did not commit himself unto them;" (ver. 24;) that is, he did not place any confidence in them, but was on his guard when before them; he did not open to them his secrets, and tell them all the things that the Father had told him, as he did to his beloved disciples. (John 15:15.) He treated his true disciples as "friends;" but these people he knew still to be his enemies, for their hearts were not made new, and the natural heart of man is enmity against God. (Rom. 8:7.)

It is a solemn thought that Jesus knows the hearts of all men. Men often deceive each other by false professions of piety, but they never can deceive him; he knows what is in them. It is said in the book of Revelation, that his eyes are like a flame of fire. When he writes to the Seven Churches by the hand of his disciple John, (Rev. 2, 3,) he begins each letter with these words, "I know your works." There is a beautiful history contained in a tract called *Jejana*, in which we are told of a little Hottentot maid, who, entering a church for the first time, heard the minister preach from these words, "I know your works." In her ignorance, she thought the preacher himself was God, and tried to hide herself from his sight behind a pillar in the aisle where she was standing; for all the lies she had uttered and the thefts she had committed, rushed to her remembrance as the sentence was uttered, "I know your works." But how light was the guilt of this heathen child, compared to that of a well-instructed person who is yet unconverted! It is not only for having committed such sins as she had committed, that people in a Christian land will be condemned at last, but for having refused to believe in the Son of God, with the heart. Christ knows the heart of every one of us; he knows what is in us; he knows whether we truly love him or not. If we do not love him, we do not believe in him in the right manner, and our faith can only be a dead faith, and such as will not save us.

Let each of us ask himself, "Do I so believe in Christ, that he might commit himself unto me, that he might consider me as a friend if he were upon earth?" Can we say like the apostle Peter, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you?"

February 8

John 3:1-8. Christ's conversation with Nicodemus.

What can be so interesting as to hear how the Savior instructed a person who desired to know the way of salvation! What a privilege Nicodemus enjoyed when he talked alone with the Son of God! What a privilege we enjoy when we read the account of this conversation!

Jesus could suit his conversation exactly to the case of Nicodemus, for he knew the state of his heart, and could tell with certainty what it would be the most profitable to say.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee; one of that sect who placed their trust in the outward observance of the law, and who neglected to purify the heart. He was a chief person, a ruler and teacher. It was not surprising, therefore, that he was ashamed to come to Jesus openly. He came by night for fear of the Jews, as we are afterwards told in John 19:39. Jesus did not refuse to receive him on that account, so compassionate is he to the infirmities of men; but if Nicodemus had not conquered this base fear of man, he could not have become the disciple of Him who has said, "Whoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven," (Matthew 10:33.) Nicodemus afterwards grew so bold, that when the name of Jesus was held in the greatest contempt, he came forward with Joseph of Arimathea, and asked for his body, that he might give it an honorable burial. But at the time we are reading of, he was still unconverted, and ignorant of his need of conversion; he was, however, desirous of instruction, and did not shrink from a private interview with the Lord. He came to the light, even the light of the world, the Son of God.

He began the conversation by telling the Lord that he believed he was a teacher come from God, because of the miracles he did; but it does not seem that he knew him to be the Lord of glory. Jesus immediately spoke to him of the concerns of his soul. The words "Verily, verily," show that the truth he was going to disclose was very important—"Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." How necessary it is for us well to consider the meaning of this declaration! Do we desire to see the kingdom of God? We must then desire to be born again.

What is it to be born again? Nicodemus did not understand the expression; he thought it related to the body, but it related to the soul. Our souls must be born again; that is, they must undergo a great change. As, when an infant is born, it undergoes a change, enters into a new world, has new desires, and joys, and sorrows; so when our hearts are born again, they have new desires, and joys, and sorrows. This doctrine has offended many people, who, knowing that they themselves were not born again in this manner, have attempted to deny the true meaning of the words. Some have declared that all who have been baptized are

born again; but this cannot be true, for we read in Acts 8, of a man called Simon, who was baptized by the apostles, but who yet was not born again; for Peter said to him, "You have neither part nor lot in this matter; your heart is not right in the sight of God."

Water is the sign of the cleansing effects of the Spirit. God has appointed the use of water in baptism, to remind us of the necessity of being purified by his Spirit. No man can bestow saving grace upon another; it is the work of God alone; the apostles could not change the hearts of men; Peter could not change the heart of the wicked Simon, to whom we have just referred.

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." What is meant by the term "flesh?" Does it mean the body? It means not only the body, but also the soul. The soul as well as the body is called "flesh," in Scripture, because the unconverted soul loves fleshly things; it only delights in the earth—all its desires are after the things of the world, its pleasures, profits, and honors. But when the Spirit changes a man's fleshly heart, then he has a spiritual nature; then he has desires after spiritual things, after holiness and heaven. By this sign we must examine ourselves. Do we love the things of earth most, or the things of the Spirit? For it is declared in Rom. 8:5, "Those who are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh; but those who are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit."

But perhaps you may ask, "How is this change effected?" How does the Holy Spirit enter into the soul? Can a person see him enter in? No! the change is wrought silently and secretly; for this reason the Spirit is compared to the wind which blows where it wills; that is, which seems to blow where it likes, for man cannot control it, or even tell where it comes from. Thus, God sends his Spirit where He wills, and we cannot tell how this holy Spirit changes the wicked heart of man. We cannot see the wind, or understand its course; yet we perceive the effects of the wind; we can also behold the effects of the Spirit. Is it our great happiness to feel these effects in our own soul? Those who have felt the refreshing breeze spring up in the evening of a sultry day, need no argument to convince them that the wind blows.

How refreshing to the soul are the effects of the new birth! Before a soul is born again, it pants for happiness, but pants in vain; but when it knows that its sins are blotted out by the Savior's blood, then it feels satisfied, and like a long-lost child just restored to a parent's arms, cries out, "Abba, Father."

February 9

John 3:9-21. The conversation concluded.

Nicodemus was very ignorant of the meaning of the Scriptures; he knew the words, but not the things spoken of. He had no idea that a change of heart was necessary. He ought to have known it, because he had often read the words of the prophet Ezekiel, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh," (that is, a soft, tender, feeling heart,) Ezek. 36:26. Now this promise of a new heart, refers to the blessing of the new birth.

Nicodemus was a master, or a teacher in Israel, yet he knew not these things. Are there not many things which we ought to know, and which yet we know not? We ought to seek to know the meaning of the Scriptures, inquiring of our minister or our pious friends, reading books they recommend, and, above all, comparing one part with another, while we entreat the Lord to open the eyes of our understandings, to behold the wondrous things in his law.

Jesus did not explain the new birth to Nicodemus; it could not be explained—it must be experienced to be understood; but he told him that he ought to believe in it; for he said, "We speak that we do know." By "we," He meant himself and the prophets, who all spoke of this new birth. How wrong it is in men not to believe heavenly messengers, especially the Son of God! "You receive not our witness." May it never be said of us, that we do not receive the witness of the Lord and his apostles! Nicodemus, however, was willing to be instructed, so Jesus continued to teach him, in spite of his ignorance and unbelief, for He is a patient teacher; he will instruct the foolish and the slow of heart, if they will but listen to his words.

He began next to unfold the wonders of redeeming love. Nicodemus had often heard of the serpent of brass that Moses lifted up on a pole in the wilderness, in order that the Israelites that had been bitten by fiery serpents, might look, and live. This bronze serpent he declared to be a type of himself. He then spoke to Nicodemus of his Father's love to man. O that these words might sink deep into our hearts. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." What a gracious declaration! What a free salvation! "Whoever." No sinner is shut out, however horrible his sins; everyone who believes shall receive pardon and everlasting life.

What can be the reason that all men do not believe? This is the reason, "They love darkness," and why? "Because their deeds are evil." Every sinner's conscience bears witness to this truth. There are many who say they desire to be religious, who profess to lament that they cannot pray—that they cannot love God. Were they sincere in what they said, they would use the means of becoming religious; they would try to pray; they would read God's word, and seek the company of religious people. If one of you were to lose your precious sight, through an accident, you would not be satisfied by saying, "I wish my eyesight were restored; but I have no skill to restore it myself, and I cannot find my way to an eye doctor; I must therefore remain as I am." O no! you would prevail on some

person to lead you to one who had already cured blind people, and then you would follow his directions, however irksome they might be.

Now if you desired to become truly religious, you would act in the same manner—you would use the means of grace—you would ask your pious friends to help you to find the way of life, and you would cry earnestly to God. What excuse shall we give to God at the last day, if we refuse to come to the light? Great will be our condemnation. Has God given us his only Son, and shall we refuse to come to him? Shall we remain unconcerned about him, and occupied with worldly trifles and cares, and then think to escape the just judgment of God? Whatever excuses we may make to ourselves now for such conduct, they will not be accepted at the day of account. The sin and folly of neglecting the way of salvation will then be openly seen, and all those who are condemned will have nothing to say in their own defense.

February 10

John 3:22-36. John's testimony about Jesus.

