

# GIBSON JOHN MONRO

EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE: THE  
GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

John Gibson

**Expositor's Bible: The  
Gospel of Matthew**

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# **John Monro Gibson**

## **Expositor's Bible: The Gospel of Matthew**

### **I.**

### ***THE COMING OF THE CHRIST***

#### **Matt. i**

THE New Testament opens appropriately with the four Gospels; for, though in their present form they are all later in date than some of the Epistles, their substance was the basis of all apostolic preaching and writing. As the Pentateuch to the Old Testament, so is the fourfold Evangel to the New.

That there should be a manifold presentation of the great facts which lie at the foundation of our faith and hope, was both to be expected and desired. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, as proclaimed by the first preachers of it, while in substance always the same, would be varied in form, and in number and variety of details, according to the individuality of the speaker, the kind of audience before him, and the special object he might have in view at the time. Before any form of presentation had been crystallized, there would therefore be an indefinite number of Gospels, each "according to" the individual preacher of "Christ and Him crucified." It is, therefore, a marvellous proof of the guidance and control of the Divine Spirit that out of these numerous oral Gospels there should emerge four, each perfect in itself, and together affording, as with the all-round completeness of sculpture, a life-like representation of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is manifestly of great advantage to have these several portraits of our Lord, permitting us to see Him from different points of view, and with varying arrangements of light and shade; all the more that, while three of them set forth in abundant variety of detail that which is more external, – the face, the features, the form, all the expression of that wondrous Life, – the fourth, appropriately called on this account "the Gospel of the heart of Jesus," unveils more especially the hidden riches of His inner Life. But, besides this, a manifold Gospel was needed, in order to meet the wants of man in the many-sidedness of his development. As the heavenly "city lieth four square," with gates on the east, and the west, and the north, and the south, to admit strangers coming from all points of the compass; so must there be in the presentation of the Gospel an open door for all mankind. How this great purpose is attained by the fourfold Gospel with which the New Testament opens can be readily shewn; and even a brief statement of it may serve a useful purpose as introductory to our study of that which is known as the First Gospel.

The inscription over the cross was in three languages: Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. These languages represented the three great civilizations which were the final outcome of ancient history – the Jewish, the Roman, the Greek. These three were not like so many nations selected at random, but stood for three leading types of humanity. The Jew was the man of the past. He could claim Moses and the prophets; he had Abraham for his father; his records went back to the Genesis of all things. He represented ancient prerogative and privilege, the conservatism of the East. The Roman was the man of the present. He was master of the world. He represented power, prowess, and victory; and while serving himself heir to the culture which came from the shores of the Egean Sea, he had combined with it the rude strength and restless activity of the barbarian and Scythian of the North. The Greek was the man of the future. He had lost his political empire, but still retained an empire in the world of thought. He represented humanity, and the ideal, and all the promise which was afterwards to be realized in the culture of the nations of the West. The Jew was the man of tradition, the Roman the man of energy, the Greek the man of thought. Turning now to the Gospels, we find the wants of

each of these three types provided for in a wondrous way. St. Matthew addresses himself especially to the Jew with his Gospel of fulfilment, St. Mark to the Roman with "his brief and terse narrative of a three years' campaign," St. Luke to the Greek with that all-pervading spirit of humanity and catholicity which is so characteristic of his Evangel; while for those who have been gathered from among the Jews and Romans and Greeks – a people who are now no longer Jews or Greeks, but are "all one in Christ Jesus," prepared to receive and appreciate the deeper things of Christ – there is a fourth Gospel, issued at a later date, with characteristics specially adapted to them: the mature work of the then venerable John, the apostle of the Christian.

It is manifest that for every reason the Gospel of St. Matthew should occupy the foremost place. "To the Jew first" is the natural order, whether we consider the claims of "the fathers," or the necessity of making it clear that the new covenant was closely linked to the old. "Salvation is of the Jews;" the Christ of God, though the Saviour of the world, had been in a very special sense "the Hope of Israel," and therefore it is appropriate that He should be represented first from the standpoint of that nation. We have, accordingly, in this Gospel, a faithful setting forth of Christ as He presented Himself to the mind and heart of a devout Jew, "an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile," rejoicing to find in Him One who fulfilled ancient prophecy and promise, realized the true ideal of the kingdom of God, and substantiated His claim to be Himself the divine Saviour-King for whom the nation and the world had waited long.

The opening words of this Gospel suggest that we are at the Genesis of the New Testament, the genesis not of the heavens and the earth, but of Him who was to make for us "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." The Old Testament opens with the thought, "Behold I make all things;" the New Testament with that which amounts to the promise, "Behold I make all things new." It begins with the advent of "the Second Man, the Lord from Heaven." That He was indeed a "Second Man," and not merely one of the many that have sprung from the first man, will presently appear; but first it must be made clear that He is man indeed, "bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh;" and therefore the inspired historian begins with His historic genealogy. True to his object, however, he does not trace back our Lord's descent, as does St. Luke, to the first man, but contents himself with that which is especially interesting to the Jew, setting Him forth as "the son of David, the son of Abraham." There is another difference between the genealogies, of a more serious kind, which has been the occasion of much difficulty; but which also seems to find readiest explanation in the different object each Evangelist had in view. St. Luke, writing for the Gentile, is careful to give the natural descent, while St. Matthew, writing for the Jew, sets forth that line of descent – diverging from the other after the time of David – which made it clear to the Jew that He was the rightful heir to the kingdom. The object of the one is to set Him forth as the Son of Man; of the other to proclaim Him King of Israel.

St. Matthew gives the genealogy in three great epochs or stages, which, veiled in the Authorized Version by the verse division, are clearly exhibited to the eye in the paragraphs of the Revised Version, and which are summed up and made emphatic at the close of the genealogical tree (ver. 17). The first is from Abraham to David; the second from David to the captivity in Babylon; the third from the captivity to Christ. If we glance at these, we shall find that they represent three great stages in the development of the Old Testament promises which find their fulfilment in the Messiah.

"To Abraham and to his seed were the promises made." As given to Abraham himself, the promise ran thus: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." As made to David, it indicated that the blessing to the nations should come through a king of his line. These were the two great promises to Israel. There were many others; but these stand out from the rest as constituting the mission and the hope of Israel. Now, after long waiting, both are to be fulfilled in Christ. He is the chosen Seed in Whom all nations shall be blessed. He is the Son of David, who is to sit upon His throne for ever, and reign, not over Israel alone, but over men, as "Prince of Peace" and "King of Glory." But what has the captivity in Babylon to do with it? Very much; as a little reflection will show.

The captivity in Babylon, as is well known, was followed by two great results: (1) it cured the people of idolatry for ever, so that, while politically the kingdom had passed away, in reality, and according to the spirit, it was then for the first time constituted as a kingdom of God. Till then, though politically separate from the Gentile nations, spiritually Israel had become as one of them; for what else than a heathen nation was the northern kingdom in the days of Ahab or the southern kingdom in the time of Ahaz? But after the captivity, though as a nation shattered into fragments, spiritually Israel became and continued to be one. (2) The other great result of the captivity was the Dispersion. Only a small remnant of the people came back to Palestine. Ten of the tribes passed out of sight, and but a fraction of the other two returned. The rest remained in Babylon, or were scattered abroad among the nations of the earth. Thus the Jews in their dispersion formed, as it were, a Church throughout the ancient world, – their eyes ever turned in love and longing to the Temple at Jerusalem, while their homes and their business were among the Gentiles – in the world, but not of it; the prototype of the future Church of Christ, and the soil out of which it should afterwards spring. Thus out of the captivity in Babylon sprang, first, the spiritual as distinguished from the political kingdom, and, next, the world-wide as distinguished from the merely national Church. Clearly then the Babylonish captivity was not only a most important historical event, but also a stage in the grand preparation for the Advent of the Messiah. The original promise made to Abraham, that in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed, was shown in the time of David to be a promise which should find its fulfilment in the coming of a king; and as the king after God's heart was foreshadowed in David, so the kingdom after the Divine purpose was foreshadowed in the condition of the people of God after the captivity in Babylon, purified from idolatry, scattered abroad among the nations, with their innumerable synagogues (prototypes of our churches) and their peculiarities of faith and life and worship. Abraham was called out of Babylon to be a witness for God and the coming Christ; and, after the long training of centuries, his descendants were taken back to Babylon, to scatter from that world-centre the seed of the coming kingdom of God. Thus it comes to pass that in Christ and His kingdom we see the culmination of that wonderful history which has for its great stages of progress Abraham, David,<sup>1</sup> the Captivity, Christ.

So much for the earthly origin of the Man Christ Jesus; but His heavenly descent must also be told; and with what exquisite simplicity and delicacy is this done. There is no attempt to make the words correspond with the greatness of the facts. As simple and transparent as clear glass, they allow the facts to speak for themselves. So it is all the way through this Evangel. What a contrast here to the spurious Gospels afterwards produced, when men had nothing to tell, and so must put in their own poor fictions, piously intending sometimes to add lustre to the too simple story of the Infancy, but only with the effect of degrading it in the eyes of all men of taste and judgment. But here there is no need of fiction, no need even of rhetoric or sentiment. The fact itself is so great, that the more simply it is told the better. The Holy One of Israel came into the world with no tinsel of earthly pomp; and in strict harmony with His mode of entrance, the story of His birth is told with like simplicity. The Sun of Righteousness rises like the natural sun, in silence; and in this Gospel, as in all the others, passes on to its setting through the heaven of the Evangelist's thought, which stands, like that other heaven, "majestic in its own simplicity."

