

## A Devotional Commentary on the Gospels

Arranged for family devotions,  
for every day in the year

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(1802-1878)

**JULY 1**

**John 9:6-23. *Christ directs the blind man to wash in Siloam.***

There were many reasons that might have deterred the Savior from curing the blind man. It was the Sabbath-day—enemies were watching his actions, in the hope of renewing their accusations against him—the blind man did not ask to be healed, neither did the disciples plead for him. Jesus might have passed on without noticing the poor beggar, but He would not lose the opportunity of glorifying his Father. He knew that the restoration of the blind man would be a miracle that would attract public attention; because it was generally known in Jerusalem that the man had been blind from his birth. The *means* He used were peculiar to this occasion. The Lord made clay, and put it over the man's eyes, and then bade him wash in a pool. Who could have thought that clay could be used as a means of restoring sight? But God shows forth his power by employing the most unlikely means for performing his greatest wonders. His greatest wonder of all, the redemption of the world, was effected by the most unlikely means—the crucifixion of the Son of Man; and the *preaching* of the cross, though by some counted foolishness, is to them that are saved the power of God. But the man was not restored by the clay alone—he was commanded to wash in a pool called Siloam, which signifies Sent. If he had not obeyed the command he would not have obtained the blessing. Neither can sinners obtain pardon unless they obey the command to wash in the fountain of Christ's blood.

When this poor man had received his sight, he did not enjoy the privilege of beholding his benefactor. He did not know where to find him, and if he had met him, he would not have known him.

He soon found himself surrounded by enemies, and standing before the Pharisees to be judged. For what? Because he was a witness of the power of Jesus, whom they hated.

What could this poor man do? There was no one to answer for him; his

benefactor was not near to defend him, and his parents refused to say a word in his behalf. How did he behave in these difficult circumstances? With more courage than the apostles showed when first placed in similar peril.

When the Jews inquired, "What say you of him?" he boldly replied, "He is a prophet." Thus he was faithful to the truth as far as he knew it. God has promised "to him that has shall be given." Those who follow the convictions of their consciences shall receive more grace.

How ungenerous was the conduct of the beggar's parents! They showed no gratitude for the benefit conferred upon their son, nor were they willing to run any risk in order to shield their own offspring from disgrace, but left him to stand alone against the host of his enemies. When asked how he had obtained his sight, they replied, "He is of age—ask him." How little they thought those words would be recorded to their everlasting shame! They sought to escape disgrace; but they have incurred the deepest. They feared lest they should be put out of the synagogue; but they considered not the danger of being shut out of heaven. How the heart of the poor blind man must have sunk within him when he heard his own parents refusing to take his part! It is a heavy trial to pious children when their parents hang back, and say nothing in their defense; much more when they join with an ungodly world in reproaching them. At such a moment they have need to think of the words of the psalmist; "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." (Prov. 27:10.)

Many Christians can remember a time in their lives when they were desolate—when they "looked on their right hand, and beheld, and there was no man that would know them." Then it was, they looked to the Lord, and said, "You are my refuge, and my portion in the land of the living."

## July 2

### **John 9:24-34. *The Pharisees cast out the man who was born blind.***

The conduct of the Pharisees was exactly opposite to that of the man who was born blind. The Pharisees betrayed their *hypocrisy* in every word they uttered, while the poor beggar evinced in all his replies *sincerity*. They endeavored to cover their hatred against the Savior by an appearance of religion. They said, "Give God the praise—this man is a sinner." But the single and straight-forward character with whom they argued was not to be deceived by their affectation of piety. He reasoned well; he kept to *facts*. He said, "Whereas I was blind, now I see." This was a *fact*, a *convincing* fact. There are many who can meet all the arguments used against true religion by this declaration—"Whereas I was a dark, ignorant creature, a stranger to God and myself; now I know that he is gracious, and that I am a sinner. I rejoice in the light that his gospel has poured into my mind, and I am persuaded that His word is *truth*."

*Experience* strengthens the mind against the attacks of infidels, more than all the philosophy in the world.

The Pharisees became enraged when they found they could make no impression on the poor man's mind. The inquiry, "Will you also be his disciples?" offended their pride, and provoked them to use insulting language. But the beggar betrayed neither anger nor fear. He boldly yet calmly answered, "God hears not sinners." This was a scriptural sentiment—"The prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord." The prayers of *penitent* sinners are heard, but not the prayers of those sinners who are pursuing a course of iniquity. If Jesus had been an impostor, God would not have heard him, or enabled him to do miracles. The poor man did not know that Jesus was the Son of God, but he felt assured that he was a true prophet. He believed, as Nicodemus once did, that he was a teacher sent from God. But how much more courageous he was than Nicodemus! The ruler came to Jesus by night for fear of the Jews, his *equals* in power and authority—the beggar in open day acknowledged Him before his *superiors* in rank and station. Nicodemus had much learning; he was a master or teacher in Israel; the beggar having been born blind, could not even have learned to read. Yet Nicodemus knew less of the truth than the blind beggar.

God delights in showing his power by exalting those whom the world despises. A simple peasant has often a clearer view of the gospel than a learned, though sincere, inquirer. It is the Holy Spirit who opens the eyes of the understanding, and sometimes he enlightens with his brightest beams the most ignorant. If we would be truly wise, we must pray for *His* light.

The poor man was not suffered to go unpunished. The Pharisees, after first reproaching him in an unfeeling manner, saying, "You were altogether born in sins," proceeded to cast him out. Though they still permitted him to enter the synagogue, they forbade him to approach any of the congregation. Did no fears oppress his mind respecting his *temporal* provision? Unaccustomed to work, how could he *earn* his daily bread? or how could an excommunicated man hope to obtain alms from the passers-by? Thus he suffered the loss of all things for his Savior's sake. He is the *first* whose name is recorded as openly disgraced for confessing Christ. He is *the* first of a glorious train, some of whom suffered reproach, others imprisonment, and others death, because they would not deny Jesus. His case was singular, because he knew not the glory of the Being on whose account he was cast out. He knew not that he was the Son of God.

If we, who *do* know who Jesus is, should be ashamed of him before the world, how would the conduct of this poor beggar condemn us! May the Lord give us grace not to be afraid of a man that shall die, or of the son of man that shall be made as grass; but to fear him who stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth, even Him who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, and will raise *us* also, if we believe in Him.

For what is man, and what—his smile?  
The terror of his anger—what?  
Like grass he flourishes awhile,  
And then his place shall know him not.  
For fear of such an one shall I  
The Lord of Heaven and earth deny?

**July 3**

**John 9:35-38. *Christ finds the outcast.***

Even a human creature, though of an *evil* nature, is interested in one who suffers for his sake. If we knew of a person, who was plunged into trouble for defending us, would not every generous and compassionate feeling lead us to fly to his consolation!

How *much more* must the Son of God, who is infinitely good, have felt for one who was suffering for his sake! Did he not show that he cared for the blind man, by seeking him when cast out by his persecutors? It was easy for the all-seeing Shepherd to find the sheep that had been driven away. He had followed him with his eye, and had strengthened him with his grace, even when he appeared to have forsaken him, and to have left him to suffer alone. He who saw Nathaniel under the fig-tree, saw the once blind beggar when insulted by the Pharisees, and when cast out of the synagogue.

We are not told on what *spot* he found him, but we are told in what *manner* he spoke to him. Did the poor man recognize his benefactor? Though he had never seen his countenance, surely that voice could never be forgotten, which had pronounced the words, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam." It must have filled his heart with delight when he heard that beloved voice again. After all the bitter revilings that had been heaped upon him, how those kind accents must have soothed his feelings! Jesus had sought him, and found him, and he was come to bestow richer blessings upon him than at the first. He was come to manifest Himself to him. He asked, "Do you believe on the Son of God?" The poor man answered, "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" There was nothing but *ignorance* that hindered this man from believing. The Lord speedily removed it by saying, "You have both seen him, and it is He who talks with you." Then the poor man exclaimed, "Lord, I believe." Not satisfied with declaring his belief, he offered his homage—he worshiped the Son of God.

There are none of us who are in his state of ignorance. We cannot say, "Who is the Son of God, that we might believe on him?" We heard from our early childhood that *JESUS* was the Son of God. Though we have not seen him, and though he has not talked with us, yet we know that he died for us, and that he is

now living to intercede for us, if we come to God in his name. The beggar did not know so much as *this*, when he said, "Lord, I believe." Yet how hard-hearted and ungrateful we should think him, if he had not believed in the Being who had done so much for him! He knew that every word his benefactor uttered must be truth. Before he had seen him he had loved him, and had suffered for his sake; and when he did see him, and when he knew who he was, he adored him. Do we believe in the Son of God? Do we love him? Are we willing to suffer contempt for his sake? Then our first meeting with him will be joyful. God has promised that we shall behold our Savior, that we shall see him face to face, that we shall hear him speak. What will be our feelings when we actually look upon the glorious Being who died for us? What will be our joy, if he receive us with the same kindness which he showed to the poor beggar! In one moment, that man must have forgotten the reproaches and revilings of the Pharisees. It was worth enduring all their sneers, to obtain one gracious smile from the Lord of glory.

If ever we are exposed to the contempt of our fellow-creatures, on account of our fidelity to Christ, let us reflect on the time when we shall behold *His* countenance. Had the poor man treacherously betrayed his benefactor in the presence of the Pharisees, how would he have felt when he saw him, and knew that he was the Son of God! He would have desired, as Adam did, to hide himself, that he might not encounter his upbraiding glance.

Jesus will come again, with clouds, and every eye shall see him. And shall every eye beam with gladness when it beholds him? O no! all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. But *some* among all kindreds will rejoice. "They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the Lord, they shall cry aloud from the sea." (Is. 24:14.) May we act so faithfully during his absence, that we may be glad when He returns!

## July 4

### **John 9:39 to end. *Christ accuses the Pharisees of willful blindness.***

We know not in what circumstances the interview between Jesus and the poor outcast took place, whether it occurred when they were alone, or surrounded by Pharisees.

Soon afterwards, however, we find Jesus again addressing his enemies in these words—"For judgment am I come into this world." But did not he come into the world for *salvation*? Yes, salvation with judgment; that is, with *distinction* of character. He did not save *all*, but those only who received him. He came in such a form, and in such a way, that the world would not receive him. Had he come in splendor and glory, then *all* would have received him; but he came adorned with the beauty of *holiness*, and not with the pomp of kings. By coming in this manner he tried men's hearts. The aged Simeon, when he blessed the infant Savior,

declared, "He shall be a sign that shall be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

The proud and worldly-minded rejected the lowly Savior; the humble and contrite loved and followed him. The man who had just been cast out of the synagogue was one of those whom Jesus came to save. He knew he was a sinner, and that he needed a Savior. The Pharisees who cast him out, thought they were holy, and needed no Savior. The Lord drew the characters of the outcast and of his persecutors in these words—"For judgment am I come into this world; that they which see *not* might see, and that they which see might be made blind." The Pharisees rightly supposed that the Lord alluded to them in the latter part of this declaration, and they insolently inquired, "Are we blind also?" Jesus returned a mysterious answer—"If you were blind, you should have no sin; but now you say, 'We see;' therefore your sin remains." In one sense the Pharisees were blind,—in another sense they were not blind. They saw *not* the glory of God—but why? because they *willfully* shut their eyes.