How little did the Jews understand the character of John the Baptist! Some of them thought that he would be jealous of the Lord Jesus. How was that possible, when he came into the world to bear witness to Him, and to persuade men to believe in Him? Some people came to John, complaining that Jesus baptized, and that all men came to him. John earnestly desired that all men would come to Christ; not come to him only to be baptized with water, but to be washed from their sins, and baptized with the Holy Spirit.

John's answer shows in the most beautiful manner the humility of his heart and the sincerity of his love to Christ. Though he had been much admired as a preacher, he was not lifted up with pride. He knew and declared that "a man can receive nothing, unless it be given him from above." O that we could always keep this truth in our minds! Then we would perceive the folly of pride, as well as its wretchedness. What have we that we have not received? Yet how apt we are to be puffed up, as though we had not received, and even to boast to others of our abilities, our possessions, our numerous friends, and amiable qualities! We ought only to feel thankful to God for his gifts, and to humble ourselves in his sight, because we are unworthy of his notice; this is what the angels do who excel in strength, in wisdom, and in beauty. How dreadful it is when we feel proud of God's spiritual blessings! If he has put grace in our hearts, or enabled us to convert others, how unspeakably thankful we should be! To be proud of such mercies is, indeed, the blackest ingratitude.

John the Baptist was full of love to the Savior; he compared him to a bridegroom, and himself to the bridegroom's friend. The bride is the church, Christ's believing people. It was John's desire to lead all men to love Christ. He had succeeded in

persuading some to love him, and now he knew that Jesus was rejoicing over these believers. To hear the bridegroom's voice was his chief joy; he delighted in praising the bridegroom! He called himself earthly, but he declared Jesus to be heavenly, for he came from above. He himself had only received a measure of the Spirit; but Jesus had received the Spirit without measure, that is, in an infinite degree.

He then described the exceeding happiness of believers in Christ, and the miserable condition of unbelievers. These are John's words—"He who believes on the Son has everlasting life, and he who believes not shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." It is not said, that he who believes shall have everlasting life, but that he has even now everlasting life. It is not said that he who believes not, shall taste the wrath of God, but that now the wrath of God abides on him. Every person is at this moment in one of these conditions; he either has everlasting life, or he is under the wrath of God. How very happy, or how very miserable every person ought to be! Ought not that person to be miserable, who knows that at any moment he may be snatched away from the scene of his enjoyments? If we were to see a man living in splendor, in a magnificent house, surrounded by luxuries, and were told that he had immense debts, and that numerous creditors might at any moment thrust him into prison, would we count him happy? He could not be happy, if he reflected upon his circumstances. Perhaps he would not reflect; perhaps he would run from one diversion to another, and thus endeavor to keep up his spirits. Now all unbelievers owe an immense debt to the justice of God, and they are in danger at any moment of being thrust into prison, even that prison of hell from where none ever escape. They would not enjoy a moment's peace if they reflected on their condition.

How different is the state of the believer! If you were to see a poor man, coarsely clothed and scantily fed, and if you were to be assured he was the heir of a large estate, you would expect him to bear his present hardships without murmuring. If we believe in the Son of God, we are the heirs of God; we were his debtors, but Christ paid our debt by his blood, and when we believed, we were free from it; and not only so, but we were made the heirs of a heavenly kingdom. Ought we not to rejoice exceedingly, and to reckon nothing of our present losses and disappointments, because of the great inheritance promised to us?

February 11

Luke 3:19, 20. John's imprisonment.

The beautiful discourse that we lately read was the last discourse of John the Baptist that we find in the Scriptures. Soon after delivering it, he was cast into prison. It was Herod who imprisoned him. This Herod was the son of that Herod who slew the babes of Bethlehem, and he resembled his father in wickedness.

As he was the governor of a fourth part of the land of Canaan, he is called a tetrarch, (which means the governor of the fourth part of a kingdom.) The Romans had made him governor of Judea. He had heard John preach. We are not informed whether he had gone into the wilderness to hear him, or whether he had sent for John into his palace; but we are told what effect John's preaching produced upon him. If we refer to Mark's gospel, we shall find an account of the sort of impression it made upon him. (Mark 6:20.) "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and a holy." Herod had a reverence for the character of John; though a wicked man, he respected John. This affords us a lesson. Perhaps we feel a respect for some holy men, yet this is not a proof that we are holy ourselves.

Herod did more than this—"He observed John." He took notice of what he said; he remembered it. Unconverted people are often struck with the sermons they hear. But Herod did more still—"He did many things." He reformed many parts of his conduct. Perhaps he showed more kindness to the poor, more attention to public worship, or more justice to his subjects. We are not informed what were the things which he altered; but we know that he altered not a few, but many things. Have we altered many things in our conduct, since we heard the gospel? It is well if we have—it is well if we read the Bible more; if we give away more; if we have left off openly breaking the Sabbath; or using profane language; or partaking of worldly amusements; but none of these things prove that we are converted.

But Herod did more still; "Herod heard John gladly." He took delight in his instructions. Was not that a good sign? It is a good sign if we take pleasure in listening to a faithful preacher, or to a pious friend, or in reading good books; but it is possible to do so, and yet to love sin; for though Herod heard sermons gladly, when John told him that it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife, he was angry. Herod had committed a great crime—he had divorced his own wife, that he might marry Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; he could not bear to part from her. This was the sin he would not give up.

What a faithful preacher John was! though he knew that Herod had power to kill him, he feared not to tell him the truth. How difficult it is to act like John! A minister knows that he shall give offence to sinners, if he speaks to them plainly of their sins. As long as he speaks in general terms, he does not offend them; but as soon as he points out the peculiar sins of each class of people, then he makes them enemies. When he reproves tradesmen for selling on the Sabbath, young people for frequenting places of worldly amusement, the poor for committing secret acts of dishonesty, the rich for living in pride and luxury, then he is hated for his interference. But how wicked it is to be angry with a faithful minister for pointing out our sins! If we do not turn from our favorite sins we shall perish. Herod would not pluck out his right eye, which was Herodias; he would not go with one eye to heaven, he preferred going with two to hell; he preferred his pleasure upon earth to everlasting joy.

See how one sin leads to another. Herod added this above all, that he shut up John in prison. Great as was the crime of marrying his brother's wife, the sin of shutting up John in prison was greater in God's eyes. And why was it greater? Because it was an insult committed directly against God; for God considers his children as himself. Whoever injures one of them, injures Him; for they are as dear to him as the apple of his eye. Besides, by shutting up John in prison, Herod hindered the preaching of the gospel; and thus he murdered men's souls. It is a dreadful sin to hinder the spread of the gospel. How much those will have to answer for, who have discouraged people from hearing the gospel!

Herodias was more bitter against John than Herod himself, and would gladly have prevailed upon the monarch to kill him. But there were two reasons which prevented his committing this crime; the fear of man, and his own conscience. We find in Matthew's gospel, 14:5, the following words—"And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet." The fear of man often prevents people following the commands of God, but it sometimes for a season hinders the wicked from doing bad actions. Herod's own conscience also made him unwilling to kill John, for the conscience of sinners restrains them as well as the fear of man. May we be kept from sin by better motives than those of Herod! The love of God in our hearts would make us hate every sin. Let us inquire whether there is any sin we refuse to part with. If we are not seeking to please God in all things, we cannot have confidence towards him—our own hearts condemn us, and "God is greater than our heart, and knows all things." 1 John 3:20.

February 12

John 4:1-15. Christ's conversation with the woman of Samaria.

Everyone must desire to know what our Savior thought fit to say to a poor ignorant woman, whom he met beside a well. He was always watching for opportunities of doing good to the souls and bodies of men. Though He was weary, and doubtless hungry and thirsty also, he was intent upon his Father's business; while we are continually making excuses for not speaking to people about their souls!

Observe how he begins the conversation—he asks the woman to give him some water to drink. She returns an uncivil, unfeeling reply—"How is it that you, being a Jew, ask for a drink from a woman of Samaria?" It was true that the Samaritans and Jews did live at enmity with each other; but this was very wicked, and our Savior would not follow such wicked customs. However, he did not enter into a dispute on this subject, but passed on to one more important. In talking to people upon religion, we should keep the chief object in view, and not be induced to dispute on less important points.

How soft an answer did our Savior return to the uncourteous woman! He saw her ignorance, and pitied her—he saw she was ruining her own soul by her refusal to have any dealings with him. How majestic and how touching is his reply! (v. 10.) "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that says unto you, 'Give me to drink,' you would have asked of him, and he would have given you living water."

The woman did not understand this answer; she did not know what the stranger meant by the "gift of God." She did not know that He himself was the gift of God, the Father, to a lost world; neither did she know what he meant by "living water;" she thought he meant running water; she did not know that he spoke of the Holy Spirit. She began, indeed, to suspect that he was some great person, though he appeared a poor man; but she could not believe that he was greater than Jacob who had dug the well in old time. Neither could she imagine that any water could be better than the water of that well, and that water she was sure the stranger could not give to her, as he could not procure it for himself. But though she could allow the blessed Lord to remain parched with thirst, He was willing to supply her with the water of everlasting life.