The story of the Incarnation is often represented as incredible; but if those who so regard it would only reflect on that doctrine of heredity which the science of recent years has brought into such prominence, if they would only consider what is involved in the obvious truth that, "that which is born of the flesh is flesh," they would see that it was not only natural but necessary that the birth

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<sup>1</sup> To some minds it may present itself as a difficulty that the great name of Moses should not find a place in the series; was not he as much of an epoch-maker as David? The answer is that, from the point of view of prophecy and promise, he was not. This, which lies implicitly in St. Matthew's summary, is set forth explicitly by St. Paul in his epistle to the Galatians, where he shows that the Law, as a stage in the dealings of God with the nation, did not belong to the main course of development, but came in as an episode, was "added because of transgressions" (Gal. iii. 16-19).

of Jesus Christ should be "on this wise." Inasmuch as "the first man is of the earth, earthy," "the Second Man" must be "of heaven," or He will be no Second Man at all; He will be sinful and earthy like all the others. But all that is needful is met in the manner so chastely and beautifully set forth by our Evangelist, in words which, angelic in their tone and like the blue of heaven in their purity, so well become the angel of the Lord.

Some wonder that nothing is said here of Nazareth and what took place there, and of the journey to Bethlehem; and there are those who are fain even to find some inconsistency with the third Gospel in this omission, as if there were any need to wonder at omissions in a story which tells of the first year on one page and the thirtieth on the next! These Gospels are not biographies. They are memorials, put together for a special purpose, to set forth this Jesus as the Son of God and Saviour of the world. And the special object, as we have seen, of St. Matthew is to set Him forth as the Messiah of Israel. In accordance with this object we have His birth told in such a way as to bring into prominence those facts only in which the Evangelist specially recognised a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. Here again the names give us the main thoughts. Just as Abraham, David, Babylon, suggest the main object of the genealogy, so the names Emmanuel, Jesus, suggest the main object of the record of His birth. "All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet."

The first name mentioned is "Jesus." To understand it as St. Matthew did, we must bear in mind that it is the old historic name Joshua, and that the first thought of the Hebrew mind would be, Here is One who shall fulfil all that was typified in the life and work of the two Old Testament heroes who bore that name, so full of hopeful significance.<sup>2</sup> The first Joshua was Israel's captain on the occasion of their first settlement in the land of promise after the bondage in Egypt; the second Joshua was Israel's high priest at their second settlement in the land after the bondage in Babylon. Both were thus associated with great deliverances; but neither the one nor the other had given the rest of full salvation to the people of God (see Heb. iv. 8); what they had done had only been to procure for them political freedom and a land they could call their own, – a picture in the earthly sphere of what the Coming One was to accomplish in the spiritual sphere. The salvation from Egypt and from Babylon were both but types of the great salvation from sin which was to come through the Christ of God. These or such as these must have been the thoughts in the mind of Joseph when he heard the angel's words: "Thou shalt call His name Joshua; for it is He that shall save His people from their sins."

Joseph, though a poor carpenter of Nazareth, was a true son of David, one of those who waited for the salvation of Israel, who had welcomed the truth set forth by Daniel, that the coming kingdom was to be a kingdom of the saints of the Most High, – not of political adventurers, as was the idea of the corrupt Judaism of the time; so he was prepared to welcome the truth that the coming Saviour was One who should deliver, not from the rule of *Rome*, but from the guilt and power and death of *Sin*.

As the name Joshua, or Jesus, came from the earliest times of Israel's national history, the name Emmanuel came from its latest, even out of the dark days of King Ahaz, when the hope of the people was directed to the birth of a Child who should bear this name. Some have thought it enough to show that there was a fulfilment of this hope in the time of Ahaz, to make it evident that St. Matthew was mistaken in finding its fulfilment in Christ; but this idea, like so many others of the same kind, is founded on ignorance of the relation of the Old Testament history to the New Testament times. We have seen that though Joshua of the early times and his successor of the same name did each a work of his own, yet both of them were in relation to the future but prototypes of the Great Joshua who was to come. In the same way exactly, if there was, as we believe, a deliverance in the time of Ahaz, to which the prophet primarily referred, it was, as in so many other cases, but a picture of the greater one in which the gracious purpose of God, manifested in all these partial deliverances, was to be "fulfilled," *i. e.*, filled to the full. The idea in the name "Emmanuel" was not a new one even in the time of King

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<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew name Joshua, of which Jesus is simply the Greek transliteration, combines the two words Jehovah and Salvation (cf. Num. xiii. 16).



Ahaz. "I will be with you;" "Certainly I will be with you;" "Fear not, for I am with you," – such words of gracious promise had been echoed and re-echoed all down the course of the history of the people of God, before they were enshrined in the name prophetically used by Isaiah in the days of King Ahaz; and they were finally embodied, incarnated, in the Child born at Bethlehem in the fulness of the time, to Whom especially belongs that name of highest hope, "Emmanuel," "God with us."

If, now, we look at these two names, we shall see that they not only point to a fulfilment, in the largest sense, of Old Testament prophecy, but to the fulfilment of that which we all need most – the satisfaction of our deepest wants and longings. "God is light;" sin is darkness. With God is the fountain of life; "sin when it is finished bringeth forth death." Here shines the star of hope; there lies the abyss of despair. Now, without Christ we are tied to sin, separated from God. Sin is near; God is far. That is our curse. Therefore what we need is God brought near and sin taken away – the very blessings guaranteed in these two precious names of our Lord. As Emmanuel, He brings God near to us, near in His own incarnate person, near in His loving life, near in His perfect sympathy, near in His perpetual presence according to the promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." As Jesus, He saves us from our sins. How he does it is set forth in the sequel of the Gospel, culminating in the sacrifice of the cross, "to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness." For He has not only to bring God down to us, but also to lift us up to God; and while the incarnation effects the one, the atonement, followed by the work of the Holy Spirit, is necessary to secure the other. He touches man, the creature, at his cradle; He reaches down to man, the sinner, at His cross – the end of His descent to us, the beginning of our ascent with Him to God. There we meet Him; and saved from sin, we know Him as our Jesus; and reconciled to God, we have Him with us as Emmanuel, God with us, always with us, with us throughout all life's changes, with us in death's agony, with us in the life to come, to guide us into all its wisdom and honour and riches and glory and blessing.

## II. *HIS RECEPTION*

### **Matt. ii**

THIS one chapter contains all that St. Matthew records of the Infancy. St. Mark and St. John tell us nothing, and St. Luke very little. This singular reticence has often been remarked upon, and it certainly is most noteworthy, and a manifest sign of genuineness and truthfulness: a token that what these men wrote was in the deepest sense not their own. For if they had been left to themselves in the performance of the task assigned them, they could not have restrained themselves as they have done. The Jews of the time attached the greatest importance to child-life, as is evident from the single fact that they had no less than eight different words to mark the successive stages of development from the new-born babe up to the young man; and to omit all reference to these stages, except the slight notice of the Infancy in this chapter, was certainly not "according to Matthew" the Jew, – not what would have been expected of him had he been left to himself. It can only be explained by the fact that he spoke or was silent according as he was moved or restrained by the Holy Ghost. This view is strikingly confirmed by comparison with the spurious Gospels afterwards published, by men who thought they could improve on the original records with their childish stories as to what the boy Jesus said and did. These awkward fictions reflect the spirit of the age; the simple records of the four Evangelists mirror for us the Spirit of Truth. To the vulgar mind, they may seem bare and defective, but all men of culture and mature judgment recognise in their simplicity and naturalness a note of manifest superiority.

Much space might be occupied in setting forth the advantages of this reticence, but a single illustration may suggest the main thought. Recall for a moment the well-known picture entitled, "The Shadow of the Cross," designed and executed by a master, one who might surely be considered qualified to illustrate in detail the life at Nazareth. We have nothing to say as to the merit of the picture as a work of art; let those specially qualified to judge speak of this; but is it not generally felt that the realism of the carpenter's shop is most painful? The eye is instinctively averted from the too obtrusive details; while the mind gladly returns from the startling vividness of the picture to the vague impressions made on us by the mere hints in the sacred Scriptures. Was it not well that our blessed Saviour should grow in retirement and seclusion; and if so, why should that seclusion be invaded? If His family life was withdrawn from the eyes of the men of that time, there remains the same reason why it should be withdrawn from the eyes of the men of all time; and the more we think of it, the more we realize that it is better in every way that the veil should have been dropped just where it has been, and that all should remain just as it was, when with unconscious skill the sacred artists finished their perfect sketches of the child Jesus.