God will condemn none of his creatures for ignorance which they cannot avoid. "If you were blind," said the Savior, "you should have no sin." But it is an aggravated case when a sinner shuts his eyes against the light, and at the same time declares that he sees. In such conduct, rebellion, and pride, and falsehood are combined. Yet this was the way in which the Pharisees acted. They were determined not to acknowledge Jesus to be the Son of God. Whether he cast out devils, or raised the dead—whether his lips poured forth divine wisdom, or his countenance beamed with celestial goodness, they had made up their minds they would not believe in him, and they would hinder the people also from believing. They would never renounce the high character they had obtained among men; they would still persist in saying, "We see." What would be the punishment of such wickedness? It would be this—the eyes they willfully shut would be sealed up in sevenfold darkness.

Those are in a dangerous state who refuse to think of religion; but those are in a much *more* dangerous state who have a *form* of religion, and *call* it *true* religion. They are the most bitter enemies to the truth. Careless sinners often have a kind of respect for devoted Christians, and express a wish that they resembled them; but those who put their trust in an outward show of piety, despise and hate real believers. While they willfully close their eyes against the spiritual doctrines of Christ, they confidently assert that *they* see, and *they alone*. What will be the astonishment of Pharisees and hypocrites when their eyes are opened, and they behold in another world the believers whom they despised seated with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, around the throne of God! Devils believe, and, in hell, wicked men believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Truths they *would* not understand in the land of gospel light, shall be clearly seen in the land of outer darkness, amid the fire that never shall be quenched.

July 5

**John 10:1-6. *The parable of the good Shepherd.***

The Pharisees had understood the meaning of the Lord when he spoke of *blindness*, but they did not understand the parable of the *good shepherd*. Had they known that *they* were represented under the figure of thieves and robbers, how great would have been their indignation! Yet such indeed they were, because they robbed God, for they destroyed the souls of his people by their false instructions. They loved to feed on the flesh, and to clothe themselves in the fleece of the sheep, but they cared not for the flock. They sought their own gain, and their own reputation, but not the glory of God.

What is meant by their climbing over the wall into the sheepfold, instead of entering by the door? The door represents Christ. The Pharisees did not come in by the door, for they did not believe in the Savior. But who is the shepherd of the sheep? How many little children could answer, "Jesus is the good Shepherd!" Some could say, "He is *my* shepherd." They know He is *their* shepherd, because they love him.

How did Jesus show he was the true shepherd? By his manner of *coming in* to the fold, and by his manner of *going out*. He did not climb over the wall, as thieves and robbers do, but entered by the door, *openly* declaring that he was the Son of God. "To him the porter opens." Does not the porter represent the prophets? Christ was the Shiloh of whom Jacob had spoken nearly two thousand years before, and the Lamb of God to whom John the Baptist had lately pointed.

He showed he was the Shepherd of the sheep by his manner of *going out*. He *led* his flock. He called them by their names, according to the custom of shepherds in the East; when he called them, he went *before* them. None but the true shepherd *could lead* the sheep; strangers would have been forced to *drive* them. It is very interesting to behold an eastern shepherd going before his sheep and leading them to their pastures. His flock know the voice of their own shepherd, and would not obey the call of any other.

Nathanael was one of the sheep of Christ. When Jesus saw him, he said, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit." Thus he showed he knew him. He was like a shepherd calling his sheep by its name. Did Nathanael hear the shepherd's voice? Yes, he replied; "You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." The man born blind was another of Christ's sheep. When the shepherd said to him, "Do you believe on the Son of God?" he soon replied, "Lord, I believe." Have we heard the voice of the shepherd, calling us to follow him to the green pastures? None but his sheep hear that voice. They hear it sounding in the depths of their hearts, saying, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." They listen to the voice, and say to their own souls, "Return unto your rest, O my soul." They feel safe while they

follow their Shepherd. Each says to Him, "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk." (Ps. 143:8.) The poor helpless sheep cannot tell which is the path that leads to glory, but his shepherd can. After passing through some dark valley, the sheep says, "When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, you knew my path." (Ps. 142:3.) The further the sheep goes in the way, the more trust he feels in his shepherd; and when he comes to the edge of the last valley he is able to say, "Though I pass through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." We know what lies beyond that valley—Mount Zion. It is to that fair mountain the shepherd conducts his flock.

But while other shepherds are of a different *nature* from the sheep they tend, the good shepherd has taken on him the nature of his flock. "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters." (Rev. 7:17.) Having fed, and led them upon *earth*, he will feed and lead them in *heaven*. We shall never cease to require a shepherd's care. It is a delight to those who love Jesus to think that He will always be their shepherd and they his sheep.

## July 6

### **John 10:7-13. Christ explains the parable of the good shepherd.**

We are thankful to the Lord for having explained the parable of the good shepherd. Most parts of it can be interpreted with certainty, because they have been explained by the great Teacher.

Nothing can be plainer than the words, "*I am the door of the sheep.*" Jesus is the gate of the fold. No man can come to the Father but by him. He is the way to God. He offered himself as an atonement for our sins, and by faith in that sacrifice we can be saved. There are *other shepherds* besides Christ, (for his ministers are his under-shepherds,) but there is no *door* but him.

What do these words signify—"All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers?" Were the prophets thieves and robbers? No! the true prophets bore witness to Jesus; they were his *under-shepherds*; they entered by the *door* and fed the flock. This is the promise made to a faithful minister and to every true believer. "By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."

But though there are other shepherds *besides* Christ, there are none *like* him. None but Jesus could say, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." God only can bestow *natural* life, and He only can bestow spiritual life. How wonderful are the *means* by which he bestows it! by laying down his own life.

In order to describe what he came to do for his sheep, He enlarged his parable, and related a circumstance which often occurs in pastoral countries.

"He who is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches them, and scatters the sheep."

The Pharisees are called by another name in this part of the parable. They had been compared to *thieves*, and to *strangers*, but now they are compared to *hirelings*. In what did they resemble hirelings? In their want of love to the sheep. How did they betray their want of love? By fleeing at the approach of danger. It is true they could not by dying save the sheep. Why then did they not seek the protection of Him who *could*? This was their crime—they drove the sheep away from their only Savior, their true shepherd. The Pharisees had tried to drive the blind man away from him, but they had not been able—they had only driven him closer to his shepherd.

Jesus cares for the sheep, and for every lamb in the flock. He found that poor blind man, and gathered him in his arms, and carried him in his bosom. For those who are just beginning to believe in Christ are weak like lambs, although they may have lived many years in the world. We have a shepherd who cares for his sheep. He knows that many of them have been *scattered*. There are people at this moment who feel that they are sinners, and long for pardon, but no one has taught them to look to Jesus. The good shepherd knows where they are, and he says, "I will seek out my sheep, and I will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day." (Ez. 34:12.) Has this Shepherd sought us, and found us? Can any of us say,

Jesus sought me when a stranger,  
Wandering from the fold of God;  
He, to rescue me from danger,  
Interposed his precious blood?

## July 7

### **John 10:14-21. Christ concludes his discourse concerning the good shepherd.**

In the conclusion of our Lord's interpretation of his parable there is no allusion made to the Pharisees. The *only* subject dwelt upon is the Good Shepherd's love for his sheep. Those who love their Shepherd must take particular delight in dwelling on this part of the Lord's discourse.

When Jesus said, "I know my sheep," he meant to teach us that he knew them to

be *his* sheep, and loved them with parental affection—yes, with more than a mother's tenderness. A woman *may* forget her babe, but Jesus says to his church, "I will not forget you." And have the sheep any affection for their shepherd? Yes, they return his love. If *he* knows their *names*, *they* know his *voice*; if he *leads* them out, they *follow* him—"I know my sheep, and am known of mine."

The Savior makes use of a wonderful comparison to give us some idea of the intimate union that exists between the good shepherd and his sheep. The sentence would be better understood if read thus—"I know my sheep, and am known of mine, *even* as the Father knows me, and as I know the Father," (ver. 14, 15.) What proof has the shepherd given of his love for his sheep? The greatest that could be given—"I lay down my life for the sheep."

When the Savior spoke of his own death, what painful scenes must have risen before his view! The agony in the garden, the insults in the judgment-hall, the ignominy on the cross. But with these painful thoughts there was associated an overwhelming joy—the thought of the numbers he should save by his sufferings. When he uttered these words, "*Other* sheep I have, which are not of this fold," what an innumerable multitude of beloved children must have been present to his mind! for even at that moment he knew them all by name. Those *other* sheep were the Gentiles—they were then heathens. Thousands were bowing down to idols, slaughtering their enemies, and reveling in sin—and millions were yet unborn; yet the Savior called them *his* sheep. He knew they would believe when they heard of his love. Did he think of *us* when he said, "Other sheep I have?" for we are *Gentiles*. If *we* are now in his fold, if *he* is now our shepherd—then we may be assured that he thought of *us* also, when he said, "Other sheep I have; them also I must bring."

After declaring his *own* love for his sheep, He revealed the *Father's* love also. How much the Father must love the flock, if He loves the Son, because he died for them! This is not the *only* reason of his love for his Son, but it is *one* reason. He does indeed love the flock; He has proved it by a wonderful act. "The Father *sent* the Son to be the Savior of the world." "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and *sent* his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:10.)

The Son also loved us, and was willing to come—for it is written, "Christ also has loved us, and has given himself for us an offering, and a sacrifice to God." (Eph. 5:2.)

Yet this Savior, so full of love, was spoken of by his creatures in this dreadful manner. Some said, "He has a devil, and is mad." How great was the patience of God, to permit those to live a moment longer who had uttered such an expression! It has been recorded in the Holy Scriptures, and will never be forgotten.

But how many since this discourse was written have felt as they read it, "Truly this was the Son of God! How precious are his words! How sweet are his promises! May the heavenly shepherd own me as his sheep at the last day!"

**July 8**

**John 10:22-30. Christ declares that he and his Father are one.**

The feast of the dedication was not one of the three feasts ordained by *God*, but a feast instituted by *man*, to commemorate the purification of the temple after Antiochus Epiphanes, a heathen king, had defiled it by idols. This feast, however, was observed by Jesus; hence we may conclude that he does not *disapprove* setting apart days for the remembrance of special mercies.

As it was winter, the Lord taught in a part of the court of the temple that was covered in and sheltered from the weather. His enemies came to him, *pretending* to desire to know the truth—"If you be the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus, however, knew their malicious design. He knew they sought to accuse him of blasphemy before the Sanhedrin. The answer that he made was not that which they expected, for he told them *first*, not who *he* was, but what *they* were. He said, "You are not of my sheep." He did not tell them plainly that they were the thieves, the strangers, and the hirelings, described in the parable; but he did tell them plainly, that they were not *the sheep*.

