

**JAMES
BROWN**

MISREAD
PASSAGES OF
SCRIPTURES

James Brown

Misread Passages of Scriptures

«Public Domain»

Brown J.

Misread Passages of Scriptures / J. Brown — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

PREFACE	5
I.	6
II.	12
III.	17
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	21

J. Baldwin Brown

Misread Passages of Scriptures

PREFACE

The accompanying Sermons on "Misread Passages of Scripture" form part of a series which the author projected, but which through ill health he has been unable to complete. He sends them forth in this imperfect form, in compliance with the wish of the publishers; and in the belief too that the topics of some of them will not be without interest, in the conflict of thought on theological subjects which waxes rather than wanes year by year.

The reader will see that much space has not been occupied with critical discussions; nor has the author gone out of his way to correct the English version of the Scriptures. He appreciates fully the value of critical inquiries; but it is wonderful how the sense of leading passages of the Bible gets moulded, apart from, and even in defiance of, critical considerations, by the bias of the various theological schools. Each school makes, if not its own version of the Bible, its own interpretation of the leading passages; and tradition plays an important part in the Protestant as well as in the Roman Church. The text being accepted, each party makes its own version of it, and widely different senses are extracted from the same words. Hence it happens that important passages of Scripture have certain ideas associated with them in the popular mind, which, if they are erroneous, are not to be corrected by a simple announcement, on competent critical authority, of the true rendering of the text.

The author of this little volume believes that there are some very popular but very detrimental misapprehensions, not of the true reading only, but of the true bearing of many important passages; and he offers this slight contribution towards a true understanding of them in the earnest hope that it may stimulate some so to search the Scriptures as to find in them not the confirmation of cherished dogmas, far less stones for the slings of theological war, but the Word of Eternal Life.

J. BALDWIN BROWN.

Clapham,
New Year's Day, 1869.

I. THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST

"My kingdom is not of this world." – John xviii. 36.

Perhaps there is no passage of Scripture more constantly misunderstood than these simple words; and certainly there is no misunderstanding of Scripture which has exercised a more detrimental influence on the life and development of the church. The whole passage contains the very marrow of the doctrine of Christ concerning His kingdom. It is the basis of its constitution. To this, its subjects have rightly looked in all ages for instruction as to its fundamental spirit, principles, and aims. Words more solemn, more pregnant, were never spoken in this world, in this universe, than these. They were spoken at the very crisis of universal destinies. They form the dividing line between the two eternities. From eternity all things had been working towards that hour – the consummation of the incarnation; and to eternity the influence of that hour would go forth, remoulding, regenerating all the worlds. Beyond any words that have ever been spoken, these words are worthy of intense and reverent attention. They are the words with which the Son of God passed on to the cross, that He might pass up to the throne.

The two kings stood there in presence. The representative of the king of this world, who wielded all its force and guided all its movements, the man who had but to nod and the whole civilized world trembled and obeyed; and a King, the elements of whose kingship few could discern, who wielded a strange power and produced a deep impression that He had a right to rule over men, but who wore no signs of royalty and laid no claim to the possession of this world's thrones. Nay, a kingdom had been forced on Him, and He escaped as from a deadly danger from the homage of His subjects, while He spake to them such searching spiritual words that they conceived a great dread of His kingly commands and claims. He bade them begin to rule themselves when they were dreaming of a splendid rule over the gentiles; and He turned inwards on the inner obliquity, foulness, and deformity, those eyes which were watching eagerly for the signs of an approaching advent of a glorious, celestial emperor to the world. Jesus looked on Pilate's kingship, and fathomed it perfectly. He knew from whence the power sprang, and by what springs it was fed, which seated Pilate's master on the world's imperial throne. Pilate found the royalty of Jesus unfathomable; none of his worldly experiences helped him to understand it. Art Thou a king then, poor, worn, tear-stained Outcast, forsaken of every subject, of every friend, in the hour of Thy bitter need? And yet the nascent smile of scorn was checked by something which cast a spell even on that worn-out profligate's heart. That lonely wasted Man there had that about Him which made the representative of the world's master afraid. It seemed mere idle talk to a man like Pilate: "a kingdom not of this world;" "witnessing to truth;" "disciples of the truth: " it was all childish to the trained intellect of this experienced ruler; and yet there seemed to be some power beyond the grasp of his intellect, which something within him recognised, and which might create and rule a kingdom after a fashion which till then had never even crossed his dreams. But to him the mystery remained insoluble. He wrote a title to which his instinct gave a reality that his intellect denied, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." And here in this passage we have the Lord's own declaration of the constitution and aims of His kingdom; the kingdom which, from that hour, has been the ruling element in the history of this world, and, as we learn from the Apocalypse, of all the worlds of the great universe of God. And men persistently misread it as they misread Him, and employ His words as they employed His works, to frustrate the purpose for which He entered into the world.

Let us see how the misunderstanding of these words arose.

"My kingdom is not of this world: " literally "not from," originally "out of" this world. A clear understanding of the full force of this will give us the clue to the interpretation of our Lord's words. There is an old sense of the preposition "of," which closely corresponds with the full sense of the word employed in the Greek, expressing "out of," "springing from." But "of," like other words and other things, in the course of time has got weakened by the wear and tear of life; and the sense "belonging to," "connected with," is its natural suggestion to modern ears; whereby the sense of our Lord's words has been grievously weakened too. Did the Lord mean to say, "My kingdom has nothing to do with the institutions and arrangements of the worldly life of men: you need not fear any rivalry, delegate of Caesar; My kingdom is in a quite different sphere, and will keep there, without touching yours: it only has to do with men as spiritual beings, with a view to their final destiny in the eternal state: keep to your secular province, and we shall never cross or clash: the two spheres are quite separate, and nothing but mischief can come of their commerce: I leave you to rule; leave Me to teach, unfettered by conditions; for I aim at no influence on earth, My one object is to persuade men to live a life separate from this world, as much detached as possible from its interests and pursuits, that they may enter into My heavenly kingdom when death releases them, and where the sphere will be all My own"? Was this His meaning? or did He mean to say, "My kingdom is not out of this world; it comes down into this world from on high: this world is, like man, made of the dust of the earth, 'of the earth, earthy,' except some spirit breathe into it from the higher world – then it lives: My kingdom comes to the kingdoms of this world, the interests, aims, pursuits, and common life of men, like this breath of Divine inspiration: without it they all languish and must perish; with it they live: it is a descent of heavenly truth, heavenly love, heavenly life, into the sphere of the earthly, to make it live anew; the earth languishes for My kingdom, for without Me it dies: leave Me free to fulfil My mission, not because this world is nothing to Me, and My kingdom will not trouble itself with its affairs, but because My truth, My life, My love are needful to the life of this world as vital air to the body; because all business, all domestic life, all friendship, all society, all government, all thought, all art, all learning are waiting, are panting, for the living baptism which I bring. I am not of the world, My kingdom is not of the world, in the springs of its influence; it is essentially of heaven, and from heaven: but it seeks the world as the sphere of its influence, the field of its conquest, the realm of its rule. With yearning desire, eagerly as man yearns for fellowship, a friend for the brother of his spirit, the bridegroom for the bride, I seek and claim this world as My own"?

