



THE
WARNINGS AND ENCOURAGEMENTS
OF
Passion Week and Easter Day :

BEING
S E R M O N S

PREACHED
IN TRINITY CHURCH, CHELTENHAM,
IN 1862;

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London:
WERTHEIM, MACINTOSH, AND HUNT.
T. K. EATON, 137, HIGH STREET, CHELTENHAM.

1862.

100. n. 81.



*These Lectures are published in compliance with
the wishes of many who heard them delivered.*



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S E R M O N I.

MARK XIV. 6—8.

“And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.”

THE supper at 'Bethany, with which the events described in this passage are connected, may be regarded as constituting a somewhat important pause, or break, in our Lord's earthly career. He has just brought His public ministry to a close. His preaching, or at least His preaching of invitation, is concluded. He has unfolded to the people, for the last time, the glorious truths of the kingdom of God: and, though an occasional act of power may be displayed, testifying to the greatness of the incarnate Son, yet He will no more be found going about doing good: no more lepers will be cleansed: no more deaf will be made to hear or blind made

to see : no more dead will be raised from the loathsomeness of corruption to the comeliness and activities of natural life—in fact, His work as a preacher, as a teacher, as a worker of miracles, and wonders, and signs, may be said to be done.

Our Lord then stands looking back upon His past ministerial career. He has accomplished, so far, what the Father hath given Him to do. And it is probable enough that the Messianic language of the fortieth Psalm rises up in His thoughts, “ I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart ; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation : I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth from the great congregation.” But before Him—stretching out before Him—lies His greatest and most important task. Yet a few hours, and His baptism of sorrow and of suffering will begin. He will appear as the substitute for sinners. The cup of God’s wrath against transgression will be put into His hands : and He will have to drink it to the dregs. He looks down through the days that are coming on ; and He sees a man among the hoary olive trees of Gethsemane, prostrated on the earth in the throes of an inconceivable mental

agony. Again He looks ; and He sees an august prisoner, standing, bound with thongs, before the scowling tribunal of priests : then hurried away to Pilate, and condemned to death : and He traces Him, step by step, as, amid buffetings, and taunts, and cruel revilings, the crowd urge Him up the steep sides of Calvary, and finish their work of butchery by nailing Him to the Cross. He knows what it means. He is beholding Himself. Those sufferings are His. That death is His. But He calmly surveys the scene. He hath come into the world chiefly that His soul may be made an offering for sin. And instead of shrinking from the fiery baptism—he is only “straitened, until it be accomplished.”

It appears then to me, Christian brethren, that in this supper at Bethany, we are placed upon a kind of intermediate ground between the ministerial and the sacrificial work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The former state of things has come to a close. A new state is about to open. And the Redeemer, as it were, allows Himself a brief breathing space, a short period of rest, among His friends and disciples, ere He goes forth to meet the fate which He well knows to be impending over His head. Here, He prepares

Himself for His sufferings. Here, He pauses to contemplate the events, which will come crowding and thickening upon Him, and hurrying Him, with fearful rapidity, to the cross and the tomb. Let us draw nigh, and observe what is going on.

The chiefest, and most noteworthy event that occurred on this occasion, is, of course, the act of Mary, the sister of Martha, and the sister of Lazarus. It is to this act that our text refers. We read that, while Jesus sat at meat, she came with an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard, very precious: and, breaking the box, poured its contents upon His head: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Now the act would have seemed to most persons to have been a graceful and loving recognition of the many benefits which Mary had received at the hands of her Divine Master. But there were some present to whom it gave offence. Instigated by Judas—who was a covetous man, and could not understand the meaning of a profuse expenditure, even when the object of the expenditure was Jesus Christ Himself; and, it may be, rendered a little jealous by the exhibition of a devoted affection exceeding and overtopping their own—the disciples—ay, the *disciples*—were indignant, and

murmured against her, on account of what they called the unreasonable and unwarrantable 'waste' of the precious ointment. It was at this point that Jesus interfered: administering a rebuke to them all, but especially to Judas, "Let her alone; why trouble ye her?" And instead of condemning her action, He—sparing as He was in His commendation of human deeds—praises her. "She hath wrought a good work on me." "She hath done what she could." And He makes her the promise, "Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her."

Now I wish to consider with you, brethren, first, the conduct of Mary: and then, the conduct of Judas. I believe we may consider the actions of both these persons as representative actions: their feelings, as representative feelings. In Mary, we have exhibited the devoted attachment of the Church of Christ to her great Lord and Head: in Judas, the cold, suspicious aversion of the world, which doubts if Christ be worth such an outlay as His followers make for Him. But let us see. It cannot, at any rate, fail to profit us, if we examine the narrative a little

more closely, whether I succeed or not in establishing the particular view of it which I am anxious to impress upon your minds.

The first point I would ask you to notice is this—that this loving act on the part of Mary is obviously called out by a persuasion that she should soon lose her Master, and lose Him by death. Our Lord says so. “She is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.” We are not indeed obliged to suppose that she clearly understood, at this time, either the manner or the meaning of the death of Jesus Christ. There must have been much that was unintelligible to her. Still, the statements of our Lord upon this point had been so explicit, and of late so increasingly explicit—that she could not allow herself to question the fact of His approaching departure. Jesus had said, that He was going away: that He was to be separated from His people. He had also assured them that this separation was to be brought about by His death. And the thought of His dying—made perhaps more vivid by some event that had recently taken place, or by some conversation that had passed at the table, quickened her affection to such a degree, as constrained her to express it by the very costliest

gift she had it in her power to bestow. She loved her divine Lord before. He had done so much for her : so much for her kindred—He had spoken such gracious words of instruction, and done so many kindly and gentle deeds—that her heart beat always, with a full pulse of affectionate attachment, towards Him. But when she heard of His dying, her love burst forth with a tenfold fervency : and, though she was probably a person of a timid and retiring character, it emboldened her to come forward and honour her Master, without heeding the construction that her conduct might possibly receive.

And I cannot but think, brethren, that, in this respect, Mary may well stand as the representative of the Church of Christ. It is much that the Lord hath done for us : and for this much we feel we owe Him our love. That He condescended to become man : that He, the only-begotten of the Father, very God of very God, left His glory, and took upon Him the sorrows and the frailties of our human nature—as it is the theme of angelic wonder, so ought it to be the subject continually of our adoring gratitude. But besides this, He hath taught us and led us. The good Shepherd, He hath taken us to the

green pastures and still waters of His heavenly doctrine : the great Prophet, He hath stood between earth and heaven—and speaking of things which He knew, describing facts, upon which His all-seeing eye rested at the moment of description—He hath unfolded to us, as far as we could receive them, the character and purposes and will of the most High God. Yet more—it is “by Him that all things consist.” To Him we owe it that the blood courses healthfully in our veins : that the brain does its work : that the order of nature, both within and without us, is upheld : in fact, that the whole of this vast piece of mechanism, which we call our earth, is kept as it is : every bolt, and bar, and hinge, and lever, in its proper place, and doing its appointed work—and thus is fitted to become, for a time, the home and the habitation of man.

For all these things, and for many others, (for the number of His benefits towards us is infinite,) we render to the Lord Jesus Christ our gratitude, our devotion, our love. But there is one thing, which more than all other things attracts us. There is one thing which swells the pulses of our hearts with the throbbings of a fuller affection : and that is—the cross of Calvary. The dying

Saviour is the mighty magnet, which draws all hearts. The death of Christ, when dwelt upon, quickens with intenser life and activity: fans with a fiercer flame—the love of His people. Jesus incarnate, the brother man, sympathising with our troubles, and entering into our joys: Jesus the teacher: Jesus the example: Jesus the comforter: Jesus the strong friend, who upholds us continually with His powerful arm, who preserves, and strengthens, and blesses us—is precious to our souls. But Jesus, crucified and dying, is a name more potent than all. Here we have, drawn and centered into one act, all the beams of His infinite and unspeakable love. And accordingly, when the Church raises her most rapturous songs, it is to praise “the Lamb that was slain:” it is to ascribe all the honour, and the glory, and the might, and the greatness, and the majesty, and the dominion, unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood.

Let me ask you to notice, in the second place, the character of the love which Mary exhibited on this occasion. It was a love which delighted in self-sacrifice. It did not stay—it could not stay—to calculate how much it should grant, and how much it should withhold. But it poured

out, at once, its best and most treasured things, at the feet of Him who was the object of its affectionate regard. Had Mary had in her possession anything more precious still than the alabaster box of ointment, it would have been offered to the Lord. There was nothing she would have held back from Him. And the deed was just the expression of that earnest love, of that true-hearted devotedness, which lays everything at the feet of Christ, and counts no blessedness so great as that of spending and being spent in His service.

And here again she stands forth, I think, to our view, as the representative of the Church of Christ. What is the feeling of the true believer? That of the perfect consecration of self to Jesus Christ. I do not mean to say that the feeling influences us all, or perhaps any of us, as much as it ought to do. Most of us fall short of the deep earnest love—of the enthusiastic devotion of Mary, pouring out her choicest and her best, as an offering to the Lord. Still, the principle is admitted, and the feeling is experienced in a degree, by every true believer. We acknowledge that we are not our own, but bought with a price. The most precious things we have, belong to

Christ. The intellect he has given us—the substance we possess—the influence we are able to exert—the time we are able to command—all these things are to be consecrated to Him. And the higher our love rises, the more completely are we constrained by that love to lay aside selfish aims and selfish desires, and to live not unto ourselves, but unto Him that hath loved us and given Himself for us.

One more thought to complete the parallel, if it be a parallel. Mary's deed, though it excited the disgust of the cold-hearted man of the world, called forth the Saviour's warm approval. It was to be spoken of hereafter, wheresoever the Gospel was preached, throughout the whole world. It was never to be forgotten.

And have we not here, brethren, a figure of that immortality which attaches to loving deeds—to things done in the name and for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ? Pour forth your hearts in works of love; and God is not unrighteous to forget them. They will be inscribed upon the tablet of His eternal remembrance. They will ever live before Him. Oh! brethren, consider the marvellous graciousness of the Lord our God! Our sins and iniquities, our offences

against His Divine Majesty, He will not remember. They will be blotted out. They will be cast into the depths of the sea. No mention shall be made of them. But whatsoever hath been done out of love to Jesus Christ, shall preserve an eternal fragrance, shall be had in everlasting remembrance before God; and even the cup of cold water, given in the name of a disciple, shall not pass by without its reward.

In all this, Christian brethren, Mary seems to me to be no inappropriate representative of the Church of Christ. Like the Church, she remembers that Jesus has healed her. When she was dead in trespasses and sins, He looked upon her, and bade her live. She has sat at His feet, and heard the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth. He has enlightened her darkness: instructed her ignorance: borne with her waywardness: led her on, step by step, wondrously, in a way she knew not of. He has been to her ever a sun and a shield, a loving friend, and a refuge whereunto she might alway resort. And more than this—He hath blessed those who were dear to her. He hath instructed Martha. He hath raised Lazarus from the dead. And now death is about to part her and her Lord: to take

Him out of her sight: to hurry Him away—she hardly knows whither. And so, as it is with the Church, the thought of His absence calls forth a more than usual tenderness, brings up to the surface the strength of her devoted love; and she pours out the feelings of her heart, in the fullest and most self-sacrificing offerings she had it in her power to make. Shall she stop to consider, to calculate what limits she shall put to her offering? Not she. All seems too poor to express her love. All seems unworthy of the Redeemer's acceptance. All seems infinitely far beneath the idea she entertains of His worthiness, and of His unspeakable value to her soul. Love so amazing, so divine, as that of the incarnate Son, who gave Himself to die, demands an answering love which does not grudge: which does not stint: which does not calculate—but expresses itself in the casting of the whole being at the feet of the Lord.

Let us pass on to consider the darker side of our subject—the feelings with which the act of Mary is regarded by the world. Judas said, “Why was this waste of the ointment made? It might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and given to the poor.” And he

murmured at her, and induced the other disciples to murmur also.

Now here, brethren, you have the very spirit of the world: here you have an exhibition of their feelings towards Christ. The thought in their heart is—"Is Christ worthy of all this expenditure?" They see a man, spending and being spent for Christ; counting it all honour, all joy, to lay out life, and even, if need be, to lay down life in His service. They look on, and cannot understand the phenomenon. "Why this waste?" they say. "Why this lavish expenditure of money? Why this eager attention to religious duties? Why this zealous endeavour—this labouring and watching—for the extension of His kingdom? Why this clatter about the conversion of souls, and the sending out of Missionaries, and the spread of the Gospel?" Like Judas, they "have indignation." To them, as to Judas, it is waste—waste of time—waste of energy—waste of money. "The efforts might be more properly directed into another channel." Ah! brethren, the reason is that, like Judas, they know nothing of the love of Christ. They do not feel that He is worthy of the most fervent devotion, of the largest self-sacrifices that His

people can make for Him. And notice too, the hypocrisy of the man. He cloaks his cold selfishness under the plea of a prudential regard to the interests of religion. "It might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and given to the poor." So are there many who disguise their real indifference to Christ's person, under the pretence of doing Christ's cause more effectual service in some other way.

Such then is the spirit of Judas—of the world—of that world which professes to love and to serve Christ, and which yet loves and serves Him not. And it is painful, brethren, to find our Lord, in this brief interval of refreshment—in this short season, in which He is preparing Himself for the coming conflict—still pursued and hunted down by the spirit of the world. Yet so it is. It comes in to darken His hour of repose. And even amongst His own true-hearted disciples, a feeling springs up which was as discreditable to them, as it must have been painful to their loving Master. It must have been a pang to Him to find that they did not think Him worthy of such an offering. It must have been another drop of gall added to His cup of bitter sorrows.

I would remind you also, that our text con-

tains a note of warning, to which it will be well for all of us to listen. "Me ye have not always." There is a warning here for God's people. Opportunities of doing good, pass away. Oftentimes they never return. Seize them then, brethren, when they present themselves. The time for showing kindness, may never come again. The season of softening may pass by. The word spoken to-day may do good: to-morrow, it may be too late. Let us work while it is called day, for the night cometh when no man can work.

To those who are not God's people our text sounds a still more serious and still more solemn note of warning. "Me," says Christ, "ye have not always." Opportunities of accepting Christ, pass away. Reject Him to-day—it is thereby made far more unlikely that ye will accept Him to-morrow. Reject Him to-morrow—your hardness will be fearfully increased: your power of resistance will be perilously intensified: the prospect of your salvation made most fearfully remote. Let there then be no delay. Is the Spirit dealing with any of you now? Is He warning any of you of the importance of this opportunity? Is He whispering to you of the preciousness of your soul? of the infinite value of salvation? Oh!

yield yourselves to His dealing *now*. Lay down your opposition *now*. Come over at once to Christ. He will not cast you out. He will not mention against you the past. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found: call ye upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

SERMON II.

LUKE XIX. 37—40.

“And when He was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen ; saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord : peace in Heaven, and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto Him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And He answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.”

THE first thing that strikes us, in reading the account of our Lord's entry into Jerusalem, is, the disappointment it must have occasioned to the great majority of the Jewish people. They had expected an entry of Messiah into the favoured city. Five centuries before, Zechariah, standing on the heights of prophecy, had raised the jubilant cry, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion : shout, O daughter of Jerusalem ; behold thy King cometh unto thee.” To enter in then, and take possession, was part of the Mes-

siah's work ; and the Jews looked for it. But they looked not for such an entry as this. Their imaginations had pictured the advent of a mighty conqueror—of a world-Prince, who should break off from their necks the yoke of the Roman power, and set them and their nation on the high places of the earth. Crowds of armed warriors, shouts of victory, all the pomp and pride and circumstance of glorious and successful war—these were the accessories of the picture. With these, their fancy had surrounded the central figure of the scene—the great Messiah of their expectations.

But how different from all this was the simple reality ! Instead of a triumphal car, a colt, the foal of an ass : instead of trained and stalwart warriors, a body of humble Galilean peasants : instead of swords and spears, palm-branches : instead of power, everything that spoke of humility, and self-forgetfulness, and self-sacrifice.

The first thought then is for the disappointment of the Jewish people. The second thought that occurs to us is this—that our Lord, on this occasion, made a very decided deviation from His usual practice. Hitherto, as you will remem-

ber, He had invariably kept Himself in the back ground. When the multitude pressed upon Him to make Him a King, He held them aloof, or withdrew Himself out of their hands. The leper who was cleansed, the blind who were healed, were bidden preserve a strict silence about the miraculous cures which had been performed upon them, or, at least, not to blaze those cures abroad; and in this procedure of Christ, was fulfilled (we are told) the prediction of the Prophet, "He shall not strive, nor cry: nor cause His voice to be heard in the streets." Up to the present time then, it was the practice of our Lord to retire from observation, as far as was possible. By prudent and circumspect conduct, He allowed His enemies no handle against Him. They could not make Him out to be a disturber of the state, when He so manifestly held aloof from all movements of a political nature. And thus He avoided the danger of precipitating His death, giving no more publicity than was actually necessary to the wonders He performed, and withdrawing Himself out of the reach of His adversaries whenever His pointed rebukes had, more than usually, embittered their feelings against Him.

Now however, and all of a sudden, He alters His conduct. He comes forward openly, as the long-expected Messiah. He claims the honour by His behaviour, entering Jerusalem in triumph; and He claims it in words; for when the Pharisees bid Him check the disciples for calling Him "the King that cometh in the name of the Lord," He refuses to do so. What then is the cause of this alteration in His conduct? It is this—the time has arrived when He is to be offered up. What remains for Him now is, chiefly, the "decease which He has to accomplish at Jerusalem." Formerly, He kept out of the way of the rage of His enemies, because His hour was not yet come. Now, the hour appointed of the Father has struck, and He goes willingly forth to welcome His death. He does not check His disciples, but encourages them in making open proclamation of His character and pretensions, because He intends to prepare the way for His sufferings, by a public avowal of His mission.