Perhaps, however, the question may be asked: If St. Matthew would tell us so little, why say anything at all? What was his object in relating just what he has set down in this chapter? We believe it must have been to show how Christ was received. It seems, in fact, to correspond to that single sentence in the fourth Gospel, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not;" only St. Matthew gives us a wider and brighter view; he shows us not only how Jerusalem rejected Him, but how the East welcomed Him and Egypt sheltered Him. Throughout the entire Old Testament our attention is called, not merely to Jerusalem, which occupied the centre of the ancient world, but to the kingdoms round about, especially to the great empires of the East and South – the empire of the East represented in succession by Ancient Chaldea, Assyria, Babylonia, Media, and Persia; and that of the South – the mighty monarchy of Egypt, which under its thirty dynasties held on its steady

course alongside these. How natural, then, for the Evangelist whose special mission it was to connect the old with the new, to take the opportunity of showing that, while His own Jerusalem rejected her Messiah, her old rivals of the East and of the South gave Him a welcome. In the first chapter the Child Jesus was set forth as the Heir of the promise made to Abraham and his seed, and the fulfilment of the prophecy given to the chosen people; now He is further set forth as the One who satisfies the longings of those whom they had been taught to regard as their natural enemies, but who now must be looked upon as "fellow-heirs" with them of God's heritage, and "partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel." It will be seen, then, how the second chapter was needed to complete the first, and how the two together give us just such a view of the Advent as was most needed by the Jews of the period, while it is most instructive and suggestive to men of all countries and of all time. As, then, the last paragraph began with, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise," we may regard this as beginning with, "Now the reception of Jesus Christ was on this wise."

According to the plan of these expositions, we must disregard details, and many interesting questions, for the consideration of which it is surely enough to refer to the many well-known and widely-read books on the Life of Christ; and confine ourselves to those general thoughts and suggestions which seem best fitted to bring out the spirit of the passage as a whole.

Let us, then, look first at the manner of His reception by Jerusalem, the city which as Son of David He could claim as peculiarly His own. It was the very centre of the circle of Old Testament illumination. It had all possible advantages, over every other place in the world, for knowing when and how the Christ should come. Yet, when He did come, the people of Jerusalem knew nothing about it, but had their first intimation of the fact from strangers who had come from the far East to seek Him. And not only did they know nothing about it till they were told, but, when told, they were troubled (ver. 3). Indifference where we should have expected eagerness, trouble where we should have looked for joy.

We have only to examine the contemporary accounts of the state of society in Jerusalem to understand it thoroughly, and to see how exceedingly natural it was. Those unacquainted with these records can have no idea of the gaiety and frivolity of the Jewish capital at the time. Every one, of course, knows something of the style and magnificence in which Herod the Great lived; but one is not apt to suppose that luxurious living was the rule among the people of the town. Yet so it seems to have been. Dr. Edersheim, who has made a special study of this subject, and who quotes his authorities for each separate statement, thus describes<sup>3</sup> the state of things: "These Jerusalemites – townspeople as they called themselves – were so polished, so witty, so pleasant... And how much there was to be seen and heard in those luxuriously furnished houses, and at these sumptuous entertainments! In the women's apartments friends from the country would see every novelty in dress, adornments, and jewellery, and have the benefit of examining themselves in looking-glasses... And then the lady-visitors might get anything in Jerusalem, from a false tooth to an Arabian veil, a Persian shawl, or an Indian dress!" Then, after furnishing what he calls "too painful evidence of the luxuriousness at Jerusalem at that time, and of the moral corruption to which it led," he concludes by giving an account of what one of the sacred books of the time describes as "the dignity of the Jerusalemites," mentioning particulars like these: "the wealth which they lavished on their marriages; the ceremony which insisted on repeated invitations to the guests to a banquet, and that men inferior should not be bidden to it; the dress in which they appeared; the manner in which the dishes were served, the wine in white crystal vases; the punishment of the cook who failed in his duty," and so on.

If things of that kind represented the dignity of the people of Jerusalem, we need not ask why they were troubled when they heard that to them had been born in Bethlehem a Saviour who was Christ the Lord. A Saviour who would save them from their sins was the very last thing people of that kind wanted. A Herod suited them better, for it was he and his court that set the example of

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<sup>3</sup> *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. i., p. 130.

the luxury and profligacy which characterised the capital. Do not all these revelations as to the state of things in the capital of Israel set off more vividly than ever the pure lustre of the quiet, simple, humble, peaceful surroundings of the Babe of Bethlehem and Boy of Nazareth? Put the "dignity" and trouble of Jerusalem over against the humility and peace of Bethlehem, and say which is the more truly dignified and desirable. When we look at the contrast we cease to wonder that, with the exception of a very few devout Simeons and Annas, waiting for the consolation of Israel, Jerusalem, as a whole, was troubled to hear the rumour of the advent of her Saviour-King.

Herod's trouble we can so readily understand that we need not spend time over it, or over what he did to get rid of it, so thoroughly in keeping as it was with all that history tells us of his character and conduct. No wonder that the one thought in *his* mind was "Away with Him!"

But who are these truly dignified men, who are now turning their backs on rich and gay Jerusalem, and setting their faces to the obscurity and poverty of the village of Bethlehem? They are men of rank and wealth and learning from the far East – representatives of all that is best in the old civilizations of the world. They had only the scantiest opportunities of learning what was the Hope of Israel, and how it should be realised; but they were earnest men; *their* minds were not taken up with gaiety and frivolity; they had studied the works of nature till their souls were full of the thought of God in His glory and majesty; but their hearts still yearned to know if He, Whose glory was in the heavens, could stoop to cure the ills that flesh is heir to. They had heard of Israel's hope, the hope of a child to be born of David's race, who should bring divine mercy near to human need; they had a vague idea that the time for the fulfilment of that hope was drawing near; and, as they mused, behold a marvellous appearance in the heavens, which seemed to call them away to seek Him whom their souls desired! Hence their long journey to Jerusalem and their eager entrance into Bethlehem. Had their dignity been the kind of dignity which was boasted of in Jerusalem, they would no doubt have been offended by the poverty of the surroundings, the poor house with its scanty furniture and its humble inmates. But theirs was the dignity of mind and soul, so they were not offended by the poor surroundings; they recognised in the humble Child the object of their search; they bowed before Him, doing Him homage, and presented to Him gifts as a tribute from the East to the coming King of righteousness and love.

What a beautiful picture; how striking the contrast to the magnificence of Herod the Great in Jerusalem, surrounded by his wealthy and luxurious court. Verily, these were wise men from the East, wise with a wisdom not of this world – wise to recognise the hope of the future, not in a monarch *called* "the Great," surrounded by the world's pomp and luxury, but in the fresh young life of the holy heaven-born Child. Learned as they were, they had simple hearts – they had had some glimpse of the great truth that it is not learning the world needs so much as life, new life. Would that all the wise men of the present day were equally wise in heart! We rejoice that so many of them are; and if only all of them had true wisdom, they would consider that even those who stand as high in the learning of the new West as these men did in the learning of the old East, would do themselves honour in bowing low in presence of the Holy Child, and acknowledge that by no effort of the greatest intellect is it possible to reach that truth which can alone meet the deepest wants of men – that there is no other hope for man than the new birth, the fresh, pure, holy life which came into the world when the Christ was born, and which comes into every heart that in simple trustfulness gives Him a welcome as did these wise men of old. There, at the threshold of the Gospel, we see the true relation of science and religion.

"Let knowledge grow from more to more,  
But more of reverence in us dwell;  
That mind and soul, according well,  
May make one music as before."

All honour to these wise men for bending low in presence of the Holy Child; and thanks be to God for allowing His servant Matthew to give us a glimpse of a scene so beautiful, so touching, so suggestive of pure and high and holy thought and feeling.

The gifts of the East no doubt provided the means of securing a refuge in the South and West. That Egypt gave the fugitives a friendly welcome, and a safe retreat so long as the danger remained, is obvious; but here again we are left without detail. The one thing which the Evangelist wishes to impress upon us is the parallel between the experience of Israel and Israel's Holy One. Israel of the Old Testament, born in Palestine, had to flee into Egypt. When the time was ripe for return, the way was opened for it; and thus the prophet speaks of it in the name of the Lord: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called My son out of Egypt." Now that the Holy One of Israel has come to fulfil old Israel's destiny, the prophetic word, which had been only partially realised in the history of the nation, is fulfilled in the history of the Anointed One. Hence, just as it happened with the nation, so did it happen with the nation's representative and King: born in His own land, He had to flee into Egypt, and remain there till God brought Him out, and set Him in His land again.

Other points of agreement with the prophetic word are mentioned. It is worthy of note that they are all connected with the dark side of prophecy concerning the Messiah. The reason for this will readily appear on reflection. The Scribes and Pharisees were insistent enough on the bright side, the side that favoured their ideas of a great king, who should rescue the people from the Roman yoke, and found a great world-kingdom, after the manner of Herod the Great or of Cæsar the mighty. So there was no need to bring strongly out that side of prophecy which foretold of the glories of the coming King. But the sad side had been entirely neglected. It is this, accordingly, which the Evangelist is prompted to illustrate.