Here are the two ideas of the meaning of these words of our Lord set fairly against each other. The number of those who would deliberately adopt and justify the former is happily growing less year by year. Were we caring only for formal misunderstandings of important passages of Scripture in these discourses, it would be hardly worth while to discuss seriously a perversion which is vanishing with the changed aspects of the times. But the spirit, the savour, of an error continues long to work after it has been formally exploded; and we discuss this passage in this present discourse under the strong conviction that the false view which we have described above continues to tincture very deeply our theology, our preaching, and our social ideas and habits, even in those who would utterly repudiate the formal idea of the Lord's kingdom on which it rests.

Some of the results of this misconception of the true nature of the kingdom have been as follow: —

1. The idea has been widely entertained that the aim of the Lord has been, not to save the world, but to save a chosen few out of the world, leaving calmly the great mass to go to wreck. The favourite notion has been that the Lord's disciples have been in all ages, and still will be, an isolated band, like Israel in Egypt; hating the world around them, hated by it, and waiting only the happy opportunity, the hour of deliverance, to pass out of it triumphant, and leave it to perish by the strokes of the Lord's avenging hand. This idea, that the Church is a little band of chosen ones in the midst of a hostile and reprobate world, is a very favourite one with the disciples in all ages; and it is nourished by the tone in which the apostles wrote and spoke to the few poor men and women who were to begin the

work of restoration, and who needed to be upborne against tremendous pressure by the assurance of the special and personal intervention of the God of heaven on behalf of the little company whom He loved. They needed a strong support against a world which was bent on destroying them as it had destroyed their Lord; and so the apostle wrote, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light. Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God; which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." "Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." That the disciples have been the few in all ages is alas only too palpable to those whose sight pierces no farther than Elijah's, and who cannot fathom the secret things which are unveiled to the eye of God. But it is a dark heresy to believe that the Lord meant that His own should be the few in all ages, and that the rescue of an election from the impending ruin can satisfy the heart of Him who cried, as the hour of His anguish drew nigh, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

2. Closely associated with this is the notion that all which belongs to the earthly life of men has a certain taint of evil upon it, is corrupt and corrupting in its very nature; so that if a disciple touches it he must touch it like pitch, cautiously, and expect contamination with all his care. That if he must enter into the world's activities, buy, sell, and get gain, marry and give in marriage, rule households and take part in the government of states, he must do it under protest and under the spur of a sharp necessity, and is bound to long anxiously for the time when the need of all this will be over, and he will be free to meditate on Divine things and to praise through eternity. If Christ's kingdom be not of this world, he argues, then all which is of this world, politics, literature, art, society, trade cannot be of Christ's kingdom; and His subjects, hampered by these evil cares for a time, must be ever looking forward eagerly to the day when they will be freed from them for ever. And this is the meaning which is constantly veiled under the phrase, "the coming of the Lord Jesus," and expressed in the prayer, "Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

3. Then further there is the notion that it is only in a very partial sense that we can talk of Christ's kingdom here, that it belongs essentially to the future and eternal state, and can only be fully comprehended by him who can separate it in thought from all the blemishes and accidents of time, and behold it, pure from the defilement and degradation of the earthly (that is the human) in this world, in its glorious Divine form in eternity.

And surely there is a great truth here. The perfect image of it, as Plato said of the polity of which he dreamed, abides only in the heavens; and we need to refresh both courage and hope, when we see the blots and fractures of the kingdom here, by contemplating the pure form of it which abides in the heavens with God. But dreams and contemplations will never bring it down from the heavens; it is here, or nowhere. It is this earthly image which is to be translated into that heavenly likeness; and if we would be near to and like the King, we must follow Him into the very heart of the world's business and throngs, not that we may seek His chosen there and rescue them from the world, but that we may rescue the world from all that makes it other than Christ's kingdom, by driving out of it "everything that defileth, or worketh abomination, or maketh a lie," and thus purify its atmosphere, cleanse the ducts and channels of its life, invigorate its energy, and consecrate its activity, till it grows like its ideal in heaven.