Taking then these thoughts with us, as introductory to the subject, let us advance to consider the lessons which the narrative, of which our text is part, may be found to teach us. There

are three persons, or groups of persons, to which I should like to direct your attention ; first, the Pharisees ; then, the people ; and lastly, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, especially when described by the evangelist as weeping over Jerusalem.

First, then, the Pharisees. Now these men are obviously unmoved by the general enthusiasm and excitement by which they are surrounded. They are educated men : men learned in the law. And they look down with a degree of contempt upon the unlettered and unintelligent rabble, who are pouring into Jerusalem as the body-guard of the Prophet of Nazareth. It seems probable that they regard Jesus, as a prophet sent from God : or, at least, as having in some irregular way, a divinely-bestowed commission to teach. Their appeal to Christ implies this. "Master," they say, (that is, Teacher) "Master, rebuke thy disciples." But they recognise no divinity about Him. They do not accept Him as the Messiah. And they are scandalised at the lofty epithets applied to Him by His followers, considering His acceptance of them as an acceptance of blasphemous homage. "Hearest thou," is their language, "what these

say? They call thee the King that cometh in the name of the Lord. They attribute to thy coming, blessings which alone can attend the advent of Emmanuel, God with us. They attribute to thee, the prophetic expressions which belong to Messiah. Jesus of Nazareth, canst thou endure this? Darest thou, a simple teacher, assume such honour to thyself? Let them not then continue any longer to insult the high majesty of Heaven. Rebuke thy disciples."

In this expostulation, (hypocritical as I believe it to have been, for I doubt not that, in their secret hearts, they trembled before the idea of the Godhead of Christ)—in this expostulation, we hear the first mutterings of the tempest, which ultimately rolled and broke over the head of Christ. It was on a charge of blasphemy that He was condemned, and put to death. "What need we any further witnesses?" said the High Priest. "Ye yourselves have heard his blasphemy." With your own ears ye have heard Him affirm that He is the Christ, the Son of God. These Pharisees then are the first to take up the charge, which issued in the condemnation and death of Christ.

It is obvious then, I say, that no salutary impression whatever had been produced upon these men, by the spectacle before them. They were hard and hopeless. They stood there unmoved, whilst the tide of human feeling flowed past them: and not a desire of their heart, not a feeling, went forth towards Jesus of Nazareth. What were they? Doubtless men of correct and moral lives: stern keepers of the requirements of the law: men great in outward purification: men who never failed in the fulfilment of any external observance that their religion demanded at their hands. And in the crowd that streamed past them were many (I doubt not) who would not bear for a moment comparison with them, if looked upon with the eyes that man sees with. There were the outcasts whom society had indignantly flung forth from her bosom: publicans and sinners, men and women of reprobate lives, thieves, harlots, drunkards. They were there, because they felt, when in His presence, that they were cared for. His holiness, it is true, struck them with awe: but His gentleness and His love attracted them. And it was the power of sympathy—of human sympathy—of the

sympathy of Him, who came to seek and to save that which was lost, which emboldened them to approach Him, and drew them in to swell the number of His attendants, as He came nigh to Jerusalem. But the Pharisees could thank God that they were not such people as these. No such blot was upon their escutcheon. No such stain upon their lives. "This people," they said, "which knoweth not the law, is cursed." But we are the favorites of Heaven, and we have kept all these things from our youth up until now.

Ah! brethren, may we not gather from these things, that there is no resistance to Christ like that which arises from sins of the spirit? These men were free from outward blame; no vicious excesses could be laid to their charge; but there was, under the fair exterior, a citadel of pride and self-righteousness, which nothing could storm.

And so it often is, in the history of the Church of Christ. In voluptuous profligate Corinth, where no one would have gone, I think, for triumphs for the Gospel, God had "much people." And eighteen months did the Apostle Paul remain in the city, gathering them out by his preaching. In

thoughtful, intellectual Athens, far purer in life, and far more inclined to consider the claims and weigh the evidence of a new religion, there was comparatively little success. "Certain men clave unto Paul, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them." And so it often is in our own experience. Not unfrequently we have before our mind's eye the figure of a man, who passes through life so honourably and blamelessly, that it seems as if it needed only one step more to make him a Christian. Conscientious to the last degree, no one ever dared to breathe a whisper against his integrity. Amiable and benevolent, he is an example to many a crabbed-tempered, close-fisted professor of religion. But he is not a Christian: obviously not. He has in him none of the signs of spiritual life: no love for Christ—no value for the Word of God—no relish for prayer. And there he stands, year after year, just outside the golden gates of the kingdom, only not entering in. We look on with surprise. Many, whose lives have been openly careless or vicious, pass by him, and enter in. A sabbath-breaker passes by him: a drunkard passes by him: an infidel

passes by him. They enter in, and, united to Christ by a saving faith, commence a new life, bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit. But there he stands, (just like the pillar of salt on the plains of old Sodom,) holding, apparently, the same position now which he held years and years ago.

Ah! brethren, why is this? It comes from some secret spiritual resistance, unseen by others. Pride holds the man a slave, or self-righteousness, or there is something which he will not consent to give up; and so, whilst others are trooping and pressing on in the service of Christ, he draws himself coldly to the roadside, as the Pharisees did, and holds aloof, scandalised at the fervour of enthusiasm, to which there is no response in his own torpid and indifferent bosom.

Such then, it seems to me, were the Pharisees. They were wholly unimpressed. They had made up their minds that they would none of Jesus Christ; and the wave of religious excitement swept by, and left them where they were—as hard, as cold, as determined and resolute in their attitude of spiritual resistance, as ever.

But what shall we say about the multitude? Let me set before you two pictures. Here is

a mass of human beings, pervaded, all of them, with the fervour of a religious excitement. Not one is unimpressed. They crowd round Jesus of Nazareth. They cast their garments in His way. They go before Him, making the air ring with their acclamations, and openly confessing Him before men, as the Christ of God—the true Messiah of His people Israel. As they come down the slope of the mount of Olives, and the city lies before them, in its magnificent beauty, lifting up its palaces and towers haunted by so many associations of the past, with the glorious mass of the Temple rising majestically above all, they seem to be seized with a sudden and irresistible impulse, and they lift up their voices with one jubilant cry, “Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord : peace in heaven : and glory in the highest.” That, is one picture. This, is the other. A crowd is congregated together in a vast open space. Before them, high up, so that all can see Him, stands a pale, drooping figure, a crown of thorns upon His brow, blood dropping from His lacerated shoulders, a purple robe thrown in mockery over His feeble frame. He stands there with a majestic, yet a pitying look ; far more oppressed

in spirit for the poor misguided creatures before Him, than He is for Himself. And they, what are they doing? They are heaving to and fro with the excitement of rage. Hands are clenched. Arms are lifted menacingly upward. Hate glares from their eyes, upon the unresisting victim. And the wild shout rises up to the sky, echoing back from the lofty walls and towers of Jerusalem, "Crucify Him! crucify Him!" But have we not seen some of this crowd before? Yes; we saw them, four days ago, coming down the descent of the mount of Olives, surrounding with their clamorous homage the man whom they are now so anxious to hurry to a painful and ignominious death. The men are the same. Jesus of Nazareth is the same. It is only four days that have passed. But those four days have made a difference—all the difference between worshipping Christ and murdering Christ.

Alas! brethren, for poor human nature!

Now what was the cause of this? I am inclined to think that it was the having good and right impressions without acting upon them. These men, as you notice, were far from being so hopeless as the Pharisees. They were influenced for the moment, in the right direction. But it was

only an *impression* : it was not a change of heart produced by the Spirit of God. Had their impressions passed on into action : had they given themselves to Christ, to be His wholly, to obey His commands, to deny self for His sake, for His sake to face the opposition of the world, the case would have been different with them. But the excitement subsided, and led to no result. And the spirit of evil, cast out for the moment, came back again to find his house swept and garnished, and brought with him seven other spirits worse than himself ; and the last state of these people became worse than the first.

I gather from this, brethren, and I think I may fairly do so, the extreme danger of religious impressions which lead to no practical result, to no surrender of heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ. I pray you to notice, that, in cases of true turning to the Lord, there is immediate action. The conviction is produced, and the acting upon it immediately follows. Christ calls Zacchæus. Zacchæus comes down at once from his tree. He calls Matthew. Matthew leaves his business, and follows Him without delay. He calls Peter and Andrew. Immediately they leave their fishing nets and boats, and go after Him.

He calls Paul: and Paul immediately confers not with flesh and blood, but yields himself a willing captive to Him who has laid His hold upon him.

And I must say I greatly dread that dallying with the offers of Christ, which is so common amongst us. Believe me, brethren, if we let an impression, a conviction, pass away, without allowing it to lead on to action, it will revenge itself upon us. It will go; but it will leave a hardness behind. If one of you should say to night, "I know that I ought to cast myself at the feet of Christ, and beg of Him to receive me; it is right for me to do so; it is safe for me to do so; and I dare say I should be all the happier if the thing were really done. I know this, and I do intend some day to take the step, for it would never do to die as I am now: but I cannot take the step just at present; I will take it soon"—if this be the language of any heart among you—and it may be—all I can say is, that it is most fearfully improbable that that man will ever look unto Christ and be saved. He *may* do so. For the mercies of God are infinite, and His power irresistible. But as far as the man himself is concerned, he is taking almost the most certain and infallible way to ensure his everlasting destruction.

And if he is startled at such a statement, and points me to the religious impressions of which from time to time he is the subject, I refer him to the narrative before us, and tell him, that those who are contented with impressions, without passing on to an entire and definite surrender of themselves to Christ, may be excitedly praising Christ one day, and proclaiming Him as "the King that cometh in the name of the Lord," and, within a short time may be as vociferously demanding that Jesus of Nazareth be led forth to instant execution.

Lastly, and briefly, I place before you the figure of Christ, weeping over the devoted city of Jerusalem. Hear the pathetic words, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes." I understand then, that there was a day of grace for Jerusalem. Had that day of grace been recognised and improved, it might have been otherwise with the city. Now the time was gone by. There was no hope left now: no chance of mercy. The judgments must descend: the enemies must come: the horrors must take place, because Jerusalem "knew not the time of her visitation." It is true that

Christ will preach again in the temple. But His preaching will be to explain and justify the ways of God. It will be, perhaps, to gather out individuals here and there. But the general day of grace and mercy is gone by for ever.

Oh! brethren, if these statements have application to individuals (and surely they have) what a solemn lesson is taught us here! We learn at once the goodness and severity of God. On the one side is proclaimed to us the free offer of the Gospel. Whosoever will, may take of the water of life. You need no qualification but your willingness. Pardon, life, peace in Christ, are offered—offered freely to all, without money and without price, if they will only accept. Here is the goodness of our God. But after a time, the offer, if neglected, is withdrawn—the day of grace passes by. Hardness—impenetrable hardness—sets in; and the soul is handed over to destruction. Here we have the terrible, but most just severity of our God.

Brethren, ye who are yet unconverted, think, I pray you, of these things. Behold the Saviour weeping tears over Jerusalem. He pities her, but *now He will not save her*. It is too late. Oh! that it may be so with none of you. God

in His mercy grant that He who now offers to receive you, if ye will come to Him—offers to receive you as your Saviour—may never have to turn His eyes upon you as a judge, and say, “I know ye not, depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.”

SERMON III.

• ————— •
JOHN XIII. 7.

“Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now ; but thou shalt know hereafter.”

IN the chapter to which our text belongs, we find the twelve apostles gathered together in an upper chamber, in the presence of their Lord. It is the last time that they will meet with unbroken numbers. Changes are even now at the doors. Events are coming on fast, which will take away their Master from their head, and drive one of their band to a death of suicide, and an eternity of woe. It is also the last occasion on which they will hold converse with their Master, before His bitter suffering. And thus, although they only imperfectly understand and only dimly foresee what the day is about to bring forth, yet enough seems to have been felt by them to cast a shade of deeper solemnity than usual over the solemn service in which they are about to engage. It is whilst the preparations for sup-

per are being made, or while the supper itself is going on, that our Lord performs the remarkable and unexpected act, which we have to consider to-day. He rises from table; and laying aside His garments, and girding Himself with a towel, pours water into a bason, and washes the disciples' feet—beginning (as it appears) with Simon Peter, and going through the whole number down to the very last of the twelve.

Now I would ask you to notice, before we proceed any further, how careful the Evangelist is to put this mysterious proceeding in its proper light. He gives us to understand that it was no hasty, unpremeditated action. Jesus was not urged to the step by a momentary impulse. Neither was it an act of unnecessary self-abasement. The thing was done by the Saviour, under a full consciousness of His Divine mission, and with a full sense of the dignity and glory of His own Person. The impression indeed on the mind of the disciples was, that their Master had forgotten Himself for the moment. But this was far from being the case. The recollection, the knowledge of His own essential Godhead, the anticipation of His future glory—were never more vividly present to the Redeemer's soul, than

when He humbled Himself before the feet of these Galilean peasants. "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God, riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments."

Whilst He is making His preparations, the disciples seem to have remained silent: probably from extreme surprise—half guessing, yet half disbelieving what their Master is about to do. But when He comes to Simon Peter and offers to perform for him this menial service, the apostle utterly refuses to permit the whole proceeding. He cannot, he will not allow the Lord to descend so low. If Christ will not care for His own dignity, he must care for Him. "Thou shalt never wash my feet." It is not difficult, brethren, to detect the wilfulness and the pride which lay at the bottom of this seeming humility on the part of the apostle, or rather, I should say, on the part of the apostles; for Peter was acting here merely as the mouth-piece of the rest. They, virtually, take their Master to task. They judge for Him what He ought to do, and what He ought not to do. They refuse compliance with His commands: obedience to His authority. Their hearts, no doubt, told them, that they were

displaying a proper humility. But the fact was, that they were simply disobedient and wilful. However, their resistance is of no very long duration. Jesus, in condescension to their weakness, promises them a solution of their difficulties at some future date. They cannot understand now: they shall understand hereafter. Now they must trust Him without explanation. They must simply obey. He warns them too of the consequences of continuing to resist Him. "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." And the two representations combined overcome their reluctance. They consent to receive the honour which their loving, humble Master is so anxious to put upon them.

Without however detaining you any longer upon the narrative itself, (parts of which will probably appear again at a later stage of our discourse,) let me ask you to examine with me the spiritual significance of this remarkable action. Let me ask you to consider what purposes our Lord had especially in view, when He humbled Himself so far as to stoop down and wash the feet of His disciples.

In the first place then, it seems to me that He intended the action to be symbolical of His whole

work upon earth. That the disciples greatly misunderstood the real nature of that work, is known to us all. They had fixed their attention and built their hopes so exclusively upon the coming glories of the Messiah's kingdom, that the idea of a suffering Messiah was well-nigh unintelligible to them. Accordingly, we find that when Christ spake at any time about the success of His work, or about the rewards that were in store for His faithful followers, the disciples were sufficiently awake to the meaning of His words. They could comprehend what it was to "sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." They could understand the request proffered by two of their number, that they might be permitted to sit, "the one on His right hand and the other on His left, in His kingdom." And this, not only because men are naturally more alive to that which suits their own inclinations, or which advances their own interests, than to anything else; but also because the throne, and the grandeur, and the magnificence, and the act of judgment, harmonized most entirely with the conception they had formed of what the Messiah would be. But when Christ expatiated upon His sufferings and death, there was something in the

statement for which their minds were not prepared ; and thus it came to pass that " the saying was hid from them," and they understood it not.

Now the time, brethren, was fast drawing nigh when these very disciples would see their Master submitting to the most painful of all painful degradations. Hitherto He had been preserved, and, in some instances, as it appears, miraculously preserved, from personal outrage. Men had mocked and reviled Him, it was true. They had ridiculed His doctrine, and despised His warnings. And even, occasionally, when goaded beyond endurance by the frenzy of their impious hatred, had taken up stones to cast at Him, and put Him to death. But through it all, He had been hedged in from their insults by a mysterious, impenetrable barrier ; and He had passed calmly on His way, healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, cleansing the leper, raising the dead, uttering His wonderful discourses, unchecked and unhindered ; every thing, apparently, giving way before Him, and the very bitterest of His opponents so silenced or so conscience-struck that they durst not ask Him any more questions. Now, however, all this was to be changed. The barrier was to be broken down. And the disciples would

look on, and behold their loved Master the subject of wanton indignities and most cruel outrage. He would be bound with thongs, and led away to judgment like a common malefactor. He would be buffeted, and scourged, and spit upon. He would be bandied about from one tribunal to another. He would be rejected and disowned by all—by friends and foes alike—by His disciples, by the Jews, by the heathen, by all classes and all ranks. And lastly, to put on the capstone of ignominy, He would be nailed to a cross, and left to die there between two thieves—left to die the lowest and most degrading of deaths, a spectacle to heaven and earth.

Naturally, brethren, such events as these (unless the disciples had been well prepared for them) would have had the effect of placing a stumbling-block in their path. It would not have been easy for them to reconcile such things with the opinion which Christ had Himself led them to entertain about His essential equality with the Father; and they might have been tempted to question the pretensions of one who, at the most momentous crisis of His life, had shown Himself so conspicuously unable to save or even to help Himself. It was necessary then that Christ

should exhibit to them, in such a way as to impress the lesson indelibly upon their minds, the true character of the work which He came down from heaven to do. It was necessary that they should understand, once for all, that the humbling, and the degradation, and the suffering, and the death, were not mere extraneous matters, which could have been dispensed with, but that they constituted the very essence, the very kernel and core, and marrow of His mission: and that though it was true that the Son of man appeared upon this earth to exercise Divine authority, yet that He did as truly appear there to "humble Himself, and to become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Now it was precisely for this reason, as it seems to me, that our Lord performed the symbolical action recorded in the passage before us. In it He gathered, as into a focus, the scattered hints which He had previously thrown out, from time to time, respecting the nature of His work. He placed the action before the disciples as a kind of compendium or epitome of His mission. The ceremony occupied probably no more than a few minutes; but as it passed before their eyes, they saw, or they might have seen, the meaning

of the mysterious life of Jesus of Nazareth : they comprehended, or they might have comprehended, the fulness of that love which deemed no sacrifice too great, and no degradation too deep, if only thereby could be secured the welfare and blessedness of its chosen.