He continued the conversation by pointing out a defect in the water of Jacob's well. "Whoever drinks of this water shall thirst again." There is the same defect in all earthly pleasures and comforts; they seem to satisfy us for a little time, but soon the tormenting thirst returns. Have we not often experienced the truth of this? We have partaken of some pleasure, and have felt satisfied; but O how short was our satisfaction? We soon become restless and uneasy again. Thus we continue to thirst until we are made partakers of the Holy Spirit; then we feel satisfied. Then we find within ourselves a source of happiness. What is this source of never-failing delight? It is the sense of pardoned sin, of God's love in Christ, the hope of heaven, and of meeting our Redeemer there. Have you not heard of people racked with pain, who yet enjoyed a peace that passes all understanding? Perhaps you have seen such people, and have wondered at their case. Behold the mystery explained; they drank, indeed, of no stream of earthly comforts, but there was in them a well of water springing up that never could be exhausted, and therefore they thirsted not after the muddy waters of this world.

The Samaritan woman did not understand the Savior's meaning, yet she made the right request, for she said, "Give me of this water." O that we might all make this prayer, understanding for what it is we ask! God would certainly grant it. What! did God give his own Son to die for us, and shall He think anything too great to give us? Who could have thought of such a gift? much less who could have dared to ask for it! that the Judge should give his only Son to die for the criminal! But as God has done this, and slain his beloved Son for us, is it not extreme ingratitude in us not to come to Him for the gifts the Savior purchased with his blood! Jesus laid down his life to procure for us the Holy Spirit, the living water; and shall we neglect to ask for this precious gift? God forbid! Let each of

us cry earnestly—constantly to God, "Give me this living water, O you who have so loved the world as to give your only-begotten Son!"

February 13

John 4:16-24. Jesus and the woman of Samaria— continued.

When the Lord said, "Go call your husband and come here," the woman may have thought that he knew nothing about her circumstances; but his next words showed that he was acquainted with her whole history. Why then did he desire her to call her husband? He wished to bring her sins to her remembrance. It is probable that she had been divorced from these husbands, or had left them in a wicked manner. It was painful to her to be reminded of the sins of past years, and to be detected in pursuing even at that time an immoral course. But why did Jesus inflict this pain and this shame? That he might afterwards confer on this unhappy sinful woman everlasting glory and felicity. Let us not turn away from the remembrance of our sins. Everyone must be brought low before he can be lifted up. We naturally shrink from being exposed even to ourselves; this is our folly and our sin.

The Samaritan woman (though now convinced that the stranger was a true prophet) did not like to dwell upon the circumstances of her history. She attempted to turn the conversation, and instead of inquiring how she might obtain forgiveness, referred to the chief points in dispute between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews said that Jerusalem was the place where men ought to worship God, and the Samaritans professed to worship him on a mountain in Samaria. Now Jerusalem was the place where God had commanded men to offer sacrifices; but he permitted them to pray to him everywhere. The Samaritans had done very wrong in building a temple on Mount Gerizim; their excuse was, that the Israelites in ancient times had pronounced blessings from this mountain, (as recorded in Deut. 26.) It was to this the woman referred when she said, "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain."

The Samaritans boasted of being descended from the Israelites, though they were chiefly of Assyrian origin. For when the king of Assyria took captive the last king of Israel and his people, he filled the land with Assyrians. At first these Assyrians worshiped idols, but afterwards they left off idolatry. Yet though they did not worship idols, they did not worship God.

Jesus said to the woman, "You worship you know not what." There are many in Christian countries who, like these Samaritans, do not worship the true God, though they think they do. God is a spirit. Do those believe that He is a spirit, who while they feel no love, nor reverence for his name, yet bend the knee and move the lip in mere external worship? If we knew that an earthly sovereign could see into our hearts, and if we felt no love, no reverence for him, would we not be

afraid of entering into his presence? Until we love God, we cannot worship him. What then is a sinner to do who is conscious that he does not love God? Let him confess his sins; let him ask for a new heart; let him think of God's love in giving his Son to die for a guilty world.

Though God is surrounded by millions of angels who worship him in spirit and in truth, yet He seeks for other worshipers. He is so condescending, that he delights in the praises of penitent sinners—He even seeks such to worship him. Perhaps last night or this morning He saw you worshiping him alone in your chamber; perhaps your voice was heard by no human creature, but your heart was full of sorrow for past sins, and of gratitude to God for having spared you so long. The Father of your spirit heard that prayer. He will answer it.

February 14

John 4:25-38. The spiritual harvest.

The ignorant Samaritan woman was much struck with the conversation of the stranger sitting by the well. It put her in mind of the promise she had heard of a Messiah, who would come into the world and instruct men. She seems at length to have desired instruction. She said, "When he has come, he will tell us all things." He has come already, and has told us all things. Are there not some here who love his words, and desire to keep them?

What a joyful moment that was when the Lord revealed himself unto the woman, and said, "I who talk unto you am he." In her joy, it is probable, she did not remember that she had refused him a cup of cold water. She was now anxious that others would hear the heavenly stranger, and she ran with haste into the city. She told her countrymen how she had been convinced that Jesus was the Christ. She said, "Come see a man who told me all the things that ever I did. Is not this the Christ?" Now one great proof that the Bible is the word of God, is, that it tells us all things that ever we did—not that it can tell each person his own life in particular, but it describes such men as we are, shows us the secrets of our hearts, and makes us feel that He who wrote it knew everything concerning us. For this reason some hate the bible; they will not believe that their hearts are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. This woman did not turn away from the Savior's word because it exposed the sins of her life. Had she turned away, what infinite blessings she would have lost!

The disciples were astonished when they returned from the town with food, to find their Master talking in a friendly manner to a Samaritan woman. They thought that he was as prejudiced as themselves; but He who has made of one blood all the nations upon earth, is no respecter of people. There are white people in some countries at the present day, who treat the poor blacks with as much contempt as if they had no souls to be saved; but these people have not

the mind of Christ—"He who despises his neighbor sins." When we look down upon another on account of the circumstances of his birth, we sin against God.

The disciples showed both respect and affection for their Master in their conduct on this occasion. They had too much respect to ask him why he talked with the woman; and they had so much affection, that they could not bear to see him refuse the food they brought him. But Jesus was too intent upon the souls he was now going to save, to be able to eat. When we are going to enjoy a great delight, our appetite is taken away, and so it was with Jesus; his food was to do his Father's will, and to finish his work. What was that will? What was that work? To seek and to save those who were lost; to glorify his Father by the salvation of sinners. John 17:4. O what love Christ had, to take delight in saving us, his enemies! Did He thus spend his life in willing labors for us, seeking no other pleasure than that of doing good; and shall we spend ours in doing our own will, and seeking our own glory?

Jesus directed his disciples' attention to the people who were thronging to hear him from the town. He compared their conversion to a harvest he was going to reap. Then he explained to his disciples that God often appointed one person to sow and another to reap. A minister who enters a place where the gospel has never been heard, may be compared to one who sows the good seed. Sometimes he is removed without seeing any fruit of his labor. Another follows him, and meets with great success in converting souls; and this last minister may be compared to a reaper.

Thus it was in Greenland. When Hans Egede first visited that land of ice and snow, he met with neglect and scorn; and though he remained there fifteen years, he could not make an impression upon a single person. Other missionaries from Germany followed in his steps, and they reaped an abundant harvest of souls; and Greenland is now a Christian country. Shall not Hans Egede who sowed the seed rejoice in heaven with the blessed men who reaped the sheaves? Jesus promised his apostles that they would reap many souls when they preached; his prophets had sown good seed long before, and had not reaped. Would God forget those poor persecuted prophets?

It is a great delight to be permitted to reap; but it is a great comfort to think, that if we only sow, and even shed tears because we meet with no success, yet that our labor is not in vain in the Lord; and that at the last day we shall doubtless come again, bringing our sheaves with us. There have been parents who have died fearing that their instructions had made no impression on the hearts of their children, and yet after their death some friend or minister has reaped those children's souls. Will not the parent rejoice with that friend when they all appear before God? He who sows and he who reaps shall rejoice together.

February 15

John 4:39-54. The conversion of the Samaritans, and the healing of the nobleman's son.

Some of the Samaritans were longer in believing than others. Some believed on account of the woman's testimony, others—not until they had heard him themselves. We know it is best to believe without hesitation, for Jesus once said, "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed." You remember how readily Mary believed the angel's message; and Elizabeth said to her, "Blessed is she who believes, for there shall be a performance of the things told her of the Lord." But though some of the Samaritans were slow in believing—after they believed, they were bold in confessing their faith. They said, "We know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world." O what a title that is! The Savior of the "world;" not of Jews only, but of SAMARITANS also, of some of every kindred and of every nation. May we all know him as our Savior. We shall never truly love him until we know him, not only from report, but from experience. How different is the state of that person who only knows Jesus from what others have said of him—from his state who has received answers to his own prayers, and felt that his own sins are forgiven!