And what has been the history of the kingdom? Since the first hour of its establishment, perpetual intervention in an action upon the worldly affairs of men. It is literally true that Dean Milman's history of Latin Christianity is the completest history of the Western European world during the middle ages, extant in our language. And why? Because during the middle ages, and until now, the Church has been the backbone of human society. All man's dearest interests and hopes have gathered around the kingdom; over its destinies, and under its banners, all man's deadliest battles have been fought. "Yes!" it may be answered; "but this is just the corruption of the kingdom; because it mixed itself with worldly affairs, and suffered worldly men to administer it, it became the centre and

pivot of all the movements of human society." But this state of things was at any rate the confession that the men of this world could not get on without the kingdom, that when it was once revealed it inevitably tended to gather around itself all the vital activity of the world. Since Christ appeared, men have felt everywhere that they must place themselves and their concerns in some kind of vital relation to the Church. And this has been the key to the public life of Christendom; in fact it has made Christendom in opposition to heathendom, as the province of all the most cultivated and progressive races of mankind. The forms of relation which men created were no doubt worldly enough; but the sense that they needed the relation, and must find it to live out a true man's life was not worldly, but true, noble, and Divine. The Church from the very hour of the ascension of its Head, began to act on human society as incomparably the most powerful influence extant in the world. It literally re-made society from the very foundations. Far from contenting itself with mastering the will of individual subjects, and wooing them away from the pursuits and interests of the world around them, it entered the homes of men, and cast out the harpy passions which had befouled them; it gave marriage new sacredness, parents new authority and new responsibility, and children new grounds of obedience to their sires. It entered the market and established just weights and balances, honest word, and loyal trust. Theft could be no virtue, and lying no graceful accomplishment, where it established its reign. It entered states, and changed tyrants into kings, serfs into subjects, slaves into freemen, nobles into guardians, pastors, and captains of industry to the poor. That very Rome which doomed the King to a malefactor's death, it entered as a conqueror, and it broke that proud empire to fragments. The time came when Rome could live no longer in the moral atmosphere which it created; and then it summoned purer, nobler, hardier races to occupy the homes and to till the fields which Rome had depopulated and destroyed. It introduced its laws into every code in Christendom. King Alfred begins his statute book by reciting the laws of the kingdom of God.¹ In truth it has penetrated and permeated every vein and fibre of human society, and it has made it all anew. There is literally nothing with which you in this nineteenth century can concern yourself, – trade, literature, politics, science, art, government, social and domestic life, human rights, human duties, human powers, human fears, aspirations, hopes and joys, – there is not one element of our complex social and political life which is not what it is, because eighteen centuries ago the Lord Jesus witnessed this good confession before Pilate "Thou sayest that which I am, a king." From the world it has asked nothing, taken nothing, but its reverence and love: of the world in that sense it has never been. But in the world, and through the world, the stream of its heavenly virtue and life has wandered, and the wilderness and the solitary place have been made glad by it, and the desert has rejoiced and blossomed as the rose. It has sought studiously to mix itself up with all the relations and interests of mankind; it has a word about them all, it has a law for them all; the weight in the pedlar's bag, the sceptre of the monarch on the throne, are alike under its rule and cognisance, for it claims man as man to be its subject. It says that man was made to be the subject of this kingdom, and all man's life is the true domain of its sway. It looks upon this worldly life of ours – our life as men of this world – as the most solemn, most sacred thing in this universe; God's school of culture of the beings who are to fill His heavenly kingdom through eternity. It cannot spare one relation of men, one art, one industry, one field of activity, one interest, one joy, one hope, one love, from its domain of empire. The whole man, the whole world, in the wholeness of its life, it claims absolutely; and it aims to present the whole man and his whole life, body, soul, and spirit, perfect before the presence of His glory at last. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

¹ King Alfred's "new book of laws" opens with the sentence, "And the Lord spake all these words and said, I am the Lord thy God," etc. Then follows the decalogue; and then, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, that do ye also unto them." Besides, there are many passages quoted from the word of God, with most wise reflections on them and applications of them to the matter in hand; and then he proceeds to the laws of the realm.

And now let me ask your attention to some principles which are suggested by a true understanding of this statement of our Lord.

1. His kingdom is not *of* this world. It is from above, and all the springs of its power are above. The attempt to help it from beneath, to bring the strength, the riches, the honour of this world to help the Spirit who is from above in the work of the kingdom, cripples its energies, frustrates its aims, and exhausts its life. Its one power is the power of truth; "to this end was I born, for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth," said its Founder and King. It has absolutely no other power. "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice;" and all the efforts of men to force, tempt, or bribe mankind to support it, but silence that witness, which is all that it asks to win the world to itself.

One can understand the argument of those who support a state establishment of religion and the whole apparatus by which men seek to win for it the supremacy to which it rightfully aspires. They say, "It is of God, it is the heavenly truth, it is worthy of all that men can give to it and of all the power which man can bring to bear on the accomplishment of its work: the state does itself honour, and gives itself stability by supporting it; monarchs are never so royal as in lending to it their influence; all the world's riches are never so precious as when they are poured into its treasuries, and are employed in the promotion of its ends."

And this is no more than the simple truth. The kingdom is worthy to receive the tribute of all the monarchs, the nobles, the wise ones, the rich ones of the world: the more it has of the goodwill and help of every man, from the king to the beggar, the better for the kingdom, the better for mankind. All that we say is, Let it win them. Let it win in its own way, by putting forth its own power, the nursing care of the noble, the rich, and the wise. Leave it to employ its own spiritual force to do this and all at which it aims. Lend your heart to it, your hand, your tongue, your pen, your purse, and everything else which it can command and use to win its way to human hearts. But if you bring your human authority to bear to win from your subjects and dependants an outward homage, if you endow it with dead gifts administered by the scribes and lawyers of this world, if you lend worldly pomp and power to those who claim to be its ministers, you oppress and stifle it, and destroy its power of progress in the world. It wants free air, the free air of willing obedience, loyalty, and love. Rob it of that, it dies. It is not of this world. Every gift that is wrung for it from an unwilling hand beggars it. Its riches are the gifts of free will. Mere gold, with no spirit of loving loyalty in the giver, is worse than dross to it; it cankers and eats into its life. The power which has troops of soldiers and legal tribunals behind it blights it by its very breath. All that it asks is freedom; power to do what Christ did, in the way in which He did it; power to bear witness to the truth, and weaken the long silent echoes of truth in human hearts. We have cut off its heavenly connection, and rooted it in the powers and policies of this world; and now we wonder that it languishes, and that one half the people in a Christian kingdom believe nothing of its truth and care nothing for its King. Oh! for the days of apostolic trust and simplicity, when the disciples, "continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people." Oh! for the baptism of Pentecostal fire from on high. Oh! for one of the days of the Son of Man, whom the Father sent into the world, armed with no authority but that of truth, clothed with no power but that of love. How eagerly then, eager as the thirsty earth when the sound of rain is in the sky, would men drink in the words of Him who had more faith in the power of truth to conquer hearts than in the arms of twelve legions of angels, and whose supreme trust was in the all-mastering force of a love stronger than death – a love that laid down its life that death might not for ever tyrannise over the world.