It was, indeed, in itself an occasion of stumbling that the King of Israel should have to flee to Egypt. But why should one stumble at it, who looked at the course of Israel's history as a nation, in the light the prophets threw upon it? It was an occasion of stumbling that His birth in Bethlehem should bring with it such sorrow and anguish; but why wonder at it when so great a prophet as Jeremiah so touchingly speaks of the voice heard in Ramah, "Rachel weeping for her children and would not be comforted," – a thought of exquisite beauty and pathos as Jeremiah used it in reference to the banished ones of his day, but of still deeper pathos as now fulfilled in the sorrow at Ramah, over the massacre of her innocents, when not Israel but Israel's Holy One is banished from the land of His birth. Again, it was an occasion of stumbling that the King of Israel, instead of growing up in majesty in the midst of the Court and the capital, should retire into obscurity in the little village of Nazareth, and for many years be unheard of by the great ones of the land; but why wonder at it when the prophets again and again represent Him as growing up in this very way, as "a root out of a dry ground," as a twig or "shoot out of the stem of Jesse," growing up "out of His place," and attracting no attention while He grew. Such is the meaning of the words translated, "He shall be called a Nazarene." This does not appear in our language; hence the difficulty which many have found in this reference, there being no passage in any of the prophets where the Christ is spoken of as a Nazarene; but the word to Hebrew ears at once suggests the Hebrew for "Branch," continually applied to Him in the prophets, and especially connected with the idea of His quiet and silent growth, aloof from the throng and unnoticed by the great.

This completes, appropriately, the sketch of His reception. Unthought of by His own, till strangers sought Him; a source of trouble to them when they heard of Him; His life threatened by the occupant, for the time, of David's throne, He is saved only by exile, and on returning to His people passes out of notice: and the great world moves on, all unconscious and unconcerned, whilst its Saviour-King is preparing, in the obscurity of His village home, for the great work of winning a lost world back to God.

### III. *HIS HERALD*

#### Matt. iii. 1-12

THIRTY years have gone since all Jerusalem was in trouble at the rumour of Messiah's birth. But as nothing has been heard of Him since, the excitement has passed away. Those who *were* troubled about it are ageing or old or dead; so no one thinks or speaks of it now. There have been several political changes since, mostly for the worse. Judæa is now a province of Rome, governed by procurators, of whom the sixth, called Pontius Pilate, has just entered on his office. Society is much the same as before – the same worldliness and luxurious living after the manner of the Greek, the same formalism and bigotry after the manner of the Scribe. There is no sign, in Jerusalem at least, of any change for the better.

The only new thing stirring is a rumour in the street. People are telling one another that a new prophet has arisen. "In the Palace?" – "No." "In the Temple?" – "No." "Surely somewhere in the city?" – "No." He is in the wilderness, clad in roughest garb, subsisting on poorest fare – a living protest against the luxury of the time. He makes no pretence to learning, draws no fine distinctions, gives no curious interpretations, and yet, with only a simple message, – which, however, he delivers as coming straight from God Himself, – is drawing crowds to hear him from all the country side. So the rumour spreads throughout the town, and great numbers go out to see what it is all about; some perhaps from curiosity, some in hope that it may be the dawn of a brighter day for Israel, all of them no doubt more or less stirred with the excitement of the thought that, after so many silent centuries, a veritable prophet has come, like those of old. For it must be remembered that even in gay Jerusalem the deep-rooted feelings of national pride and patriotism had been only overlaid, not superseded, by the veneer of Greek and Roman civilisation, which only seemed for the moment to satisfy the people.

So they go out in multitudes to the wilderness; and what do they see? "A man clothed in fine raiment," like the Roman officials in the palace, which in those degenerate days were Jerusalem's pride? "A reed shaken by the wind," like the time-serving politicians of the hour? Nay, verily; but a true prophet of the Lord, one reminding them of what they have read in the Scriptures of the great Elijah, who suddenly appeared in the wild mountain region of Gilead, at a time when Phœnician manners were making the same havoc in Israel that Greek manners are now making in Jerusalem. Who can he be? He seems to be more than a prophet. Can he be the Christ? But this he entirely disclaims. Is he Elijah then? John probably knew that he was sent "in the spirit and power of Elijah," for so his father had learned from the angel on the occasion of the announcement of his birth; but that was not the point of their question. When they asked, "Art thou Elijah?" they meant "Art thou Elijah risen from the dead?" To this he must, of course, answer, "No." In the same way he must disclaim identity with any of the prophets. He will not trade upon the name of any of these holy men of old. Enough that he comes, a nameless one, before them, with a message from the Lord. So, keeping himself in the background, he puts his message before them, content that they should recognise in it the fulfilment of the well-known word of prophecy: "A voice crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight."

John wishes it to be distinctly understood that he is not that Light which the prophets of old have told them should arise, but is sent to bear witness to that Light. He has come as a herald to announce the approach of the King, and to call upon the people to prepare for His coming. Think not of me, he cries, ask not who I am; think of the coming King, and make ready for Him, – "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make *His* paths straight."

How is the way of the Lord to be prepared? Is it by summoning the people to arms all over the land, that they may repel the Roman invader and restore the ancient kingdom? Such a proclamation would no doubt have struck a chord that would have vibrated through all the land. That would have been after the manner of men; it was not the way of the Lord. The summons must be, not to arms, but to *repentance*: "Wash you, make you clean: put away the evil of your doings." So, instead of marching up, a host of warriors, to the Roman citadel, the people troop down, band after band of penitents, to the Jordan, confessing their sins. After all it is the old, old prophetic message over again, – the same which had been sent generation after generation to a backsliding people, its burden always this: "Turn ye unto Me, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts."

Like many of the old prophets, John taught by symbol as well as by word. The preparation needed was an inward cleansing, and what more fitting symbol of it than the water baptism to which he called the nation? "In that day," it was written in the prophets, "there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness." The prophecy was about to be fulfilled, and the baptism of John was the appropriate sign of it. Again, in another of the prophets the promise ran, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you ... and I will put my spirit within you." John knew well that it was not given to him to *fulfil* this promise. He could not grant the real baptism, the baptism of the Holy Ghost; but he could baptise with water; he could give the sign and assurance to the truly penitent heart that there was forgiveness and cleansing in the coming One; and thus, by his baptism with water, as well as by the message he delivered, he was preparing the way of the Lord. All this, we cannot but observe, was in perfect accord with the wonderful prophetic utterance of his father Zacharias, as recorded by St. Luke: "Thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of their sins," – not to give salvation, which only Christ can give, but the knowledge of it. This he did not only by telling of the coming Saviour, and, when He came, pointing to Him as "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world;" but also by the appropriate sign of baptism, which gave the same knowledge in the language of symbol addressed to the eye.

The summons of the prophet of the wilderness is not in vain. The people come. The throngs increase. The nation is moved. Even the great ones of the nation condescend to follow the multitude. Pharisees and Sadducees, the leaders of the two great parties in Church and State, are coming; many of them are coming. What a comfort this must be to the prophet's soul. How gladly he will welcome them, and let it be known that he has among his converts many of the great ones of the land! But the stern Baptist is a man of no such mould. What cares he for rank or position or worldly influence? What he wants is reality, simplicity, godly sincerity; and he knows that, scarce as these virtues are in the community at large, they are scarcest of all among these dignitaries. He will not allow the smallest admixture of insincerity or hypocrisy in what is, so far, a manifest work of God. He must test these new-comers to the uttermost, for the sin of which they need most to repent is the very sin which they are in danger of committing afresh in its most aggravated form in offering themselves for baptism. He must therefore test their motives; he must at all risks ensure that, unless their repentance is genuine, they shall not be baptised. For their own sakes, as well as for the work's sake this is necessary. Hence the strong, even harsh language he uses in putting the question *why* they had come. Yet he would not repel or discourage them. He does not send them away as if past redemption, but only demands that they bring forth fruit worthy of the repentance they profess. And lest they should think that there was an easier way of entrance for them than for others, lest they should think that they had claims sufficient because of their descent, he reminds them that God can have his kingdom upon earth, even though every son of Abraham in the world should reject Him: "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham."

It is as if he said, The coming kingdom of righteousness and truth will not fail, even if Pharisees and Sadducees and all the natural children of Abraham refuse to enter its only gate of repentance; if there is no response to the Divine summons where it is most to be expected, then it can be secured where it is least to be expected; if flesh become stone, then stone can be made flesh, according to the word of promise. So there will be no gathering in of mere formalists to make up numbers, no including of those who are only "Jews outwardly." And there will be no half measures, no compromise with evil, no parleying with those who are unwilling or only half willing to repent. A time of crisis has come, – "now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees." It is not lifted yet. But it is there lying ready, ready for the Lord of the vineyard, when He shall come (and He is close at hand); then, "every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire."

Yet not for judgment is He coming, – John goes on to say, – but to fulfil the promise of the Father. He is coming to baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire – to purify you through and through and to animate you with a new life, glowing, upward-striving, heaven-aspiring; and it is to prepare you for this unspeakable blessing that I ask you to come and put away those sins which must be a barrier in the way of His coming, those sins which dim your eyes so that you cannot see Him, which stop your ears so that you cannot recognise your Shepherd's voice, that clog your hearts so that the Holy Spirit cannot reach them, – repent, *repent*, and be baptised all of you; for there cometh One after me, mightier than I, whose meanest servant I am not worthy to be, – He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire, if you are ready to receive Him; but if you are not, still you cannot escape Him, "Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly cleanse His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the garner, but the chaff He will burn up with unquenchable fire" (R.V.).

The work of John must still be done. It specially devolves upon the ministers of Christ; would they were all as anxious as he was to keep in the background, as little concerned about position, title, official rank, or personal consideration.