Jesus could not stay more than two days with these Samaritans! We perhaps have heard a thousand sermons, and have read the Bible through many times. Is it possible that any one among us does not love the Savior? Would not these Samaritans rise up in judgment against one so much favored and yet so unfeeling!

Jesus did not return to Nazareth, which was his own country. There he was more despised than in any other place, because the people were accustomed to him. Though they had heard his blessed conversation year after year, and beheld his lovely example, they esteemed him not. It often happens that the gospel is most neglected where it has been longest preached. The excellent Baxter said, "I wish to be the minister of a place, either where the people have heartily embraced the gospel or where they have never heard it; but I dread being the minister of a place where the people have heard in vain." Those who have heard without profit become hardened, and are more rarely converted than others.

We find in this chapter an instance of a nobleman coming to Jesus. Not many noble are called, yet some are called. This man was brought to Jesus by his afflictions. In his sorrowful circumstances this nobleman found himself as dependent upon God as a beggar. There was none but Jesus who could relieve his sorrow. The Lord did not favor him more than others, but treated him with the greatest plainness. Had this nobleman been proud, like Naaman, the Syrian, he might have gone away in anger; but he stood the trial of his faith. It was to try him, Jesus said, "Except you see signs and wonders, you will not believe." The nobleman showed by his answer he believed already, for he replied, "Sir, come down before my child dies." Yet he had not such faith as the Centurion had, of

whom we afterwards read; for this nobleman did not believe that Jesus could save his child unless he came down to the spot where he lay. But the Lord is compassionate to weak faith, when it is real. Jesus gave a greater proof of his power than the afflicted father had ever thought of—for "he is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or THINK," (Eph. 3:20.) "Go your way," said the Lord, "your son lives." The nobleman's faith was grown so strong, that he believed the declaration. Nor was that faith disappointed—for, while returning home, he learned that his child had recovered at the very hour that Jesus spoke the word.

He now acquaints his family with this great display of the power and love of Jesus. What is the result? The whole family, wife, children, servants, believe. What a happy family they must have become! The master's journey was blessed to his whole household. It is the fervent wish of every master who loves God, to bring his whole household to the knowledge of him. May this family and this household be joined to the household of faith, and to the family in heaven and earth who are named after Jesus the Lord!

February 16

Luke 4:14-32. Christ preaches at Nazareth.

The people of Nazareth were much offended with the Lord for not visiting them immediately after his return from Jerusalem. They thought they had the best right to his presence. What a temper of mind was this! Had they any right to Jesus, because he had condescended to be brought up among them? What pride there was in the thought!

And what was their reason for desiring to have him among them? Were they thirsting for spiritual blessings, the forgiveness of sins, the renewal of the heart? No! the Nazarenes were only anxious to partake of temporal benefits; they wished Jesus to heal their sick, as he had healed the sick of other cities. When, at length, He came to Nazareth, he was invited to read. It was usual for seven people in succession to read a portion of the Scriptures; one of them was a priest, another a Levite, but the other five might belong to any tribe. There was a minister of the synagogue, but his office was not like the office of ministers in our churches. It was his part to appoint which of the readers he pleased to read the lessons for the day. One of the lessons was taken from the law, and one from the prophets. The various books of the Scriptures were written on rolls of parchment. The roll containing the prophecy of Isaiah was presented to Jesus. The words he read were probably the lesson for the day, and they applied most forcibly to himself. Did the Nazarenes understand the meaning of the sublime passage which the Savior read on that day? Perhaps some thought that Isaiah spoke of himself when he said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor." But it was Jesus who really came

to preach glad tidings, or "the gospel," to the poor in spirit. In that passage poor lost man is compared to a miserable prisoner, whose eyes had been put out, and who had been thrust into a dark dungeon. One of our Christian poets describes our condition by nature in the following stanza—

"Plunged in a gulf of deep despair,
We wretched sinners lay,
Without one beam of cheerful hope,
Or spark of glimmering day."

Jesus came to deliver the poor blind captive, bruised, or galled by the chains of sin. He came to preach the "acceptable year of the Lord." There was a year of deliverance among the Jews—it occurred every fiftieth year, and was called the year of Jubilee. That year was a figure of Christ's great salvation from death and hell. Let each of us ask himself, "What do I know of this deliverance? Am I still tied and bound with the chain of my sins; or have I been set free from the power of Satan?"

The readers in the synagogue were permitted to explain the lesson they had read. Our Lord availed himself of this permission, and said, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." For a moment the people were astonished at his words; but the next their pride rose. They remembered that he was considered to be the son of a carpenter, and they made this an excuse for despising him. It is pride which causes numbers to reject God's salvation; they think to themselves, "Who is that man that I should listen to him? Why should he know more than I do?" Thus the Nazarenes reasoned. Jesus knew well that rage was working in their hearts—he knew that they were angry with him for having healed the sick of other cities before he had healed theirs; and he answered their thoughts by showing them that God had always chosen whom he would. Elijah in time of famine had sustained with oil and meal a widow of a heathen city; and Elisha had cured a leper of a heathen country, and not of his own. Jesus would not encourage those earthly-minded people to expect any benefits from him—while they rejected the greatest, he would not give them the least.

We see how hateful a worldly mind is to Jesus. If we are more anxious to possess an earthly portion than a heavenly inheritance, we are not His people. Yet you know well that the desire of the heart by nature is only for health, riches, pleasures, for worldly honor, or domestic comforts. If Christ would bestow these on all who asked, what constant fervent prayers would be offered at his throne! The heathen imagine that their idols will bestow earthly blessings upon them, and that is one reason they pray to them so earnestly.

Behold with wonder the madness of the Nazarenes! They cast out the Savior of the world, and forfeit their part in all his blessings! His Father preserved his life, for his hour was not yet come, and it has been well observed, "His children are all immortal until their work is done."

Can we behold without dismay such treatment of the Lord of heaven and earth? If He who was so lovely and so gracious was thus treated, ought not we to be prepared for similar usage? Had he been less faithful, the gentle Savior might have avoided persecution; but he sought not to please men, but God; he desired not to get honor, but to save souls. We may often escape persecution by acting insincerely and unfaithfully. But what, if we should also lose our peace of mind, and the approbation of God!

February 17

Matthew 4:12-17. Christ takes up his abode at Capernaum.

The Lord Jesus chose to reside principally in the most ignorant part of Canaan; he selected the part at the greatest distance from Jerusalem, and which bordered on the wicked cities of Tyre and Sidon. And what led him to do this? Was it not pity for the ignorant and neglected? There are some who are now employed in visiting the courts and alleys of great cities, and some who are going into desolate villages, and some who are leaving their country to dwell among the heathen. Are they not walking in the steps of their Master?

Jesus fulfilled a prophecy of Isaiah, by preaching in Zebulon and Naphtali. The words in the prophecy are difficult to understand, but learned men have offered a satisfactory explanation. Let us first read the prophecy in Isaiah 9:1—
"Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. The land of Zebulon and Naphtali will soon be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles, which lies along the road that runs between the Jordan and the sea, will be filled with glory." What is the sense of the passage? It is this—Once the tribes of Zebulon and Naphtali were afflicted, (because, being situated on the borders of Canaan, they were exposed to the invasions of the enemy,) but afterwards they were "filled with glory." How? By the preaching of the Gospel. Yes, the Savior by his presence and preaching bestowed glory on those sequestered spots.

How great a blessing is the Gospel! it may well be compared to a great light, for it sheds peace and joy around it. How melancholy is the condition of those who do not hear the Gospel! Well may they be said "to sit in darkness and the shadow of death." They sit on the very brink of hell. We sometimes see a smiling village, seated on the side of a verdant hill, full of neat cottages and blooming gardens. We feel disposed to exclaim, "O! what a lovely spot!" But if the Gospel is not known there, it is, in the sight of God and of angels, a dismal place; while on the gloomiest, darkest alley, where Christ's word is heard, they look with joy.

In vain, however, the great light shone upon the people of Zebulon and Naphtali; for the light did not shine into their hearts. Christ afterwards pronounced a woe

upon some of their cities, Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida, because they repented not.

Let us take warning from this. If God does not shine into our hearts, in vain for us are the splendors of the noonday sun; in vain the clearest, most affecting preaching; even the preaching of Christ himself.

And about what did Jesus preach? Repentance. And why did he preach "repentance?" Because sorrow for sin and turning from it is the beginning of true religion; but though it is the beginning, it must never cease upon earth. As Philip Henry said, "Repentance shall follow me to the gates of heaven." Rowland Hill also observed, that if he could regret anything when he entered heaven, it would be that he would no more shed the penitential tear. There is no true religion without repentance. "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." May God bestow it upon each of us!