2. Make your life, your man's life in its wholeness the domain of its empire in you. Beware of a double allegiance. How earnestly and emphatically the Lord denounces it: "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." Beware of yielding to Christ a part of the empire which is all His own. Beware of that fatal distinction between the man as a Christian, and the man as a citizen, the man as a man of business,

which has grown out of the misunderstanding of the principle laid down by our Lord. Christian saint, Christian worshipper, Christian citizen, Christian merchant, Christian parent, be Christian wholly. Refuse to touch a thing in any department of your activity, which will not square with your Christian ideas and aims. Let your daily transactions be as freely open to Christ's inspection as to the world's honourable judgment: let it be the aim of your life at home, abroad, in the shop, the exchange, the forum, to show what the laws of Christ's kingdom can make of a life which is square with their precepts. Adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour, not by fellowship with His people only, but by winning men to worship Him by the spectacle of your diligence, your industry, your purity, your truth, your charity, gentleness, patience, faith, and hope in God; and when they learn that these are the King's gifts to you, at once the signs and the fruits of His reign, they will, like the people of old, break forth into thanksgiving, and confess joyfully that God is with you of a truth.

3. Count it your chief work on earth to be His fellow-helper in His kingdom; help to win for Him the empire of the world.

His kingdom is not of this world. But it is over this world, and it claims this world as its own. The Lord has a heart so large that only the world can fill it. He uttered its whole longing as He entered the cloud of the last agony: – "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Bear witness in the world that the one thing needful to it is Christ. Tell statecraft that it needs the laws of the kingdom, to regulate its methods and to indicate its ends. Tell monarchs that they need to observe *the* Monarch, that their rule may be a benediction to loyal subjects instead of a curse to cringing slaves. Tell citizens that they need to become citizens of this kingdom, that the commonwealth on earth may be the image and the vestibule of the commonwealth of the skies. Tell classes that they need the instructions of this Master, that society may be less a den of selfish contentions, and more a field of gracious ministries and ennobling toils. Tell commerce that she needs the inspiration of this duty, that the dull, the common, the base may be transfigured and wear the forms of beauty, nobleness, and truth. Tell life that it needs the quickening of this spirit, that it may not drop piecemeal through the corruptions of sin into the darkness and rottenness of the pit. Above all, tell every soul that hears you, that it needs Christ, the living Bread; the bread of Christ's truth, the bread of Christ's life, the bread of Christ's love, that it may not settle into the darkness of death for ever, but "have everlasting life," where Christ lives and reigns at God's right hand eternally.

II.

THE DUES OF CÆSAR AND OF CHRIST

"Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's." – Matt. xxii. 21.

What things are Cæsar's? Clearly the things which bear his image and superscription; the things on which he has the right and the power to imprint his mark.

What things are God's? Clearly those things which bear His immediate mark and superscription, which belong to the diviner part in man, which are in man by the breath of the Divine inspiration, and which God claims, and therefore has the right to claim directly and exclusively for Himself. The Lord will not stand between Cæsar and that which bears his image; let not Cæsar dare to stand between God and that in man which bears His image, and which He claims to rule directly by His word and by His Spirit indwelling in human hearts.

This text is constantly quoted to justify the refusal to pay to Cæsar the tax, be it church-rate or anything else, which he may demand for the support of a spiritual system, which we may not believe to be in accordance with the Divine will. I confess that the teaching of our Lord in these words seems to me to point in precisely the opposite direction. The argument which one often hears is to this effect: Cæsar is intruding into God's province when he demands anything from us for spiritual uses; this is a department with which he has nothing whatever to do, and we are giving him that which is God's if we yield to his claims. God alone has the right to claim anything at our hand for spiritual uses; and we are wronging Him, we are robbing the Lord of what political theologians call His "crown rights," if we give unto Cæsar one farthing for the maintenance of any Church system or systems, or any spiritual operations of any sort, since these are of the things which belong to God alone. The argument of our Lord in these verses points surely the other way. With Him the test of the demand is not the purpose, but the thing demanded. If what is asked has Cæsar's image on it, enough; let him have it; the responsibility of using it rests with him. If Cæsar asks that which has not his image upon it, which he cannot compel before his tribunals or distrain by his officers, such as your judgment, your conscience, and the support of your voice and your hand, obey God rather than man. If you yield to Cæsar, yield because you see that it is right in God's sight, that it is a duty to God to yield to him; if you refuse, refuse because to yield would be wrong in God's sight, and then be prepared to sustain your refusal even unto death.

Do not misunderstand the difficulty of the Jewish rulers, which was a very real one. It was a case of conscience with them. They did not care about the amount of the tribute, that was a small matter; but Cæsar was a Gentile, idolatrous prince. Idolatry was the state religion of the Roman empire. It was a bitter thought to the Jew that an idolater, one capable of setting up his own image in the holy of holies, should rule over him and exact his tribute. Was it not a betrayal of duty to God to consent to it? Was it not right to suffer any extremities rather than yield to the imperial claims? There was a party among the Jews who felt so grievously the degradation and the burden on their consciences, that they were in a chronic state of rebellion against Rome. They were always seeking to foment the differences between their own and the Roman government; and they were prepared to stake their own lives and the life of the nation on their fealty, as they understood fealty, to God alone. It was one of the questions most eagerly debated among them, which they asked the Saviour to solve. A case of conscience, – conscience grieved by being compelled to support a system of government other than that which they believed had been ordained to them of God. Our Lord's solution is most original and striking; and it offers the clearest guidance to us through the multitude of kindred perplexities which cannot fail to arise by reason of the ever varying relations of the secular and spiritual powers

in every age of the world. (Matt. xxii. 15-22.) The image on the tribute money settled the matter. This is *primâ facie* evidence that Cæsar has a right to claim it. The power of putting an image on the money marks it as a thing between you and Cæsar. You accept it and use it in daily life, at Cæsar's hand. That image on the penny, the right of coining money being represented by it, is the symbol of all the order and benediction which flow to you from Cæsar's rule; and Cæsar's right to exact it back again is distinctly a question between you and the earthly monarch, into which you have no right to drag, for the purpose of protest, the name of God. Cæsar is ordained of God to take visible charge of this department, the order of civil society; and he and you must settle between you the fair adjustment of his claims. A piece of money bearing Cæsar's image is no battleground for the rights of God. Pay whatever Cæsar asks for his purposes, no matter what they may be, so long as by using Cæsar's mintage you give the stamp of your acquiescence to his rule; and if his purposes seem to you to be wrong, fight him with nobler things than pennies – with voice and pen, the free utterance of opinion, and, if needs must be, in the last extremity, with swords.