## IV. *HIS BAPTISM*

### Matt. iii. 13-17

"THE baptism of John, was it from Heaven or of men?" This question must have been asked throughout the length and breadth of the land in the days of his mission. We know how it was answered; for even after the excitement had died away, we are told that "all men counted John for a prophet." This conviction would of course prevail in Nazareth as well as everywhere else. When, therefore, the Baptist removed from the wilderness of Judæa and the lower reaches of the Jordan to the ford of Bethany, or Bethabara, – now identified with a point much farther north, within a single day's journey of Nazareth, – the people of Galilee would flock to him, as before the people of Judæa and Jerusalem had done. Among the rest, as might naturally be expected, Jesus came. It was enough for Him to know that the baptism of John was of Divine appointment. He was in all things guided by His Father's will, to whom He would day by day commit His way. Accordingly, just as day by day He had been subject to His parents, and just as He had seen it to be right to go up to the Temple in accordance with the Law, so He recognised it to be His duty to present Himself, as His countrymen in such large numbers were doing, to receive baptism from John. The manner of the narrative implies that He came, not as if He were some great person demanding special recognition, but as simply and naturally as any of the rest: "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to the Jordan unto John, to be baptised of him."

John looks at Him. Does he know Him at all? Perhaps not; for though they are cousins, their lives have been lived quite apart. Before their birth their mothers met; but it is doubtful if they themselves have seen each other before, and even if they have, in earlier years, they may both be so changed that recognition is uncertain. The one has had his home in the South; the other, in the North. Besides, the elder of the two has spent his life mostly in the desert, so that probably he is a stranger now even to his own townspeople, and his father and mother, both very old when he was born, must be dead and gone long ago. Perhaps, then, John did not know Jesus at all; certainly he did not yet know Him as the Messiah. But he sees something in Him that draws forth the homage of his soul. Or possibly he gathers his impressions rather from what Jesus says. All the rest have confessed sin; He has no sin of His own to confess. But words would no doubt be spoken that would convey to the Baptist how this disciple looked on sin, how the very thought of it filled Him with horror, how His whole soul longed for the righteousness of God, how it was a sacred passion with Him that sin should perish from the hearts of men, and righteousness reign in its place. Whether then, it was by His appearance, the clear eye, the calm face, – an open window for the prophet to look through into His soul, – or whether it was by the words He spoke as He claimed a share in the baptism, or both combined, John was taken aback – surprised a second time, though in just the opposite way to that in which he had been surprised before. The same eagle eye that saw through the mask of Pharisee and Sadducee could penetrate the veil of humility and obscurity; so he said: "I have need to be baptised of Thee, and comest Thou to me?"

Think of the majesty of this John. Remember how he bore himself in presence of the Pharisees and Sadducees; and how he faced Herod, telling him plainly, at the risk of his life, as it afterwards proved, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." Remember that all Judæa, and Jerusalem, and Galilee had been bowing down in his presence; and now, when an obscure nameless One of Nazareth comes to him, only as yet distinguished from others by the holiness of His life and the purity of His soul, John would not have Him bow in his presence, but would himself bend low before Him:

"I have need to be baptised of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" Oh for more of that grand combination of lofty courage and lowly reverence! Verily, "among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist."

But Jesus answering said unto him, "Suffer it now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (R.V.). Though about to enter on His Messianic work, He has not yet taken its burden on Him; accordingly He comes, not as Messiah, but in the simplest and most unassuming way; content still, as He has been all along till now, to be reckoned simply as of Israel. This is what we take to be the force of the plural pronoun "us."

On the other hand, it should be remembered that Jesus must have recognised in the summons to the Jordan a call to commence His work as Messiah. He would certainly have heard from His mother of the prophetic words which had been spoken concerning His cousin and Himself; and would, therefore, as soon as He heard of the mission of John, know well what it meant – He could not but know that John was preparing the way before Him, and therefore that His time was close at hand. Of this, too, we have an indication in His answer to the expostulation of John. "Suffer it now," He says; as if to say, I am as yet only one of Israel; My time is at hand, when I must take the position to which I am called, but meantime I come as the rest come: "Suffer it *now*; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."

While then Jesus came simply in obedience to the will of God, He must have come with a very heavy burden. His study of the Scriptures must have made Him painfully familiar with the dark prospects before Him. Well did He know that the path of the Messiah must be one of suffering, that He must be despised and rejected, that He must be wounded for the people's transgressions and bruised for their iniquity; that, in a word, He must be the suffering Priest before He can be the reigning King. This thought of His priesthood must have been especially borne in upon Him now that He had just reached the priestly age. In His thirteenth year – the Temple age – He had gone to the Temple, and now at the age when the priest is consecrated to his office, He is summoned to the Jordan, to be baptised by one whom He knows to be sent of God to prepare the way before Him. Those Scriptures, then, which speak of the priestly office the Messiah must fill, must have been very much in His mind as He came to John and offered Himself to be baptised. And of all these Scriptures none would seem more appropriate at the moment than those words of the fortieth Psalm: "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God."

At this point we can readily see the appropriateness of His baptism, and also an element in common between it and that of the people. They had come professing to be willing to do the will of God by turning from sin to righteousness. He had no need to turn from sin to do the will of God; but He had to turn from the quiet and peaceful home life at Nazareth, that He might take up the burden laid upon Him as Messiah. So He as well as they had to leave the old life and begin a new one; and in this we can see how fitting it was that He as well as they should be baptised. Then, just as by baptism – the symbol, in their case, of separation from sin and consecration to God – John made "ready a people prepared for the Lord;" so by baptism – the symbol, in His case, of separation from private life and consecration to God in the office of Messiah, – the Lord was made ready for the people. By baptism John opened the door of the new Kingdom. From the wilderness of sin the people entered it as subjects; from the seclusion of private life Jesus entered it as King and Priest. They came under a vow of obedience unto Him; He came under a vow of obedience unto death, even the death of the Cross.

This, then, is the moment of His taking up the Cross. It is indeed the assumption of His royalty as Messiah-King; but then He knew that He must suffer and die before He could enter on His glory; therefore, as the first great duty before Him, He takes up the Cross. In this we can see a still further appropriateness in the words already quoted, as is suggested in the well-known passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of

the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God." Ah, who can understand the love in the heart of Jesus, who can measure the sacrifice He makes as He bends before John, and is baptised into the name of "the Christ," the Saviour of mankind!

The act of solemn consecration is over. He comes up out of the water. And lo, the heavens are opened, and the Spirit of God descends upon Him, and a voice from heaven calls, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased."

"The heavens were opened." What was the precise natural phenomenon witnessed we can only conjecture, but whatever it was, it was but a symbol of the spiritual opening of the heavens. The heaven of God's love and of all holy Angels, shut from man by sin, was opened again by the Christ of God. Nothing could be more appropriate, therefore, than that just at the moment when the Holy One of Israel had bowed Himself to take up His heavy burden, when for the first time it was possible to say, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!" the heavens should open to welcome Him, and in welcoming Him, the Sin-bearer, to welcome all whose sins He came to take away.

"And He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him." This was His anointing for the work He had come to do. The priests of the line of Aaron had been anointed with oil; He was anointed with that of which the oil was but a symbol, – the Holy Spirit descending from the open heaven. From His birth, indeed, He had been guided by the Spirit of God. But up to this time He had, as we have seen, nothing more than was needed to minister to that growth in wisdom which had been going on in private life these thirty years, nothing more than was necessary to guide Him day by day in His quiet, unexacting duties at home. Now He needs far more. Now He must receive the Spirit without measure, in the fulness of His grace and power; hence the organic form of the symbol. The emblem used when the apostles were baptised with the Holy Ghost was tongues of fire, indicating the partial nature of the endowment; here it is the dove, suggesting the idea of completeness and, at the same time, as every one sees, of beauty, gentleness, peace, and love. Again let it be remembered that it is on Him as our representative that the Spirit descends, that His baptism with the Holy Ghost is in order that He may be ready to fulfil the word of John, "He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." Heaven opened above Him means all heavenly blessings prepared for those who follow Him into the new Kingdom. The descent of the Spirit means the bestowment on Him and His of heaven's best gift as an earnest of all the rest.

Last of all there is the voice, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," spoken not merely to Himself individually, – all along, in the personal sense, He was God's beloved Son, in whom He was well pleased, – but to the Messiah, as the Representative and Head of a new redeemed humanity, as the First-born among many brethren, as One who at the very moment was undertaking suretyship on behalf of all who had already received Him or should in the ages to come receive Him as their Priest and King – "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual and heavenly blessings in Him: with an open heaven, a present Spirit, a reconciled Father's voice. Blessed be our loving Lord and Saviour, that He came so humbly to the Jordan, stooped so bravely to the yoke, took up our heavy Cross, and carried it through these sorrowful years to the bitter, bitter end. And blessed be the Holy Spirit of all grace, that He abode on Him, and abides with us. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with us all!