February 18

Matthew 4:18-22. Christ calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

Was it not a high honor to follow the Lord Jesus from place to place, to hear his word both in private and public, and to behold his works of power and love? Whom did he call to enjoy this honor? Poor ignorant fishermen; these became his intimate companions, his bosom friends, and his holy apostles. Thus, our glorious Lord stained the pride of all human glory; as he had done before, by lying in a manger, and as he did afterwards, by dying on a cross between two thieves. How ill pride befits us, when the Lord of glory was so lowly! Ought we to look down upon anyone as beneath our notice, when the Son of God was so condescending? It is true that there are different stations in society, and some stations are counted high, and others low. It is well that this difference should exist; it is God's own wise appointment. But it is not his will that the rich should despise the poor; no, he has made us all of one blood, and he has commanded us to love each other as brethren.

Jesus might have chosen princes for his companions, or even angels, and sent them out as ministers of his Gospel; but he preferred to prepare poor fishermen for the glorious work. Before he sent them out, he taught them for three years, and afterwards the Spirit caused them to know in a moment various languages. Education is now an important preparation for the work of the ministry, as the wonderful gifts the apostles enjoyed are no longer bestowed.

These men were employed in an industrious manner when Jesus called them. When God called Moses, he was keeping sheep; Gideon, he was thrashing; Elisha, he was guiding the plough. Industry in our common callings is pleasing in God's sight; a Christian should not be slothful in business. Yet these men were

not so fond of their trade, or of their gains, as to prefer them to the service of Jesus. When he called, they left all and followed him. He did not bribe or entice them to come by promising them temporal rewards; he told them plainly that his design in calling them was to make them fishers of men. The net they would hereafter use would be the Word of God; the fish they would catch, the souls of men; and the reward they would obtain, a heavenly crown. They had often toiled in fishing, but they would toil more arduously in preaching; they would find men more hard to catch than fish, and the hatred of the world more terrible to bear than the winds and the waves. Christ has now many faithful fishermen, who, for his name's sake, are laboring to convert souls. Has their labor for us been in vain? Have we yet been caught in the Gospel net—willing captives? The poor fish, indeed, finds death in the net, but we find life in it. Well may the fish struggle and strive to escape; but it would be in us the height of folly; for the day in which a perishing sinner is caught in the heavenly net, is the first happy day of his existence; even the tears of the penitent are sweeter than the laughter of the world.

February 19

Luke 5:1-11. The miraculous catch of fish.

As these disciples had toiled all night and had caught nothing, it is probable they were in need of food when Jesus bid them launch into the deep. Was it only to supply their temporal wants that He caused them to enclose so large a multitude of fish? No! for though he delighted in relieving their bodies, he delighted more in helping their souls. By this wonderful catch of fish, he taught them many great truths—he taught them something of the greatness of his power; he taught them something of the blessedness of obedience. Peter had said, "At your word I will let down the net." How richly was his obedience rewarded! The apostles were to become fishers of men. Who could enable them to catch men, that is, to convert souls? None but Jesus. Though ministers preach—until God pours down his Spirit, no souls are converted; yet ministers, like Peter, should be obedient, and continue patiently to let down the net of the Gospel.

And should ministers only act thus? All Christians ought to exhort each other daily, and their common conversation should minister grace to the hearers. We ought to distribute tracts and Bibles, to teach children, to contribute our property to the support of missionaries, and to do whatever we can to benefit the souls of our fellow-creatures; yet our exertions will be vain, unless God adds his blessing. Let us then entreat God to put forth his great power and to prosper the feeble efforts which we make in obedience to his command.

The remembrance of this miracle should encourage us; and still more the remembrance of the sermon Peter afterwards preached, recorded in Acts 2, when three thousand were converted. Probably there were not three thousand

fish in the net. Lately God has done wonders in America, and in India, and in the islands of the South Seas; thousands have been converted. We must pray for the outpouring of the Spirit, and then sinners will be awakened, and will cry out earnestly, "What shall we do to be saved?"

What do you think of Peter's prayer after the miracle? "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." It was a good prayer, and yet it was a mistaken prayer. It was a good prayer, because it contained confession of sin. Peter was overwhelmed with a sense of his unworthiness; (that is the right spirit in which to make a prayer;) his heart was broken and contrite.

Perhaps he had indulged unbelieving, murmuring thoughts when toiling all night without success, and now he was overcome by the mercies of the Lord. This is true repentance—when we are grieved the more for our sins, on account of the Lord's goodness to us. Would not a person feel cut to the heart who had been suspecting another, and speaking against him; if suddenly he discovered that the man whom he counted an enemy had labored to serve him, and contrived schemes for his good. The discovery would fill him with remorse; he never could forgive himself for his ungenerous suspicions. Thus, "The goodness of God leads us to repentance." It leads us to feel our unworthiness and ingratitude.

But why did Peter desire so gracious a Lord to depart from him? Jesus knew the spirit in which he made this prayer, and he would not take him at his word. Though Peter said, "Depart from me," Jesus knew he sincerely loved him.

When the wicked say to God, "Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of your ways," He often takes them at their word; but He does not deal thus with the trembling penitent, but receives him in his arms, and bids him abide with him forever. "Fear not," answers the blessed Savior, "from henceforth you shall catch men." Instead of departing from Peter, the Lord never permitted Peter to depart from him.

February 20

Mark 1:21-28. Christ casts out a devil in the synagogue.

Though the Lord was continually working miracles, yet the miracle here related seems to have caused unusual amazement. And it might well do so, for in it Christ's power over the devil was displayed. One of the most mysterious subjects in the Bible is the manner in which devils possessed men in former times. It is so mysterious, that some have chosen not to believe it; but if we were to believe nothing that we could not clearly understand, how little we would believe! We would not believe in our own existence, for we cannot tell how we live, or what life is; yet we know that we do live. It is very reasonable to suppose, that when Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, that wicked spirit would make great

efforts to resist him. Some have thought that the people possessed with devils were in a state of insanity; but we find that the insane or lunatic are mentioned by Matthew, separately from those possessed with devils; therefore insanity is a different calamity from being possessed of devils. (Matthew 4:24.)

It is true that Satan even now enters into men's hearts, to fill them with wickedness; but it was not in this way that he had entered into the man in the synagogue; for had this man been filled with Satan, as Judas afterwards was, Jesus would have spoken to him as to a wicked man; but He did not rebuke the man, He only rebuked the devil.

The evil spirit had permitted the man to go to the synagogue. Had he known whom he would meet there, surely he would not have allowed him to go; for he seemed full of fear when he saw Christ. He cried out, "Let us alone; what have we to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Are you come to destroy us?" We know that devils believe and tremble. They cannot feel hope, but they can feel fear. They have no hope of growing happy, but they have a fear of becoming more miserable. Nor do they fear without cause; for their continual wickedness must render them more and more miserable throughout the ages of eternity, and must bring down upon them larger measures of God's wrath.

Even the praises of devils are abominable to Christ. When the evil spirit said, "I know you who you are, the Holy One of God," Jesus replied, "Hold your peace." He cannot bear the praises of those who hate him.

Let none think that while engaged in the service of Satan, the Lord accepts their praises. Though they may join in the responses at church, and say, "You are the king of glory, O Christ;" or repeat daily upon their knees, "Hallowed be your name," yet while they are living in sin, their services are displeasing to God. He is ready to silence their tongues with "Hold your peace." To the wicked, God says, "What have you to do to declare my statutes, or that you should take my covenant in your mouth, seeing you hate instruction and cast my words behind you?" (Ps. 50:16, 17.) Such is the dreadful condition of the children of the devil—of the unconverted, even now. What will it be hereafter? Judge what it will be from the malice the devils displayed towards this poor man. When commanded to come out of him, the devil first tore him, and (as Luke informs us) "threw him in the midst." Though obliged to obey the Lord of all, with what reluctance he left his victim! He made him feel his malice before he left him.

It is to the malice of such devils that the wicked are to be forever given up! These are to be their companions through eternity; no Savior's voice will penetrate the gates of hell to bid the raging fiends cease from tormenting. Let us consider the horrors of the future, and remember that these spirits now fill the air, and that Satan is called, "the prince of the power of the air." (Eph. 2:2.) This prince seeks now to deceive the soul, in order that it may be cast into hell forever. There will be no escape for us, if not washed in the blood of Christ, and sanctified by his

Spirit. What do we know of pardon and holiness? Have we obtained these precious gifts from Christ? He died that we might obtain them. Are there any of us, of whom it may be said, that "they are taken captive by the devil at his will?"

Jesus can command the devil to let us go, and he will do so, if we implore his help. But the devil will not let go his captives, unless he is compelled; he diligently watches over them, lest they would believe and be saved, accompanies them to church and follows them home. Yes, he follows them close, for he has a numerous train of servants at his command. But there is a place where he cannot come; the shadow of the Almighty's wings. O enter into the secret place of the Most High, and there you shall be safe; for He shall cover you with his feathers, and under his wings shall you trust; the young lion and the dragon shall you trample under foot. (Psalm 91)

February 21

Mark 1:29-39. The scene at sunset and sunrise.