Christ knows his own sheep; the world cannot distinguish them from wolves in sheep's clothing, but it is enough, if their shepherd knows they belong to Him. However the flock may be scattered, not one of them shall ever be lost. Jesus knew that great efforts would be made to steal, and kill, and destroy them, but that all these efforts would be vain. He promised, "They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." The Pharisees had sought to pluck the poor man, born blind, out of his shepherd's hand—to arguments and threatenings they had added insults and injuries; but he had refused to hear their voice, or to follow them.

Do we belong to the little flock? then Satan will seek to pluck *us* out of the Savior's hand. We know not in what *manner* he will seek to separate us from our shepherd, for Satan has *many* devices. In the histories of the saints recorded in the word of God, we find instances of his temptations. Satan attempted to induce Job to forsake his shepherd by severe afflictions—he endeavored to drive away Peter by the fear of man, and to allure Moses by the riches of Egypt; but he never succeeded in plucking one sheep out of the shepherd's hands,—and he never will. In the last prayer Jesus offered up in the presence of his disciples, He said of them, "These that you gave me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition." Judas was not one of Christ's sheep; if he had been one of

them, he could not have been destroyed by Satan's power.

And why can neither man nor angel destroy one of the sheep? Because their shepherd is God. Jesus is the shepherd, and the Father is the shepherd, and yet there is *one* shepherd; for Jesus said, "I and my Father are one." The shepherd who gave his life for the sheep is He whom Israel worshiped in days of old, saying, "It is *He* that has made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture."

The glorious Creator is that tender shepherd who carries the lambs in his arms, and gathers them in his bosom.

**July 9**

**John 10:31 to end. *The Jews attempt to stone Christ for saying he was the Son of God.***

What meekness our Savior showed when the wicked Jews took up stones to stone him! How touching was his appeal—"Many good works have I shown you from my Father; for which of these works do you stone me?" He might make the same appeal to us now. When we neglect, forsake, and disobey Him, he might say to us, "I have bestowed on you many gifts—I have made you many promises—I have passed over many transgressions—for which of these acts of kindness do you thus treat me?" What could we reply? Should we not be obliged to own that we were ungrateful, hard-hearted creatures?

But Jesus, by his affecting speech, did not soften his enemies, and He next used powerful arguments. He alluded to a passage in the 82nd Psalm, in which God speaks to the kings and rulers of the earth under the name of *gods*. "I have said, You are gods." And why did he give them this name? Because both kings and priests were anointed, and thus made types of *Christ*, who is *the Anointed*. The word Christ means "anointed." These earthly princes were placed in authority, and thus also made types of the Son of God, to whom all power is committed. Therefore God spoke to them in these words—"I have said, You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High;" but because they abused their authority by oppressing the poor, these words were added, "You shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes."

These kings, rulers, and priests, were only *types* and *shadows* of the Son of God, who is alone *worthy* to possess all rule, authority, and power. Now the argument Jesus used with the Jews was this—"If those who only *shadowed* forth my greatness, were called gods, how much more must I be the Son of God?" Christ called himself one whom the Father had sanctified, and sent into the world. By "*sanctified*," he meant "set apart" for the office of priest and king. The Father appointed him to be our priest and king before the foundation of the world, and in

the fullness of time he sent him forth. "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!"

But no arguments could convince the Jews that Jesus was the true Messiah, because their hearts were set against him; therefore he went into a retired place beyond the river Jordan, where John had baptized long before his imprisonment.

This spot must have been very interesting to some of the disciples; for it was there that two of them had first beheld the Lamb of God, and had followed him to his own abode. (See John 1:28.) The children of God love the place where first their hearts were opened to receive the truth.

How refreshing the season passed in this retreat must have been to the Savior's wearied frame and harassed spirit! He had the joy of bringing some souls into his fold; for it is written, "Many believed in him there." The preaching of John had prepared the way for the reception of Christ. After ministers are dead, their past labors are often blessed; and they are joined in the world above by souls born again through their word *after* their own decease.

## July 10

### **Luke 13:23-30. *Christ describes the misery of those who shall be shut out of His kingdom.***

Those who lived when the Lord was upon earth enjoyed the great privilege of asking him questions. Who would not wish to share it! It was one, however, that might easily be abused. Many asked the Lord unprofitable and curious questions. This inquiry, "Are there few that shall be saved?" seems to have been made by one who was not earnest in seeking to be saved *himself*. For the Lord, instead of replying to the question, addresses an exhortation to his hearers—"Strive to enter in at the strait (or narrow) gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." But did not the Lord once say, "Everyone that seeks finds?" This promise applies only to the *present time*; there is a period when none who seek will find. The Lord described that period in a parable—"When once the master of the house is risen up, and has shut to the door, and you begin to stand without and to knock, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us.'"

That period has not *yet* arrived—the door stands open, the master invites, entreats, implores us to enter, and to partake of his glorious feast. But if we disregard his entreaties, he will suddenly shut to the door, and shut us out forever. Those outside will use arguments to induce the Lord to open the door. Some, who have been his companions upon earth, will say, "We have eaten and drunk in your presence;" and some, who have listened to his discourses in their own cities, will say, "You have taught in our streets." If we die in our sins, it will be of no use for us to say at the last day, "We have lived with holy people; we

have been instructed by holy ministers."

There are two circumstances that will increase the anguish of those *Jews* who will be shut out of the kingdom of God. They will see their own forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their own prophets, sitting down at the heavenly feast. It will seem hard to them not to be admitted into the presence of their own kindred. And will it not seem hard to many other ungodly people, when they behold a father, or mother, a brother, or sister, sitting down at the supper of the Lamb, and they themselves thrust out! On earth they were ever welcome at their father's table, but even a pious father will have no power to gain admission for an unconverted child into Christ's presence.

Another circumstance that will aggravate the disappointment of the unbelieving Jews, will be this—they will see Gentiles whom they despised, flocking from the east and west, the north and south, into the new Jerusalem, while they are forbidden to enter. And will it not increase the disappointment of those who live in this *Christian* land, if they should see those who were brought up in *heathen* countries, saved, when they are lost?

When we were little we were taught to pray to God; we heard of heaven and hell; we lisped the name of Jesus, as soon as we could speak. There are many in distant lands who were taught in *their* childhood to bow to frightful idols, and to delight in deeds of cruelty; yet some of these have turned to God, and will go to heaven; and what if *we* should not go there! Then, the last would be the first, and the first last. May God of his infinite mercy save us from the great guilt of rejecting his gospel!

## July 11

### **Luke 13:31 to end. *Christ replies to Herod's threatening.***

The Savior showed his abhorrence of Herod's character by the name which he gave him, "a fox." The manner in which Herod had treated John the Baptist, rendered him deserving of the name of fox. He had once listened to his preaching, and shown him respect; but had afterwards imprisoned and basely murdered him. The different natures that God has bestowed upon the animals are intended to represent the various characters of men. The children of Satan resemble wolves, bears, and foxes, and all manner of voracious birds and loathsome reptiles; while the children of God are like the gentle sheep and the harmless dove.

But the threats of Herod did not alarm the Lord. Though the Pharisees said, "Herod will kill you," yet He who knew all things, knew the tyrant *would* not kill him. And why not? Because *that* hour was not the *time*, nor *that* spot the *place* of his death. The Savior knew *when* He should die. He prophesied that He should

live a few days, that is, a short time longer, and on the third day be *perfected*, or rendered complete. In this mysterious language, He alluded to his death—by death He was perfected, or rendered complete as an atoning priest. In *death* He offered that sacrifice which atoned for the sins of his people, and with that sacrifice He appeared in the presence of God for us. Jesus knew *where* He would die. He said, "It cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem." He did not mean to say, that *no* prophet had perished elsewhere, but that *most* prophets had been slain in that wicked city. Did the prospect of his death, with all its attendant horrors, excite angry feelings in his bosom? Instead of expressing anger, He burst forth into the most tender lamentations over the city of his murderers. How touching are the words—"How often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen does gather her brood under her wings, and you would not!"

In the Old Testament the Lord compared himself to an *eagle*, bearing her eaglets *on* her wings to a place of safety. But in this place He compares himself to a *hen* seeking to guard her little ones *beneath* her wings, from the birds of prey hovering in the air. How suitable are both these comparisons! When Israel was in Egypt, God delivered him from his enemies with the strength of an eagle, by carrying him into Canaan. But when Israel was in the promised land, He promised to guard him with the fond care of a hen, from the enemies that threatened to devour him. When we are in trouble, God is like an eagle in delivering us; and when we have been delivered, He is like a hen in keeping us from evil. How many blessings we possess at the present moment! But there are many dangers on every side. If we take shelter beneath the wings of our God, no evil shall overtake us. But if we refuse to come to Him who calls us, then we shall fall a prey to our enemies. Satan and all his angels are like birds of prey hovering in the air, longing to devour us. But Jesus will preserve his people from their malice. We live in a world full of trouble and temptation, but there is a refuge for us. Here is a prayer for a soul that feels its own helplessness, and dreads the power of its enemies—"Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me; for my soul trusts in you; yes, in the shadow of your wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast." (Ps. 57:1.)

## July 12

### **Luke 14:1-11. *Jesus Christ reproves the ambitious guests.***

The account of the healing of the man with the dropsy reminds us of the healing of the man with the withered hand. It was on the *Sabbath-day* that Jesus performed both these miracles—but the *places* in which He wrought them were *not* the same. The withered hand was healed in a synagogue; the dropsy was cured in a Pharisee's house. On both occasions many of the Lord's bitter enemies were present. But no circumstances could restrain the compassionate Savior from showing mercy to his suffering creatures. Neither did the displeasure

He excited by healing the man with the dropsy prevent Him from reproving the proud behavior of the company.

In the East, it is still the custom for guests to occupy seats that mark their degree of rank. Each person, as he enters, seats himself in the place that he thinks he is entitled to fill, and often he takes a higher place than the company consider to be his due. But the master of the feast has the power to desire him to move either to a higher or lower place. The Pharisees showed a great anxiety to occupy the most honorable seats. Our Lord openly censured their conduct, and alluded to one of Solomon's proverbs, (25:6,) an authority that they professed to revere. There it is written, "Put not forth yourself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men; for better is it that it should be said unto you, Come up here, than that you should be put lower in the presence of the prince whom your eyes have seen."

Jesus exposed the folly of the Pharisees' conduct. It is foolish, as well as sinful to exalt ourselves. Some worldly people put on the *appearance* of humility, in order to attract notice and admiration. But the true Christian desires not only to *appear*, but to *be* humble. After having lain low at the foot of the cross, can he go forth desiring to be admired in society?