## V. ***HIS TEMPTATION***

### **Matt. iv. 1-11**

MUCH has been written on the possibility of temptation in the experience of a sinless Being. The difficulties which have been raised in this region are chiefly of a metaphysical kind, such as it is possible – for some minds, we might say inevitable – to raise at every point in that mysterious complexity which we call life. Without attempting to enter profoundly into the question, may not an appeal be made to our own experience? Do we not all know what it is to be "tempted without sin," – without sin, that is, in reference to the particular thing to which we are tempted? Are there not desires in our nature, not only thoroughly innocent, but a necessary part of our humanity, which, nevertheless, give occasion to temptation? But on its being recognised that to follow the impulse, however natural, would lead to wrongdoing, the temptation is instantly repelled and integrity perfectly preserved. In such a case there is temptation, conflict, victory – all without sin. Surely then what is possible to us on occasion was also possible to our Lord on all occasions, all through His pure and spotless life. His taking our nature indeed involved not only the possibility, but the necessity, of temptation.

The passage before us records what is known as *the* Temptation, by which it is not, of course, meant that it was the only one. Our Lord was all His life exposed to the assaults of the Tempter, which seem indeed to have increased in violence as He approached the end of His life. Why, then, is this attack singled out for special record? The reason seems obvious. It marks the beginning of the life-work of the Messiah. In His quiet home at Nazareth Jesus must have had the ordinary temptations to which childhood and youth are subject. That was the time of quiet preparation for the great campaign. Now the war must begin. He must address Himself to the mighty undertaking of destroying the works of the devil. The great adversary, therefore, wisely endeavours to mar it at the outset, by a deliberately planned series of assaults, directed against all the vulnerable points of that human nature his great antagonist must wear. From this time onward our Lord's whole life was to be a warfare, not against the rage of wicked men only, but against the wiles of the unseen adversary, whose opposition must have been as bitter and relentless as that of his representatives in flesh and blood. From the nature of the case, the conflict waged in the spiritual sphere could not appear in the history. It belonged to that hidden life, of which even the closest disciples could see but very little. We get a hint of it occasionally in certain looks and words betokening inward conflict, and in those frequent retirings to solitary places to pray; but of the actual soul experience we have no record, except in the case of this first pitched battle, so to call it, of the lifelong conflict. It is evident that our Lord Himself must have given His disciples the information on this deeply interesting subject which enabled them to put it on record, for the encouragement and comfort of His people in all time to come. Blessed be His Holy Name, for this unveiling of His hidden life.

The greater portion, indeed, is still veiled. A dark cloud of mystery hangs over the forty days. Nothing else is told of them in this Gospel than that Jesus fasted for that time – an indication of sustained intensity in the life of His spirit. From St. Mark and St. Luke we learn that the temptation lasted throughout the entire period – a fact not at all inconsistent with sustained spiritual elevation, for it is just at such periods that man is most exposed to the assaults of the enemy. We may not penetrate the darkness of these forty days. Like the darkness in Gethsemane, and again, from the sixth to the ninth hour on Calvary, it forbids entrance. These were times when even "the disciple whom Jesus loved" could not be with Him. These are solitudes that can never be disturbed. Only this we know:

that it was necessary that our Saviour should pass through these dark "cloud-gates" as He entered on and as He finished His priestly work on earth.

But though we cannot comprehend what our Lord did for us during these forty days, when He "recovered Paradise to all mankind," we may, remembering that He was tempted, not only as our Representative but as our Exemplar, endeavour with all humility and reverence to enter into this soul-experience of our Lord, so far as the vivid representation of its main features in the inspired record warrants.

It is always difficult to tell the story of soul-experience in such a way as to come home to the common mind and heart of humanity. It will not do to tell it in the language of philosophy or psychology, which none but those familiar with such discussions could understand. It must be addressed to the imagination as well as to the pure reason. If this had been sufficiently kept in view, it might have saved many a difficulty on the part of those who have set themselves to discover exactly what were the outward circumstances of the temptation, forgetting that here especially it is the inward and spiritual with which we have to do, not the outward and physical. It is not what happened to the body of Jesus, – whether it was actually carried to a pinnacle of the Temple or not, – with which we have any concern in connection with the subject of temptation; but what happened to His soul: for it is the soul of man, not his body, which is tempted.

It is above all things necessary to hold firmly to the reality of the temptation. It was no mere sham fight; it was just as real as any we have ever had when most fiercely assailed by the tempter. This will, of course, dispose of the vulgar idea that the devil appeared in recognisable shape, like one of Doré's fiends. Some people cannot rise above the folly of imagining that there is nothing real that is not material, and therefore that our Saviour could have had no conflict with Satan, if Satan had not assumed some material shape. The power of temptation consists in its appearance of being suggested without sinister intent. Our Lord was tempted "like as we are," and therefore had not the advantage of seeing the tempter in his proper person. He may have appeared "as an angel of light," or it may have been only as an invisible spirit that he came. However that may be, it was unquestionably a spiritual experience; and in that consists its reality and value.

In order firmly to grasp the reality of the conflict, we must not only bear in mind that our Lord had to contend with the same invisible adversary whom we must encounter, but that He had to meet him just as we have to meet him – not as God, but as man. The man Christ Jesus was tempted, and in His human nature He triumphed. He had "emptied Himself" of His divine attributes; and to have had recourse to them when the battle raged too fiercely for His resources as a man, would have been to have acknowledged defeat. What need was there to show that God could triumph over Satan? There needed no Incarnation and no wilderness contest for that. Had it not been as a man that He triumphed there had been no victory at all. It is true that He went into the wilderness in the power of the Spirit; but so may we go into any wilderness or anywhere. It was through Divine strength He triumphed, but only in that strength made perfect in human weakness according to the promise which is valid for us all. Here too "He was tempted like as we are," with the same ways and means of resisting the temptation and overcoming it as are available to us. It follows from all this that we should not look at this temptation scene as something quite foreign to ourselves, but should endeavour to enter into it, and, as far as possible, to realise it.

Observe first the close connection with the baptism. This is made prominent and emphatic in all the three accounts. Evidently, then, it supplies the key to it. The baptism of Christ was His consecration to the work of His Messiahship. And let us not imagine that He had any ready-made plan for the accomplishment of it. His was no stereotyped life-work, such as that which most of us take up, in which we can learn from those who have gone before how they set about it, and proceed accordingly. Even with all that advantage most of us have to do not a little hard thinking, before we can lay our plans. Could it be, then, that He who had such a work before Him had no need to think over it, and plan it, and weigh different methods of procedure, and face the difficulties which every

one who enters on a new enterprise has to meet? Do not let us forget for a moment that He was a real man, and that in planning the course He would pursue, as in all other points, He was tried like as we are.

Accordingly, no sooner is He baptised, than He withdraws by Himself alone, as Moses and others had done when about to enter on their work, to commune with God and to take counsel with His own thoughts. Was He free from all misgiving? Let us not imagine that it was impossible for Him to doubt. Tempted in all points like as we are, He must have known this sore temptation. One may well suppose, then, that He was visited again and again with misgivings during these forty days, so that it was not at all unnatural that temptation should take the form: "If Thou be the Son of God – "

Look now at the first temptation, and mark the double human weakness to which it was addressed. On the one hand *doubt*– "*If Thou art the Son of God;*" on the other, *hunger*– for He had fasted long and had as strong a craving for bread as any of us would have had in the circumstances. See now the force of the temptation. He is suffering from hunger; He is tempted to doubt. How can He have relief? "If Thou be the Son of God, *command that these stones be made bread.*" Special powers are entrusted to Him for His work as Messiah. Should He not use them now? Why not? So in his subtlety suggests the tempter. In vain. He had taken His place among His brother-men, and would not separate Himself from them. They could not command stones to be made bread; and would He cease to be their Brother? What saith the Law? A well-known passage leaps into His memory: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Man must trust in God, and when he is hungry in the wilderness, as Israel was of old, must look upwards for his help. So must I; so will I. And He bears the hunger, repels the doubt, and conquers His subtle foe.

The thought of the doubt that must exist in other minds if not in His own, gives occasion for a second assault. To have proved His power by commanding the stones to be made bread would only have gratified a personal craving. But would it not advance His work to make some signal display of the powers by which He shall be accredited – do something that would attract universal attention; not in the desert, but in Jerusalem; – why not show to all the people that God is with Him by casting Himself from the pinnacle of the Temple? "If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down; for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee; and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone." One sees at once the added force of this temptation. The hunger remains, together with the weakness of body and faintness of spirit which always accompany it. And the very weapon He used to repel the first assault is turned against Him now, for His adversary has found a passage of Scripture, which he uses with great effect. Moreover, the appeal seems to be to that very spirit of trustfulness which stood Him in such stead in His first encounter. Is He not hard beset? What then? Does He in this emergency summon to His aid any ally denied to us in similar stress of trial? No: He does exactly what we have to do in the same case: meets Scripture quoted with a bias by other Scripture thought of without prejudice. He recognises that the Scripture first presented to His mind is only a part of the truth which bears on the case. Something more must be had in view, before the path of duty is clear. To meet the distracting thought, this word occurs, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." It is one thing to trust, another to tempt. I was trusting when I refused to command the stones to be made bread. But I should be tempting God were I to cast myself down from a pinnacle of the Temple. I should be experimenting upon Him, as did the children of Israel at Meribah and at Massah (for that is the connection of the words He quotes) when they said, "Is the Lord among us or not?" I must not experiment, I must not tempt, I must simply trust. Thus victory is gained a second time.