If Cæsar asks your homage to his idol, the bending of your knee, or the acclamation of your voice, the answer is clear, – Thy image and superscription are not here; my knee is for my God, my voice is for my God; and all the powers of the universe cannot bend the one or awaken the other without my will. Here I follow the Divine precedent: "Nebuchadnezzar spake," etc. (Dan. iii. 14-18.) But if Cæsar asks my pennies for any purpose which he comprehends within the aim of his government, let him have them; they clearly belong to his sphere. I scorn to hold back what his force can wring from me the next moment; they are his, the responsibility of taking them is his, and the responsibility of using them is his. If I am not satisfied with his use of them, I have nobler means of protest and influence; or, in the last extremity, I can go forth from his empire and have done with him and his pennies for ever.

This is the principle on which it seems to me right to act in church-rate matters. Suppose that one were living in a neighbourhood in which the church of the district had been built under a special act of parliament, to be paid for by a rate levied on the householders during a term of years. It would be our duty to pay year after year our share of the tax which parliament imposed. The money asked for has Cæsar's image and superscription on it: by using it we consent to Cæsar's sway. We have no right to pick and choose which claims of a government we will honour, and which we will refuse. We get the good of the government as a whole, and we pay its claims as a whole, always endeavouring by moral means to secure that the adjustment shall be righteous and fair. And so it may become a clear duty to pay for the building of a church which we never enter, and whose minister regards our ministry as an unauthorized and mischievous intrusion on his sacred domain. If the Church, by Cæsar's ministry, will have our tribute money, we say, Take it; and if the demand be very harsh or peremptory, we say, Take it, in very scorn. But God forbid that we should ever consent to belong to a Church which can condescend to take tribute by force of the unwilling, and which gives the adversary thereby such strong temptation to blaspheme.

Such seems to me to be the bearing of this principle on this and kindred questions. It seems to me distinctly to enjoin on us the course which it is constantly quoted as denouncing. The money Cæsar needs, for the carrying on of his government in the best way he can, is the first charge on the property which the order of civil society suffers us to possess and enjoy. God claims none till Cæsar is satisfied; for Cæsar's claim is His ordinance. Having satisfied Cæsar, take counsel with him about the rest.

But these reflections open up many, some of them perplexing, questions, on which this seems to me a good opportunity to offer some brief remark.

1. Does not Christ in this place seem to recognise some divided allegiance – man under two masters, owing duty to Cæsar, owing duty to God? Will he not be puzzled perpetually to determine their limits, and to settle what is secular and what is sacred? and is there not something repugnant to the very essence of Christianity in the idea that man at any moment, in any relation, can have to

do with another being than God? Is not God the sole Lord of his being and of his life? What can be Cæsar's, in contradistinction to that which is God's? I think I have learnt from the Scripture, and I am always preaching the doctrine, that God claims the man in his wholeness; that body, soul, and spirit, riches, knowledge, power, and love, all belong to Him; that there is but one empire, one service, one King; that life is simple, simple as the infinite God. "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and mind, and strength,*" "*and Him only shalt thou serve.*" "*This do, and thou shalt live.*" What claim can Cæsar have on man then, which is not also God's claim? What tribute can one pay to Cæsar, which is not also paid to God? None, absolutely none. The Lord recognises no divided allegiance; His words rightly understood are in perfect harmony with the doctrine of His own sole and supreme lordship over every thought, every passion, and every possession of man. "*Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's.*" Why? Who ordains it? Who has the right to demand it? God. Within the sphere of Cæsar's government, obey him, not because Cæsar can force you, but because God will have you; make it a part of your Divine obedience, to obey wisely and loyally as a subject and a citizen; and consider that Cæsar claims your service within the sphere which belongs to him, as the ordained minister and representative of God. There is no secular and sacred since Christ appeared. It is all sacred. Civil obedience is an ordinance of the Church. The Scripture bears most explicit witness to these principles wherever it touches on the relations of civil society and its institutions. (1 Pet. ii. 13-17; Rom. xiii. 1-7; 1 Tim. ii. 1-4.) It is God's institution. He sustains it; He, through the ruler, claims your tribute; the result, the order and progress of society, is His work. Innocent III. was right, though in a sense of which he little dreamed. The moon has its own relation to the earth; but they have a common relation to the sun. The moon's orbit is included in the earth's orbit; but the sun sways and balances both of them, and there is not a movement of the moon in obeying the inferior earthly attraction which is not also an act of obedience to the superior sphere. So God has set us under rulers, in societies, as a kind of interior province of His kingdom; but our loyalty as subjects, our duty as citizens, are alike part of the one duty which we owe to God. There is no schism in the body of our service, no double authority in our Lord's realm. The two worlds, the two services, the two spheres, are one in Christ. "*One is your Master, even Christ.*" "*Thou shalt worship Him, and Him, only shalt thou serve.*"