What are *our* feelings in company? Are we highly elated when noticed, and deeply mortified when overlooked? Do we love to be first? Do we envy those who are more regarded than ourselves? This was the spirit of the Pharisees. It is not the spirit of Christ. There are many people who do not openly contend for places of honor, who are secretly thirsting for admiration. The children of God do not indulge this feeling, but strive and pray against it. The rule of their conduct is, "Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another." (Rom. 12:10.)

## July 13

### **Luke 14:12-14. Christ advises his host to invite the poor.**

With what faithfulness the Lord acted towards the Pharisee who had invited him to his house! It appears that the entertainment was splendid, and the guests rich and honorable. But it was not such a feast as the Lord approved. He knew the motives which led the rich Pharisees to invite their neighbors—it was the hope that they should be invited again. This was a selfish and sordid motive. In the East, when an animal was killed, it was necessary to eat it *immediately*. The covetous invited none to partake of their dinner who would not be able to return the favor; but the charitable often called in the poor and afflicted, or sent portions to their dwellings. Job appealed to God, saying, "If I have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless has not eaten thereof." And Nehemiah on a day of rejoicing said to the people of Israel, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink the

sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared." In this country, many benevolent people, instead of giving feasts to the poor, contrive other means of giving them relief and pleasure. It is the *spirit* and not the very letter of the counsel that ought to be followed.

But some may inquire, Is it wrong to invite our friends and kindred to a feast? We know that in every part of Scripture the joyful meetings of brethren and neighbors are spoken of without censure.

But no feasts impart so much happiness as those given to the poor. Rich guests often come with reluctance, and depart without thankfulness. But the poor assemble with delight around the well-spread board, and go away blessing the bountiful hand that spread it. They enjoy but few pleasures, and they meet with but little kindness. It is in the power of the rich to cast a beam of light across their dark path, and to make them for a short season to forget their sorrows. To invite the poor is pleasing to the Lord. Among those gathered from streets, and lanes, and highways, and hedges, there may be a Lazarus whom we shall meet again at the heavenly banquet. It will be pleasant when we meet to feel that we honored him upon earth as the saint of the Lord. There are no doubt wicked people to be found among the poor—but the kindness of the rich often opens their hearts to receive instruction. There are pious rich people who devise means to render the feasts they give profitable to the *souls* of their poor guests, as well as refreshing to their bodies. That venerable reformer and martyr, Hooper, while he was bishop of Gloucester, entertained a certain number of the poor every day with a dinner of whole and wholesome meats in his great hall; but first he examined them in the creed, the Lord's prayer, and the ten commandments; nor would he himself sit down to table until his poor guests had been served.

How rejoiced we ought to be at every discovery of the will of God! If the world in general valued his approbation, there would not be so many entertainments as there now are given to the *rich*, and there would be many more given to the *poor*. Those words, "You shall be blessed," sound very sweetly in the ear of a true disciple of Christ. This is what he desires—"to be blessed." Because the poor cannot recompense him for the kindness he shows them, the Lord will remember it—even as a father takes upon himself to reward every service rendered to his *infant* children.

Let us beware of thinking that anything we can do *deserves* a reward. No, that is impossible. When we have done all, we have done only what it was our duty to do. The excellent bishop, of whom we have just spoken, though he had given his goods to feed the poor, and though at length he gave his body to be burned, was so far from trusting in his good deeds for salvation, that, when brought to the stake, he was heard to pray thus—"Lord, I am hell, but you are heaven; I am a sink of sin, but you are a gracious God, and a merciful Redeemer."

It will be easy for God to recompense his children for all they have done for him

upon earth. One glimpse of his countenance will more than compensate for the martyr's acutest pangs. But how shall his saints recompense *Him* for what He has done for *them*? He found them poor, and blind, and miserable, and fed them with heavenly bread, even with that living bread which came down from heaven. It is this thought that makes them so anxious to please Him.

**July 14**

**Luke 14:15-24. *The parable of the great supper.***

Our Lord concluded his conversation at the Pharisee's house by a parable. He had said that those who invited the poor to their houses should be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. This declaration induced one of the guests to exclaim, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." Then Jesus related a parable to show how unwilling the rich men were to come to the heavenly feast. This parable was exactly suited to the company present, and was intended as a warning to the Pharisees, and to all worldly-minded people, whether rich or poor.

The man in the parable invited his rich neighbors to a feast. It is the custom in the East to send an invitation some weeks before the time appointed, and when the day arrives, to desire the servants to remind the guests of their engagement. Nothing can be more insulting than to refuse to come after the feast has been prepared, excepting there be some real hindrance. The excuses made by these rich men were of a frivolous nature. Neither sickness nor the death of friends detained them at home. They could not have *foreseen* those events; but it showed great contempt to purchase land or oxen, or to contract a marriage at the time they had agreed to come to the feast. It would have been far better to have refused at *first*, than to accept the invitation, and then to make excuses, when the feast was prepared and the master was waiting.

Like the rich men in the parable, the Pharisees *professed* to be willing to come to God; but when the blessings of the Gospel were offered to their acceptance, they began to make excuses. They were hypocrites, because they pretended to be religious, while their hearts were set upon this world. Would the insulted master of the feast permit his plenteous provisions to be wasted, or his table to remain unoccupied? By no means. He sent his servants into the streets and lanes of the city, and directed them to summon the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind. Thus, when the self-righteous Pharisees refused to listen to the Gospel, the Lord encouraged publicans to accept its blessings.

Afterwards the master of the feast sent his servants into the highways and hedges, to gather more guests for the feast. Who are the wanderers in the streets and lanes of the city, and who are those in the highways and hedges? Do not the former represent the Jews, and the latter the Gentiles? For the Gospel

was first preached at Jerusalem, but afterwards among the Gentile nations, even among us who live in these northern isles. What were our forefathers doing when Jesus uttered his parable? They were worshiping frightful idols among their forests of oak. But even then the Lord had purposes of mercy towards those poor savages.

But why did the master declare that none of those men who *first* were bidden should taste of his supper? Had they not refused to come? What need was there to affirm that they should not come? Do not the words seem to indicate, that a time would arrive when those who had made excuses would repent of their folly, and seek to be admitted to the feast? When they saw the poor wanderers from the city and the country, clothed in white robes, surrounding a sumptuous table—when they descried the splendid lights, and heard the joyful sound of music and singing, they would change their minds, and desire to join the glorious company. But they would find the door shut against them. When they knocked, they would hear a voice within, saying, "I know you not." They would not be permitted even to *taste* the supper, of which they had once been invited to partake.

And is there any despiser of Christ and his Gospel who will not change his mind when he beholds, afar off, the glories of the blessed, in the kingdom of God? Yes, when all his earthly delights are perished, he will wish for a place at the heavenly banquet. But he will find that no place is reserved for him among the happy guests. O what will then be the bitterness of his disappointment, and the agony of his regrets! Let us now obey the Savior's gracious call, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of my wine, which I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live, and go in the way of understanding."

## July 15

**Luke 14:25 to end. *Christ declares to the multitude that his disciples must encounter great difficulties.***

As the Lord Jesus knew all hearts, he could perfectly adapt his discourse to the state of mind of his hearers. We have lately listened to his conversation at a Pharisee's table, and heard his alarming warnings to those who *despised* his Gospel. Now we behold him surrounded by a different class of hearers.

The multitudes did not openly despise the Savior, they admired him, and many of them wished to become his disciples; but they were not prepared to encounter difficulties, or to make sacrifices for his sake. Therefore the Savior, turning towards them, set before their eyes the great trials which his disciples must expect to suffer. Parents and kindred would persecute them, and rulers would condemn them to death. How ought they to act when placed in these distressing circumstances? None can suppose that Jesus disapproves of natural affection; the meaning of his declaration is, "Those who would follow me must not yield to

the persuasions of their dearest friends, or to the threatenings of the most cruel tyrants, but must be ready to forsake all, and to cleave to me alone." In our days, converted Jews and converted Brahmins have resisted the tenderest entreaties of affectionate mothers and devoted wives, who would have turned them from the faith. And even in our Christian land, there are many instances of children who have endured much unkindness from their own parents, rather than comply with the vain customs of the world.

The Lord Jesus related two short parables to show the folly of setting out in the Christian course, without being prepared to surmount difficulties.

If a man would build a tower, he must first consider whether he has money sufficient to complete the building; and if a captain would meet an enemy, he must first consider whether he has soldiers enough to resist him. It would be better not to *begin* the tower, than to leave it unfinished—and not to *undertake* the war, than to suffer a defeat.

It would also be better not to *profess* to follow Christ, than to turn back after having set out. It would be *better*—if we can talk of *better* in such a case. For he who does not set out at SOME TIME OR OTHER in the Christian course, must endure EVERLASTING misery. It will be a poor consolation for him to think that his case would have been still worse, had he turned back after having known the way of righteousness.

Christ never discouraged a sincere soul from following him. But he has given a true description of the nature of his service, so that none can say in the end, "My Lord deceived me, and represented his service to be easier than I have found it." A poor Madagascar woman, who had undergone great persecutions, was once asked whether she was surprised when afflictions overtook her. She replied, "No; from the first we knew it was written, that through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom of God; and when our troubles came, we said, 'This is what we expected.'" This poor woman was once shut up, for five months, in an iron case that prevented her moving a single limb; yet, having counted the cost, she proved "more than conqueror through Him who loved her." \* See "Madagascar and its Martyrs," a book for the young.

## July 16

### **Luke 15:1-10. *Parables of the lost sheep, and of the lost piece of silver.***

There is a tenderness in these parables which is not to be found in the discourses we have lately read. When the Savior was at the Pharisee's house, he faithfully reprov'd both the guests and the host; when he was surrounded by the multitude, he solemnly warned them; but when he sat in the midst of publicans and sinners, he uttered the most touching and encouraging words. The

Pharisees showed the pride of their hearts, by murmuring because Jesus received sinners into his intimate society. The Lord answered their murmurings by relating several parables. He knew their *covetous* disposition, and that they would understand the joy of finding a lost sheep, or a lost piece of money, though their hearts were too hard to enable them to understand the joy felt by angels at the salvation of a sinner.

Even penitent sinners themselves can hardly believe that angels should care for them. How many penitents have read with astonishment that there is joy among the angels of God over *one* sinner that repents! Could we have conceived that the recovery of *one* of our fallen race should interest those glorious beings? *Why* do they care so much for us? The Son of God, whom they adore, loved us and died for us. They know that *He* cares for each wanderer, and that *He* rejoices over each soul that he brings back to his fold. The angels share in the joy of their beloved Lord. They felt with him in his *sorrows*, and one of them strengthened him in the garden of Gethsemane. They partake also in his *joys*; they delight to see the fruit of the travail of his soul. But *their* joy cannot be compared with *His*. He is an infinite being, therefore his love and joy are infinite.