It is our privilege to possess an account of the chief events of one whole day that our Savior passed upon earth. It was a Sabbath-day. In what labors of love was that Sabbath spent! In the morning Jesus was at the synagogue, where he cast out a devil. After the service he returned to Simon Peter's house, which was in the city of Capernaum. There he healed Peter's wife's mother of a fever. How much tenderness there was in the manner in which the miracle was performed—"He took her by the hand and lifted her up." At his touch the fever fled, and strength returned. After a fever, a person is always exceedingly weak; but this woman arose, and waited upon her deliverer. How gladly must she have waited on him by whom she had been restored! Has Jesus done nothing for us? Has he never healed us when we were sick? Are we anxious to serve him?

When the sun was set, the Sabbath was ended; for the Jewish Sabbath began on Friday evening, and ended on Saturday evening. Then numbers flocked to Jesus, and he healed them all. This was a painful and laborious service. Could Jesus behold unmoved the diseased creatures that were brought to him? Could he hear the ravings of those possessed with devils, and the cries of those in pain, without anguish of spirit? Impossible; for his heart was full of compassion. Some people turn away from the view of misery, because it gives them uneasiness; but such conduct is selfish. Our blessed Savior felt far more at the sight of suffering than we can feel; yet he was willing to bear the pangs of sympathy. In this self-denying compassionate behavior, he fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy. "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows," (Is. 56:3;) or as Matthew expresses it, "Himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses."—(Matthew 8:17.) He did this, not only by partaking of them, but by relieving them. He left us an example that we should follow his steps. We are not to give ourselves up to selfish enjoyment, while our fellow-creatures are groaning. No! we are to lay ourselves

out for their good; to visit the sick, to give them food and medicine, and kind words of sympathy, and to be ready, if needful, to nurse them. Thus shall we follow Christ, who bore our sicknesses.

The Lord Jesus rested when his day of labor was over, but he rose a long while before the dawn to pray. He thirsted for communion with his Father. We always find time to do those things in which we much delight. Those who say they have no time to pray, show that they do not love to pray. A Christian finds prayer as necessary for his soul, as food for his body.

The Savior's retirement was interrupted by his disciples, (and by the people of the city, as Luke tells us,) who said, "All men seek you." Was this addressed to him who was despised and rejected of men? But how few of those who sought him truly loved him! Thus it is now. Multitudes will flock to hear an earnest, interesting preacher; but only a few receive into their hearts the blessed Gospel he proclaims.

Jesus, however, could not stay in Capernaum; and he said, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also; for that is why I have come." He ever remembered the purpose for which he came into the world—not his own pleasure, but the glory of God in the salvation of sinners. For what purpose were we sent into the world? Our own amusement? O no! yet many live as if they were born merely to live in pleasure, and then to die like the beasts. We were born that God might be glorified by us and in us. A young lady was once converted by meditating on the first answer in the Assembly's Catechism. The first question is, "What is the chief end of man?" The answer, "To glorify God, and enjoy him forever." She felt that she was not fulfilling this end while spending her time in vain and worldly pleasures. By the grace of God she gave them up, and became an eminent Christian.

February 22

Matthew 4:23-25. Mark 1:40-45. The cure of the leper and of multitudes with diverse diseases and torments.

How full of labors of love was our Savior's life below! His principal object was to preach the Gospel, but he confirmed his word by various miraculous cures. These bodily cures represented the spiritual blessings he came to bestow. As he healed all manner of diseases without any exception, so he could forgive all manner of sins; for his blood cleanses from all sin. No disease was too bad for him to cure, no devil too strong for him to cast out; neither was any sin, if repented of, too great for him to forgive. He declared, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men."

We cannot wonder that crowds followed Him, when He bestowed such abundant temporal benefits. We know how men value the health of the body. But Jesus was far more anxious to save the souls than to heal the bodies of men, and therefore he sought for opportunities to preach his holy word. Probably one reason for his charging the leper not to mention the means of his recovery was, that he foresaw that if the miracle were made known, a still greater throng of diseased people would be collected, and that by this means his preaching would be interrupted. Disease of body must have appeared to him very light, compared to that disease of the soul which leads to destruction. We judge of diseases by their end, and not by their beginning. If we have seen a man die in torments from any disease, when we see the beginning of that disease in another we are filled with horror. Jesus had seen souls tormented in burning flames, and he knew that sin was the beginning of hell.

Of all diseases, none represents sin in a more striking manner than leprosy. In the first place leprosy was a POLLUTING disease. It rendered a man unfit to enter the temple, or even to associate with his fellows; as by God's law anyone who touched him became unclean. Thus sin unfits man from entering heaven, and for the society of spotless saints and angels.

Leprosy was also a SPREADING disorder. It covered a man with white scales from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot. Thus sin has defiled all our powers. It has disordered our affections, blinded our understandings, hardened our consciences, and perverted our wills.

Leprosy was a PAINFUL disease. The hands and feet of the poor leper are often eaten away, and in this crippled state he drags out a miserable existence. But what disease is as painful as sin—the swellings of pride, the tumults of passion, the anxieties of covetousness, the gnawings of envy, the gloom of unbelief? Some have been induced to pray for a new heart, not from fear of the wrath to come, but on account of the present misery of their unconverted state.

Leprosy also was INCURABLE. When the king of Syria in former times asked the king of Israel to cure Naaman his captain, the terrified monarch rent his clothes, saying, "Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man does send unto me to cure a man of his leprosy?" (2 Kings 5:7.) Sin also is incurable by MAN. None can forgive sins but God alone; none can overcome sins but God alone. Tears cannot wash out our past sins, nor can good resolutions keep us from committing them in time to come.

Having then a leprosy in our souls, let us imitate the poor leper of whom we read. Behold him falling at the feet of Jesus, beseeching his help. Are our prayers earnest like his? or do we ask for eternal blessings with less earnestness than a beggar asks for an alms?

The leper's prayer is remarkable—"If you will you can make me clean." He doubted, not the power of Jesus, but his mercy. Yet his mercy is as great as his power. It is true that by his power he stretched out the heavens, and laid the foundation of the earth. But it is also true that, "High as the heaven is above the earth, so great is his mercy towards them that fear him." Had this leper known the compassion of the Savior's heart, he would not have said, "If you will!"

Observe how tenderly Jesus felt for him—"Moved with compassion, he put forth his hand and touched him." He showed his condescension by touching the loathsome leper, from whom all others fled. Thus he encourages polluted sinners to approach him. He will not repel them, and say, "Stand by yourself, for I am holier than you;" He invites them to come near, and he offers by his holy touch to heal them. Fear not, penitent sinner; stay not until you are better; believe that Jesus will welcome you as you are. His blood is a fountain for sin and uncleanness; he himself stands by to wash you in it. Come to him to be healed; your cure shall be perfect; all your sins shall be forgiven and cast into the depths of the sea, and you shall be restored to the favor of God, and admitted into the heavenly Jerusalem.

February 23

Luke 5:16-26. The paralytic let down through the house-top.

The Lord Jesus, being prevented for a time from entering the towns by the immense crowds that collected wherever he went, retired into the wilderness. How blessed was the use which he made of his retirement! He gave himself unto prayer. And shall we venture to live without prayer—without much prayer—without fervent prayer! How can we hope for any peace of mind without prayer to the God of peace?

Soon, however, our Savior came into the towns again. It was in Capernaum that he healed the man sick of the palsy. He was then preaching in a house, and many of the wise and great were present, watching maliciously his words and actions.

It was on this occasion that four men, bearing a poor paralytic, unable to get in at the door, ascended to the top of the house, (probably by some stairs outside,) and let down their sick friend through the roof. Great surprise must have been felt by the crowd below when the bed descended in the midst. Our Savior was not annoyed by the interruption; he was always ready to help the afflicted, and rejoiced at beholding any proof of faith in his power. In this instance he seems to have perceived some spiritual desire in the man; for, instead of healing him immediately, he said, "Your sins are forgiven;" and, as Matthew relates, he said also, "Son, be of good cheer;" as if he regarded him with especial tenderness, as

a son, who mourned more for his sins than for his sufferings. This man was surely one of the broken-hearted ones that Jesus came to bind up.

But what do you think of the conduct of the friends of the paralytic? If they had not been very anxious about the recovery of the sufferer, they would have retired when they saw the crowd around the door; but they had set their hearts upon bringing him to Jesus, and they were ingenious in finding out a way. If we are as anxious to obtain spiritual blessings, as they were to benefit the sick man, we shall be ingenious too. We shall find time in almost any circumstances for prayer, and for reading the Scriptures.

Some pious prisoners were once confined in a dark dungeon, and only had light allowed for a few minutes at meal-time. How could they read the Bible? They used the light to read it, and they ate in the dark. What holy ingenuity they displayed! There are others who have used a like ingenuity in contriving means to bring sinners to Jesus. The last day will reveal how abundantly their pious plans have been blessed.

Jesus knew that his power to forgive sins was doubted by the enemies who surrounded him; therefore he inquired which was easier, to forgive sins, or to heal the man. He knew which they thought the easier—to forgive sins. Mistaken idea! It was so hard, that Jesus shed his blood, that he might procure this forgiveness. Little did his enemies know what it would cost him to be able to say, "Your sins be forgiven you."