2. It is needful to inquire how far this principle of obedience is to carry us.

If the money has Cæsar's image and superscription, let him have it; he has a right to it, and in recognising that right we are fulfilling so far our duty to God. Here is a clear and simple principle: but is it a sufficient guidance? does it provide for all the possible exigencies of social and political life? How about the right of resisting Cæsar, when he rules unrighteously? How about John Hampden's refusal of the ship-money, and the grand and glorious struggle which it inaugurated, by which our liberties were won? This is a very grave and important question, and one which, having voluntarily selected such a subject as this, we have no right to pass by. There is a Divine precedent here. (1 Kings xii. 12-24.) What is it which is ordained of God in government? Not any particular king, nor any particular form or institution, but the good of men in the order of civil society. This it is at which God aims, and to this end kings and institutions are His ministers. The king or institution which may best assure this end is the open question in the settlement of which God demands the concert and co-operation of mankind. Every king, every magistrate, every political institution, has a certain Divine sanction, inasmuch as it is the keystone of the arch which He has built, and under whose sheltering dome we live and work. But a keystone which, instead of securing the arch, threatens its stability, has no Divine sanction longer than for the time during which it can be successfully replaced or repaired. The Divine shield is cast, not around the particular king, but around the society and the civilization of which he is the head. It is only in the unity of the society that the Lord's sanction upholds him; let him mar that unity or distract it, and God passes to the side of those who are seeking to set up a new and real keystone in his room. There is nothing like the duty of passive obedience to tyrants implied in the text, or enjoined in the word of God. "*Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's,*"

while Cæsar is the recognised lord. In those crises of history in which Cæsar has to be weighed in the balance, in which the question has to be tried, Who is king and by what rule shall he reign? godly men have to keep clear before the mind's eye what God means by human society, what He aims at, and to help Him, yes, help Him to secure it. If no Cæsar be worth recognising, or Cæsar be altogether too bad to be borne, then refuse his tribute, resist his myrmidons, draw the sword of the Lord and of Gideon to strike for deliverance. The Lord is the Cæsar of such an hour; the Captain of the Lord's host, His sword drawn in His hand as at Jericho, is in these times of revolution busy among men. They best honour Cæsar and serve Christ in such hours, who have the clearest eye for the good of the commonwealth, and who prepare the way for the reign of a Cæsar who, like David, shall rule according to the will of God. The sacred sense of the obligations of a subject or a citizen which those cherish, who have learnt from Christ "by whom kings reign and princes decree judgment," and who know that obedience to the powers that he is a form of obedience to God, makes them patient, beyond the measure of mere political patience, of the weaknesses, follies, and sins of the men who occupy the world's high places; while it makes them stern and firm as death when God has pronounced the sentence of deposition, and has bared the avenging sword and committed it to their hands. These are the men who, like Cromwell, do their work with a terrible force and completeness, and who read lessons in God's name to Cæsars, which remain doctrinal through all time.

3. Surely our Saviour intends us to understand how little money, or anything with Cæsar's image and superscription upon it, can do to make or to mar the fortunes of God's kingdom, which spreads and rules like the dawn, like the moisture in the south wind, like the blush of spring, like the splendour of summer, like everything that is quickened by the breath of God. Tribute! We are always perplexing ourselves about tribute – a steady stream of regular contributions, a flood-tide of golden gifts. It is our measure of power. Quite other is Christ's. His power flashes like lightning from one part under heaven, and shineth to the other part which is under heaven. The world flashes into light, glows into life in a moment, when the times of refreshing, of quickening, come down from God. Men catch it from each other's eyes, each other's lips. It spreads as flame, and gathers strength as it widens its circuit. Money, social and political influence, the force of this world, all that seems solid and potent to men while they are enacting the masque of life which we call living, faint back like rushlights in the lightning's flash, like aged institutions in the hour of revolution, when the breath of the Spirit as at Pentecost is falling on the world. I speak, and I am quite sure the sacred writers spoke, in no scorn of money. No *thing* is base: we keep our hate, our scorn, for base spirits, not for things. But for money Paul must have starved, and the kingdom must have perished in its birth. What the Lord means us to understand is that money is the inevitable satellite of higher things. Spirits in earnest movement sweep it with them in their course, as the earth sweeps its atmosphere. Give us hearts of fire, fire that kindles and flashes from heart to heart, from peak to peak of the human; and what work will wait long for gold? Men who in common levels of interest dole out their tens and hundreds, and feel some dull glow of satisfaction stirring the stagnation of their hearts, scatter forth their thousands when God fires their spirits, and their whole being is alive and thrills with joy. Money! nothing greatly spiritual was ever made by money, or was ever marred by money in this world.

There is a touch of scorn in the Saviour's words, "*Shew me the tribute money.*" Scorn of the vain worldly mind that was perplexing itself about tribute, while the love of God and the belief in judgment were fast dying out of human hearts. One sacred conviction in their hearts would have answered the question, and lifted them above the sphere of tribute – as Paul was lifted – into the region of that kingdom which would sweep Cæsar's as a satellite in its sphere. Did the Lord foresee sadly the scene from which a few dark days divided them, when they would yield to Cæsar – these men, who were groaning and haggling over the tribute – absolutely everything that was God's? (John xix. 7-16).

The leader of the band who turned the world upside down witnessed this confession, "*Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.*" They were poor as beggars, but richer in power to draw forth the treasures of this