And if the repentance of *one* sinner causes so much joy, what will be felt on account of the salvation of *all the Church of God!* The mind is overwhelmed at the thought of the boundless raptures of that day. Many joyful emotions have been felt since first the foundation of the earth was laid; the birds have rejoiced at every return of spring; children have smiled each opening morn; the saints have tasted higher delights in their sacred assemblies; and angels have made the heavens ring with their rapturous songs; but all these joys are as a drop compared to the ocean of delight that the glorious company of heaven shall feel, when all the redeemed are gathered together into the celestial city.

Are we prepared to taste these joys? Do we *now* feel any satisfaction when we hear that a sinner has repented? We might discover our own state in the sight of God by this token—what are the events that occasion us most joy? If we are saved hereafter, we shall be the *companions* of angels. But if our hearts are not interested in the salvation of sinners, shall we be fit company for them? What a contrast there is between a selfish human creature and a benevolent angel!

How delightful it will be, in ages to come, if we are numbered among the saints, to see the angels who rejoiced over *our* conversion! They will not forget the happiness they experienced on such occasions, and they will feel their joy complete when they see the pardoned sinner, saved from all his enemies, comforted after all his sorrows, and enclosed in the everlasting arms of his Almighty Savior.

**July 17**

### **Luke 15:11-16. *The departure of the prodigal son.***

Though the Pharisees were hard-hearted men, yet they possessed the feelings of parents. The parable of the prodigal son was suited to touch every father's heart. But even if the proud *Pharisees* listened unmoved to the Savior's representation of the father's generous compassion, the poor *publicans* must have heard the wonderful history with grateful astonishment. When the Lord described the conduct of the younger son, they were reminded of their own base departure from God. The Pharisees also had wandered far from their Father's house; but they knew it not. They *imagined* that, like the elder son in the parable, they had always been faithful and obedient. Many people entertain the same false notion of their own goodness, and forget that it is written, "*All we like sheep have gone astray.*"

Every penitent sinner sees his own likeness in the prodigal son. The most striking feature in his character is his *ingratitude*. Instead of being thankful for his daily bread, and his shelter beneath his father's roof, and for all the comforts and privileges he enjoyed, he claims fortune as his *right*, saying, "Give me the portion of goods that falls to me." This is our spirit by nature. Instead of being overwhelmed with a sense of God's wonderful goodness, we conceive ourselves entitled to further gifts.

When the prodigal had obtained his desire, he showed his ingratitude by going into a country a great way off, and there wasting his father's gifts in riotous living. And have we not acted like this prodigal? We need not move from the spot where we were born in order to do this—it is sufficient that shutting up our hearts from God, and banishing him from our thoughts, we seek our gratification in earthly things.

But behold the *consequence* of this conduct; the prodigal comes to poverty. He has at last spent *all*. It is well when we discover before *death* that we have spent *all*—that we have wasted our hopes and affections upon the world, and have obtained no lasting satisfaction in return. But what will be the despair of those who never discover their poverty, until they are removed to the place where the uttermost farthing is *required*, but not even a drop of water *granted!*

Perhaps the prodigal in his days of revelry may have looked forward to the time when he should have spent all, and he may have intended *then* to enter some service that would preserve him from want. But God defeated his design, and caused a mighty famine to arise at the *very moment* when he was destitute. *Now* there were few masters who could afford to hire, and many servants to be hired, so that the prodigal was forced to engage in the lowest service at the lowest wages; he became a swineherd for a less reward than would provide him with a meal of husks, such as the pigs fed upon.

How easily God can disappoint the sinner, and blast all his devices! Many think,

"When *this* enjoyment is passed, I will betake myself to another," forgetting how God can in a moment take away *every* idol, shut up *every* way of escape, and dry up *every* stream of happiness.

The thoughtless companions of his mirth remembered not the prodigal in his distress. "No one gave unto him." Those who had gladly partaken of his riotous feasts, forsook him in his poverty and hunger. Accomplices in guilt are not comforters in sorrow. For what unfeeling creatures the prodigal had forsaken his loving father, and his happy home! O the folly and the madness that sinners show in preferring the society of the wicked to the favor of the ever-blessed God! Can the world console them in sickness? Will the world be faithful to them in old age? Can the world receive them into glory after death? Happy are they who have made this blessed choice, "I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."

**July 18**

**Luke 15:17-19. *The repentance of the prodigal.***

God greatly blessed the prodigal's afflictions to his soul. While he was employed as a swineherd a great change took place in his mind—"He came to himself." This expression implies, that before he was *not* himself. A state of sin is a state of *madness*. When a person is converted he is in his *right* mind. How could any one indulge in sin, if he reflected on its dreadful consequences! "for the wages of sin is *death!*" But sinners are like the brutes that perish, and do not consider their latter end.

It is very interesting to hear the reflections of the prodigal when he was come to himself. He saw everything now in a new light. He understood the happiness of his father's house. Once he had abhorred its restraints and longed for liberty, but now he esteemed each servant happy who dwelt beneath that peaceful roof. Unconverted people think religion gloomy, and endeavor to escape from its influence; but when the Holy Spirit visits their hearts, they account the servants of God blessed, and long to be numbered among the saints.

The prodigal now felt convinced of his guilt. He not only lamented his miserable condition, but he traced it to his *own sin*; he blamed no one but himself. Thus the Spirit convinces of sin, and makes us feel that we have sinned against God, more than against any other being, because He is the greatest and best of beings, and our chief benefactor.

The prodigal felt confidence in his father's mercy. Though he felt unworthy to be called a son, yet he resolved to say "Father." Had he not felt this confidence, he might have been devoured by remorse, and have deemed it useless to return. Doubtless his memory furnished him with numerous instances of his father's

love, of his readiness to forgive his early waywardness, and of his patient endurance of the provocations of his youth. He had enjoyed opportunities of knowing his father's character, and it now appeared to him in all its loveliness. Happy is it when the convinced sinner can hope in God's mercy. No child ever had such reason to believe that his father would receive him, as the chief of sinners has that God will in nowise cast him out; for God has so loved us, as to give his only Son a sacrifice for us; and He who spared not his own *Son*, will he not with him also freely give us all things?

The prodigal made a resolution to return, and openly to confess his sins, to entreat forgiveness, and to implore permission to become a servant, though not a son, in his father's house.

Have we ever made the resolution to return to God? Can we recall the time when we felt we had wandered from the best of fathers, and that we deserved to be rejected? Every true believer has repented of his sins, and has sought forgiveness with weeping and supplications. Nor does he ever cease to seek it while he lives upon earth. The sense of his own sinfulness increases, as he experiences more of his Father's goodness. Daily he says, "Forgive me my trespasses," and daily he feels that he is not *worthy* to be called a son.

## July 19

### **Luke 15:20-24. *The reception of the prodigal son.***

The prodigal had conceived a high idea of his father's compassion before he set out to return home; but his thoughts had not reached the heights of his father's mercy. He could not have anticipated such a reception, at once so affectionate and so honorable. Had he returned as the deliverer of his country from some powerful foe, he could not have been welcomed with more honor. Had he left his home to plead for his father's life, he could not, when he was come back, have been received with more tenderness.

What is the reason that the sinner is treated with so much honor and so much love, when he falls at the footstool of divine mercy? Is he not received in his Savior's name, with all the honor *that* Savior won by trampling upon Satan, and with all the love that Savior deserved for dying upon the cross?

Great must have been the humiliation of the prodigal, as he approached the parental roof. How it must have wounded the natural pride of his heart to return in tatters, with an emaciated countenance and a haggard eye! But when true penitence is felt, natural pride is in great measure subdued. Those who only feel a *slight* regret for past transgressions, are often prevented by pride from asking forgiveness. No doubt the prodigal had *wished* to return as soon as he became a swineherd; but it was not until "he came to himself," that his penitence was deep

enough to enable him to face all the humiliation connected with the step. Then he felt he could bear the taunts of unfeeling spectators better than the reproaches of his own conscience; better than the remembrance of his despised home, and of his injured father. But he was spared the most painful part of the expected trial by the tender affection of that father, who "saw him when he was a great way off, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him." Did the prodigal repress his humble confession because he saw he was already forgiven? No, he said all that he had purposed to say, excepting, "Make me as one of your hired servants." When he saw that he was received as a *son*, he could not ask to become a *servant*. The best robe was then put on him, a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; a feast was made, and rejoicing was heard on every side.

Could the prodigal doubt his father's full and free forgiveness? All his past transgressions seemed to be forgotten; his father's love was not abated in the least degree; a prospect of happiness was opened to his view beyond his highest expectations.

This is the way in which the Lord deals with the returning sinner. He clothes his guilty soul in the spotless robe of his Redeemer's righteousness, and satisfies his hungry soul with the heavenly food of his gracious promises. Why then do sinners refuse to return to God? They do not believe that he will receive them so affectionately, and render them so happy. The father of the prodigal is *our* God and *our* Savior. Those who have sought his mercy can witness how He received them, and how happy He has made them.

It is sad to think that any should remain miserable, because they will not arise and return to Him, who offers them full and free forgiveness. The way may appear long; but it would be shortened, for their Father would meet them while they were yet a "*great way off*," and conduct them himself to his own glorious abode.

**July 20**

**Luke 15:25 to end. *The envy of the prodigal's brother.***

Amid the burst of joy at the prodigal's return *one* complaining voice was heard; among the glad countenances one lowering brow was seen; and that voice and that brow were a brother's. But the father showed as much forbearance towards his envious eldest son, as he had manifested compassion towards his prodigal younger son. He went out, and entreated this unfeeling brother to unite in the festal scene. These entreaties drew forth the pride that reigned in his son's heart. Pride is the root of a whole host of sins, especially of envy, anger, and discontent—all these evil passions gave their coloring to the answers of the eldest son. What a description he gives of his blameless conduct! He reproaches

his father with his services, as if he had laid his own parent under obligations—"Lo, these many years have I served you!" He declares those services were *perfect*, as well as persevering. "Neither transgressed I at any time your commandment."

While he thus boasts of his *own* goodness, he places his *brother's* conduct in the worst point of view. The father might have turned away in wrath from his ungenerous son, but he condescended to argue with the proud objector. In a few words he describes the rich privileges of his first-born. "Son, you are ever with me." Surely the continual presence of such a father was happiness in itself. But, knowing the covetous heart of his son, the father added, "All that I have is yours." There was no *argument* required to *prove* that a lost son should be received with joy. The father thought it sufficient to say, "It was meet that we should make merry and be glad."