Such appears to me, brethren, to be one motive which actuated the Lord, when He knelt down, like a servant, before His own humble disciples, and began to wash their feet. He would teach them, by the most significant of symbols, that though He was the God-man—the Christ—the Son of the living God, yet “ He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister ; and to give His life a ransom for many.” They did not understand this then, but they undertood it afterwards. Partially, when He had risen again from the dead, more fully when the light of the day of Pentecost streamed back upon the wondrous events that had taken place, and showed those events instinct with the glowing vitality of a spiritual significance—they entered into the mind and meaning of their Master. Then they saw that they could not have been raised themselves without the degradation of their Lord. Then was it made clear to them, that Christ must have been

a suffering Christ, in order that He should ultimately enter into His glory.

And if we ourselves learn to interpret this action aright, Christian brethren, there is no depth of condescension on the part of the Saviour that, after this, will be able to stagger us. Does it surprise you that Christ should stand so long at the door of the heart of a sinner and knock? There He stands, sometimes for years, pleading for admission. The door is barred against Him. A deaf ear is turned to the gracious voice of invitation, with which He beseeches the sinner to have mercy upon His own soul. But He will not leave us alone. He will not allow His people to perish. He pursues us with entreaties. Though repulsed, He still stands and knocks, until at last, by a sweet compulsion, He obliges us to open to Him, and peace and blessedness and joy come with Him, as He enters in and takes possession of the soul. Or do you wonder at the gentleness of His dealing with the waywardness of our wills? Or are you surprised when you see the backslider reclaimed and healed? Do you marvel at the loving-kindness and tender mercy, at the forbearance and consideration which he receives after having so grievously transgressed

against the Lord? Then turn your eyes to the scene painted here by the pencil of the Evangelist St. John. That mysterious man before you is the Lord of heaven and of earth. He is the image of the invisible God: the first-born of every creature. The Father hath given all things into His hands. Angel and archangel, seraphim and cherubim, in shining ranks, bow down before Him, and cast their radiant crowns at His feet. He wields the sceptre of the universe. And what is He doing? Dispensing blessings, like a sovereign, from His throne, high and lifted up? Not so, brethren. With His garments laid aside,—with a towel girt about Him—with a bason in His hand, He goes from Peter to John, from John to James, from James to Judas, and on through the whole number of the apostles, kneeling down before them in turn, and washing their feet.

But there was, doubtless, another lesson which our Lord intended to teach His disciples, and us through them, by means of this remarkable act of self-humiliation. You will remember that when Peter exclaims, "Thou shalt never wash my feet," our Lord replies, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." To the warm-hearted disciple, the idea of separation from his

Master—the idea of having no interest in Christ, was simply appalling ; and He cries out at once, “ Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.” To this Jesus makes reply again, “ He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit.”

Now, in this expression, taken in its outward meaning, our Lord seems to refer to the fact, that one who has bathed already, needs not entire washing, after he has reached his home, but only to have his feet washed from the dust of the way. But there is also an inner and a spiritual meaning. And it seems to be something of this kind. The first thing that is necessary is the bath of the new-birth—spiritual regeneration. The man, convinced of sin by the power of the Spirit—convinced of his own utter uncleanness and pollution, flees to Christ, as to Him who alone can cleanse him. In the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, his filthiness is washed away. “ Clean water is sprinkled upon him, and he is clean.” Now this is a process which need not be repeated. It is done once—once for all. With the sprinkling of clean water—i. e. the application to one-self of the atoning blood of Christ—comes the “ new heart,” and the “ new

spirit," and the spiritual life is actually begun. This bathing, this bath of the new-birth, all the apostles, with one exception, already had. "Ye are clean, but not all. For He knew who should betray Him; therefore said He, Ye are not all clean."

What then are we to understand by the washing of the feet? We are to understand, I think, that continually recurring application to the blood of the cross, which the believer makes, whenever he becomes conscious of the presence, the touch, the pollution, of sin upon his soul. As we walk on through the path of life, our feet become begrimed and befouled by the dust of the way. "We are set," as our collect expresses it, "in the midst of so many and so great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright." We sin, and that continually. In thought, and word, and deed, we sin. Outwardly and inwardly, in motive and in action, we sin. Sin enters into our prayers—pursues us into the house of God—flashes through our mind, even when we bend our knee at the communion rails, and receive into our lips the symbols of the broken body and poured-out blood of our crucified Lord. It breathes its pollution

upon the surface of our souls, and leaves its track and trail, like the slime of a serpent, upon our best thoughts and our holiest actions. It bubbles up, from a perennial fountain of bitterness within us. It is like the canker in the bud, corroding the opening flower. It is like the dead fly in the pot of ointment, corrupting and marring the fragrance of the whole.

What then are we, thus painfully conscious of sin—we, who believe in Jesus Christ, and are therefore more painfully conscious of sin than others are—what are we to do? Are we to treat the matter superficially? Are we to say, that it is not a thing to be anxious about, since it has been undertaken and answered for by the blood of the cross? Not so, brethren. No Spirit-taught soul will ever think lightly of the evil of sin. I have indeed met with those who have told me, that they never thought it necessary, at any time since the first time, to bewail and confess their transgressions, or to seek for forgiveness for them. Their impression was, that they had received forgiveness once for all, and that they needed not to seek it again. Ah! brethren, I much fear that such persons as these were never taught of the Spirit at all. Even after we have been

plunged in the bath of the new birth, we need to wash our feet. And if we are not inclined to come to Christ for the latter cleansing, it seems to me an evidence that we have never really come to Christ for the former. St. John says, speaking, mind you, of those who had believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." What then are we to do? Are we, on the other hand, going into the other extreme, to believe that, because we have sinned, the work is all to be done over again? that we are again to pass through the bath of regeneration, and to be made afresh "new creatures in Jesus Christ?" Not so, Christian brethren. The work, once done, stands, and stands for ever. The forgiveness, once granted, is a complete forgiveness, and holds for eternity. We are not to allow ourselves to doubt that God hath blotted out our sins, and that He hath, through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, taken us, joined us to Himself in a perpetual covenant, that shall not be forgotten. And yet, for all that, sin is a terrible, and a

hateful, and a deadly, and a loathsome thing. When it is discovered upon us, that very instant we are to judge ourselves on account of it, and to confess it before God. We are to go, at once, to the blood that cleanseth. Let not the defilement rest for a moment upon our souls. Let us flee to Him who, at the first, washed us from our sins in His most precious blood, that He may wash our feet—that He, in His condescension and mercy, may cleanse us from the impurities we contract in our passage through this present evil world to the land of our everlasting rest.

I am unwilling to quit this portion of our subject altogether, without touching, briefly, upon a thought suggested by the behaviour of the apostles, in the narrative which we are now considering. It seems to me, brethren, that the apostles, in their false humility and real resistance to the will of their Lord, were no inapt representatives, for the time, of those persons who, directly or indirectly, reject the method of salvation by the blood of the cross. There are some, as you know, to whom the scheme of redemption by blood seems utterly unworthy of the Majesty of God. To them it is an incredible thing that the Son of God—a Being coequal and coeternal with the

Father—should so humble Himself, so degrade Himself, as to become a sacrifice for sin, and to pour out His soul unto death, dying as a reputed malefactor upon a cross of wood, between two convicted felons. Accordingly, they either deny the Godhead of Christ, or they deprive the death of Christ of its sacrificial character and meaning—ennobling it, as they think, into a most sublime example of patience, or into an act of most perfect submission to the will of a Heavenly Father. But such persons surely tread in the footsteps of the disciples, in their blameable reluctance to accept the self-humbling of the Lord. Their language is, “That be far from Thee, O Lord. This humiliation is not worthy of Thy greatness. For Thee—Thee—to be ‘made sin’ for us, it is too much. We cannot accept it. We cannot credit it. The idea is revolting to all our natural instincts, and at variance with all our conceptions of what Thy character and conduct ought to be.”

Now, brethren, I am far from wishing to deny that there is something mysterious—something which we cannot at present fathom—about the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is to this mysteriousness that the words apply, “What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know

hereafter." The act which Jesus had performed before the eyes of His disciples—an act unexpected and unintelligible—they were ultimately to understand. Part of its meaning was revealed to them as soon as it was done. They comprehended more after the day of resurrection, more still when the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, on the watching and waiting Church. And, doubtless, they entered still more fully into the meaning of the mystery, when the burden of the flesh was laid aside, and they were removed into that state in which men "know, even as also they are known."

And so is it with that great act, to which Christ made (I believe) chiefest reference, when He washed the disciples' feet—the act of His dying upon the Cross. What He did there we only partly understand now. We see something. We see something of the fitness of the arrangement which provides for the pardon of the sinner, while it preserves inviolate the holiness, and the justice, and the truth of the God whose laws he has broken, and whose authority he has despised. Nor is it difficult to comprehend, or at least to feel how exquisitely is the scheme adapted for securing the happiness of man. It

is the application of the blood of the Lamb, which alone can give quiet to the disturbed and uneasy conscience, which alone can impart that "peace," without which the service of our God is little better than a service of bondage and fear. It is through the blood of atonement that we obtain the feelings of children, and confidence and boldness in all our approaches to God. In fact then we know enough for our guidance, enough for our comfort, enough to call out our most devoted love, and our most earnest reliance, towards Him who spared not His own Son, but surrendered Him to the death of the Cross. Yet is there something undiscovered. "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." And it is reserved for the revelations of the future state, for the time, when the light of eternity flowing in full tide from the throne of God shall fall upon the problems that have puzzled us, and the difficulties that have hampered, or distressed us, in our present twilight condition, and shall make every obscurity plain, and justify, down to its minutest particular, the dealing of Jehovah with our sinful and rebellious race—it is reserved for that period of undimmed perception, and unobscured revelation, for us to enter into

the perfect significance of the dying of the incarnate Son of God.

And if the parallel be correct, we must recognise also the blameworthiness of those, who refuse to attach its proper meaning to the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. The disciples were blamed for resisting their Master's humiliation. Their resistance may have been natural, the result of their moral instincts; but it was sinful; it was reprehended by Christ; and, had it been continued, would have cut them off from all fellowship and communion with Him. We see at once the pride and the self-will, implied in their virtually undertaking to show their Master how He ought to act. We may see those feelings also, in the conduct of those, who reject God's method of salvation by the blood of the Cross. It is a bold thing for a man to do, to dictate to the Most High the manner in which He is to save a sinner. It is a bold thing to say, "beware, lest Thou lower Thyself in my eyes, by taking a course, which seems to me so inconsistent with Thy greatness and dignity." Yet this, and no less than this—is what we do, if we reject the doctrine of Redemption by blood, because we conceive it to be unworthy of the character of God.

Nay more. We run the risk of separating ourselves entirely from the fellowship of Christ. For does not the Lord Himself say, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me?"

Such then seem to me to have been some of the lessons taught to the Church of Christ by the washing of the disciples' feet. The act was intended to put before us at one view the real character of Christ's mission upon earth. It was intended also to teach us the need of perpetual recurrence to the blood of atonement. But it conveyed also another lesson. Listen to the words of Jesus, when the ceremony was over. "Ye call me Master, and Lord; and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet." What does this teach us? The duty of humbling ourselves, if by that act of humbling we may benefit our brother. We ought to think nothing beneath us, (supposing it be not positively sinful) by which the interests of our brethren might be advanced.

The words (I believe) may be taken literally, as well as figuratively. We ought, literally, to wash one another's feet, if there be a necessity for it. Such necessity however is not often likely

to arise. But in the figurative and spiritual sense, we are frequently called upon to fulfil this precept of Christ. By undertaking tasks repugnant to us ; by tending the sick in their peevishness, and the poor in their squalor ; by bearing with ignorance and rudeness on the part of those, whose good we seek ; by not “ seeking our own things,” but submitting even to wrong, for the sake of Christ, and Christ’s cause ; by being ready to be reconciled without insisting upon what we may consider our rights ; by restoring an erring brother in the spirit of meekness—in these ways and many other ways, we may obey our Master, and “ wash one another’s feet.” And if ever the pride of our old nature rises up and rebels (as at times it will), and the heart revolts and is disgusted at ingratitude ; and the cheek flames and the pulse beats faster at insult and wrong—let us remember, brethren, that what Christ hath done, we may well condescend to do. He says, “ I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord ; neither he that is sent, greater than He that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”

The root and source of all such self-humbling—is love. And love ennobles every act of self-humbling; just as the beams of the sun falling on the meanest objects in nature, upon the withered tree, upon the dull cold stone, upon the barren field—glorify them by their own radiance. It was love which led to this amazing act on the part of Christ. For we read that “when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father; having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.”

There is one thing which yet remains to be noticed. The narratives which we consider together this week, abound in warnings. It must be so, brethren, from their very character. And there is a warning to be borne in mind even on this occasion. Among the disciples was one, whose feet were washed as well as the feet of the others, but who, not having been made partaker of the washing of regeneration, not having become, by the Spirit, “a new creature in Jesus Christ,” was not “clean.” The washing—even when performed by Jesus Christ Himself—was of no use to Judas. It was a form. It was nothing more. And what do we conclude from this?

That it is possible to be a partaker of ordinances, even the ordinances appointed by Christ Himself, without receiving a blessing. If we come with a heart unchanged, with a spirit unrenewed, we receive no blessing. Only to those who are born again, only to those who have appropriated Christ, who are washed from their sins in His blood—are grace and benediction vouchsafed, when to them are administered even in the most regular and orthodox way the ordinances of God.

SERMON IV.

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JOHN XIII. 21.

“When Jesus had thus said, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.”

OUR subject to day is a gloomy and a difficult one. I always feel when considering it that I am placed in closer contact than usual, with some of the profoundest mysteries of human existence. The old, the world-old antagonism between the divine decrees and the free-will of man, between predestination on the one side and responsibility on the other, seems to come here to a sharper point, than elsewhere. Questions, impossible perhaps to be solved in our present state, start up on every side. We feel disposed to ask why a man was created, concerning whom it was certainly known, and if known, settled beforehand, that he would perish for ever. We can hardly subscribe to the opinion that Judas was simply an instrument in the hand of God, raised up to accomplish a purpose which

necessarily involved destruction to himself; and yet, if it was the intention of Christ, in His dealing with the faithless disciple, to lead him to repentance, it is equally hard to understand that that intention should fail in its effect. On all sides then (as it seems to me) we are encompassed with difficulties. And with these difficulties, move as cautiously and as wisely as we will, we must needs come occasionally into collision, as our inquiry proceeds.

However, brethren, I would have you to notice that in the case of Judas, we have on a higher platform and under more striking circumstances, only an exhibition of what continually meets our eye in the experience of daily life. Men come into existence who start fair, who promise well, who have advantages and opportunities of no common kind, who nevertheless take a downward course, who in this downward course have their checks and their hindrances, their moments of softening, their convictions and inclinations to change, who seem after a time to be handed over to judicial and irremediable hardness, and who, ultimately, pass into eternity, to all appearance, without God and without hope. This is no uncommon thing,

as we are all aware. Nor do I know that we are any of us surprised at it, or disposed to arraign the proceedings of God on account of it, when it meets us as a fact of our actual life. And yet it is the very case of Judas over again, the case of Judas on a smaller scale. It was his proximity to Christ, which called out into such hideous activity the evil of his heart. It was his conduct to Christ, which made him so conspicuously infamous in the annals of the Christian Church. But in its essence, his offence was precisely the offence of those who deny Christ with their lives, while they confess Him with their lips, and who rush through all the opposition which God puts in their way, through warnings, through visitations, through transient impressions, through calamities, right on into the yawning horrors of eternal death.

From what I have stated you will gather that I approach the subject with considerable diffidence. I purpose, certainly, moving with much caution in my enquiry. And I trust that I may be kept from saying anything which shall not be entirely in accordance with the mind of the Spirit. We will consider then in the first place, the character and career of Judas. In the second

place, the manner in which our Lord appears to have dealt with him.

Now I am inclined to suspect (though I cannot say that it is more than a suspicion) that Judas, in power of intellect and in force of character, was a man somewhat superior to the rest of the apostles. That he had a superior capacity for business, seems to follow from the fact that our Lord constituted him the bursar, or treasurer of their little community ; and entrusted him, above all others, with the management of its affairs. Those affairs were, doubtless, of a very simple kind. And yet it seems most natural that they should have been committed to the most energetic and able of the apostles ; to that one of the whole number who evinced the greatest aptitude for negotiations with his fellow-men, and the greatest dexterity in managing and directing the body to which he belonged. It appears also to be an unquestionable fact, that he exercised a very considerable influence over his fellow apostles. Take as an instance of this influence what occurred at the supper at Bethany. It may be (as I have already hinted in one of these sermons) that the eleven were moved to jealousy by the display of a devoted love which

surpassed, or seemed to surpass their own ; and were thus in a state of readiness to murmur at the deed. But they would probably have never ventured to have broken out into open expression of their dissatisfaction, had not Judas led the way. It was a bold thing for them to do, brethren. They were cavilling at an honour shown to their Master, an honour too, which He had graciously received. And the influence which Judas exerted over them, must (I think) have been great, to induce them to take the step. For it was he that instigated them. We read in St. John's Gospel, "Then saith one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray Him ; why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor ?" While in other Gospels we read, as for instance, in the Gospel of St. Matthew, "When His disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste ?"