The pardon He bestows is valued only by those who groan beneath the burden of sin. The great reformer, Martin Luther, soon after he had become a monk, fell dangerously ill. Though he had long sought for pardon, he was filled with terror at the prospect of eternity. It was then that an aged monk visited his cell, and reminded him of those words in the creed, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins."—"Believe," said the old man, "not only that the sins of David or Peter are forgiven, but that your own are pardoned." These words were a balm to Luther's wounded heart. He thought no more of gaining heaven by his own righteousness, but looked with confidence to the mercy of God in Christ.

February 24

John 5:1-9. The miracle at the pool of Bethesda.

Can we hear of this pool without being reminded of that fountain for sin which Jesus has provided in his Gospel? This pool was called Bethesda, which signifies "House of mercy." And has not Jesus opened a house of mercy in his Word? The poor sick people who sat near the water's side represent diseased souls, such as we all have by nature; only our souls are far more diseased than their bodies were—for some of them were blind, and others halt, and others

withered, but our souls are diseased in all their powers. Neither had they all been afflicted many years. Even the man who had been thirty-eight years sick had not been sick from his birth—but our souls have been diseased by sin ever since we were born!

The pool of Bethesda is not an exact image of salvation—for only the first one who stepped in it was cured. But what would become of sinners, if Christ's salvation were thus straitened? Blessed be God, the fountain of Christ's blood is opened to all sinners unto the end of the world. How much selfishness must have been displayed at the borders of this pool! how each man must have viewed his neighbor with an evil eye, fearing lest by another stepping in before him he would himself be deprived of a cure! How differently ought we to view our fellow-sinners! Their salvation will not hinder ours.

Yet in one respect we ought to imitate the sick people around the pool—in their earnestness. As they knew the first only would be cured, how patiently they watched around the pool, how eagerly they rushed in after the troubling of the water! We ought to seek God as earnestly as IF only one could obtain salvation; then not one would fail to obtain it.

It appears that Jesus was not known by these sick people. Had they known the great Physician was so near, what a cry would have been raised from a multitude of suffering lips! Jesus approached one of these pitiable objects. It was one who had been very long afflicted, who had been anxiously seeking a cure, and who had no friend to help him into the pool. Some person indeed had brought him to the edge of the pool; but not one had watched by him to plunge him in at the critical moment.

Jesus knew his desolate condition, and the bitter disappointments he had suffered. He selected him as a fit object on whom to display his power and mercy. The poor paralytic was not accustomed to the voice of kindness. It must have refreshed his weary spirit to hear Jesus inquire, "Will you be made whole?" Immediately he began to pour out his complaints into the ear of the compassionate stranger, hoping perhaps that he would obtain his help the next time the water was troubled. But there was richer mercy in store for him, than any man or angel could bestow; for by a word, Jesus restored him—suddenly, and perfectly.

That Savior knows the circumstances of all his creatures now scattered over the world; and we know that he pities those who have no friends to teach them the way of salvation, especially when they themselves are concerned about their own souls. He may let them remain for a time in distress and perplexity; but He will not let them perish in their ignorance.

February 25

John 5:10-16. Christ's interview with the restored paralytic.

We have in this history an instance of the bitter hatred of men to the truth. Why did the Jews accuse Jesus of having broken the Sabbath? Was it because they revered that day? By no means. We may judge of their respect for the Sabbath by their regard for the temple; and we know that they made it a den of thieves, and filled it with sheep, and oxen, and money-changers. They did not care in their hearts for the service of God. And had Jesus caused the paralytic to break the Sabbath? No! for though God had forbidden men to bear burdens on the Sabbath-days, He never intended that a sick man suddenly healed would not carry home his bed.

The reason the Jews objected to the action was, that they suspected who had cured the paralytic; and they were offended with the rebukes that Jesus had often given them in his sermons, and in his conversation. Holy men are generally watched in this way. Why have faithful preachers in later days been insulted? Because they interfere with the vices of men.

The restored cripple was unable to gratify the malice of the Jews, by informing them of the name of his deliverer. He knew it not. Must he not have longed to discover it? Soon Jesus afforded him the opportunity. He found him in the temple. We are glad to hear that the poor man went there. For thirty-eight years he had been unable to tread God's courts, and perhaps before that period he may have been unwilling; for, from the words of the Lord addressed to him, we have reason to fear he had been an ungodly youth.

This was the warning he received. "Behold you are made whole, sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you." It appears that his affliction had been sent as a punishment for early sins. All afflictions are not sent as punishments. Those of Job were trials of his faith. But they are often sent to those who know not God, that they may remember their sins and turn from them.

It was a heavy chastening that the paralytic had endured—an illness of thirty-eight years. At length he was delivered. What, if he should return to sin! how many have acted thus!—After vows and tears they have risen from their sick beds, to requite their God with black ingratitude. What must be the consequence of such conduct?—a worse thing will come upon them. Is there anything worse than a palsy of thirty-eight years' continuance? Let the lost spirits speak, who have spent but one hour in the flames of hell. How gladly would they exchange their place for the most suffering bed to be found on earth!

He who gave this warning was soon to taste the punishment of sin himself, and to know by experience that worse thing of which he spoke. In two or three short years Jesus would be extended on a cross, and nailed there for our sins, and would bear the weight of God's infinite wrath. By the blood he then shed, he is

able to save us from eternal woe. But those who go on in sin shall taste something worse than anything they have known on earth.

Are there any here who still love sin? Remember these words—"Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you." It is Jesus who utters them; He who has delivered sinners by his own death; HE, even He, entreats them not to continue in sin.

February 26

John 5:17-30. Christ's defense of himself before the Sanhedrin.

This is part of our Lord's defense of himself against the Jews. We know not in what place he made this defense. Some think he made it before the great council of seventy people, called the Sanhedrin; and others think He made it in the temple. But all must allow that he made it publicly to the great and learned Jews, who were his deadly enemies, and who even then sought to kill him. They wanted to find an accusation against him, and the accusation they now made was that of Sabbath-breaking.

The first sentence our Savior uttered in his defense is difficult to understand—Ver. 17. "My Father works hitherto, and I work."

What works did his Father work? He had made the world in six days, and had then rested. He had rested from creating, but not from preserving. God preserves man and beast continually. He is working in this manner on every side continually. Were he to cease from this work on the Sabbath-day, or on any other day, all creatures would sink into death; for it is God that preserves even the angels of heaven from death every moment. It is in Him we live, and move, and have our being. Jesus, in curing the paralytic, had done a work of this kind—he had renewed his life by imparting new strength to him. Thus the Jews were accusing him of sin for doing works which the Father was always doing, and which he also was always doing; for his Father and he were joined together in every work. Jesus, as well as the Father, had created the world, and he, as well as the Father, upheld all things by the word of his power; therefore he said, "My Father works hitherto, and I work." And why are the Father and the Son always thus united in their works? Because they are one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God.

The defense Jesus made of his work only brought fresh matter of accusation against him; because he had called God his Father, and thus had made himself equal with God. Now they not only accused him of breaking the Sabbath, but of the greater crime of blasphemy. And how did Jesus defend himself from the charge? Not by denying that He had said that He was equal with God, but by speaking of those great works which He would do, and which would show who

He was. Those great works are to give life, and to execute judgment. Who could do such works but God himself! Even at the moment Jesus was speaking, He was able to give spiritual life to dead souls; for he said, (verse 25,) "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear shall live." He has been doing this work ever since that hour. We do not see the dead souls arise, but Jesus does. He knows when he quickens a sinner who was dead in trespasses and sins. A time is approaching when his power will be publicly displayed as the Life, and as the Judge of the world, (verse 28.) "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth—those who have done good unto the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."

This is a dreadful declaration. It once awakened an aged sinner from the sleep of death. He went to the church where Joseph Milner preached, and heard this passage given out as the text. He heard no more, for the words took possession of his mind, and filled him with anguish. He sought the Lord, obtained forgiveness, and became as eminent for holiness as he had before been for iniquity. God alone knows all the conquests of his own word. Verses of Scripture which are heard by many with indifference, have, through the power of the Holy Spirit, given life to souls now rejoicing in the presence of God.

February 27

John 5:31-39. The defense continued.

It is supposed that Jesus at this time was standing in the presence of the great council of the Jews, called the Sanhedrin. He had been accused of having healed the paralytic on the Sabbath-day; and then of having made himself equal with God. Did he deny either charge? By no means; but he more fully declared his own glory as the Son of God. He brought forth his witnesses. His first, a great witness, was his Father who sent him. (See ver. 32.) "There is another that bears witness of me."

Yet He condescended to appeal to a human witness also, even to John the Baptist. He said, "You sent unto John, and he bore witness unto the truth." You have not forgotten what is recorded in John 1:19-23. "The Jews (that is, the chief men) sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask John, Who are you?" They came to him in the wilderness where he was preaching; and he took that opportunity of bearing witness to Jesus. He said, "There stands one among you whom you know not; he it is who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose." (Ver. 26, 27.)