Could the Pharisees avoid perceiving in the envious brother their own likeness? Now that the Savior was receiving penitent publicans, and that angels were rejoicing over them in heaven, the Pharisees were boasting of their own goodness, and reproaching the Lord with partiality. They *imagined* that they had served God all their lives, and had never transgressed his commandment. The Lord did not show them (as He might have done) how false was this notion—but He proved, that even if they were as good as they supposed, the spirit they evinced towards penitent sinners was ungrateful and ungenerous. Had the Pharisees really been holy men, they would have rejoiced with angels over pardoned penitents. True believers remember the season when they were received into their father's favor, and they rejoice with each wanderer who returns as they did. There is not a son in the house of our heavenly Father who has not had his festival; except the angels who have been ever with Him, and have never transgressed his commandments. Yet there are some of the children of God, who were sanctified at so early a period, that they cannot remember the *first* feelings of penitence; they have not experienced the bitterness of an unconverted state, and cannot tell by contrast how great is their present happiness. These have enjoyed the best portion, in having been *ever with their Father*. How many days of childhood have been gilded with more than childish joy through the early knowledge of their Father in heaven! How sweet the remembrance of a youth spent in his service, unpolluted by worldly vanities! Yet even *they*—even those sanctified in infancy and devoted to God unto old age, have wandered into some forbidden paths, and have committed innumerable transgressions. They have experienced the forgiving love of God, when returning from their backslidings. They can say with David, "He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

**July 21**

**Luke 16:1-8. *The parable of the unjust steward.***

This parable has perplexed many people. They have said, "What a dishonest man this steward was! Did his lord commend him for his wickedness?" No, not for his *wickedness*, but for his *wisdom*—for his *worldly* wisdom. His plan to secure himself from want was very cunning and ingenious. It is supposed that the oil and the wheat that the creditors owed were their rent. It was the office of the steward to make agreements with the tenants concerning the amount of produce that ought to be paid to their lord. This steward, before he was dismissed from his post, made *new* agreements with the tenants, and ingratiated himself by lowering the rents. When he was gone, the lord became acquainted with these proceedings, and expressed his wonder at the wicked policy of his unfaithful steward.

But some may still inquire, "Why did our Lord select a *dishonest* action as an instance of worldly wisdom? Does not the selection seem to countenance dishonesty?" But, if we consider, we shall perceive that the *badness* of the action renders it a suitable instance of the wisdom displayed by *bad* men. This was the point that the Lord wished to prove—*bad* men take more pains to accomplish their *bad* ends, than *good* men to accomplish their *good* ends.

Perhaps a blush arose in the face of many a Pharisee, as this instance of knavery was related. That very steward may have been present. Many of the hypocritical Pharisees had committed actions equally dishonest. Their own consciences must have convicted them. But it was chiefly for the instruction of the *disciples* that the parable was related. It was addressed to them, and this was the lesson taught—"The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." By this sentence the Lord turns into a volume of rich instruction the actions of this wicked world among whom we live.

Wicked men are intent on accomplishing *different* wicked ends. One is bent upon accumulating immense riches. How does he set about his design? With the lukewarmness that Christians so often betray in pursuing their designs? Does he not rise early, and sit up late? Are not his thoughts always intent upon devising new schemes for amassing wealth? Is not the crowded city the place where he delights to be, whatever pleasures may allure, or weariness oppress? Were Christians to be as diligent in prayer, as this man in counting his gains, how rich would they grow in faith, and love, and every grace!

Another is bent upon destroying the reputation of his neighbors, in order that he alone may be praised and admired! How dexterously he performs his work! How cleverly he *insinuates* that some evil is practiced by his companion! Perhaps he says nothing directly against him, (as this might awaken suspicion,) but he contrives to place him in a disagreeable light. Do we thus watch opportunities to say a word in behalf of our Lord and Master, insinuating something in his praise, when we cannot speak more openly? When we reflect on the *greatness* of the *end* that Christians have in view, we feel that they ought to be most earnestly

intent on gaining it. Could heaven be *purchased*, the world would be a bauble to offer for it—it has been bought with more precious blood. Shall we grieve our dying Lord by our indifference to a gift so *dearly* bought, and so infinitely glorious?

**July 22**

**Luke 16:9-13. Christ exhorts his disciples to be faithful in the use of riches.**

The Lord Jesus had shown, by the history of the unjust steward, that the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. He next explained in what particular point they are wiser—in the use they make of riches. The steward made use of the property consigned to his care in gaining friends, who would receive him into their habitations when he lost his stewardship. Therefore Jesus said to his disciples, "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when you fail they may receive you into *everlasting* habitations." The name given to riches is very remarkable—"the mammon of unrighteousness." Money is often made an occasion of sin, and the love of money is the root of all evil. Yet even of this unrighteous mammon, a righteous use may be made. Our Lord's precept would be more clear, if rendered thus—"Make to yourselves friends WITH the mammon of unrighteousness." How can friends be made with this mammon? By spending it in the relief of the saints and in the service of God. The widows whom Dorcas clothed, the prophets whom Obadiah fed, the apostle whom Onesiphorus visited, and Phebe succored, with all those brethren and strangers whom Gaius brought forward on their missionary journeys, will be witnesses of their charity and piety before the great white throne.

It is true the disciples were poor; but the poor, by the gift of two mites, show more love to God than the rich by large contributions out of their abundance. The Lord knows that he who is faithful in the *least* would be faithful in *much*. That poor widow who cast her mites into the treasury will be intrusted with true riches in the world to come.

Riches are only *lent* to the possessor, not *given*. This is the meaning of the verse—"If you have not been faithful in that which is *another man's*, who shall give you that which is your own?" Every possession is now, as *if* it were another man's—it is only lent. Hereafter a possession will be *bestowed* upon the righteous, even an inheritance that *fades not away*. As riches are only lent, an account of the use to which they have been applied will be required. What account will those render who willfully devote any part of their property to the service of Mammon, the god of this world? Whatever is spent in the encouragement of sin is spent in the service of Mammon. There are some people who employ *part* of their money in doing good and *part* in promoting evil. They attempt to serve God and Mammon. They support Sunday-schools and Bible

societies with part of their property, and with another part they encourage those worldly amusements, and that proud display, which are condemned in the word of God. But those who really love their crucified Savior cannot act thus. The apostle Paul declares, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world."

**July 23**

**Luke 16:14-18. *Christ rebukes the Pharisees who derided him.***

The Pharisees hated reproof. When they found the Lord's discourses applied to their own case they were angry. Conscious that they were covetous, they could not bear to hear covetousness spoken against. It is natural to the human heart to shrink from the touch of truth. How often ministers find that their hearers have been offended by the most searching parts of their sermons! Let us inquire whether we hate to hear our faults reproofed. No doubt it is painful to be told of our sins. But is it not better to be made acquainted with them now, than to wait until we stand before the face of God? The kindest friends we have are those who take us apart to say, "Are you acting right in this point, or in that particular?" The most faithful ministers are those who will not let sinners slumber on in their sins, until the fire of eternal wrath devour them.

But none are so angry at reproof as those who make a false profession of religion. The Pharisees were only anxious that *men* should think highly of their characters. As they knew that men could not see into their hearts, they did not care in what state *they* remained. If a monarch were going to pass through a town, the inhabitants would probably cleanse and adorn the *outside* of their houses—but as they would know he could not see through the walls, they would not think it necessary to make the *inside* beautiful. But if the monarch were to announce that he should enter the house of one of the citizens, then what care would be used to render it fit for his reception! The King of kings searches every heart. A fair outside is not sufficient—God knows our *hearts*. A heart, unwashed in the blood of Christ, and unrenewed by his Holy Spirit, is an abomination in his sight. It may be highly esteemed by men, and called a tender heart, a kind, warm, and good heart—but it is pronounced by God to be a deceitful and desperately wicked heart. With such a heart none can enter his kingdom. The Pharisees had unconverted hearts. They professed to love God—but in reality they hated Him. How did they show they hated Him? By hating his law. They did not keep his holy commandments. Christ reminded them of one great sin, which they frequently committed. They broke the seventh commandment by putting away their wives in order to marry others. This sin had been rebuked by the prophet Malachi four hundred years before. He had said, "The Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously; and yet she is your companion and the wife of your covenant." Yet these Jews in Malachi's time had made a great profession of religion. At the very

time they were treating their wives with cruelty, they were offering sacrifices to God at his altar. But did he accept these sacrifices? No, he abhorred them. The injured wives had poured out their tears before the altar, where their treacherous husbands presented their offerings—God saw those tears with compassion, and rejected those offerings with indignation. Let us never imagine that God will accept any of our services, while we are ill-treating any of his creatures. If, when we go and kneel before God to say our prayers, any person is pouring out tears before his footstool on account of our ill-treatment, can we expect our prayers to be heard? God has declared in his word that He will hear the cry of the oppressed, and that He will punish the oppressors—"You shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If you afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry—and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless."

**July 24**

**Mark 10:13-16. *Christ blesses little children.***

How many young and tender hearts have been encouraged to come to their Savior by the sweet declaration, "Let the little children to come unto me!" How many dying children have lisped these words in their last moments! When Jesus uttered them, he knew what comfort they would afford to the lambs of his flock for many ages to come.

It was, however, in *displeasure* that he gave the command, "Let the little children come unto me." It was not with the *children* that he was displeased, nor with their *mothers*, but with his own *disciples*. He was not often *much displeased with them*. There must have been some *great* offence to excite this *great* displeasure. It was a *great* offence to attempt to drive away these children from their Savior! How could the disciples take so much upon them, as to forbid the mothers to bring their babes! Pride lurked in their hearts, and suggested many harsh and ungracious measures. Before Jesus left this world he charged Peter to feed his lambs—those lambs whom He carries in his own bosom. Faithful ministers love little children, and are ready to instruct them.

The babes brought to Jesus were too young to receive instruction; therefore the Lord only took them in his arms and blessed them. He knew even then what should befall each—he knew which fair blossom would be nipped in the bud, and which would bloom in the church on earth. He knew which smiling infant would become a minister, and which would prove a martyr. May we not hope that none of the infants that Jesus blessed were lost forever? Was not His blessing the pledge of their salvation?

The parents did well in bringing them to Christ. Many parents had brought sick children to him to be healed—but these parents sought no temporal benefits—

they desired that the Savior should put his hands upon their little ones, and *pray*. Surely Jesus must have been as much *pleased* with these parents, as he was *displeased* with his disciples. He still is pleased when mothers care more for the immortal *souls* of their children than for their perishing *bodies*. How grateful these little children ought to have been to their kind parents, when they were old enough to know what those parents had done for them in their infancy! Many are indebted to the secret prayers of a mother to her Savior for the richest blessings they enjoy! We never can repay our parents for the prayers they have offered up on our behalf. The kindest parents often make mistakes in their manner of bringing up their children—but no mistakes will prove fatal, if they are fervent in their prayers for them, and consistent in their example.

What reason did Jesus give for receiving these little ones so kindly? He did not say it was because he loved their parents, or because he knew the children would be holy when they grew up; but he said, "For of such is the kingdom of heaven." The disciples had only to observe the ways of the little creatures, then folded in their mothers' arms, in order to know what they themselves ought to be. Those babes cared not for strangers, but only for the hand that fed them, for the arm that upheld them, for the face that smiled on them. Such ought to be the devoted affection of all believers for their everlasting Friend. How interesting it is to observe a little child, while we think of the words, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven!" Does not this sentence give us ground to believe that there are many little children now in glory?

Why do babes ever taste death? This epitaph was once written upon an infant's tomb—"It died, for Adam sinned.