I find another indication, though a slight one, in the fact that, when Christ had announced that one of His own band should betray Him, the suspicions of none of them pointed to Judas. Even when our Lord said to him, "What thou doest, do quickly," and the traitor had left the

table, the rest of the disciples (with the exception perhaps of John and Peter, who had just received private information from their Lord) seem to have thought that Jesus was still employing the services of Judas, either to buy something that was necessary for the feast, or to bestow some alms upon the poor. Now matters by this time had proceeded very far with the unhappy traitor. For months, it may be for years, his dark dislike to Christ had been gaining ground and gathering shape. We should expect then, that his feelings would, at least at times, have influenced his outward conduct. Nay, and Christ had hinted very plainly, and on more occasions than one, that there was a man of an evil spirit among them, a man altogether unlike the rest. And yet the influence which Judas put forth over the minds of his associates was such, that they looked up to him to the very last, and each was more ready to suspect himself of the traitorous deed, than to suspect the man who had already covenanted with the Chief Priests and Pharisees to betray his Master for thirty pieces of silver. Let me add another thought. It has sometimes occurred to me that Christ had Judas especially in view, Judas first in himself, and then as

the type of a class, when He uttered those words in the sermon on the mount, "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you. Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity."

Now I am quite willing to admit, brethren, that each of these indications (as I have called them) amounts when taken by itself to very little. But if we put them together will it be too much to conclude that the false apostle was a man of pre-eminent talent, a man gifted with large administrative capacity, and with the power of influencing to no ordinary degree the minds of his fellows, that he was a successful preacher, a worker of miracles, a fluent expounder of the mysteries of the kingdom, and in fact one who seemed to be, and who really was an efficient instrument in the hands of God?

This supposition, if it be a correct one, seems to me to clear the way for an explanation of his subsequent conduct. Conscious of great powers, and finding in his native sphere no adequate room for their exercise, his attention is drawn to the

advent of a mysterious personage, who was baptized, under somewhat remarkable circumstances, on the banks of the river Jordan. A whisper goes about among the people that this is the Messiah, whom their nation has been looking for so long. The impression gains ground and gains strength every day. And Judas, stirred up to examine the matter for himself, looks carefully into it, with keener and more intelligent vision than others, and comes to the conclusion that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed He, of whom "Moses in the law, and the prophets did write." For some reason, he finds, this Jesus prefers to remain in obscurity. Obviously, He dislikes creating a commotion. His manners are simple; His work unobtrusive; His followers men of the working class. No matter. He is biding His time, thinks Judas. He is watching His opportunity. When the opportunity comes, Jesus will spring with a bound into the throne of David; and then—it will be all the better to have attached oneself to Him at a time when His fortunes were low, and when His pretensions were unheeded or misunderstood by the great majority of the people.

Now, though I think there is reason to believe that Judas, in common, let us remember, with

the rest of the disciples, looked forward to Messiah's temporal reign, and was actuated by selfish motives, by expectations of personal aggrandisement, in the step of attaching himself to Jesus ; yet I should not like to leave the impression on your minds that this was the *whole* account of the matter. There was, it is true, a very serious, a very radical difference between him and the other disciples, throughout—from the very first. They, in some vague and dim and indistinct way, looked upon Jesus as the sin-bearer. They had a sense of sin ; and this sense of sin was one very important constituent of the attraction which drew them to Christ. It is probable enough that they could not have analysed and explained their feelings. It is probable enough that they understood very imperfectly the nature of sin, or how their sin was to be put away. Still, they felt, in some general sort of way, that their salvation depended upon fellowship with Jesus, and that, if separated from Him, they would infallibly perish. And thus, although they came to Him, with their old Jewish carnal notions, as to Messiah, a temporal prince, who could bless and aggrandise His followers with temporal blessings, yet they also came to Him, and clung to Him,

as to "the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." Judas, on the contrary, had, I believe, no true sense of sin. Of this work of the Spirit he never partook. Had it been so, his career and his end would have been different. Nevertheless, he was not wholly consumed by ambition. There was something about him which promised well. He had (if I may so express myself) *religiousness, but not religion*. He had a zeal for God, a desire to see the kingdom of Jesus extending, and the name of Jesus honoured. This at first. But inasmuch as it was based upon no true conviction of personal sinfulness; inasmuch as it was unaccompanied by a real surrender of self and selfish aims to God, his "religiousness" was one of those plants which are not of divine planting, and it was soon rooted up: it soon gave way before the temptations to which he was exposed, and left the bad passions of his heart to burst out into full luxuriance, and to flourish alone.

Such, I think, was Judas when he became first a disciple, and afterwards an apostle of the Lord. No one becomes, suddenly, a reprobate. No one becomes, suddenly, spiritually hopeless. There is a process. There are downward steps, carrying

a man lower and lower by insensible, imperceptible degrees, until at length he arrives at a depth to which even the arm of the Almighty will not reach down to pluck him out. So was it with Judas. He began by "having something good about him," as we say. There was promise of great things. There were great powers, great zeal, great energy, and all (as it appeared) turned in the right direction. He was obviously a man who would carry weight. He would be great for good, or for evil. And, at the early stages of his connection with Christ, the eye of man could discover only that which indicated a career of most earnest and most useful activity in the service of his Lord. Such then was he when Christ called him, and exalted him to the perilous position of one amongst His chosen twelve. Now how was it that, when placed in that position, he took the downward and not the upward path?

I have already hinted at what I consider to be the original cause of the mischief—the absence of a true sense of sin. For I believe that, if a man has no sense of sin, there is no telling what he may or may not become. However, let us try to trace the probable steps of his downfall.

Before long, Judas begins to find that his Master, so far from aiming at temporal aggrandisement, leads a life of self-humbling and self-denial, and enforces the same upon His followers. This was a great disappointment to the ambitious disciple. Perhaps, at first he thought that matters would take a more favourable turn. This lowly, self-mortifying life, might be only the prelude to lofty pretensions—the portal which would lead, unexpectedly, to great designs and gigantic enterprises. But Christ is resolute in maintaining the course upon which He has entered. He refuses all offers of dignity. And, as time advances, He continues to speak with ever-increasing distinctness of the suffering and shame and death which He will have to undergo at Jerusalem. The false disciple then, finding his hopes thus rudely overthrown, becomes, by degrees, by insensible degrees, greatly embittered against the humble Jesus. He feels, at times, as if he had been drawn into His service on false pretences: as if Christ had deceived him. He had expected reward for his labours. And lo! what reward does Christ offer to His servants, when He takes no pains to honour Himself? Perhaps too, at times, a feeling of contempt for

Jesus crosses his mind. A proud, ambitious spirit, able to take its own part, and to maintain its own cause in the world, may naturally be tempted to despise one who systematically allows himself to be trampled on, and who, when one cheek is smitten, turns to the smiter the other also. Any how, a feeling of dislike to Jesus begins to make way in his mind. You will remember that, by our supposition, he never entertained, as the others did, a true love for Jesus. As it is now, so it was then—those only who knew themselves, however indistinctly, to be sinners—those only felt anything like a rooted love for Jesus. And this feeling—this conviction of sin—Judas never had. Well, the dislike increased. The better feelings which he had at first, not having the permanence of the Spirit, dropped off. And the opposition of heart to Christ and Christ's doctrine, became intenser every day.

And I would ask you to notice, brethren, that when a man's heart is resolutely set upon that which is evil, the proximity of goodness only exasperates him, and embitters him the more. To the eleven disciples, whose hearts were substantially right with God, though they had their frailties and infirmities and sins, like other men,—

to them their association with Christ was a source of unspeakable blessing. It was like drawing near to a fire, which purged out, by degrees, all their impurities. It was like being near a light, which chased away all the obscurities which gathered upon their souls. But to the unhappy Judas, determined to hold fast his sin, the presence of Christ had a most destructive effect. It hardened him. It embittered him. Evil always hates that which is good—hates it from the very instinct of its nature. What must it then have been to Judas, with his dark heart, with his evil passions, with his burning ambition, with his consuming covetousness—to have been ever in the presence of Jesus, ever in the very closest proximity with the incarnation of purity and holiness, and truth! Think, brethren, how darkness hates light. Think too how possible it is to harden ourselves by habit against the holiest things. Remember what a capacity there is in us to approach God without reverence: to pray with the lips, while the heart is far from Him: even to draw nigh to the sacrament of the Lord's supper, whilst the life is polluted by open sin. Think of these things; and then you may be able to understand how Judas remained in the presence

of Jesus, distrusting Him, disliking Him, hating Him, and unmoved and unchanged by His miracles and His discourses.

I have no doubt that he would have left Christ, and walked no more with Him, had he not been so far committed by his apostleship. That was an eminence from which he could not well descend; else, when many of Christ's disciples (as is recorded in the sixth chapter of John) went back and separated themselves from His ministry, Judas would have gladly accompanied them. To this, I think, Christ points when He says, "Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" Judas would have gone then. He felt himself to be detected. He saw that Christ read the secrets of his heart. He would have gone then, but he was hampered by his position. He knew not how to move. It would have surprised his brother apostles, and all who knew him, if he had withdrawn, and thus acknowledged himself to be the man of whom Christ spake. So he remained. And the opportunity passed by.

I must say I hardly know how to account for his pilfering out of the little treasury of Christ and His followers. The temptation, one would think, must have been so exceedingly small,

considering the circumstances of the disciples. Yet a covetous man, we know, will risk his soul every day of his life, for the meanest gratification of his appetite. And the appetite for saving, for accumulating, becomes after a time so intense, that *anything almost* will be done for the sake of the very smallest sum. And thus, perhaps, we can understand how Judas, urged on partly by hate, partly by covetousness, could betray his Master for thirty pieces of silver, which amounted only to about three or four pounds of our money. Probably, when Judas found that his ambitious hopes of rising in the world through his connection with Christ had come to nothing, he determined to indemnify himself for the disappointment in the best way he could. He had two appetites to gratify—ambition and covetousness. A check was put upon his ambition. That channel was blocked up. And so all the force of his strenuous nature flowed out in the other channel; and the fact of being denied in one respect made him more ready to clutch at any little gratification in the other. Thus he became a thief—a pilferer. He abstracted small sums from their little hoard, and appropriated them to his own use. And when he found himself detected by Christ, and the

detection made so plain as at the supper of Bethany, his exasperation, his hatred of Christ rose to its highest pitch, and he hurried off at once to the chief priests, offering to betray his Master for a sum of money.

In this way I understand the character and conduct of Judas. An unconverted man, with no sense of sin, and no love to Christ—his official proximity to Christ called into intense activity the hatred to Christ's holiness, which reigned in his heart. It was continually put to him, "Shall it be Self, or shall it be Christ?" And the answer was always, "It shall be Self." Christ therefore came to be hated. This hatred, raised to its highest pitch at the supper at Bethany, roused him to the act of treachery. The door was open for the tempter. The tempter came in—was yielded to—gained more and more power—until the traitor's heart was *filled* by his influence; and the man passed over into the state of judicial and incurable hardness.

And as to the manner in which Christ dealt with him, I would gladly say little, for I feel that I understand little. This I seem to see, as indeed we see it everywhere, that there is a difference made between those who are of

Christ's people, and those who are not of His people. A great difference. Peter falls. But Peter is watched over, and cannot fall finally. Christ prays for him that his faith may not fail. And when he has sinned, Christ recalls him with a loving compassionate look. I do not find that this was done for Judas. I do not find it said that Jesus prayed for Judas. There is then a difference. And yet it seems to me equally obvious, that Christ's dealings with him were of such a nature, that Judas might have been benefitted by them if he would. When the secrets of Judas' heart were laid bare before his very eyes, was not that an opportunity of confessing his sin, and obtaining forgiveness? He did not avail himself of the opportunity. He hardened himself. But did not that hardening lie at his own door? When Christ washed his feet, as well as the feet of the other disciples, was not that an evidence of good will, of compassion? Ought not that to have touched his heart? It did not. He hardened himself. Yet was not that hardening his own doing? Again, there is no severity about the manner of Christ. Our text shews that He was troubled in spirit about Judas. He mourned over the eternity of

this man, so much so that He forgets the sorrow which Judas was bringing upon Himself. In fact, brethren, though I see a difference between the way in which Peter is dealt with, and the way in which Judas is dealt with, I see enough to convince me that Christ's dealing with him was perverted from its intention, by Judas' own evil heart of unbelief; that what should have been for a blessing was turned into an occasion of falling; and that Judas was a moral suicide—self-condemned and self-destroyed.

One lesson, brethren, in conclusion, let us learn from the text itself. Christ says "One of you shall betray Me,"—and they are troubled and say, "Lord is it I?" *One of you*—you My privileged, favoured disciples, admitted into fellowship with Myself. "One of you shall betray Me." Surely He intends to lead them all to deeper self-knowledge, to truer penitence, to greater dread of sin. He leads them to think thus—"I am myself a man, a weak frail man; I am myself capable of anything, if I be left to myself. There are in me the germs of what the traitor will do. Oh! my God, hold Thou me up that my footsteps slip not."

And let this be our language too, Christian brethren. Let us learn this lesson at least from the story of Judas. Close to Christ, kept by Christ—we shall be kept from sin. Apart from Christ, and left to ourselves—we, even we, with all our privileges, would be capable of anything, even of basely betraying our Lord, as Judas did, for thirty pieces of silver.

S E R M O N V .

LUKE XXII. 61, 62.

“And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.”

THERE can be no doubt, I think, that the denial of our Lord by one of His chosen disciples, added very considerably to the burden of sorrow which, at this time, He was called upon to bear. It grieved Him that an associate and companion like Judas, a man who had continued with Him in the many vicissitudes of His earthly career, and who appeared to be steadfast when others had fallen away, should be led into playing the traitor. But Judas was never one in heart with his Master. He came into juxtaposition with Him, but he was never united to Him. His connection too with the band of the apostles was seeming rather than real. He did not truly belong to them, although he was numbered with the rest, and had obtained part of their ministry. With Peter, however, the case was widely dif-

ferent. He was one of those who were "chosen and faithful." Jesus loved him. And it was an inexpressible grief to the Lord to find that of all to whom He had given the words of eternal life, 'whom He had taught and comforted, and strengthened, and blessed—not one solitary individual had the courage to stand by Him in His hour of trial; and that he who was the foremost in his protestations of affection, and the readiest to maintain the honour of the cause to which he had attached himself, even went beyond the others in baseness, by repudiating all connection with his Master, and by enforcing that repudiation with cursing and blasphemous language.

But this, brethren, was a part of the sufferings of Christ, which could not be spared. It was necessary, as we know, that He should sound the whole compass of human sorrow. It was necessary that He should taste the bitterness of the pang caused by the ingratitude and desertion of those who are loved, in order that, having suffered being tempted, He might be able to succour them that are tempted.

Bearing then in mind the fact, that an additional bitterness was infused into the Redeemer's cup of sorrow by the denial of Peter, we shall be

better able to estimate the love and gentleness, the exquisite tenderness and compassion, manifested on this occasion towards the erring disciple. For nowhere, throughout the whole transaction, does Christ appear conscious that a wrong has been inflicted on Himself. We find no upbraidings. If there was any reproach at all, it was conveyed in the look that was cast upon Peter. But the Redeemer seems occupied, both now and after His resurrection, with the endeavour to reclaim and comfort and establish the follower who had yielded to temptation, and had fallen so low.

Thus we have, brethren, in the narrative we are now considering, an exemplification, on the one side, of the treacherous weakness of the human heart : on the other, of the watchful loving-kindness, of the jealous care, of the wondrous wisdom, which the great Head of the Church displays, in restoring His fallen members, and in wringing for them a victory out of the materials of the most terrible defeat. Let us consider the narrative more closely. And let us begin by examining first the character and then the behaviour of Simon Peter.

Now it is obvious, on the very surface of our enquiry, that Peter was a man of a warm-hearted

and affectionate nature. He was deeply devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ. And nothing seems to have been more appalling to his mind than the idea of being separated from the Master he loved. Now in some natures, (as, for instance, in that of Mary, and in that of John,) an earnest, affectionate devotion to the personal Christ, flows on in a tide, which, however irresistible, is deep and silent, and almost escapes observation. It was not so with Simon Peter. Impulsive and impetuous, he was always forward in speech and energetic in action. His love was essentially demonstrative. It showed itself whenever occasion offered. It shone forth like a fire that could not be hid. And if ever the cause of Christ required, or seemed to require, a defender, Peter appears (if we judge him aright) to have regarded discretion as cowardice, and silence as a virtual desertion of the cause which he was pledged to maintain. Moreover, it is equally obvious that this apostle was gifted with remarkable quickness of spiritual discernment. It was he upon whom the great truth of the Godhead of Christ seems to have flashed with peculiar vividness, at the time of the miraculous draught of fishes. "Depart from me," he cries, "for I am a sinful man, O

Lord." He, again, was the foremost to acknowledge formally his Master's divinity, in the ever-memorable confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And he, with two more, formed a kind of inner circle in the circle of the disciples, and was admitted, on several occasions, to a closer proximity to Christ, and to a more intimate acquaintance with His purposes and doings, than others. Such then is a rough sketch of Simon Peter, when viewed on the better and more attractive side of his character.