How could the Jews resist this testimony? For a season they had rejoiced in his light; that is, for a time they had admired his preaching; yet they would not believe. John had now ceased to preach, for he was shut up in prison.

Jesus next described the different ways in which his Father witnessed to him. There were three ways—First, By enabling him to do miracles, such as healing the poor paralytic—those were "the works which his Father had given him to finish," mentioned in verse 42.

Secondly, (see verse 37.) His Father himself had borne witness of him, by speaking from heaven at his baptism, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Such a voice had never been heard at ANY TIME before, witnessing for the old prophets, nor had such a display of glory been seen. It was the excellent glory, as Peter calls the brightness of the Father. (2 Peter 1:17.)

Thirdly, The Father had borne witness to his Son, in the Scriptures, that is, in the prophecies. Jesus bade the Jews search the Scriptures; saying, "They are they which testify of me." (See ver. 39.)

Had not the Jews of old sufficient proofs that Jesus was the Son of God? And we also have abundant evidence of this important truth.

We have not heard John the Baptist preach, that burning and shining light, but we have heard other preachers speak of Christ with devoted affection.

We have seen no miracles wrought, no blind eyes nor lame feet restored; but we have seen greater works than these. We have seen miracles done upon the SOUL. Have we never known a person, who lived a wicked life, changed by the power of the Gospel into a holy creature? Is it not far more wonderful to see a man's mind changed than his body? None can make such a change but God. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then can they who are accustomed to do evil learn to do good." Had we seen a black man changed into a white man, we would not have seen so great a wonder as if we had seen a child of the devil changed into a child of God.

We have another witness—the Old Testament Scripture. It is filled with prophecies concerning Christ. Have you read them? See how Isaiah declares, that he shall be brought like a lamb to the slaughter—how Zechariah says he shall ride on a donkey, and be sold for thirty pieces of silver—how Micah foretells, he shall be born in Bethlehem; and how David in the Psalms predicts, that vinegar shall be given to him in his thirst, that his garments shall be parted, and his hands and feet pierced. The Jews, though they will not believe in Jesus, regard these prophecies as the word of God, and have kept them sacred for many ages. How can we disbelieve such proofs? And if Jesus be the Son of God indeed, and in truth, let us consider whether we are prepared to stand before his judgment-seat? Have we believed in him with our hearts?

February 28

John 5:40 to end. The defense concluded.

Thus ended the Savior's defense of himself before the chief Jews. These last verses we may call the application of the sermon. How forcibly could He speak to the conscience, who is himself like a two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow! (Heb. 4.) He knew that those to whom he spoke would not come unto Him. "You will not come unto me, that you might have life." And He knew why they would not. It was because they had not the love of God in their hearts. He said, (ver. 42,) "I know you that you have not the love of God in you." As Jesus was one with the Father, if men did not love God, they could not love Him. He was not such a Savior as they liked; he cared not for the pomps and vanities of the world, and he did not promise them as rewards to his followers—therefore men did not desire him for their Savior.

It is very important for us to consider this subject, because the same reasons cause men now to despise Christ. Why are they so careless about religion? Why do they treat the Bible as if it were not true? Is it because there is not proof enough? No! but because Jesus is too holy to suit the taste of sinners.

If we were to visit heathen countries we would find the people devoted to their idols—as the Scripture says, "mad upon their idols." (Jer. 50:38.) You have heard of the car of Juggernaut, in India. When it came forth, with what transports of joy it was viewed! Thousands traveled over sultry plains to attend it on its way; hundreds pressed forward to drag it along; some even threw themselves beneath its wheels, ready to be crushed in honor of the frightful idol that sat enthroned upon the ponderous machine. Why are people so fervent in the worship of idols? Because they imagine that these idols will indulge them in sin. The Roman Catholics show the same zeal in their religion of forms and ceremonies. They are ready to spend their money in decking images with flowers, and in illuminating the pictures of saints with candles. Men are willing to do anything to please God—but to give up their sins.

And why is it that they have no taste for a holy and spiritual Savior? Because they have a taste for the world. Why is it they do not love God? Because they love the world. Jesus pointed out this reason to his enemies. He said, "How can you believe, which receive honor one of another?" They cared for the opinion of their fellow men; therefore they would not come to a despised Savior.

But, O how foolish were they to prefer the honor that mortal man could give, above the honor that the everlasting God could bestow! What shame will overwhelm them at the last day, when even Moses, the prophet in whom they professed to trust, will disown them! Had they believed his writings they would have believed the Savior's words; for Moses had plainly declared, in Deuteronomy 18, that God would raise up a prophet like himself to be the

teacher of the Jews; and such a prophet was Christ. When they shall see the Lord appear in all his glory surrounded by his saints, and among them Moses and all the prophets, they will feel ashamed of their treatment of that blessed Savior. Would we enjoy true honor hereafter, we must now faithfully cleave to His despised name, and to His despised people. We must not inquire, "What will the world think of me, if I follow this command of the Lord Jesus?" but we must only ask, "Will God approve my conduct?"

February 29

Matthew 12:1-8. Christ defends his disciples when falsely charged with the breach of the Sabbath.

The Pharisees were so much inflamed against Christ, that now that he was in Jerusalem they sought eagerly to find some accusation against him, or his disciples. They particularly watched them on the Sabbath day; and now they thought they had caught them in a fault, because they observed them plucking ears of corn, and rubbing them in their hands, (as Luke informs us,) and eating, as they passed through some fields on their way to the synagogue.

It was particularly mentioned in the law of Moses, that men might pluck either corn or grapes as they went through fields or vineyards, and eat them while they were passing along, though they might not carry any away. Surely the Pharisees could not really have thought it was wrong in the disciples to satisfy their hunger; but there is nothing so foolish that malice will not say against the object of its hatred. What trifling and absurd accusations have been brought at all times against the people of God! It is a great trial to the followers of Christ to know that they are the subjects of criticism, and the butt of slander. Some are deterred from professing to be religious, by the fear that their conduct will then be ridiculed, and that they shall be blamed even when innocent. But why should this prospect alarm them? The reproaches aimed at them are intended for their Master. Is it not an honor to share in His shame? O that our enemies could never find greater cause to blame us than the Pharisees had on this occasion to blame Christ's disciples! Then indeed would we shine forth as the sons of God, harmless and without rebuke. With what meekness the Lord Jesus defended his disciples! he returned no railing accusation, but he mildly argued with his enemies. His example ought to lead us, when unjustly attacked, neither to give an angry retort, nor to preserve a sullen silence, but to endeavor, in a gentle spirit, to convince our opponents by forcible arguments.

These were the arguments Jesus offered. He said, "Have you not read what David did?" (1 Sam. 21.) Have we not read what David did? He once was fleeing from Saul, and was overtaken with hunger at Nob, where the tabernacle was then placed. In the tabernacle there was a table, on which twelve loaves, called show-bread, were placed every Sabbath, and when removed, were eaten by the

priests. Yet the priests gave David that holy bread, because they had no other to give him; and they were right in doing so; and even the Pharisees, when they had heard the history, had never blamed David for eating it. This was one of the Lord's arguments—if David might eat holy bread when he was hungry, might not the disciples pluck corn on a holy day, when they were hungry?

Another argument was this—the priests did much work on the Sabbath-day in the temple; they killed animals, and kindled fires, though the people in general were forbidden to do these works on the Sabbath-day; but the priests might do them when serving God in the temple. Jesus then declared himself to be greater than the temple; for not only God dwelt in his body as in a temple, but he was God—therefore his disciples might perform any works while waiting upon him. How this declaration must have exasperated and maddened the Pharisees! It teaches us, that on the Sabbath all works are lawful which are done in the service of Christ. We may use animals in his service, and to advance his kingdom. We may collect money for holy uses, or bestow it. We may write upon holy subjects, or distribute holy books. All these acts are like the services of the priests in the temple; they are done in honor of One greater than the temple.

But Jesus added one argument more—he quoted a verse from the prophet Hosea, well known to the Pharisees in the letter, but not in the spirit—"I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." God gave the Sabbath as a mercy, and mercy must never be forgotten on that day, in order to pay sacrifice or outward service. The hungry must be fed and the sick nursed. God does not wish any creature to suffer on that day. Whatever is necessary for our health, or for the health of others, may be done on that day. Mark relates, that Jesus added, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." The Sabbath was given by God to man for the benefit of his soul and body. Of course the soul is to be the most considered, because it is of the most worth. If any way of spending the Sabbath does good to our bodies, but hurts our souls, it is a cruel and not a merciful way. On the Monday morning we ought to observe whether we are more inclined to pray than before, for thus we may discover whether we have spent the Sabbath as its Lord would desire.

"The Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath-day." Jesus showed that he was Lord of the Sabbath, by afterwards changing the day from Saturday the seventh day, to Sunday the first day, because then he rose from the dead. We ought therefore upon that day to think much of our risen Lord. How many tears were dried, when angels first declared, "He is risen!" The joy then felt shall never pass away. Every returning Sabbath bids us rejoice again. It was on the Lord's day that the apostle John once heard a voice saying, "I am he who lives and was dead."

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).