It lives, for Jesus died."

Every action of our Savior silently assures us that he loves children. He listens to their songs in the temple—he rebukes their enemies—he folds them in his arms—he lays his hands upon them and blesses them. Will he shut *those* out from his presence in glory whom he would not allow to be sent from his presence upon *earth*? If he prayed for them when he lived here below, does he refuse to intercede for them now he reigns on yonder throne above? Surely he would be *much displeased* with *us*, if we were to harbor any doubts of his tender love for the little creatures that his hands first formed, and that he has never ceased to defend and bless.

**July 25**

**Luke 16:19-24. *The rich man's petition for his own relief.***

In this parable, the curtain that conceals the eternal world is lifted up—and by whom? By Him who every moment beholds the sons of men sinking into hell, or

soaring up to heaven. He described these solemn scenes that we might be filled with holy awe. They were ever before his eyes, and he wondered at the indifference of sinners to their approaching doom.

No doubt this rich man and this beggar were *real* people. He had no need to employ *fiction*, who knew all *facts*.

It may appear strange to short-sighted mortals that God should permit one of his own beloved to languish, covered with sores, before a lordly gate. But the eye of faith beholds the happy spirit of the beggar, conveyed by glorious angels along the path of life into the presence of God. Then the mystery is explained. The Holy Spirit had sanctified the sorrowful heart of Lazarus, and Jesus had pardoned all his sins. When we see a poor diseased object, let us remember Lazarus, and say, "This may be one of God's elect." But we know that there are many who suffer afflictions in vain; many who are not softened by poverty or sickness; many who curse God and die.

The rich man does not appear to have committed any flagrant crime; he seems to have been a respectable worldly man. His body was buried with pomp, but his soul was not conducted with honor through the regions of the air to eternal glory. "In hell he lifts up his eyes, being in torment!" What a change was this! instead of a bed of down—burning coals; instead of purple clothing—a flaming robe; instead of sumptuous food—the lack of all things, even of a drop of water. But what a glorious sight he beheld! heaven with its inhabitants. Do we envy him this privilege? How the sight must have added to his misery! *We* would like to behold the saints' abode, for we hope to reach it—but in hell, "Hope that comes to all, comes never." The flame must have seemed to burn with redoubled fury, when the lost spirit saw the stream which makes glad the city of our God. Among the guests at the supper of the Lamb, he saw Abraham and Lazarus. He had been brought up to revere Abraham as his great ancestor, and as the father of the faithful. Though he had never seen him before, yet he knew him. It is probable he had been accustomed to despise Lazarus as a loathsome object; now he saw this despised beggar seated next to the honorable patriarch. God had exalted Abraham when upon earth, and had abased Lazarus, but he had bestowed like precious faith upon them both. When we behold the company of the redeemed, we may expect to know them again, whether we were before acquainted with their *persons*, or only with their *names*. God grant that we may not behold them *afar off*, as the rich man did, but that we may be mingled in their society. We may expect to see among the eminent servants of God, among ministers, missionaries, and reformers, among prophets, apostles, and martyrs, others who have lived and died in lowliness and obscurity—blind beggars, hospital patients, and workhouse inhabitants. Some of these will doubtless occupy places next to such revered men as Luther or as Latimer—as Daniel, Job, or Noah.

The rich man must have been surprised to see the beggar in so honorable a place. Did he recognize none of his kindred, nor friends, nor servants, that he

fixed all his hopes of receiving relief upon Lazarus? Where were his father and mother? Where were his friends and neighbors? Had none of them reached the place of rest? It is to be feared that there are ungodly families whose names are unknown among the blessed. They have encouraged each other in forgetfulness of God, and have sunk down together into the pit. Why did the rich man think that Lazarus would be ready to come to his aid? No doubt the crumbs from his table had often been given to the beggar who lay at his gate, and therefore he may have thought he had some claim upon his services now. But surely if this rich man had loved God, he would have bestowed more than *crumbs* upon the poor sufferer dying before his eyes. Now his condition was far worse than that of Lazarus had ever been. The least moisture upon his tongue was the only favor he asked, and it was denied him. The misery of hell is COMPLETE. *Here* in our present world, in our deepest sorrows there is some alleviation, some comforting circumstance, some ray of hope; but in hell there is none; *all* is darkness, desolation, destitution, and despair.

**July 26**

**Luke 16:25-28. *The rich man's petition for his brethren.***

If prayers were heard in hell, how many would be offered up! But the abode of despair is not the place for prayer. All the rich man's requests were refused. The first was a very small petition. It was not a petition for release. Lost spirits know that release is impossible. The gates have closed upon them **forever**. The Redeemer's blood cannot be sprinkled upon their conscience, the Holy Spirit cannot be shed abroad in their hearts; therefore salvation cannot be obtained.

But the rich man hoped that the slightest possible relief might be granted. He did not ask that Lazarus might bring him a large *glass*, nor even a *drop* of water—he did not ask that he might dip his *hand* or his *finger* in water—but he asked that he might dip the *tip* of his finger in water, and apply it to his burning tongue. Yet the request was refused.

Abraham reminded the tormented spirit that on earth he had received good things, and Lazarus evil things. By the manner in which Abraham reasoned, it is evident that the rich man had desired, when on earth, no *better* portion than he now received—and that Lazarus had been content with the bitter portion allotted to him. It was, therefore, just that each should now abide by his own choice. Lazarus must not feel even for a *moment* the scorching flames of hell, nor must the rich man taste one *drop* of the cooling streams of heaven.

God now gives *us our* choice. Do we prefer *heaven*, with any amount of grievous *sufferings*, to *earth*, with any amount of passing *delights*? Which would we rather encounter—the *trials* of the saints, or the *temptations* of the world?

We perceive that if there had been *no* impassable gulf between heaven and hell, yet that Lazarus would not have been permitted to soothe the sufferings of the lost. But there *is* such a gulf. It fills heaven with **delight**, and hell with **despair**. The inhabitants of each world know that there can be no change of state. Hell knows that no celestial comforter will ever enter her gates, and Heaven that no malicious enemy will ever break through hers.

But though the rich man found there was no path from heaven to *hell*, he knew there was a path from heaven to *earth*. He requested that Lazarus might be sent to warn his five brethren of the danger of their condition. It seems that he had left no children upon earth. Perhaps he had died in his youth. We cannot tell what his *motives* were for desiring that his brethren should not partake his misery. Can natural affection exist in *hell*? or was the rich man afraid lest the reproaches of brothers, whom he had corrupted by his example, should add to his own torment? Let us be reminded by his prayer of the privileges we now enjoy. Have we any unconverted relatives? We may pray for them, not to *Abraham*, but—to *God*. We will not pray that a departed spirit may be sent to warn them, but we will entreat that God's Holy Spirit may convince and convert them.

The saints can witness that God does hear their prayers, and has mercy on others for their sake. It makes a Christian's heart sad to think of those who have shared with him a mother's care, not sharing with him a Savior's glory. It would add to the joy of a believer, even in heaven, to see every one of his kindred sitting around their heavenly Father's table.

If pious *brothers* feel solicitude for their brothers' salvation, what must *parents* feel for the souls of their beloved **children**? They bear them incessantly on their hearts before God, and with tears implore the Lord to preserve them from sinking into the place of torment. They can hardly imagine that it would be possible that they themselves should be happy in heaven, if any one of their dear children were missing. Yet some who have brought down their parents' gray hairs with sorrow to the grave, have repented *afterwards*. Then they have lamented (O how bitterly!) that they did not gladden their parents while they were yet alive. It is their comfort to think that their parents will see them enter into glory. One of these penitents was heard to say, "How much surprised my father will be to see *me* enter heaven!"

**July 27**

**Luke 16:2931. *Abraham's reply to the rich man.***

It is natural to suppose that the sight of a departed spirit would awaken a thoughtless soul. The rich man imagined that his brethren would turn from sin if Lazarus were to appear to them in the midst of their luxury and their gaiety, and to say, "I am the beggar that once languished at the gate—I am now an

inhabitant of heaven—I partake of the immortal feast—I sit with the saints, and behold the face of God—I have seen your brother—he is not with us—I heard a doleful cry—it was his voice—he was burning in the flames of hell—he entreated that I might moisten his tongue with the tip of my finger, but the request could not be granted. He has remembered you. He once lived (as you do now) a worldly, thoughtless life—he knows how your lives will end—he dreads lest you should join him in the place of torment."

The rich man supposed that such a warning voice would alarm his brethren, stop them in their sinful career, and turn them to God. But the Lord has *not* appointed this mode of dealing with men. He *might* have made the departed, the ministers of the living. Every dead relative *might* have appeared again; the happy ones to tell of their happiness; the miserable ones to tell of their misery. But God devised another method. He spoke to holy men of old, and taught them to write the words he dictated. He appointed living men to speak of those holy words to their fellow-creatures. This is God's method. Thousands and tens of thousands have been saved by these means. They have believed the written message, and the living preacher, and have fled from the threatened wrath. God continues to pursue this plan of dealing with men. He requires us to believe what we do not see, only because HE says it. The Lord Jesus well knew that if he had appeared to his enemies when he rose again from the dead, he would not have overcome their enmity; therefore he did *not* appear to *them*. He appeared to his friends for their comfort, but not to his *enemies* for their *conversion*.

The Lord's method must be the most excellent way. If we would save the souls of men, we must let them hear the word of God, which he spoke by Moses, by the prophets, by his own Son, and by his apostles. That word has awakened whole families, who were as thoughtless as the rich man's brothers, and has saved them from the place of torment. Every soul that reaches the abode of bliss, will trace his coming there to his having heard the word of God. Some will speak of *one* part of that blessed word, and some will speak of *another*, and all will bless the Holy Spirit who opened their hearts to receive the truth. We shall not need the Bible in heaven, because we shall be with Him who wrote it; but surely it will not be *forgotten* there. Neither will it be forgotten in *hell*. It will add to the fierceness of the flames to remember the slighted warnings, the despised promises, the rejected invitations of the word of God.

**July 28**

**Luke 17:1-4. *Christ teaches the forgiveness of injuries.***

When Jesus was alone with his disciples, he dwelt upon those topics that were the most necessary for them to understand. All who believe in the Savior must listen with particular interest to these conversations.

Believers *now*, like the first disciples, are "compassed with infirmity." The instructions that suited the little flock who surrounded the Lord when he was on earth, will suit the larger flock that wait at his feet now he is enthroned in the heavens.

On this occasion the Savior warned his disciples against two things—committing offences, and indulging an unforgiving spirit.

The "offences" spoken of are stumbling-blocks laid in the way of weak believers. Those who are *strong* in faith must be careful not to injure the *weak* in faith, even as the *elder* children in a family must carefully avoid hurting the tender frames of the younger children. A considerate youth would refrain from performing some feats that *he* could with *safety* perform, if he thought that his little brothers might be tempted to imitate his example, and to endanger their limbs or their lives. Believers *strong* in faith ought to act in the same way, and to refrain even from enjoying *lawful* privileges, sooner than endanger their weak brethren. In Rom. 14 the apostle Paul points out very clearly this duty.