But all men, brethren, together with their excellences, have also their corresponding defects. The courage of the bold is apt to degenerate into rashness; the caution of the prudent into hesitation and timidity. The firm man frequently becomes obstinate; the yielding man becomes too pliable, and gives way where he ought to stand his ground. And there is not, I think, a single good quality among all those that go to constitute a human character, which is not liable, at times, to overbalance itself, and to lead its possessor into error and sin. At all events, it was so with the apostle Peter. His firmness, and boldness, and impetuosity, were admirable qualities, when kept under due restraint, and in due sub-

ordination : but they degenerated, not unfrequently, into a blameable rashness. Or (to put it in other words) the natural failing of his character was an overweening self-confidence. Peter, brethren, was conscious, and he could not be otherwise, of a deeply-seated love to the Lord Jesus Christ. His feelings towards the Saviour were of no doubtful or hesitating nature. He could say, unshrinkingly, to the searcher of hearts, "Lord thou knowest that I love Thee." But he seems to have trusted far too much to the ardour of his affection. He seems to have thought that one who loved the Lord so truly, and with such ardent affection, could never greatly fall. And he relied upon the strength of his own love, and the strength of his own character, and not upon the strong arm of the Lord of Hosts. Trace this self-confidence of his a step further, and you will find it based upon self-ignorance. Peter had unquestionably a sense of sin. To a certain extent he knew what a sinful nature was. And, as I said yesterday, it was to Jesus Christ the sin-bearer, as well as to Jesus Christ the Messiah, that he had attached himself from the very outset of his career. But he was very imperfectly acquainted with the real

power and malignity of sin. How it has tainted and poisoned our whole nature down to its very springs—how powerless we are to resist temptation, except when sustained by an arm more mighty than our own—how utterly useless, how foolish it is, to trust to good resolutions, to force of character, to strength of will, to higher and better feelings of which we may sometimes be conscious—how all these things, strong as they may seem to be, and rooted in our very being, are swept away in a moment of fierce trial, like stubble before the blast—Peter, unhappily, had yet to learn. And it was necessary that he should be led on, no matter how thorny the way, and no matter how sharp the process, into a deeper knowledge of himself—into a sense of his own infinite weakness and need of continual dependence upon the strength of his God.

Now we should have imagined, Christian brethren, that this lesson of self-distrust was one which this particular apostle might have already learnt. He had had many opportunities. On one occasion, when the little band of disciples, crossing the sea of Galilee in a fishing-boat by night, had been overtaken by a storm, Jesus, we are told, drew nigh to them, in the fourth watch,

walking upon the waters. At first they were greatly alarmed, imagining that they had seen a spirit. But when it was discovered to be Jesus Himself, their alarm was suddenly changed into joy: and Peter, partaking in the revulsion of feeling more largely than the others, and more confident in himself than the others were, proposes to walk on the water to go to his Master. He is permitted to do so. But ere he has taken many steps, his faith fails. His courage gives way. And he is humbled before them all, by the words of Jesus, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Here, brethren, was one opportunity of learning the lesson. Another occurred after Peter had made the confession of faith to which I have already alluded. Elated by the words of Christ, "Blessed art thou, Simon-Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven," he begins to presume. When Jesus speaks of His sufferings and death, Peter cries, "Be it far from Thee, Lord; this shall not be unto Thee;" and draws down upon himself the terrible rebuke, "Get thee behind Me, Satan." Surely, we should have thought, such a rebuke as this would have taught the apostle humility and

self-distrust. Again, on the night of the betrayal, Peter's rashness nearly brought his Master into circumstances of exceeding difficulty. It was, as you know, the policy of the enemies of Jesus to represent Him as a disturber of the public peace. Nothing then could have suited their purpose better than any attempt on the part of the disciples to protect or rescue their Master by force. And Peter, by drawing a sword and striking a servant of the High Priest—striking him too with such deadly aim as only just to have escaped taking his life—ran the risk of most seriously compromising the character of Jesus. He could not possibly have done a more indiscreet—a more ill-advised thing. Our Lord extricated Himself, it is true, from the difficulty. But when the disciple heard his Master's gentle rebuke, "Put up again thy sword into his place," surely he must have felt that he had been taught a lesson, another lesson, about his own liability to fall, whenever he attempted to act for himself.

But in spite of all these opportunities of self-acquaintance, (and the mere mention of them shows how important they were,) Peter had not yet profited as he ought to have done. Rash self-confidence seemed to be rooted, ingrained

into his very nature. He must have another lesson in addition to those already received—a lesson so sharp, so bitter, so painful that its effects shall never pass away. He shall see what his fallen nature is capable of. The depths of his own heart shall be opened up to him. A revelation shall be made to him, from which he shall start back with horror and dismay. The revelation, brethren, will be a terrible one. It will disclose to him evils whose existence he had never suspected in himself. It will force upon him the truth of God's word, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." But the effect will be, that henceforth he will renounce all his confidence in self, and that in the Lord his God will be his strength and his boast for ever. And pause here, Christian brethren, I beseech you, to notice how wise and how loving a father is that Heavenly Father with whom we have to do. About Him there is none of that seeming kindness, but actual selfishness, which spares the rod of salutary discipline. He goes down to the very root of the matter. He probes till He reaches the very seat of the disease. Ah! we may cry out, we may wince, under the process. But it *will* be carried on

until the work is complete. Does one affliction fail to do its work? Another is sent. Does that do its work imperfectly? Then comes a third. God loves His people too well to spare them. Not that He "willingly afflicts or grieves them." Not that He delights in seeing them fall into errors, through which alone they can see their own corruption and frailty. Far from it. But the work must be done. Self-knowledge must be gained. The will must be brought into entire submission to the divine will. And if this be not accomplished by one process, it will be attempted and accomplished by another.

I do not intend, Christian brethren, detaining you long over the circumstances of Peter's fall. I will just simply allude to them. It appears that, after our Lord had been apprehended and bound by the band of soldiers, and was being led away, Peter, though scared by the consequences of his assault upon Malchus, followed afar off. Why did he do so? Partly, I believe, out of true love for his Lord. Partly, I fear, to keep up his credit; that it might not be said that he who had boasted so loudly of his determination to follow his Lord even unto the death, had basely deserted Him, and joined the others in

their cowardly flight. He follows the crowd at a distance, sees them enter into the courtyard of the High Priest's palace, taking Jesus with them ; and the door is shut. Peter, left outside, would probably have been glad to retire from the scene altogether ; but still a feeling of love for his Master kept him hanging about to see what would happen, (for that love still held its ground in spite of all the confusion and perplexity into which his soul was thrown,) and he lingered about the door, until at last he obtained admittance. Jesus was in the house itself, undergoing examination. A crowd of soldiers and servants and others were gathered round a fire of coals in the open courtyard, warming themselves ; and Peter approached and joined them, believing that no one would know him, and that he should escape detection. However, he is recognised, first by one, then by another, and challenged as belonging to Jesus of Nazareth. Taken by surprise, fearful of consequences, he blunders out a denial. Then, as one sin rapidly leads on to another, he plunges in his alarm more deeply into the mire, denying with greater boldness and more decisive asseverations that he belongs to Christ, or even knows anything about the Nazarene

at all. And, at last, frightened, exasperated, desperate, hemmed in by his tormentors, and not knowing how to shake them off—he breaks out into oaths and execrations. Alas! brethren, that it should ever come to this! Alas! that the heart that really beats with love to Christ still, should tremble at the thought of confessing Him before men! Alas! that the mouth that had uttered the grand confession, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” should pour forth oaths and curses, that it may thereby convince men that it has nothing to do with Christ.

Just as he is in the middle of his vociferous denial, (for his fears are now roused, and his voice rises to the highest pitch,) the door of the palace opens, and Jesus appears, condemned to death. The attention of those who are gathered round Peter is immediately diverted, and Peter escapes from them. At that moment the cock crows for the second time. Peter hears the sound. Christ too hears it. And remembering His erring disciple, turns and casts on him a look full of tenderest pity and compassion, perhaps not altogether unmingled with gentle reproach. Peter knows well the meaning of that look. It reminds him of the warning he had received. It reminds

him too that Christ had said, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." And his faith does not fail. Instead of turning away, as Judas did, in cold and hopeless hardness—instead of becoming sullen, and unmoved, and full of enmity, at being detected in such baseness—Peter's heart melts within him, at the look of Christ. He goes out, and weeps bitterly.

Such, brethren, was Peter's character. Such was Peter's discipline. Such was Peter's fall. And such was Peter's recovery.

Let us endeavour in conclusion to make a brief practical application of the narrative. First, then, we may notice that though our Lord allows His people to fall into sin, and out of the evil brings good, brings knowledge of self, brings knowledge of the strength of temptation, brings deeper trust in Himself, and more ardent affection than ever to His divine person—yet He does not allow this to take place without warning them beforehand of that which is coming. If Peter sins, it shall be his own fault, and not Christ's fault. There shall be no lack of warning, and there shall be no lack of precept by which Peter may be kept from sin, if only he will take heed to his ways. Just remember.

All the disciples are informed that a time of trial is approaching, and thus are prepared for it. They are warned that they will forsake their Master. They are bidden watch and pray lest they enter into temptation. And especially is this the case with Simon Peter. He is singled out from the rest for peculiar admonition. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift thee as wheat, but I have prayed for thee." Again, Peter said, "Lord! I will lay down my life for Thy sake." But what is Jesus' answer? "Wilt thou lay down thy life for My sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied Me thrice." And, again, in the garden of Gethsemane. "Simon, sleepest thou—*thou?* Couldst not thou watch with Me one hour. Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." Had then Peter obeyed his Master's voice, had he watched and prayed, he would not have fallen into this grievous sin.

We learn then from such a narrative as this, not only the depth of evil that exists in our hearts, but also the danger of neglecting the precepts of Christ. We may well suspect ourselves when we look upon the fall of such a man

as the holy and loving apostle Peter. If he denied his Lord, what may not you and I do in a moment of sore temptation? "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Nor will it do for us to trust to any fervour of love to Christ which we may feel—to any spiritual advancement to which we may imagine we have attained. We must watch and pray lest we enter into temptation.

Another thought that occurs is—the gentle, loving dealing of Christ with His erring disciple. What was it that Christ did to the man who had denied Him with oaths and curses, and added so grievously to the bitterness of His bitter cup of sorrow? "He turned and looked upon him." Looked upon him. That was all. And after His resurrection, almost His first thought seems to have been for weeping, broken-hearted Peter. The angel said, "Go and tell His disciples, and *Peter*." And we all remember the scene in which "Simon son of Jona, lovest thou Me," is repeated three times, the number of his denials; and the fallen apostle is formally reinstated in the favour of his Divine Master.

And did Peter therefore think lightly of his sin, because he had been so leniently, so lightly,

so tenderly dealt with? Surely not. For do we not know, brethren, that it is when we experience and realize the fulness of the forbearance, and loving-kindness, and forgiveness of our Lord, it is when we are *assured* of our forgiveness that we loathe ourselves for all the abominations that we have committed against Him. Brethren, thus are God's people dealt with. Their sins even, are overruled for good. Prepared beforehand by warning, startled along their course by the voice of the Spirit speaking through some providence which calls them to repentance, (as the crowing of the cock did with Peter,) if they fall, they rise again by the power of Christ. He prays for them that their faith fail not. And by the overruling wisdom and power of their Lord, the very warnings which they have neglected, become when they look back upon them, the means of confirming and strengthening their faith. And yet let none presume upon this. For if we become careless about sinning, wilfully unwatchful and indifferent, in the expectation that Christ will certainly restore us again, and will certainly overrule all for our good—depend upon it, brethren, we may calculate upon having Peter's fall without having Peter's recovery.

SERMON VI.

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JOHN XIX. 8, 9.

“When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; and went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer.”

IN the course of those few painful hours which immediately preceded the crucifixion, we find our Lord standing as a criminal before three different judges—before Caiaphas the High Priest, before Herod, and before Pontius Pilate. To the questions put to Him by the first of the three, He vouchsafed no reply, except when solemnly adjured by the living God to say whether He were the Christ, the Son of God. The second could extort no answer from Him at all. But to the third He addressed several warnings, and made several statements, which obviously produced, at least for a time, a considerable effect.

Now I think it is not difficult to discover the reason of His acting so differently on the different

occasions. The High Priest, as Christ knew, was immovable in his malignity. He had come determined to condemn. No amount of evidence, no protestations of innocence, would have stirred him from his deadly purpose. And consequently the Lord judged it better to be silent, and to commit His cause into the hands of His Heavenly Father. Herod again was simply a coarse and profligate mocker. He was curious to behold the famous Galilean teacher, of whom he had heard so much, and desired to see a miracle wrought by Him. To such a man as this there was no answer but silence. It would not have been right to cast pearls before such a swine. And, accordingly, no threats, no scoffs, no amount of ill-usage, could induce our blessed Lord to open His mouth, when standing in the presence of the Tetrarch of Galilee. But Pilate was a different kind of man. In his breast a conflict was going on. He had doubts and misgivings. He would gladly have done the thing that was right, if he had only had the courage. And with him the Lord condescended to reason, thus giving him an advantage, an opportunity not extended to the others, but at the same time, be it remembered, laying upon him the burden of a heavier responsibility,

and exposing him to the curse of a more terrible condemnation, if he should refuse to yield himself to the convictions that had thereby been engendered in his soul.

To-day, brethren, we come to consider the case of Pilate, and Christ's dealings with Pilate. The subject, like that of Judas, is a painful one, and not altogether without its difficulties. But it is important in its practical bearings. It is important for us to see distinctly how past sins haunt and hamper and cripple a man, when duty is to be done and conscience to be obeyed. It is important for us to see how close is the alliance between weakness and wickedness; and how the malignant priests, and the hard unfeeling Herod, and the vacillating Pilate, with his scruples and fears, all meet together ultimately, and unite in crucifying the Lord of glory. Let us then proceed at once to the subject. I think that our best plan of procedure will be to do as we have done before—examine first the character and conduct of Pilate in connection with our Lord's dealings with him, and then pass on to such practical observations as the subject may happen to suggest.

Now I think we should make a most important

mistake, if we were to regard Pontius Pilate as being a man of unusual and pre-eminent wickedness. He was just an educated, and intelligent, and somewhat sceptical Roman gentleman, who had come among the Jews in the hope of amassing a fortune during his tenure of office, and of returning to spend that fortune, when his work was over, among the luxuries of Rome. That he could be cruel, if provoked, we have evidence in the slaughter of the Galileans, whom he caused to be massacred round the very altar of the temple, as they offered their sacrifices. That he was unscrupulous and rapacious, is likely enough. For few Roman procurators were anything else. And that the Jews hated and abhorred him (as they would hate and abhor any representative of the foreign tyranny) is perfectly certain. But we have no reason for supposing that he was a whit worse than the ordinary run of Roman authorities, or that any very special charge of criminality and vice could fairly be fixed upon him.

He had been, it appears, a considerable time in the country. How far his responsibility was increased by residence in a land in which alone was to be found the knowledge of the one true and living God, I cannot undertake to determine.

On the one side, we may perhaps say that he ought to have enquired into the religion he came in contact with, and thus to have obtained a solid standing-ground for his soul. On the other, it is likely enough that the men he was accustomed to to associate with—the members of the Jewish hierarchy—with their narrow and uncharitable views, with their bitter spirit, with their unrelenting hostility to every thing which opposed itself to their ecclesiastical supremacy—were not the persons to give him a very favourable impression of the faith of the Jews. Certainly he appears to have despised the Jews for being superstitious, as they despised him for being an infidel. In fact, he was an easy-going, liberal-minded sceptic. He did not wish to persecute any for their opinions. They were welcome to their superstitions, so long as those superstitions were harmless, and did not interfere with the order and comfort of the state. They might believe in a certain unseen world, if they liked. He did not. He troubled himself about no invisible, inaccessible mysteries, but lived for the present, the actual, tangible, palpable, visible, enjoyable present. And as to professions of goodness and disinterestedness—as to heroic sublimities, and aspirations

after a higher, a divine life—why, he had been behind the scenes. And public men, mixing much with the world's business and the world's politics, and accustomed to take the measure of everything that came in their way, were not very likely to be deceived by religious pretence.

If then I wished to sum up in one word the character of Pontius Pilate, at the time when he comes into contact with Christ, I should say that he was a thorough-going man of the world, who believed in this world, in the things of this world, and in nothing else. He did not believe in goodness, or in truth. His experience of mankind made him question the existence of the first. The clatter of systems and creeds, the conflict of opinions going on about him, made him sceptical about the second. He was the very reverse of an earnest man. He cared not to base his heart upon facts. And he would probably have told you that there was no such thing as truth or certainty to be found anywhere: that it did not matter: that his desire was to make the best of the present life—his motto, "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

Now this man, so wanting in earnestness of purpose and in fixity of principle, is brought into

contact with our blessed Lord. The contact awakens new feelings in his soul. It rouses feelings about duty and responsibility, and the importance of human life. It flashes across his mind the thought that perhaps, after all, there is a kingdom of righteousness and truth, though hitherto he has been contented to ignore its existence. But then the past haunts him and drags him down, when he would rise to better things. In the first place, he cannot get rid of the habit of doubting. And then, when he would follow the dictates of his conscience, the fear of offending the priests and displeasing the people comes in and holds him back. So that he presents one of the most pitiable spectacles that can possibly be conceived. Vacillation, bewilderment, an increasing consciousness of his duty with increasing reluctance to do it, vain attempts at compromise, equally vain attempts to clear himself and to throw the burden of blame upon the shoulders of others; and all these things leading him, edging him on gradually, but surely, into the abyss of crime—such is the story of Pontius Pilate in his connection with Jesus Christ. But let us proceed to examine it a little more in detail.