world than kings. What king's command could have wrought this miracle? "*And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.*" (Acts iv. 32.) In truth, this love of Christ is the universal solvent. Nothing remains any man's own when once the heart is touched by this Divine fire. It melts all selfish separations and appropriations, as sun warmth the bonds of winter, and quickens in the universal human heart the glow and circulation of the spring. Nothing starves in summer for want of the bread that perishes; supplies lie thick everywhere around. And no Divine work stays for lack of the gold that perishes, when once the sun of the Divine love has loosed men's hearts from the winter of their isolation and selfish grasping care. Don't worry about the tribute. "*Trust in the Lord, and do good,*" and things will right themselves at once. Tribute will pour into the treasury, and even the exactors shall become ministers and yield their willing aid. "*Thine officers shall become peace, and thine exactors righteousness.*" "*Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and queens thy nursing mothers.*" "*Violence shall be no more heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders,*" if the King is in thy palaces; if thy heart, soul, and hand are loyally devoted to Christ. I often think, in these days of grand Christian institutions, with their vast fixed incomes and endowments, and all the magnificent apparatus without which it seems to us the Lord's kingdom must perish out of this land and out of the world, of the little company who trudged wearily about the highways of Palestine, seeking their morning meal from the fig-tree by the wayside, and lodging wherever a poor cottager's faith and love gave them shelter for a night, and who, – beggars as to the things which were Cæsar's, but filled as never men were filled before or since with the things which were God's, faith, hope, joy, truth, wisdom, and Divine charity – went forth in this their might and re-made society: the grandest revolution in the history of this universe, accomplished by its beggars and, as the world thought, its fools. And the fact repeats itself in every revolution. Let a man in any age go forth with the fire of God in him; and the force he wields, the mastery he wins, the new life he quickens in a nation, in a world, pours silent contempt on gold. The gold is gathered, as spirit gathers flesh about it and becomes incarnate; so all that belongs to Cæsar's sphere is at the commandment of that which comes straight from God's and glows with the inspiration of His life. Gifts of a splendid lavishness in such seasons are abundant; and strangely enough the givers feel enriched unspeakably by the joy of giving, enlarged immeasurably by impoverishment, and increased by abnegation. The richest in such seasons are those who give most, not those who have most. A wonderful sense of the glorious wealth of a heart which has a guest-chamber for Christ, and whose pulses beat joyously as the free tide of the Divine love flows through and over it on all around, kindles men's souls to a new conception of riches. It fills the beatitudes with a wonderful meaning, and shows the sorrows and straits of poverty overflowed by the riches and joys of God.

III. "UNTO THIS LAST."

"I will give unto this last, even as unto thee." – Matt. xx. 14.

These words appear at first sight to set us very decisively face to face with the sovereignty of God, in its sternest and most naked form – affirming its right to distribute its gifts and payments at its pleasure, and refusing to consider the question of equity when urged by the creature's sharp complaint. "Take that thine is, and go thy way." "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" "I will give unto this last, even as unto thee." There, it is said, and with apparent truth, is Sovereignty – pure, naked Sovereignty. The "I will" of God seems to be the sole explanation which is vouchsafed of His dispensations and decrees. But this view of the matter has always seemed to me deeply unsatisfactory. Equity is a strong instinctive principle, which God Himself has established in the judgment seat of the human conscience; and God never beats down with the bare assertion of an irresistible Sovereignty the soul that is perplexed about the equity of His ways. It is equity, pure, celestial equity, which reveals itself to those who will search for it in this parable; equity to the poor souls who had been standing all the day idle in the market-place, because no man had called them to the vineyard; equity to the labourers who had borne the burden and heat of the day, and had made the dignity and culture of the Lord's husbandmen their own. It is an equity which invites the closest criticism from those who will search it thoroughly, and which reveals to the searchers deep vital truths about man and about God.

"I will give unto this last, even as unto thee." It is a startling sentence. This man had been labouring in the vineyard under the burning heat, through the blazing noon; he had borne and bent under the whole burden of the work: while this one had been brought in at the eleventh hour, in the cool evenfall, and by a few minutes of light sweet labour he had won the equivalent prize. There is something startling here, and men have felt it; and they have striven in manifold and curious ways to square the method of the Master with their fundamental notions of the righteousness of God. There are theologians who feel no need to square it. According to a theology which has exercised a wide-spread and malign influence in the past, Sovereignty answers amply every difficulty, and treats our ideas of equity as a high impertinence, when they claim to weigh the ways of God. If it pleases God to make some men to be saved and other men to be damned, who shall question His rights? and if He is glorified equally by the salvation of the chosen and the damnation of the reprobate, who dares complain, or to what court can we carry the appeal? There are theologians who would have us rest calmly on the conviction that a sovereign and inscrutable will is ruling, and trouble ourselves in no wise about the equity of the decrees. But one cannot but reflect that this composed contentment with the doctrine of reprobation is mainly conspicuous in those who feel themselves safe from its trenchant stroke. With the exception of Lord Byron – to whose malign and scornful tone we believe that this was the real key – we hardly discover the disciples of the doctrine among those who believe that they are reprobate; and in the case of the theological school whose influence is happily dying away, but which survives in out-of-the-way places to an extent little dreamed of still, we may fairly entertain the question, whether, if it were flashed suddenly on their souls that they, the theologians, were doomed by the Divine decree to everlasting anguish, their rest in the inscrutable Sovereignty would be so calm, and their contentment so assured. For thinkers of this school, of course, such a parable as this presents no sort of difficulty. A penny more or less would not be likely to stagger them, when the gift of heaven or the doom of hell raise no question as to the equity of the Divine decrees. But with the great multitude of Christian thinkers the parable has been the source of much grievous perplexity, as the manifold explanations amply prove. The question is, in which verse of the parable are we to find

the key to it? "Unto this last will I give, even as unto thee," states the problem. Is the solution to be found in the body of the parable, or must we seek it outside in a general study of the ways of God?

There can be no question, I think, that the broad bearing of the parable is on the impending revolution in the visible Divine kingdom, whereby, as the Saviour says, the kingdom of God was to be taken from the Pharisees, and "given to a people bringing forth the fruits thereof." I say advisedly, from the Pharisees; from the party which held the chief influence and authority in the Church. Their influence, their standing-ground, was utterly shattered by the Saviour's advent; the kingdom passed visibly, absolutely, finally, out of the rule of their hand. But there was never any question of its passing wholly from the Jews; the Jews were never to be disowned. Paul earnestly, with intense emphasis, asserts this, and makes it the basis of a long and profound argument. "I say then, hath God cast away His people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away His people, which He foreknew." (Rom. xi. 1, 2.) The Jews, as such, were not cast away. We think all too slightly of the strength of the Jewish element in the apostolic Church. And it is the Jews – the people, not their leaders – who are in question here. They had borne the burden and heat of the day; they had done the work – with what result, well or ill, is not the point in debate. There is no idea of their being dismissed without honour or recompense; the question is simply concerning the bringing in of other husbandmen, the Gentile nations, at the last hour, to share in full measure in all that the Jewish workmen had won by their long and hot day's toil.