But if it be a grievous sin to wound a weak believer through *carelessness*, how dreadful a crime it must be to injure him *willfully*! No true believer would commit this sin. It would be better to be cast into the sea, (as criminals often are in the East,) than to be guilty of it. To persuade a child of God to act against his conscience, and to break his Father's law, is to commit a worse sin than *murder*. If you were to induce a person to leap from a high window, you might be the occasion of the destruction of his *body*, but if you were to tempt him to break the Sabbath, to tell a lie, to join in profane discourse, you would endanger his *soul*. God indeed *could* preserve the body from being dashed to pieces, and the soul from being lost, but the person who deceived would be as guilty as if the worst consequences had followed. How watchful we ought to be over our behavior to the children of God, lest we injure those whom God guards with such tender care!

There is another sin that we must strive against, if we desire to please God. It is an unforgiving spirit. The family of God upon earth are so full of defects, that they often annoy each other. If we were surrounded by angels, we should have no temptations to anger. But is there one of us who can say, "I act like an angel to those around me?" Is it not true that we are constantly exercising the patience of our companions? Does it become us to be slow to forgive? When we are conscious that we have wounded another, each of us should say, "I repent;" and when another says to us, "I repent," each of us should reply, "I forgive." But if our brother forget his duty, and omit to acknowledge his fault, we ought not to be rigorous in demanding the confession. Were he to make it, we should find it more easy to forgive; but if he withhold it, we have the opportunity of showing a higher degree of grace by forgiving, *notwithstanding* his omission. In most differences, however, *both* parties have something to confess and something to forgive. Mutual concessions and mutual forgiveness are generally needed. He who *first*

says, "I repent," acts the most Christian part; for he shows that he has *already* forgiven the trespasses of his brother. Had not Jesus forgiven us *before* any of us said, "I repent," we never should have felt even the *desire* to obtain his forgiveness. It was the thought that He loved us *before* we loved him that melted our hearts, and made us feel truly penitent for our sins.

**July 29**

**Luke 17:5-10. *The disciples pray for more faith.***

Why did the disciples offer up the prayer, "Increase our faith?" Had their Lord just revealed some *mystery* that it was difficult to *believe*? No—but he had just enjoined a *duty* that it was difficult to practice. That duty was, "Forgiving often-repeated trespasses." Whoever has been deeply or often injured, and has endeavored freely to forgive, knows that the wicked heart rises up against the righteous deed—and that the struggle is sharp between the sense of injury and of duty. In vain the person offended reasons with himself, and urges himself to the performance of the command; his unwilling soul hangs back, and refuses to obey. What is the only remedy against this inward repugnance? *Faith*. Had we more faith, we should *run*, where now we cannot *walk*. The disciples felt their need of faith, and they applied to him who alone can bestow it. Jesus is the *author* of faith.

Though some *prophets* have been enabled to bestow *temporal* benefits, none have ever had the power to confer *spiritual* good. No mere man was ever known to give repentance, or to strengthen faith. But the Son of God can do all things. If any man lack *wisdom*, let him ask of him and it shall be given him—if any man lack *faith*, let him ask and it also shall be given. Have we any excuse for saying, "I cannot do what my Lord commands?" Do we find it difficult to forgive *repeated* injuries, or *great* injuries, or (which is harder still) to forgive trespasses still *unconfessed*, there is power in Christ to enable us to overcome these mountains.

And when we have succeeded in conquering the deep-rooted sins of our hearts, what ought to be our feeling then? Our Savior teaches us what it ought to be. When we have done all that was commanded, we must say, "We are unprofitable servants—we have done that which was our *duty* to do." But we have never done *all*, or *half*, or a *hundredth part* of the things that were commanded us. We are not only unprofitable, but we are provoking and guilty servants. Had we not the God of all patience for our master, we should have been dismissed long ago from his service. But instead of dismissing us, he treats us in the most generous manner. His *yoke* is *easy* and his *burden* is *light*, while his *reward* is a *weight* of glory. He is so infinitely gracious, that after having borne with our imperfect services, he has promised to say to each who sincerely loves him, "Well done, good and faithful servant—enter into the joy of your Lord."

The thought of receiving such commendation ought to humble us more than the severest reproof. It *will* humble those who shall receive it. Every one of them will cast his crown of life at the feet of Him who bestowed it, and say, "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honor, and power." (Rev. 4:11.)

**July 30**

**Luke 9:51-56. *James and John betray a revengeful spirit.***

And was it the *gentle* apostle John who proposed to consume the Samaritans with fire? Yes, it was even that apostle whom Jesus loved; that apostle who leaned on his bosom at supper, who stood by his cross, and who became a son to the Messiah's bereaved mother. Yes, even John once indulged a proud, passionate, and revengeful spirit. When the Samaritan villagers refused to receive the Lord, the apostles James and John thought that they showed a holy zeal in desiring to revenge the insult. How easy it is to deceive ourselves respecting the motives of our actions! Party spirit often appears like holy zeal; but it is of an opposite nature, and comes from a different place.

The Lord felt compassion for these ignorant Samaritans. They refused to receive him into their houses; but had they known who he was, and what he could bestow, they would have asked of him, and he would have received them into *everlasting* habitations. But they knew him not; they looked upon him as their enemy, because he belonged to the Jewish nation.

The sin of the well-instructed apostles James and John was much greater than the sin of the ignorant Samaritans. When Moses and Aaron once said to the Israelites, "Must we fetch water for you rebels!" the Lord was so much displeased with the passionate speech, that he permitted neither of these eminent saints to enter the promised land. Yet was not the spirit of the brothers James and John like the spirit of Moses and Aaron on that occasion? The two leaders of Israel would have permitted the thirsty host to languish for lack of *water*; the two apostles were anxious to consume the Samaritan villagers with *fire*.

There was once another prophet who indulged the same wrong spirit. Jonah desired the destruction of Nineveh. God expostulated with the prophet upon his cruelty in wishing so large a city, containing so many little children, to be destroyed.

God loves better to hear his people intercede for perishing sinners, (as Abraham did for Sodom,) than to hear them plead for their destruction. It better becomes a creature, who deserves himself to be consumed, and who has been snatched by the arm of divine mercy as a brand from the burning—it better becomes such a one to ask *mercy* for his fellow-sinners, than to invoke *vengeance*. When Elijah called down fire from heaven to consume the captains that the king had sent to

take him, he spoke in the power of God's Spirit, and not after his *own will*. When Elisha turned and cursed the children of Bethel, he acted by the direction of God. When David in his psalms denounces dreadful curses upon the wicked, he speaks in the person of *Christ*, and foretells the sentence which the Lord will pronounce upon *His own* enemies at the last day. There is not a word in the Bible, from the beginning to the end, to sanction a revengeful spirit. But nothing can show the hatefulness of such a spirit so clearly as the example of Christ. Even when nailed upon the cross, he prayed for his murderers, saying, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Do not we feel ashamed of the harshness and heat of our own spirits? Are we not too soon provoked, and too slowly pacified? All who know their own hearts lament that they have not yet attained to that charity which bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. But let us not be discouraged. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit may sanctify our hearts, and subdue those proud tempers and angry feelings that disturb our peace, dishonor our profession, and displease our Savior.

**July 31**

**Luke 9:57 to end. *Christ replies to three people.***

Would not each of us like to know what the Savior would have "said to us had we lived upon earth at the time that he honored it with his bodily presence? We have just read of three people who had interviews with him, each of whom received an answer suited to his real character. The first and the last of these three *offered* to follow Jesus; the second was *called* to follow him. It is natural for us to suppose that those who *offered* to become his disciples were more attached to him than the man who did *not* offer himself, but who only received a call. Yet it is evident from the Lord's replies to each that he was most approved whom we might deem *least* earnest.

The *first* of the three appears to have mistaken the nature of the Lord's service. He said, "I will follow you wherever you go." But was he prepared to follow him to prison and to death? It appears from the Lord's answer that he was not. Jesus replied—"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests—but the Son of man has not where to lay his head." By this answer the Savior seemed to say, "If you desire a life of ease, you must not follow me; for I have no retreat from the malice of my foes." Had the man truly loved him, he would not have been deterred by any dangers from following his steps. As no further mention is made of this man, it is most probable that he was discouraged by the reply he received.

Those who cannot read the heart might have thought that the man who said, "Permit me first to go and bury my father," was *unwilling* to follow Jesus. But the Lord judged differently. He saw in the man the spirit that he approved. It was not *unwillingness* to obey his call, but a sense of duty to an aged, and perhaps a deceased parent, that prompted the request. The Lord replied, "Let the dead bury

their dead." It is probable that this man had relations who were *dead* in sins. The Lord appointed that they should bury the dead father, and that the *living* son should preach the kingdom of God. He was not *dead*—he was made *alive* by the Spirit of God. Christ does not say to *every* one, "Preach the kingdom of God;" but when he does call a man by his Spirit to the holy ministry, every hindrance to his obedience to the call must be laid aside. Many who have gone forth as missionaries to heathen lands, have broken the dearest ties in order to pursue their sacred work! Some have left widowed mothers, others have sacrificed their brightest earthly hopes, rather than disobey the command, "Preach the kingdom of God."

The *last* of the three resembled the *first* in *one* respect. Like him he *offered* to follow Jesus. He resembled the *second* in another respect. Like him he asked permission to delay his coming for a little while; but the reason he gave was different. He wished to bid fare well to those at home in his house. Was this request wrong? Did not Elisha once make a similar request when called by Elijah? It is evident that in this case the  *motive* was wrong. The Lord's answer showed that *this* man, like the *first*, was not prepared for the service he offered to engage in. His heart still clung to his earthly interests, and was not devoted to Christ. Therefore the Lord compared him to one, who, holding the handle of the plough, instead of fixing his eye upon the furrow before him that he may make it straight, turns his head round, and gazes on the scenes behind. Such a man, he declared, was not fit for the kingdom of God.

The *first* and *last* of the three appear to have been unsound at heart. The first was *eager* to set out, because he knew not the nature of the service; the last was *unwilling* to set out immediately, because he loved too well his earthly portion.

Let us examine our own hearts, to see whether we resemble any one of these three men! Perhaps we are eager, like the first, to undertake some Christian work. But are we prepared for sufferings, and persecution, and poverty? Or our case may resemble that of the last. We may intend some day to become devoted Christians, while we feel so much engrossed by our earthly enjoyments that we are continually putting off the time for beginning to lead a new life. The Lord Jesus knows our most secret feelings. It is useless to attempt to deceive him—if we do not really love him, and think it a privilege to serve him, he will not accept our services. If, like the second character, we really long to do something for his cause, but are hindered by other pressing duties, the way shall be made clear; a door shall be opened, difficulties shall be removed, and the desire of our hearts shall be granted.

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