When the chief priests, after having condemned Jesus to death on the charge of blasphemy, hurried Him off to Pilate that their sentence might be by him carried into effect, the Roman governor strove at first to keep clear of the matter altogether. He did not wish to mix himself up with Jewish squabbles. "Take ye Him, and judge Him according to your law." But this escape from duty and responsibility is not allowed him. He is obliged to examine into the case. And, accordingly, with obvious reluctance, he summons Jesus to him in the judgment hall, and enquires into the charges preferred against Him by the Jews. Now it is probable enough that the Roman governor had heard of Jesus of Nazareth before. Indeed it must have been so. The fame of Jesus as a teacher, and as a worker of miracles, must have reached the governor in his palace, during the three years, or more, of our Lord's eventful ministry. And it is probable too, that, knowing the bitter malignity of which the Jewish priesthood was capable, he had previously formed his own opinion as to the innocence of the victim they were driving to the death. If so, these opinions were confirmed by his interview

with Jesus. He is convinced, clearly convinced, that the charge against Jesus, the charge of sedition and treason, is one which will not bear a moment's investigation; and he goes out to say so. "I find in Him no fault at all."

Now that interview with Jesus, the first that he had, was, in many respects, a remarkable one. You will observe that when he goes into the judgment hall to question our Lord, he asks Him, "Art Thou the King of the Jews?" The question appears to have been not merely official, but to have been prompted by a secret feeling that there was some mystery about Christ, something more than appeared on the surface. Our Lord, as His manner was, lays His finger upon the secret feeling, touches the hidden chord, and replies, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of Me?"—His object being, clearly, to call out into distincter and more vigorous activity the better inclinations and purposes of the Roman governor. But Pilate shrinks from such close dealing. He does not want to be so nearly approached. He retires within himself at once and disclaims all personal interest in the trial. "Am I a Jew?" he exclaims. What have I to do with the matter except

officially? "Thine own nation and the Chief Priests have delivered Thee unto me. What hast Thou done?" And yet on receiving the reply of Jesus, that His kingdom is not of this world, Pilate returns again to his former questions, and asks if He were a king. Once more Jesus touches the secret thoughts of the man who was standing before Him. Jesus knew that it was Pilate's dread of the truth which had made him shrink before. Like many other men he believed even while he disbelieved. He had an uneasy persuasion even when most loudly denying the existence of such a thing as truth, even when most triumphantly demonstrating the impossibility of its existence—he had an uneasy persuasion that the truth was, and that the truth had a claim upon him. And to this point our Lord directed His answer, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the Truth. Every one that is of the Truth, heareth My voice." Pilate's heart is touched for the moment. He is disquieted and disturbed. Perhaps he has been in the wrong after all; or perhaps this is only another enthusiast who pretends to have discovered the undiscoverable. Truth! what is

truth? Where is it to be found? Who knows anything about it? Is it not better to go on through life enjoying as much pleasure and avoiding as much pain as possible, instead of troubling oneself about seeking the truth? What is truth? I hear a clatter of systems and sects. Creed fights against creed. Here are the men who profess to be the sole depositaries of the knowledge of God, and they are striving to put one of their own number to death because he preaches a different doctrine from their own. Why, the very scene passing before my eyes proves that the existence of truth is an impossibility. And who art Thou, man of Nazareth, that thou shouldest stand up in my path and proclaim Thyself a witness to the truth? No! No! No! I say. There is no such thing as truth. There is nothing certain. There is nothing real. All is dark, impenetrable, hideous mystery.

However, in spite of all his internal struggles and conflicts, Pilate is called upon to *act*. Here is a plain duty before him. Let him do it. Jesus is manifestly innocent. He is the victim of a fiendish plot. Let Pilate do his duty, and set Him free. But, alas! brethren, we cannot expect firmness of action where there is no fixity of

principle. Pilate has never been in the habit of acting from a sense of duty. It is hard to begin ; especially hard at such a time of difficulty as this. And he naturally wavers. Moreover, the recollection of the past comes in here, to disturb him still more. His administration, though not worse than that of other Roman governors, has been far from blameless. He has reason to dread the effect of Jewish accusations upon the mind of his jealous and irritable imperial master, as soon as his tenure of office is over ; and he would rather win the favour of the Jews, if it were possible, than incur their additional dislike. Notice then, brethren, what a terrible strait he is placed in. On the one side duty ; on the other side interest. On the one side, the fear of injuring that innocent and mysterious man of Nazareth ; on the other, the fear of alienating and exasperating the Jews. On the one side, his better half-acknowledged feelings just struggling into existence ; on the other, the old habit of doubting and distrusting every thing. Remember too, brethren, that this was not a mere matter of comparing and balancing opinions. Whatever be your views, or no-views, it cannot but be right and safe to act righteously. To do justice between man and man—to let the

oppressed go free—to deliver this hunted hart from the fangs of the cruel blood-hounds that are running him down—to interpose the authority of the Roman people, so as to prevent this most foul act of murder under the cloak of religion—this was plainly the duty of Pilate, even before he had settled the question about the existence of truth. And Pilate knew this. Pilate knew that it was his duty. But he hesitated about the doing of it.

However, he did something. He acts as many would have acted, if placed in similar circumstances. He adopts a middle course. He makes a compromise. He will not put Jesus to death, but he scourges Him. Of course, as Jesus is innocent, he has no more right to scourge Him than to put Him to death. But this is the policy of expediency. “It is not right. But it will get both Jesus and himself out of a difficulty. The vengeance of the Jews will be sated, when they behold their victim bleeding from the rods of the ruthless Roman soldiers, and crowned in mockery with the diadem of thorns, and they will remit the punishment of death.” Miserable subterfuge! Miserable endeavour to escape from the requirements of duty! I need not say that it fails.

The difficulty comes up again with bolder front and sterner demands than before, and Pilate is in a lower, a more disadvantageous position than he was at first—more disadvantageous as regards his own moral strength—more disadvantageous as regards the demands made by the Jews. For he is weaker in himself by the concession: and they have gained ground upon him, by his admitting that Jesus is so far a criminal as to have deserved the punishment of scourging by rods. No; nothing whatever has been gained; but much has been lost. The Chief Priests are not appeased by the sight. Their appetite for blood is only whetted by it. And they cry out, when they see Jesus, “Crucify Him, crucify Him.” And then, observing the vacillation of the man with whom they have to do, they plainly announce the charge, which had hitherto been kept in the back ground. “We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.”

We come here to the point of time indicated by our text. When Pilate heard this plain avowal, he was fearfully perplexed. It was so much like a confirmation of the suspicions which had been gaining ground in his mind about the

real character and pretensions of Jesus. "When he heard that saying, he was the more afraid." In an agony of perplexity he hurries back to the judgment-hall, and says to Jesus, "Whence art Thou?" But Jesus gives him no answer. What does that silence mean? It means this—"It is not fresh knowledge, Pilate, that you want, but honesty and courage to act upon that which you already possess. I shall do thee no good by telling thee whence I am. It will only increase thy responsibility, unless thou canst make up thy mind to act, and act rightly. Do then thy duty, which thou knowest. And do not come to Me for further knowledge." Then Pilate, feeling this, and perhaps angry with Jesus because angry with himself, says, "Speakest Thou not unto me? Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee?" Upon this Jesus opened His lips—"Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above. Therefore he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin;" i.e. to say, "the power of which you boast is not thine to use as you please. It is given thee. It is given thee from above. It is a trust. Thou art responsible. See that thou use the trust according to the right.

And again, powerful as thou art, thou hast much reason to be on thy guard against the superior wickedness of the High Priests, who have delivered Me unto thee. They are making thee their tool. Thy sin is great, if thou abusest the power with which God hath entrusted thee; but their sin is yet greater. For with all their advantages of spiritual insight, they have rejected and disowned Me, in My claims to be regarded as the Son of God."

This interview seems to have roused Pilate more than anything had yet done. It called out into greater activity his sense of responsibility. It showed him the reality of his position. It gave, for the moment, life and energy to his wavering purpose. From this time, we are told, Pilate sought to release Him—i. e. made more earnest and resolute attempts than ever to extricate Jesus from the power of His enemies. But poor, sceptical, vacillating Pilate, who never had been in earnest in his life, and who was only just beginning to wake up to the consciousness that the problem of human existence was a serious one—Pilate, with no fixed principles to guide him, with his powers of moral action emasculated and enervated by the sins of the past—was no

match for the cool, decided, unrelenting malignity of the Jewish priests. The greater sinner (as is usual) swept the lesser sinner away into his vortex, and hurried him to the commission of deeds from which his better feelings and his better judgment both equally recoiled.

Observe the process. It probably startled the Jews, for a moment, to find Pilate so much more earnest than they had expected about the rescue of Jesus. But they speedily recovered themselves, and gathered up their strength to overthrow, completely and finally, his troublesome reluctance. They believe they can master him. They have one weapon in their hands, to which he must succumb. "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend. Whosoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Cæsar." Ah! that settles the matter. Pilate well knows that the charge of making himself a king, as brought against Jesus, is utterly without foundation. But then Tiberius, the emperor, is a jealous and suspicious and irritable tyrant; and if the case be represented to him, in their own way, by a set of influential and malicious Jewish priests, his release of Jesus will only too probably lead to his degradation and ruin. He would gladly save

Jesus, if he could; but he cannot do it at the expense of himself. He would gladly do the thing which is right, if he dared; but he is not prepared to do it, and leave the consequences, trusting them with that God who never allows the right to fail in the end. No. There will be no more decided endeavours to save Christ, now. There will be feeble protests. There will be declarations of continued belief in His innocence. There will be attempts to shift the responsibility of judgment on to the shoulders of Herod. But he is now completely in the grasp of these Jews. They are his masters. And his weakness, his vacillation, his want of principle, compel him, even with his eyes open, to be their most unwilling instrument and tool.

I think you will find that the narrative bears out this idea. When Pilate "heard that saying," he consented that Jesus should be formally and officially arraigned before him. He sat down on the judgment seat. Again the old scenes repeat themselves. But it is clear that the Jews have a great advantage. Pilate is weaker. They are more insolent, and out-spoken, and exacting. They know their man now, and see that he must yield in the end. Pilate says, again, for the

fourth time, and says it sitting in his robes, as judge, on the judgment seat, "I find no fault in this man." Miserable being! What was the effect upon the Jews? It stirred them up to a more frantic exhibition of hatred than before. Pilate is driven to desperation. He tries one expedient, then another. He sends Jesus to Herod. That will not do. Herod sends Him back again. He tries to appease the Jews by punishing Jesus. "I have examined this man before you. I have found no fault in Him. Nor has Herod. Herod takes the same view of the case that I do. Herod thinks, as I do, that nothing worthy of death has been done by Him. I will therefore chastise Him and set Him free." But no! this will never do. The Jews are just now within spring of their prey, and they are not going to be balked by the scruples of Pontius Pilate. No scourging, no chastising, will satisfy them. They must have His *death*. And Pilate, against his will, shall be compelled to grant their demand. Notice that every moment Pilate gets weaker: that every moment the Jews, feeling their strength, get stronger. They become more insolent, more loud, more urgent, more imperious in their demands. They throw off all appearance

of respect for him. They make a tumult in his presence. And at last Pilate yields. With a pitiable weakness, with a lamentable attempt at self-deception, the man who had said to Jesus, "Knowest Thou not that I have power to release Thee, and have power to crucify Thee?" tries to cast off from himself on to others the consequences of his own act and deed. "He took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it." And then came the tremendous reply, thundered out by ten thousand furious voices, "His blood be on us and on our children."

Here, brethren, let the scene close. The fickle populace, the bitter, malignant priests, the treacherous Judas, the senseless Herod, the vacillating Pilate, sinners of different stamps and different degrees, all converge by different roads upon one point, and unite in rejecting Christ, and in crucifying the Lord of Glory. Yet let us not be disposed to excuse Pilate because he was vacillating. His vacillation was but one phase of that unbelief in God which is the root and source of all sin. Moreover, the sins of the past, the accumulated scepticism and worldliness, and ir-

religion of a lifetime, told upon him at this momentous crisis. He was paying for them. Nor is it a slight aggravation of his guilt, or a slight addition to his responsibility, that he was brought into actual personal contact with Christ; that he was thus pleaded with, and reasoned with by the Son of God; and that he *would* fall into the pit of sin, although the hand of Christ was so often mercifully stretched out to save him.

And as to practical lessons, gather above all others two chief ones—first, the importance of yielding to convictions of conscience: and then the miserable weakness of unbelief.

Most dangerous is it, brethren, to know what is right without acting upon the knowledge. Most dangerous to the believer to receive upon his soul the touch of God the Spirit, without following his convictions, and obeying their leading. Most dangerous, most ruinous to the man who is not a believer, to know the truth intellectually, and yet to refuse to live according to the truth. And if I wanted to shew any one the real weakness of no-belief, the real weakness of that sceptical spirit, which practically throws discredit on a kingdom of righteousness and

truth, and which looks upon every one who has an earnest religious faith, as an enthusiast or a knave, I do not know how I could better do it than by relating to him the story of Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor of Judea, under whom (as our creed says) Jesus Christ was crucified.

SERMON VII.

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JOHN XIX. 18.

“Where they crucified Him, and two other with Him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst.”

IT was in strictest accordance with the divine purpose and arrangement that the event of our Lord's crucifixion took place after the manner recorded in the text. There stood in the ancient Hebrew Scriptures a prophecy, uttered many hundred years before, which foretold that Messiah should be “numbered with the transgressors.” This prophecy might have been supposed to have met with its accomplishment when Jesus was arraigned as a criminal before the judgment-seat, and received a sentence of condemnation first from the mouth of the Jewish High Priest, and afterwards from the mouth of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. But, like many other prophecies relating to our Lord—indeed I believe I ought to say, like all other prophecies relating to our Lord—it was destined

to be fulfilled to the very letter. Jesus was crucified between two thieves—notorious malefactors—on either side one, and He in the midst.

I cannot help thinking, however, that the Divine purpose secured not only the dying of the Saviour in the actual company of transgressors, but also the very number and character of those with whom He was appointed to suffer. The prophecy, as you will observe, would have received its fulfilment had there been more malefactors than two—had they all died blaspheming—or had they all died penitently casting themselves upon Christ as their only hope of salvation. And it appears to me not to have been left to chance, but to have been previously determined and ordered, that of the two men who were thus brought into juxta - position with Christ, one should have accepted, and the other should have deliberately rejected Him. For thus, on the summit of Calvary, God sets before us an image or representation of what is continually going on in the world. Christ, a dying Christ, lifted up from the earth, is placed in the midst of perishing sinners. He is forced upon their notice. They cannot but cast their eyes upon Him: they cannot but make up their mind about Him.

And what is the result? Why, that a separation takes place. He divides men. To some His cross is a stumbling-block: to others, it is the very foundation of their hopes. He seems to be set for the falling of this man, and the rising of that. Here He is a savour of life unto life: there He is a savour of death unto death.

It is in reference to this particular view of the event that I wish to consider with you this morning the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. And I will arrange what I have to say in three simple divisions, speaking first about the impenitent; and then about the penitent thief; and lastly, about the suffering Saviour Himself.

Now we may notice, with regard to the impenitent thief, that his opportunities of becoming acquainted with Christ's character and Christ's power to save, were precisely the same as those enjoyed by his companion on the other side of the cross. Both gazed upon the same object. Both witnessed the conduct of the crowd and the majestic patience of the divine sufferer. Whatever words dropped from the lips of Christ were heard with equal distinctness by both the criminals. In fact, Jesus Christ was set before the one as much as the other; and whatever there

was in the circumstances of the hour either to encourage faith or to make it difficult to believe, made its appeal, with equal force, to the hearts and consciences of each of the men who were crucified together with Christ. And yet, brethren, how different was the effect produced upon them by the exhibition of Christ! How different were their destinies! The one (as we fear) by the dark road of unbelief and wilful rejection of the only Saviour, passed from misery in this world to misery in another—passed to the horror of the blackness of darkness for ever. The other (as we know) by the bright road of faith, rose from the degradation and torment of the cross to the honour and bliss of eternal life, and became the first fruits of the Redeemer's triumph—the first fulfilment of the prophecy, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." And let us remember, brethren, that the scene that was thus enacted on Calvary, has been repeated many and many a thousand times since in the Christian Church. There has been the same separating effect produced by the lifting up of Christ crucified. Ay, there shall be two men in one pew. The same message shall be offered to each. The same warning, the same

entreaty, the same exhortation, shall sound in their ears. Christ shall be set before both of them with equal distinctness, as their only Saviour. He shall be pressed upon them both with equal urgency. And yet, the one will accept and the other reject. The one will soften, the other will harden. On the one will descend the glories of faith: on the other all the hideous horrors, all the withering and blasting influences of unbelief.

Notice again what an exemplification we have in this narrative of the depravity of the human heart, and of its utter opposition to the truth of God. We preachers are sometimes accused, I believe, of over-colouring the picture. Human nature, it is said—unconverted human nature, is not so black as we paint it. They tell us that we overstrain our statements: that we exaggerate. But, brethren, just look at the spectacle before you. Jesus of Nazareth was one who “went about doing good.” When the eye saw Him, then it blessed Him. He had never spared Himself in His labours for the human race: and hundreds and thousands of afflicted creatures, blind, withered, palsied, crippled, leprous, besides the unconscious demoniacs, had received healing

from His gracious hands, and departed from His presence, with benedictions upon their lips. In addition to this, He was holy and harmless and undefiled. He was the one solitary instance of a perfect human being. He moved amongst men, the very incarnation of goodness, and gentleness, and purity, and truth. Strange then was it—utterly inexplicable upon the supposition of those who think highly of human nature—that when this one perfect man came upon the earth, shedding round Him, wherever He moved, the light of a holy life, and the gracious beneficence of loving deeds, He should have been welcomed with the crown of thorns and the cross of Calvary: strange, most strange, that buffetings, and scourgings, and cruel taunts, and angry revilings, should have constituted the reception which His fellows prepared for Him. Nor can it be said that this rejection was the act of a few. Look at the crowd round His cross, gathered together to gloat over His dying agonies, and to mock Him as the death-spasm draws His sacred features into deep lines and furrows of pain. Look at it, I say. It is not wholly constituted of the rabble of Jerusalem. Not the back streets only, not the filthy alley and the overcrowded court only,

have vomited forth their rude and ignorant occupants, to witness the deed of blood. But all ranks and all classes have their representative at the cross. Wealth is there. Respectability is there. Religion, so called, is there. Magistrates, nobles, soldiers, priests, are there—drawn together into a strange and hideous amalgamation, by the one magnet of hatred to Jesus of Nazareth. Ah! after witnessing such a scene as that, you may think well, if you like, of unchanged, unconverted human nature. I cannot.