If it is not right to begin His work by any such display as that which the tempter has just suggested, how shall it be begun? A question surely of unexampled difficulty. The air was full of expectancy in regard to the coming of King Messiah. The whole nation was ready to hail him. Not only so, but even the heathen nations were more or less prepared for His coming. Why not take advantage of this favourable state of things at home and abroad? Why not proclaim a kingdom that

will satisfy these widespread expectations, and gather round itself all those enthusiasms; and, after having thus won the people, then proceed to lead them on to higher and better things? Why not? It would be bowing down to the prince of this world. It is clearly a temptation of the Evil One. To yield to it would be to fall down before him and worship him in exchange for the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them. It would be gaining the allegiance of men by methods which are not of God, but of the great adversary. He recognises the device of Satan to lure Him from the path of self-denial which He sees to be the path of duty; accordingly, with energy He says, "Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." In establishing My kingdom I must show Myself to be a servant and worshipper of God and of Him only; accordingly, no worldly methods must be used, however promising they may seem to be; the battle must be fought with spiritual weapons, the kingdom must be established by spiritual forces alone, and on truth and love alone must I depend: I choose the path of the Cross. "Get thee hence, Satan."

The crisis is passed. The path of duty and of sorrow lies plain and clear before Him. He has refused to turn aside to the right hand or to the left. The tempter has been foiled at every point, and so must withdraw, for the time, at least. "Then the devil leaveth Him; and, behold, angels came and ministered unto Him."

## VI. *BEGINNING OF HIS GALILEAN MINISTRY*

### Matt. iv. 12-25

DID our Lord's ministry begin in Galilee? If so, why did He not Himself set the example of "beginning at Jerusalem"? As a matter of fact we learn from the fourth Gospel that He did begin at Jerusalem; and that it was only after He was rejected there that He changed the scene of His labours to the North. Why then do the three Evangelists not mention this earlier ministry in the South? The answer to this question seems suggested by the stress laid by each of the three on the fact of John's imprisonment, as giving the date after which Christ commenced His work in the North. Here, for example (ver. 12), it is put thus: "Now when He heard that John was delivered up, He withdrew into Galilee." Their idea, then, seems to be that the Judæan ministry of Christ belonged rather to the closing months of John's career; and that only after John's mission, the sphere of which had been mainly in the South, had closed, could the special work of Christ be regarded as having begun.

If we review the facts we shall see how natural and accurate was this view of the case. John was sent to prepare the way of the Lord, to open the door of Jerusalem and Judæa for His coming. At first the herald meets with great success. Jerusalem and Judæa flock out to him for his baptism. The way seems ready. The door is opened. The Messiah has come; and John has pointed Him out as "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." Now the Passover is at hand. People will be gathered together from all parts of the land. What better time for the Lord to come to His temple? And, as we are told in the fourth Gospel, Jesus takes the opportunity, goes up to Jerusalem, enters into the Temple, and at once begins to cleanse it. How is He received? As one whose way has been prepared, whose claims have been duly authenticated by a prophet of the Lord, as all acknowledge John to be? Not at all. Forth step the Temple officials and ask Him by what authority He does these things. He has come unto His own; His own receive Him not. He does not, however, too hastily accept their suicidal refusal to receive Him. He gives them time to think of it. He tarries in the neighbourhood, He and John baptising in the same region; patiently waiting, as it would seem, for signs of relenting on the part of the rulers and Pharisees, – one of whom, indeed, has come by night and made inquiries; and who can tell what the result will be – whether this Nicodemus may not be able to win the others over, so that after all there will be waiting for the King the welcome He ought to have, and which He is well entitled to expect after the reception given to His herald? But no: the impression of John's preaching and baptism is wearing off; the hardness of heart returns, and passes into positive bitterness, which reaches such a height that at last Herod finds the tide so turned that he can hazard what a few months before would have been the foolhardy policy of seizing John and shutting him in prison. So ends the mission of John – beginning with largest hope, ending in cruellest disappointment.

The early Judæan ministry of Christ, then, as related by St. John may be regarded as the opportunity which Christ gave to the nation, as represented by the capital and the Temple, to follow out the mission of John to its intended issue – an opportunity which the leaders of the nation wasted and threw away, and which therefore came to nothing. Hence it is that the three Evangelists, without giving any of the details which were afterwards supplied by St. John, sum up the closing months of the forerunner's ministry in the one fact which suggests all, that John was silenced, and shut up in prison. We see, then, that though Jesus did in a sense commence His work in Galilee, He did not do so until He had first given the authorities of the city and the Temple the opportunity of having it begin, as it would seem most natural that it should have begun, in the centre of the old kingdom.



But though it was His treatment in the South which was the immediate cause of this withdrawal to the North and the beginning of the establishment of the new kingdom there, yet this was no unforeseen contingency – this too was anticipated in the prophetic page, for herein was fulfilled the word of Isaiah the prophet, spoken long ago of this same northern land: "The land of Zabulon and the land of Nephtholim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; the people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up."

It is the old story over again. No room in the inn, so He must be born in a manger; no safety in Judæa, so He must be carried to Egypt; no room for Him in His own capital and His Father's house, so He must away to the country, the uttermost part of the land, which men despised, the very speech of which was reckoned barbarous in the polite ears of the metropolitans, a region which was scarce counted of the land at all, being known as "Galilee of the Gentiles," a portion of the country which had been overrun more than any other by the foreign invader, and therefore known as "the region and shadow of death;" here it is that the new light will arise, the new power be first acknowledged, and the new blessing first enjoyed – one of the many illustrations of the Lord's own saying, "Many of the last shall be first, and the first last."

Here, then, our Lord begins the work of setting up His kingdom. He takes up the same message which had seemed to return void to its preacher in the South. John had come saying, "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The people of the South had seemed to repent; and the kingdom seemed about to come in the ancient capital. But the repentance was only superficial; and though it still remained true that the kingdom was at hand, it was not to begin in Jerusalem.

So, in the new; and, to human appearance, far less promising field in the North, the work must be begun afresh; and now the same stirring words are ringing in Galilee, as rang a few months before in Judæa: "Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

It is now in fact close at hand. It is interesting to note its first beginnings. "And Jesus walking by the Sea of Galilee,<sup>4</sup> saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishers. And He saith unto them, Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed Him. And going on from thence He saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them and they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed Him."

Observe in the first place that, though John is in prison, and to all human appearance failure has been written on the work of his life, the failure is only seeming. The multitudes that had been stirred by his preaching have relapsed into their old indifference, but there are a few whose souls have been permanently touched to finer issues. They are not of the lordly Pharisees or of the brilliant Sadducees; they cannot even claim to be metropolitans; they are poor Galilean fishermen: but they gave heed when the prophet pointed them to the Lamb of God, the Messiah that was to come; and though they had only spent a short time in His company, yet golden links had been forged between them; they had heard the Shepherd's voice; had fully recognised His Kingly claims; and so were ready, waiting for the word of command. Now it comes. The same Holy One of Nazareth is walking by the shores of their lake. He has been proclaiming His Kingdom, as now at last beginning; and, though the manner of its establishment is so entirely different from anything to which their thoughts have been accustomed in the past, their confidence in Him is such that they raise no doubt or question. Accordingly, when they see Him coming alone and unattended, without any of the trappings or the suits of royalty, without any badge or sign of office, with a simple word of command, – a word of command, moreover, which

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<sup>4</sup> It is worthy of notice that He has had the same experience even in Galilee as before, for He is cast out of His own place Nazareth, so that He cannot really begin there. He gave them the first opportunity in Galilee as He had given Jerusalem first of all, but they too had rejected it, had driven Him out, and hence it is that the beginning was not in the village up in the hills, but down by the lakeside in the midst of the busy life that thronged its shores.

demanding of them the sacrifice of all for His sake, the absolute trusting of themselves and all their future to His guidance and care, – they do not hesitate for a single moment; but first Andrew and Simon his brother, and a little further on James and John his brother, straightway leave nets, father, friends, home, everything, and follow Him.

Such was the first exercise of the royal authority of the new King. Such was the constitution of His – Cabinet shall we call it? – or of His Kingdom itself, shall we not rather say? for so far as we can see, His cabinet at this moment was all the kingdom that He had. Let us here pause a moment and try to realise the picture painted for us in that grey morning time of what we now call the Christian Era. Suppose some of our artists could reproduce the scene for us: in the background the lake with the deserted boats upon the shore, old Zebedee with a half sad, half bewildered look upon his face, wondering what was happening, trying to imagine what he would do without his sons, and what his sons would do without him and the boat and the nets; and, in the foreground, the five men walking along, four of them without the least idea of where they were going or of what they had to do. Or suppose that, instead of having a picture of it now, with all the light that eighteen centuries have shed upon it, we could transport ourselves back to the very time and stand there on the very spot and see the scene with our own eyes; and suppose that we were told by some bystander, That man of the five that looks like the leader of the rest thinks himself a king: he imagines he has been sent to set up a kingdom of Heaven upon the earth; and he has just asked these other four to join him, and there they are setting out upon their task. What should we have thought? If we had had only flesh and blood to consult with, we should have thought the whole thing supremely ridiculous; we should have expected to see the four men back to their boats and nets again in a few days, sadder but wiser men. How far Zebedee had a spiritually enlightened mind we dare not say; perhaps he was as willing that his sons should go, as they were to go; but if he was, it could not have been flesh and blood that revealed it to him; he as well as his sons must have felt the power of the Spirit that was in Christ. But if he did not at all understand it or believe in it, we can fancy him saying to the two young men when they left: "Go off now, if you like; you will be back again in a few days, and foolish as you have been, your old father will be glad to take you into his boat again."