Perhaps the favourite mode of reconciling the Master's dealings with fundamental principles of equity is to be found in the suggestion, towards which some sentences in Olshausen's Exposition strongly lean, that the first called laboured so lazily, and the last called so strenuously that (regarding the actual amount of work accomplished) the Master's arrangements were more equitable than might at first appear. Notwithstanding the apt illustration of this which appears to be offered by the history of St. Paul, who, though the last called, "laboured more abundantly than they all," the explanation seems to me to miss the whole point of the teaching of the parable, and to proceed upon very low and worldly conceptions of the method of the Divine ways. There is no hint of such a solution in the body of the parable itself; which is a sufficiently grave objection. If this be the key, its existence is carefully suppressed, and the souls that were most sorely perplexed by the appearance of injustice are left wholly ignorant of the truth. Nay, their ignorance is confirmed by the language, or rather by the silence, of the parable. The answer to their protest on the ground that they had "borne the burden and heat of the day" would have been decisive and was ready at hand. But no hint of a justification on this ground is suffered to appear. Their assertion is allowed to pass unanswered, and must be accepted for the purposes of the parable as the truth. Whether they had wrought well or ill, though it may be the main point in other parables, is plainly not the point which is in question here. And in the interpretation of parables we get into endless difficulties, if we, so to speak, travel beyond the record, and consider the details in any other light than as the garniture of the one central idea which the parable is intended to set forth. As far as this parable is concerned, we must accept it as a fact that they had borne the burden and heat of the day; and no explanation of its equity can be entertained which sets that fact at nought.

That we may the better understand what it does mean, let us consider: —

I. The work of the vineyard to which all were called, and in which the first called bore the burden and heat of the day.

II. The reason of the idleness of the husbandmen who at the eleventh hour were called to the work.

III. The Lord's justification of His ways.

I. The work of the vineyard.

I believe that there is nothing very definite in detail here set before our minds, and that we shall get into dire confusion if we inquire about the class or classes of members of the Church which may be signified by the husbandmen. There is no question of classes of Christian labourers, or kinds

of Christian work, in the narrative. It is God's work, and these are God's workmen in the field of His visible Church, in the broadest sense which those words may bear. The vineyard is the visible field of God's tillage. The vast invisible field we are not called to consider; except to assure ourselves that one grand principle rules, explains, and justifies God's methods with the whole. The visible field, up to the day of Pentecost, was the Jewish commonwealth, which was about to expand into the Christian commonwealth when our Lord delivered the discourses which contain our text. In the Jewish commonwealth, not priest and prophet only, but every child of Abraham was a called husbandman; just as every Christian disciple, as much as apostle, bishop, evangelist, or deacon, is a called labourer in the wider vineyard of the Christian Church. The broad feature of the work of the vineyard is, that it is man's true, noble, God-ordained work.

It is the work for which all his organs and powers were fashioned, and in which his whole being was made to rejoice. Why were these men standing in the market-place? What took them there? Why were they not lounging idly about the fields, or sleeping at home? Clearly because some divine instinct within them moved them thither, that they might be in the way of being hired for a day's toil. A divine instinct, I say. He little understands humanity, who imagines that the great bread and cheese question is at the bottom of even a tithe of the daily labour of mankind. It would be hard to find a man who just works enough to provide the bread and cheese and beer which he needs to sustain his animal nature, and then folds his arms and takes his ease until new hunger compels new toil. There are such men about the world, no doubt; but it is a hard matter to find them. And when they are found, men attach to such a bestial idea of life the epithet "unmanly" with a bitter emphasis, which reveals how deeply there is inwrought into the very texture of man's nature the divine instinct of work. Man is made for it, as the flower of the field is made for the free air of heaven. Shut out from it, he grows irritable and sickly, his powers droop, his courage fails, his hope dies, his life is a wreck. And very noble motive inspires well-nigh the whole of human labour. Love, pure self-denying love, love of wife, love of child, of friends, of mankind, is the moving spring of most of man's most strenuous toil. God's work, work for God, and for man for the love of God, is but the highest form or mode of human labour. Man's divine work is not something essentially different in principle from all his other work. All his best labour in his daily tasks proceeds upon the existence within him of powers and organs which can only find their highest exercise, and which can only justify their lowest exercise, in the work of the vineyard which the Lord has given us each one to do. Man is simply unmanned while he stands all the day idle in the market-place; his goodliest powers and organs are rusting, his blood trickles with dull stagnant motion through his lazy veins, his whole system is oppressed and burdened, his muscles ache for exercise, his cheek is pale, his eye is dim. The kingly being is unbraced and discrowned; no joys or honours attend the *fainéant* king.

Who are the pitiable ones here? On whom shall we spend our regrets and sorrows? The hardy sunburnt workmen, who have spent their strength manfully in a brave day's work; who watch the westering sun as only the tired labourer has the right to watch him; and who settle peacefully to the workman's rest till the gay sunlight wakes them again to new glad toils in a young, fresh, dewy world? Nay, the work of the vineyard is man's honour, joy, glory, and bliss. To be called to work in it is the crown of his manhood; to finish his work with joy is his noblest praise. But why should it not end here? If he is to be counted blessed who works in the vineyard, if his work gladdens, enriches, and ennoble him what room is there for the thought of pay? What can the pennies in this case mean?

Man is made with a large capacity, and a large thought and hope of happiness. He can take a large blessing into his being, larger than he can meet within his present sphere. The range of his nature takes in the infinite and the eternal. The work is noble, glorious exercise; but God only can fill and satisfy his spirit. Man needs something beyond the mere play of his powers, though their free play is an intense exhilaration and delight. He needs the fellowship of beings to satisfy the yearning, to feed the appetite, of his nobler nature; he needs the love of God, and communion with all that is of God, that he may rest and be blessed. This is the reward which the earthly day of his toil and patience

will bring. The true workman is happy in his work, and sings while he toils. But God has a yet richer benediction for His children when the work is done, a blessing which will beautify and glorify life through eternity. This He gives to the workman out of His royal bounty, His own blessedness. It is His own to give; and all true workmen, whatever the measure of their work, because of the spirit of their work, shall claim it at His hand.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.