But we have not done with the scene yet. We have not done with the exhibition of human depravity. It is often thought that suffering has a mysterious power of changing the heart, and of turning the current of the spiritual being into a new and a better direction. Here then is a man suffering the slow tortures of crucifixion. Again, it is often thought that the approach of death will soften the hardest; that, even if the life has been careless and godless, the position of one who stands hovering on the brink of a dark and unknown eternity, will produce serious thoughts, befitting the position. Here then is a man who may be said to be upon his death-bed. He must die, ere long, and he knows it. It is

only a question of a few hours more or less. And he is even now on the very borders of that mysterious state for which, through his whole life-time, he has made so little preparation. Now observe him. He is so fastened to the cross that he can only move his head and his tongue. His head he turns towards Jesus, to shoot glances of bitter, malignant dislike at one who has never done him wrong, and who would bless him even now, if he were willing to be blessed. And with his last breath, his dying breath, he joins the crowd in scoffing at Jesus of Nazareth. "If Thou be the Son of God, save Thyself and us."

Again, before we dismiss finally this portion of our subject, suffer me to remind you that what ruined this man was *his unbelief*. His previous life, with its horrible crimes, was bad enough. It was bad to set all laws human and divine at defiance; it was bad to lead a life of violence and oppression; it was bad to plunge into foul licentious excess; yet all this would not have cost him his soul, had he only accepted the salvation offered to him in Jesus Christ. But to all his other sins he added the ruinous one, of rejecting Christ. And surely, brethren, this is the greatest of all sins. When God sends His Son

into the world ; spares Him not, but sends Him ; sends Him to indescribable humiliation, to the horrors of Gethsemane ; sends Him to the slow lingering agony of the cross — when such a spectacle as this is spread out before our eyes, if we turn away in indifference, and if when Christ, the crucified Christ, is brought into our presence, we turn from Him with dislike and contempt—tell me, brethren, what act is there, which concentrates, as this does, into one black sting the virus of ingratitude and selfishness, and opposition to the pure and holy will of God ? Ah ! let us not think lightly of unbelief. We think much of open sin. There is an outcry, and rightly, against the murderer, the thief, the impure. But rejection of Christ, how lightly it sits upon the consciences of most men ! And yet, let us remember, bad as all sin is, unbelief is the only damning sin—the only sin which ruins the soul irretrievably, for ever.

In the next place let us consider the penitent thief. The first thing I notice about this man is the astonishing strength of his faith. Never, I suppose, had it been so difficult as now to understand the real character and pretensions of Jesus Christ. If you had been with Him

at the graveside of Lazarus and heard the words, "Lazarus come forth:" or had you been with Him when He multiplied the food, and fed five thousand hungry men with five loaves and two fishes, you might have been comparatively ready to recognize the gleams of Deity, bursting through the lowly tabernacle of human flesh in which it was enshrined. But now when He is like a crushed worm, and no man; when He has become an outcast and a scorn to the people; when God Himself seems to have deserted Him; and all the power He once possessed has left Him, and He can offer no resistance to the most wanton insults of His persecutors—now, in this deepest depth of His degradation, to detect the eternal Son of God, was spiritual discernment indeed. Yet this the penitent thief had. "Lord! remember me when Thou comest into (or rather "in") Thy Kingdom." What! did this poor ignorant malefactor look forward to the coming again in glory of the man who was dying helplessly by his side, rejected and disowned by His own people, by the learning, and wealth, and power, and influence of the whole Jewish nation? Yes. This is precisely what the man did. The murderers of Christ thought that they had crush-

ed Him entirely. They had made, they thought, His whole enterprise a failure. He would trouble them no more. But the penitent thief with the strong clear vision of faith saw through the appearances of the present time, and beheld the Son of Man coming in the majesty of that Kingdom that shall have no end. Notice then, in the first place, the remarkable faith of the man. We have the same faith, Christian brethren. We recognize the Saviour in His humility, before we can really benefit by His work. We must look through the Cross to the Kingdom. We must see that the Crowned Christ is contained in the Crucified Christ—is only the development of the Crucified Christ. Our faith then is of the same kind and nature as that of the penitent thief. But can we say that *it is the same in degree?*

Notice in the next place his confession of sin. “We suffer the due reward of our deeds. But this man hath done nothing amiss.” Brethren, there is a manliness about a true repentance. Satan tries to persuade us that it is mean to acknowledge ourselves to have been in the wrong, and to confess our sins, judging ourselves on account of them. But the meanness is with

those who refuse to repent. What is repentance? Repentance is the result of looking the truth right in the face—of ascertaining, by the help of God's Holy Spirit, how matters really stand between God and our soul. And I say, unhesitatingly, that there is courage, nobleness, in thus bringing your heart resolutely into contact with the truth, and in making the humble request, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

In the next place, will you notice that the man does not keep his feelings about Christ to himself, but confesses Him openly before men? He is not a secret disciple—a hidden believer. He rebukes his fellow-sufferer for blaspheming Christ. He manifests a concern for his brother's soul. And he acknowledges, without hesitation, his own entire dependence upon Jesus of Nazareth. Here we have some of the evidences of a work of grace in the heart. It is true enough that the malefactor was saved, not according to his works (for what good works had he done?) but "according to the purpose and grace" of God. He was saved by simple dependence upon Christ. As soon as ever he had cast himself upon the Lord, committed his all into the hands of Jesus, at that very moment, and quite irrespectively of

all works of any kind, his salvation was secured ; he was translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. Christ took upon Himself the burden of his sins. He was clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and stood before God, "accepted in the Beloved." But, at the same time, as we all know, the man who is justified is also sanctified. So was it in this case. The new-born soul began immediately to show signs of spiritual life. It trusted, it repented, it witnessed for Christ, it showed an anxiety for the salvation of others, it rebuked sin, and so gave evident proof of the existence of a work of grace. And thus, brethren, when the sinner, just falling into the deadly jaws of hell, was plucked out, and carried with the Saviour into Paradise, he was also found *fit* for the new scenes and new associations into which he had been so suddenly and unexpectedly transported.

Lastly, we come to consider the central figure of the group, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. On this occasion, Jesus showed Himself to be "the way, the truth, and the life." It was He who gave life to this soul, dead in trespasses and sins. It was He who poured upon it the light of a divine illumination. It was He, who not only

showed the sinner the way to heaven, but was Himself the road to convey him thither. On this occasion again Jesus showed Himself to be the great High Priest, "able to save to the uttermost those who come to God by Him." Even while the work was going on, even before the sacrifice was completely offered, we have a convincing proof of its perfect efficiency. The blood then being shed, could wash out the blackest stains. The intercession of the intercessor was even then powerful. And He could say, even then, "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me,"—and this sinful and ignorant man among them—"be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which Thou hast given Me."

Many are the thoughts, Christian brethren, that rise up within us when we gaze upon the mystery commemorated on Good Friday. We remember that as believers we are crucified with Christ, crucified with Him so that all our sins are put away by that sacrifice made upon the cross, because we are looked upon as having suffered with Him; crucified with Him because in the recollection of His sufferings for us, we arise to live a life of earnest self-denial and self-

mortification for His sake. Strong too is the sense of sinfulness which ought to be called out in us by the sight of the bleeding Saviour. For *it was our sin that pierced Him*. But stronger still, will be the sense of love. For all our safety, all our happiness, all our blessedness has been purchased for us by the death of Christ; and our feeling to-day will naturally be “thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift”—thanks be to the Son who loved us and gave Himself for us: and our prayer will be to the Holy Spirit so to enlighten us by His teaching that we may understand more of the great things done for us, more of the great love manifested towards us, by the dying upon the cross of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God.

SERMON VIII.

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JOHN XX. 16, 17.

“Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto Him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father.”

IT is not very easy, Christian brethren, nor is it perhaps at all necessary for us to harmonize the different accounts given by the evangelists of the resurrection of Christ. We shall probably agree in believing that their writings present, on this point, as on all others, a perfect unity of statement. But it is one thing to believe in the existence of that unity; and it is another thing to be able to detect it in the midst of fragmentary notices, thrown out without any attempt at elaborate order, and at a distance of time which renders it impossible to supplement the information derived from documents with the

information derivable from other sources. However, though I am very far from wishing to aim at the solution of every difficulty, or the clearing up of every thing that is obscure, I think it may be well for me to introduce our present subject by comparing the narrative of St. John with that of St. Matthew, so far as the interview of the Lord with Mary Magdalene is concerned. By so doing we shall perhaps be in a better position for understanding the language of Christ in the text, and for gathering up the lessons which this particular portion of the whole story of the resurrection may be intended to teach us.

Now we learn from St. Matthew, that very early on the morning of the first day of the week, (the day we now call Sunday,) in the dim dawn, when it was hardly otherwise than dark, a party of women set out to visit the sepulchre in which the body of Jesus had been laid. The party appears to have consisted of Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome. They had no expectation of a resurrection. They did not understand the Scriptures, which spake of a resurrection: and their only thought was to pay the last sad rites of respect to their murdered Master, and to fulfil the customary duty of

anointing the body with sweet spices—a duty which had been neglected on account of the necessary haste with which Jesus had been entombed. As they approach the sepulchre, a violent shaking of the earth takes place. An angel descends from heaven, rolls back the great stone from the door, and sits upon it. He speaks re-assuringly to the women, tells them that Jesus had already risen : not (mind you) that the rising took place at the moment of the removal of the stone, but that Jesus *had already risen* ; and bids them go quickly and carry the tidings of His resurrection to the rest of the disciples. In obedience to this command they depart, and as they are going, Jesus meets them, saying, “All hail.” They immediately recognise their Lord, draw nigh to Him, and touch Him. “They came,” we read, “and held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him.”

Now turn for a moment to the narrative of St. John. St. John tells us that Mary Magdalene came early to the sepulchre, and that when she came she found the stone already removed from the door of the sepulchre. Her distress at what she thought was the abstraction of the body of Jesus was great, and she ran at once to

tell Simon Peter and the beloved disciple. They rose and went together, she following, but not so quickly, to the spot. John, probably the younger man of the two, outruns Peter, and coming to the sepulchre, finds Mary's story to be true. The door is down. The tomb is open. He looks in and sees the linen clothes lying; but reverence and awe prevent his entering in. Soon after, comes up the more impetuous Peter, and enters into the tomb. Then John does the same. And both are persuaded of the removal of the body of Jesus, though it is only John, as it appears, that believes that Jesus has risen again from the dead. After they are gone away, Mary Magdalene, who had come up of course more slowly, and whose womanly grief was greater, or at least more demonstrative than that of the men, remains behind, at the open mouth of the cave, weeping, and sometimes stooping down and looking in. Suddenly she beholds an apparition of angels, who say unto her, "Woman, why weepest thou?" She having no conception whatever of a resurrection, and grieving only over the abstraction of the body of Jesus, replies, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." And then turning

away, is confronted by Jesus Himself. But she does not recognise Him. She does not, as it appears, look full at Him ; but merely seeing a figure before her, and blinded by tears, supposes Him to be some official connected with the garden, and says, " Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will come and take Him away." Then Jesus utters the word, " Mary." And then it is that with one delighted cry, " Rabboni," she springs forward, as it seems, to touch Him, and hold Him fast, that she may never lose Him again ; but is gently repulsed with the words, " Touch Me not, for I am not yet ascended to My Father."

Putting then these two narratives together, I come to the conclusion that Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, and Salome, started together, in the first instance, to go to the sepulchre ; but that Mary Magdalene, by some means or other, was parted from her companions, and left behind, so that they came to their destination first. Then occurred the scene already described—the scene of the earthquake. After the other two women have left the spot, in obedience to the command of the angel, and have met Christ on their way, and have " held Him by the feet and

worshipped Him," Mary Magdalene approaches the sepulchre and finds the door down, and the body gone. Upon this, as I said just now, she hurries off to tell Peter and John; and returning with them, or rather after them, when they are departed, meets with our Lord. You will notice that, although she is gently repulsed by Him, she is yet honoured by receiving a commission at His hands. "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father." And it appears that she, after all, was the first who had the privilege of bearing the news of the resurrection to the sorrowing disciples of the Lord.

Now if this view I have taken of the circumstances of the case be a correct one, it will naturally occur to us to enquire why the privilege accorded to the other women was denied to Mary Magdalene—why they were permitted to hold Jesus by the feet, whilst to her it was said, "Touch Me not;" and in our answer to the enquiry will be involved an explanation of the meaning of the text. We will make it then our first object to understand, if we can, the dealing of our Lord, in this instance, with His faithful and loving disciple, Mary Magdalene.

Now it seems to have been the error of all the disciples—and it probably was, in an especial manner the error of some of them—to attach far too great an importance to the possession of the personal presence of our Lord. From this error our Lord, as you will remember, endeavoured to wean them. As the end drew nigh, and with it the time of unavoidable separation, He explained to them with increasing distinctness the benefits they would gain by His departure from earth. “Nevertheless I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away.” And in some of His later discourses with the disciples, the idea of the Comforter, who should take His place in the Church and carry on His work, assumes a greater prominence than before, and almost exclusively fills the field of spiritual vision. The disciples, however, were slow to entertain the novel and somewhat unwelcome idea. Some of them were especially slow. Gifted with less spiritual discernment than the rest, and understanding very imperfectly the true character of their Master, they clung with a painful tenacity to His bodily presence. And our Lord’s discourses about the Comforter—His intimations of a truer and higher and more satisfying fellowship with Himself, to

be obtained by the agency of that Comforter, fell upon unheeding, because unprepared and unwilling ears. To this class, I fancy, Mary Magdalene belonged. To her, it was everything that she could see Jesus, that she could hear His voice, that she could go into His presence for instruction, for consolation, for strength. The loss of His personal presence was to her almost the loss of all. And when she had beheld Him expire upon the cross, and had beheld Him laid in the tomb, a blank sense of desolation fell upon her heart; her existence seemed to have been exhausted, at once, of everything that was worth living for, and she felt herself to be emphatically an "orphan." That it was really so with her is indicated, I think, by her behaviour, as recorded in the passage before us. Her sole idea seems to be to recover possession of the body of Christ. Her thoughts are filled with the body. And why? Because, to her apprehension, it was the one connecting link between herself and the friend she had lost. It was the one visible and tangible thing to which she could cling. To pay honour and respect to the body, seemed the only thing that could impart, at such a time, consolation to her soul.

Now to Mary Magdalene, in such a frame of mind as this, Jesus Christ suddenly reappears. Ah! she has got what she wants. Her Master is restored to her; she does not care how; it is enough that He is restored to her in bodily presence. It is enough; yes, enough. She wants nothing more, nothing better. Now there will be a resumption of their former intimate and confidential intercourse. Now she will be able to gaze upon His face with all its majestic tenderness. She will be able to hear the tones of His voice. If she has any difficulty, any trouble, any sorrow, she may carry it to Him at once. And she may sit again at His feet and hear Him discourse in those well-known and much-loved accents about the mysteries of the unseen and eternal Kingdom. And so, throwing the whole feelings of her soul into the one cry, "Rabboni!" she springs forward to hold Him fast, that she may never more be parted from Him, never more undergo the sorrows of a desolate separation from the Master she loves. It is this act which our Lord gently repulses. "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to the Father."

I understand then that in Mary Magdalene there was a lack of a deeper apprehension of the

character of Christ, and consequently, a lack of a deeper reverence for His person. The other women had this reverence. Their act was an act of worship. "They held Him by the feet and worshipped Him." Mary Magdalene, I think, had not this reverence, or at least had not to the same degree. The exclamation which bursts from her lips indicates as much. "Rabboni!"—"Master!" Not "my Lord and my God!"—as we should have expected. Why, in the very word you see the direction in which the current of the mind is flowing. The mind goes back at once to the merely human relationship, and revealing, as all sudden words do—all words leaping out unexpectedly—the real, innermost feelings of the soul—points to an imperfect apprehension of the true character of Christ. I do not mean to say, brethren, that Mary was altogether in the dark, as to the divinity of our Lord. I believe her to have had a sense of sin; and a true sense of sin is the portal through which we enter to the knowledge of the truth respecting the person of Christ. Let a man feel his sinfulness, let him feel ever so dimly and indistinctly, if it be truly, his utter need of a Saviour, and that man requires only to have his inner feelings developed and

put into articulate language, in order to express with Peter his belief, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." But I mean that with Mary Magdalene, the perception of the human preponderated far too much over her perception of the divine. In her religion, true and real as it was, there was too much sentiment, and too little deep, awful reverence. She could understand no fellowship with Jesus Christ, but that which was dependent upon His bodily presence. And she needed, more perhaps than others did, though they needed it as well—to be taught that the old relation between the Master and His disciples had passed away, and that the time of the new, of the truer and more intimate, because more spiritual relation, had been already ushered in. And how was she taught the lesson? By the repulse, and by the words of our Lord. "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father." As if He said,—“Mary, thou desirest to enjoy My friendship, to possess Me, to have My presence continually. Thou shalt have thy desire. But not now: nor in the way thou dost imagine. That fellowship with Me which thou longest for, thou canst not have until I am ascended to the Father. Then, the Spirit

of truth shall come ; and He shall lead thee into that truer, nearer, nobler, more satisfying communion with Me, of which I spake before. But meantime, Mary, this restoration of My bodily presence, in which thou so much delightest, will not satisfy thy soul. And if I allow thee to think so, if I fall in with the ideas thou art now indulging—I shall lead thee astray. Therefore, “touch Me not.” Lay aside thoughts of the mere earthly fellowship. Look forward to the heavenly fellowship which thou shalt enjoy after I have ascended to the Father. Thy true possession of Me, thy true seeing, thy true grasping and holding of Me, shall only then begin, when I am removed out of thy sight, and out of thy reach, and when the Spirit hath come down to lead thy soul into perfect fellowship and communion with thy risen and ascended Lord.”

Such, brethren, appears to me to have been the meaning and intention of our Lord, in thus dealing with His faithful disciple. Nor was the lesson intended exclusively for Mary Magdalene. It was aimed at the other disciples as well. It strikes the key-note of all the intercourse they enjoyed with their risen Lord, during the mysterious forty days which elapsed before His final

departure. They were to understand that the former relation had ceased, and a new relation had begun. They were to be weaned from their dependence upon His bodily presence, and to be taught to believe that it was better for them that He should go away—better, not only because the Spirit would descend and invest them with new powers and fresh dignities, but also because, by the advent of that Spirit, they would actually be able to come into closer contact with their glorified Master, would know Him better, would love Him more, than they could whilst He was sojourning in bodily presence among them. To this end—to impress this truth more and more deeply on their minds—tended all Christ's dealing with them during those mysterious forty days. First by His interview with Mary Magdalene, then by His fragmentary intercourse with the disciples, by His brief manifestations, by His unexpected appearances and His sudden vanishings—He taught them that they were to be led, by means of His glorified body, into a higher and truer and diviner acquaintance with Himself than before.

And such may be for us, Christian brethren, one of the lessons taught us by the resurrection

of Jesus. It is by means of that resurrection that we, who are also His disciples, are drawn up into a condition of fuller and more satisfying fellowship with Christ. It may sometimes occur to us that it would have been better—that it would have been more safe, more encouraging, more reassuring, to have possessed the very bodily presence of Christ: that, if we could have seen Him, watched Him in His movements, and heard His discourses with our own ears—we should have enjoyed pre-eminent advantages for entering into His mind and spirit, and for enjoying the most intimate fellowship and communion with Him. And yet such an idea would be the merest delusion. For no true and close and real contact with Christ was possible, until the Saviour had entered into His resurrection state. Christ must die. Christ must rise again in a glorified body. Christ must seem to be removed to an inaccessible distance. Christ must even seem to repulse His people from a nearer approach. And then, not till then, they will know Him perfectly to be “the way, the truth, and the life.” Then, not till then, will they have “fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

Beautiful, brethren, beautiful exceedingly, are the thoughts which cluster round the subject of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The subject, look at it where you will, is a joyful one. And bright and encouraging are all the aspects in which it might be presented to you. Yet, to this one particular point I have wished, on this occasion, to restrict your attention—that it is by the resurrection, and by the resurrection-life in a glorified body of Jesus Christ, that it becomes possible for the believer to hold that close, that intimate communion with his Lord, which his soul desires. And so, brethren, when we experience what it is to enter more deeply into the mind of Christ—to understand Him even as we understand the heart of an earthly friend—when we know what it is to sympathize with Him more thoroughly, and to cast ourselves more entirely out of ourselves into the greatness and grandeur of His majestic purposes; and above all when in times of deep sorrow and trouble we feel Him, as it were, coming forth from the unseen, and shaping Himself into a distinct reality, making Himself so real, so tangible, that we can pour out our hearts before Him as we can to no one else, and can rest ourselves trust-

fully upon His everlasting arm—then let us remember that we owe all these blessings and benefits to the resurrection and to the resurrection-life of Jesus Christ, because it is through the resurrection-life and that alone, that we are able to enter into intimate friendship and communion with our Lord.

NOTE.—St. Mark says that Jesus “appeared first to Mary Magdalene.” If this statement is to be harmonized with the accounts given by St. Matthew and St. John, we must suppose that our Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene whilst the other women were hastening away to report to the disciples the vision of angels that they had seen; and that then, leaving Mary, He placed Himself in the path of the other Mary and Salome, saying to them, “All hail!” The supposition is a little awkward; but even if it be correct, it leaves undisturbed our argument founded on the different treatment which Mary Magdalene received at the hands of the Lord.

SERMON IX.



1 CORINTHIANS XV. 25, 26.

“For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”

WE NEED scarcely remind you, Christian brethren, that in this well-known and magnificent chapter, the apostle is bringing forward many arguments to establish the doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh. Among them is the argument of which our text is a part. Christ (reasons the apostle) upon His resurrection from the dead, was invested with sovereign empire. All power was given unto Him in heaven and in earth. And it was decreed by the Father, that as the reward of His obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, He should be highly exalted: so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Now this kingdom, given to Him as the purchase

of His sufferings, and given to Him as the God-man—the connecting link through whom all transactions between heaven and earth were to be carried on—this kingdom was to continue for a certain time, and until a certain purpose had been entirely accomplished and brought about. It was to continue until all opposing power and rule and authority were crushed, and all enemies put under His feet. This then is the purpose for which Christ is reigning now. He is overthrowing opposition. He is subjugating His foes. He is eradicating rebellion. Or (to put it in other words) He is engaged in gradually destroying the effects and consequences of sin.

But one of the effects of sin is death. It was sin that brought death into the world. It is through sin that the bodies of so many millions of God's people are now lying in all the loathsomeness and dishonour of corruption, or are scattered about, in apparently irrecoverable particles, among the dust of the earth. And it is owing to sin that so many more of the saints will yet descend into the grave, and leave their mortal tabernacle there to remain for a season in darkness and degradation and silence. Death then is one of the enemies of Christ and of

Christ's people. He is one of those enemies that must be destroyed. But how is he to be destroyed? Only (it is clear) by a resurrection of the flesh. If the bodies on which he has laid his heavy grasp and crumbled them to powder, are to remain as they are, death will still have power—will still reign—will still be victorious. But if he is to be crushed and annihilated, there must be a wresting of the body out of his grasp: or, in other words, there must be a resurrection of the flesh. Such is the apostle's argument. Let me place it again before you in fewer words. The purpose for which Christ's mediatorial kingdom was given Him must be carried out. That purpose is the ultimate destruction of all enemies. Of these enemies one is death. Death therefore must be destroyed; and as he can only be destroyed by an undoing of his work, there must be a resurrection of the dead.

Leaving however on one side the argument of the apostle, let us take up and consider together the subject suggested by it—the reigning of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us examine, first, what is said in Holy Scripture about the nature of His kingdom: and then, how the fact of His reigning may be found practically to affect ourselves.

Now the kingdom of which we are speaking is, of course, the mediatorial kingdom of Christ. It is something distinct from that natural and inalienable dominion over the creatures, which belongs to Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God, as very God of very God. It is something received. It is something purchased as the reward of sufferings. It is something which would not have been His, had He not taken upon Him human flesh : had He not accepted the form of a servant, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. We find, in Scripture, the Father appearing always in the majesty and with the authority of God. We find the Son, made man, appearing as the minister of the Father. In that capacity He is promised a kingdom. This kingdom He received after His resurrection and ascension, when He was seated "on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens." And now He is made head over all things to His Church ; has power given Him to protect it against all its enemies ; and in the end to destroy them, and to complete the salvation of all that believe in Him. It is not, therefore, brethren, as God that He rules, but as God-man : as mediator : as a middle person

between God and man, partaking of both natures, as He was to reconcile both parties, God and man.

To this fact our Lord seems to point Himself, in one of His discourses. He says, in the fifth chapter of St. John's Gospel and the 27th verse, that the Father "hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man." And again, in the same chapter, "the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son; that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father." It seems then, if I understand the matter rightly, that we are not now under the immediate rule of the Godhead, but under the sway of one who unites the two natures, and is man as well as God. To Him—this God-man, this Mediator, we come; with Him we have to do. He exacts our obedience. He demands the submission of our wills to His, the consecration of ourselves to His service. He is our only method of approach, the only pathway between earth and heaven. It is to Him we must draw nigh, if we would be brought into fellowship and communion with God. And this arrangement, it appears, is necessary for a time. But it is not to last for ever. A period will come when all enemies will be

subdued and destroyed; and then (the purposes of the mediatorial kingdom having all of them been answered) the Son shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father: He shall Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God, that is the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—the triune Jehovah—may be all in all.

The passage in which this statement is made is obscure and difficult. And I wish to speak about its meaning with great caution and diffidence. Yet thus much seems to be conveyed to us—that a time is coming when the office of a Mediator will no longer be necessary. Christ's person, it is true, will not change. The humanity will remain eternally associated with the divinity. But there will be a change in His office. For every enemy has been crushed and trodden under foot, and the office is no longer required. Then the Godhead will govern all things immediately by Himself, without the intervention of a Mediator. Then we shall have to tender all our obedience immediately to Him, and receive all our happiness immediately from Him. Then the Godhead will be all in all, by a full communication of Himself to all the saints, and by a

direct and intimate union and fellowship with them.

I have said perhaps enough upon this point. Let us leave it, and pass on to the next—the practical effects of believing ourselves to be under the mediatorial kingdom of Christ: to be subjected—not to the pure Godhead, but to the God-man, Christ Jesus—to the risen and ascended and reigning Saviour.

The first feeling, I think, is one of encouragement and comfort. Tell me that the Lord reigneth, and that He will ultimately establish a kingdom of truth and righteousness upon the earth—tell me that, under His sway, the good will triumph over the evil, the light prevail against the darkness, and I am not sure that I shall at first hearing rejoice greatly in the announcement. An angel might do so. One of these pure and holy beings, poising himself on his wings above this earth of ours, and calmly surveying the scene—hearing the cry of the oppressed, the voice of the blasphemer, the groans of the miserable, that go up daily and enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth—seeing how sin hath deformed the fair face of creation, and how the vast tide of human beings rolls on, with

comparatively few exceptions, until it falls over the verge into the deep abyss of eternal death—an angel, I say, observing this, might rejoice to know that all would be righted, and that such a scandal and a blot would be wiped away at last from the fair face of God's creation. But I am a sinner myself. I carry within me a corrupt, unholy nature. And what if the setting up of the kingdom should involve *my* removal, *my* destruction, as being one of the things that offend, and that do iniquity in the sight of God? The bare announcement then, that a work is going on which will end in the final establishment of every thing that is holy, and in the final destruction of every thing that is impure—will not, of itself, convey much comfort to my soul.

Tell me, however, that Jesus Christ is King, and the matter assumes at once a different aspect. He who loved me, who gave Himself for me, who washed me from my sins in His own most precious blood, who hath given to me His Spirit to dwell in me and to work in me, who is my brother man, who feels for me and sympathizes with me as no earthly friends do or can do—He is the monarch of this mediatorial kingdom. He sits on the throne, bending all things to His

will. He wields the sceptre of government. He guides all things into the channel in which He would have them to flow. Ah! it is like hearing about some mighty monarch who has in his hands the disposal of your fate. You picture him to yourself. You imagine the sternness of his aspect, the tones of that voice in which he may pronounce your doom. You are bidden draw nigh. He seems awful in the distance. Surrounded by all the majestic accompaniments of royalty, with courtiers and attendants round him, ready to do his bidding, he looks increasingly terrible as you approach. Nigher and nigher you come, with failing heart and trembling knees; and then, just venturing to look up, you see that the dreaded monarch is your brother, your own brother, of whose loving heart you stand in no doubt, and you catch the smile of recognition with which he welcomes you and bids you draw nigh and not be afraid. Thus, brethren, is it with ourselves, when we remember that this King, seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High, raised to the blazing centre of the universe, having a name that is above every name—is no other than the gentle, loving Jesus, whom we know. We have held converse with Him, many

a time. We have poured out our hearts before Him. We have met with Him in His word, in His house, in His sacraments. It is a source of unspeakable comfort and strength to us, to know that He reigneth until He hath put His enemies, and the enemies of His people, all under His feet.

In the next place, I think, we experience a feeling of *certainty*. Christ will certainly accomplish the work which He hath taken in hand. "All power has been given unto Him, in heaven and earth." He wields all forces. He commands all agents. The work of the kingdom will therefore assuredly be done. And what is that work? It may be briefly described as destroying the effects of sin. First, the Lord Jesus Christ destroys the effects of sin in His own people. When we, brethren, by the power of God's Holy Spirit, have been brought to see our need of Christ, and then heartily and unreservedly to embrace Him, to close with Him, as our only hope of salvation—then, as I need hardly tell you, we are put into the school of Christ to be trained. It is true indeed that, at the very moment of believing, there is a fitness for glory. Fitness for glory does not come at the end of our Christian career, but at the begin-

ning. So says the apostle Paul, "Giving thanks unto the Father, which *hath* made us meet"—not "which shall make us meet—to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." But the believer, in the earlier stages of his spiritual life, is like a new-born babe. The child has faculties, powers, organs suiting it for the circumstances in which it is placed. So with the believer. He is adapted to the new spiritual life from the very beginning. If at the very moment of believing he were to be suddenly translated into another world, he would find himself in harmony with the great realities with which he would be surrounded. But for all that, he needs development. He is not always to be a babe: he is to be the full-grown man. His spiritual life is not always to remain in the bud, but to burst out into blossom, and bear fruit, much fruit, to the praise and glory of God. And consequently, as soon as ever he belongs to Christ, he has to enter upon a process of education and discipline, upon a course of spiritual training, by which he shall be drawn out into more perfect conformity to the image of Christ. Or, to put the thought into other words, the kingdom of Christ has to be set up more entirely

and more perfectly in our hearts. And this is part of the work which our ascended Saviour undertakes for His believing people. The will shall be brought to submit itself to the holy and righteous will of God. It must be done, cost what it may. And so, Jesus, by the exercise of His kingly power, orders our circumstances for us, surrounding us with those things which shall best lead us to the knowledge of ourselves, to true humility, to true dependence upon His grace and power. He sends us affliction, if need be; He sends opposition; He places us in conditions which will reveal to us the depth of evil in our hearts; He even allows Satan to go a length in tempting us, as he did with Job, a certain length, but no farther; and thus makes "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to His purpose."

And there is also another consequence or effect of sin which He will destroy with His kingly power. He will destroy the dominion of death. These bodies, which will decay and crumble into dust, He will raise up again. He will glorify them. He will make them spiritual bodies, like unto His glorious body. And then shall we

attain to the perfection of our nature, when, glorified body reunited to purified spirit, "the righteous shall shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father."

In the next place, brethren, Christ, in His mediatorial kingdom, rules over His enemies, and bends them to His sway. If you will not serve Christ with a willing heart, you shall serve Him against your will. Any how, you shall serve Him. Remember how it was with Satan. Persecuting Christ all through His life, he hunted Him down, as he thought, at last. He stirred up the virulent rage of the Pharisees: persuaded them to get Him put to death. And when he saw Him hang expiring on the cross—when he saw Him dead, and taken down, and consigned to a tomb—he triumphed in his heart, thinking that his work was accomplished, and that he had utterly frustrated the plans of the incarnate Son of God. But oh! how he gnashed his teeth, to find that he had only befooled himself: that all his opposition, all his malicious schemes, all his successful machinations, had only brought about the very thing that he ought most to have dreaded; and that by accomplishing the death of Christ, he was just accomplishing the purpose of God, and

achieving his own overthrow. And so, brethren, it is with us human beings. If we will not consent to be instruments in God's hands, and to lend ourselves to His will, we shall still be His instruments. Oppose Christ. Mock His power. Ridicule His people. Say you will go your own way, and will give no heed to the crucified Nazarene. Still, He will use you. There shall a niche be found for you in the fabric of His mighty purposes. He will have something for you to do, as He had for Judas, for Pilate, for all His enemies; and you will gnash your teeth with rage to find that your opposition, your ridicule, your endeavours to lead others astray—have all been overruled for the fulfilment of His purposes, and His ultimate glory. And why shall this be so? Because He is seated on His mediatorial throne: and “He shall reign until He hath put all enemies under His feet.”

I gather two thoughts in conclusion. First for the people of God. Then for those who are not His people. To God's people I would say,—do not be alarmed, because ungodliness abounds. New heresies are springing up, day by day, almost with mushroom growth. Men, whose occupation it ought to be to defend the Faith, are the fore-

most to assail or to undermine her. Books are issued which seem to shake the foundation of old Christianity to the very base. In some people's eyes everything totters, everything reels. And they are perplexed, and staggered, not knowing what will come next. Ah! I would say,—do not be alarmed. The Lord Jesus Christ reigneth. He will manage this matter, as He has managed other matters, and turn it to His own glory. He will make the opposition of men in the end to praise Him; and the disciple, who comes with Judas-like step and mien, to betray his Master while kissing Him, shall be found at last, only to have worked out unconsciously the purposes of God.

To others I would say, brethren, be persuaded to give up your rebellion against Christ, for it is useless. It cannot prosper. Remember that rejection of Christ is rebellion against Him. You say, "Oh! I am only indifferent. I am neither for, or against Christ. Not on His side certainly, but as certainly not on the side of His enemies." Ah! brethren, believe me, rejection of Christ is rebellion against Him, is hatred of Him only a little disguised. Give up your rebellion then, I say. It is a losing game. You are

kicking against the pricks. Let Christ use you as *willing* instruments. Consent to glorify Him in your lives. His service is a happy, a blessed service, as many of us can testify. Only by yielding to Him, only by living for Him, can ye attain the true end of your being. Down then with the weapons of your rebellion. Hearken unto His gracious offer of pardon, and come. Him that cometh He will in no wise cast out. But let there be no delay. "Kiss the Son lest He be angry, and so ye perish from the right way, if His wrath be kindled, yea, but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."

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