It is worth while for us to try to realise what happened in its veriest simplicity; for we have read the story so often, and are so thoroughly familiar with it, that we are apt to miss its marvel, to fail to recognise that it is perhaps the most striking illustration in all history of the apostle's statement, "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, ... that no flesh should glory in His presence."

Where was ever a weaker thing in this world than the beginning of this kingdom? It would be difficult to imagine any commencement that would have seemed weaker in worldly eyes. Stand by once again and look at it with only human eyes; say, is it not all weakness together? – weakness in the leader to imagine He can set up a kingdom after such a fashion, weakness in the followers to leave a paying business on such a fool's errand. But "the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men." And now that we look back upon that scene, we recognise it as one of the grandest this earth has ever witnessed. If it were painted now, what light must there be in the Leader's eye, what majesty in His step, what glory of dawning faith and love and hope in the faces of the rest – it must needs be a picture of Sunrise, or it would be utterly unworthy of the theme!

Now follow them: where will they go, and what will they do? Will they take arms and call to arms the country-side? Then march on Jerusalem and take the throne of David, and thence to Rome and snatch from Cæsar the sceptre of the world? "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people." Teaching – preaching – healing: these were the methods for setting up the kingdom. "*Teaching*" – this was the new light; "*preaching* the Gospel of the Kingdom" – this was the new power, power not of the sword but of the Word, the power of persuasion, so that the people will yield themselves willingly or not at all, for there is to be not a shadow of constraint, not

the smallest use of force or compulsion, not the slightest interference with human freedom in this new kingdom; and "*healing*" – this is to be the great thing; this is what a sick world wants, this is what souls and bodies of men alike are crying out for – "healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people." Heavenly light, heavenly power, heavenly healing – these are the weapons of the new warfare; these the regalia of the new kingdom. "And the report of Him went forth into all Syria; and they brought unto Him all that were sick, holden with divers diseases and torments, possessed with devils, and epileptic, and palsied; and He healed them" (R.V.). Call to mind, for a moment, how in the extremity of hunger He would not use one fraction of the entrusted power for His own behoof. "Himself He cannot save." But see how He saves others. No stinting now of the heavenly power; it flows in streams of blessing: "They brought unto Him all that were sick, ... and He healed them."

It is Daybreak on the shores of Galilee. The Sun of Righteousness has risen with healing in His wings.

## VII. ***THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM***

### ("SERMON ON THE MOUNT.")

#### Matt. v., vi., vii

IT may seem almost heresy to object to the time-honoured title "Sermon on the Mount;" yet, so small has the word "sermon" become, on account of its application to those productions of which there is material for a dozen in single sentences of this great discourse, that there is danger of belittling it by the use of a title which suggests even the remotest relationship to these ephemeral efforts. No mere sermon is this, only distinguished from others of its class by its reach and sweep and power: it stands alone as the grand charter of the commonwealth of heaven; or, to keep the simple title the evangelist himself suggests (iv. 23), it is "The Gospel (or good news) of the Kingdom." To understand it aright we must keep this in mind, avoiding the easy method of treating it as a mere series of lessons on different subjects, and endeavouring to grasp the unity of thought and purpose which binds its different parts into one grand whole.

It may help us to do this if we first ask ourselves what questions would naturally arise in the minds of the more thoughtful of the people, when they heard the announcement, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." It was evidently to such persons the Lord addressed Himself. "Seeing the multitudes," we read "He went up into the mountain," perhaps for the purpose of selecting His audience. The idle and indifferent would stay down on the plain; only those who were in some measure stirred in spirit would follow Him as He climbed the steep ascent from the shore of the lake to the plateau above; and in their minds they would in all probability be revolving such questions as these: (1) "What is this kingdom, what advantages does it offer, and who are the people that belong to it?" (2) "What is required of those that belong to it? what are its laws and obligations?" And if these two questions were answered satisfactorily, a third would naturally follow – (3) "How may those who desire to share its privileges and assume its obligations become citizens of it?" These, accordingly, are the three great questions dealt with in succession.

#### **I. The Nature and Constitution of the Kingdom (vv. 2-16): first in itself, and then in relation to the world**

##### *1. In itself ("The Beatitudes"), vv. 2-12.*

The answer to the questions in the people's hearts is given in no cold didactic way. The truth about the heavenly kingdom comes warm from a loving heart yearning over the woes of a weary and heavy-laden humanity. Its first word is "Blessed"; its first paragraph, Beatitudes. Plainly the King of heaven has come to bless. There is no thunder nor lightning nor tempest on this mount; all is calm and peaceful as a summer's day.

How high the key-note struck in this first word of the King! The advantages usually associated with the best earthly government are very moderate indeed. We speak of the commonwealth, a word which is supposed to mean the common welfare; but the common welfare is quite beyond the power of any earthly government, which at most can only give protection against those enemies that would hinder the people from doing what they can to secure their own welfare. But here is a kingdom which

is to secure the well-being of all who belong to it; and not well-being only, but something far beyond and above it: for "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him," and which His ambassador wrapped up in that great word "Blessed," the key-note of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

As He proceeds to show wherein this blessedness is to be found, we are struck by the originality of the conception, and its opposition to vulgar ideas. What the ordinary way of thinking on the subject is to this day can be readily seen in that very word "wealth," which in its original significance means welfare, but from the mistaken idea that a man's life consists in the abundance of the things which he possesses has come to mean what it means now. Who can tell the woes that result from the prevalence of this grand mistake – how men are led off in pursuit of happiness in a wrong direction altogether, away from its true source, and set to contending and competing with one another, so that there is constant danger – a danger averted only by the degree in which the truth enshrined in the Beatitudes prevails – that "the common wealth" will become the common woe? What a different world this would be if only the teaching of Christ on this one subject were heartily accepted – not by a few here and there, but by society at large! Then should we see indeed a kingdom of heaven upon earth.

For observe wherein our new King finds the universal weal. We cannot follow the beatitudes one by one; but glancing over them we see, running through them all, this great truth – that blessedness is essentially spiritual, that it depends not so much on a man's condition as on his character, not so much on what he has as on what he is. It needs no great effort of imagination to see that if men in general were to make it their main object and endeavour in life to be what they ought to be, rather than to scramble for what they can get, this earth would speedily become a moral paradise.

In expounding the blessedness of the kingdom the Master has unfolded the character of its members, thus not only explaining the nature of the kingdom and the advantages to be enjoyed under it, but also showing who those are that belong to it. That this was intended seems evident from the first and the last of the beatitudes both ending with the emphatic words "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." It is as if on the two gates at the hither and farther end of this beautiful garden were inscribed the words, "The truly blessed ones, the citizens of the commonwealth of heaven, are those who are at home here." Originality of conception is again apparent. A kingdom so constituted was an entirely new thing in the world. Previously it had been a matter of race or of place or of forced subjection. The forefathers of these people had belonged to the kingdom of Israel, because they belonged to Israel's race; themselves belonged to the empire of Rome, because their country had been conquered and they were obliged to acknowledge Rome's sway; moreover, they were subjects of Herod Antipas, simply because they lived in Galilee. Here was a kingdom in which race distinctions had no place, which took no account of territorial limits, which made no appeal to force of arms or rights of conquest – a kingdom founded on character.

Yet it is no mere aristocracy of natural virtue. It is not a Royal Academy of the spiritually noble and great. Its line seems rather to stretch down to the lowest, for who else are the poor in spirit? And the mourners and the meek are no elect classes of nature's nobility. On the other hand, however, it runs up to heights even quite out of sight of the easy-going virtue of the day; for those who belong to this kingdom are men full of eager aspirations, bent on heart purity, given to efforts for the good of others, ready even to suffer the loss of all things for truth and righteousness' sake. The line is stretched so far down that even the lowest may enter; yet it runs up so high that those have no place in it who are satisfied with mere average morality, who count it enough to be free from vices that degrade the man, and innocent of crimes that offend the state. Most respectable citizens of an earthly commonwealth such honest men may be; but no kingdom of heaven is open to such as they. The foundations of common morality are of course assumed, as is made specially evident in the next division of the great discourse; but it would have been quite misleading had the Herald of heaven's kingdom said "Blessed are the honest," or "Blessed is the man who tells no lies." The common virtues are quite indispensable; but there must be something beyond these – first a sense of need of something far higher and better,

then a hungering and thirsting after it, and as a necessary consequence some attainment of it, in order to citizenship in the kingdom of heaven and enjoyment of its blessedness.

The last beatitude breaks forth into a song of joy. No light-hearted joy, as of those who shut their eyes to the dark things in life, but joy in facing the very worst the world can do: "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad." O wonderful alchemy of heaven, which can change earth's dust and ashes into purest gold! Think, too, what riches and royalty of spirit in place of the poverty with which the series began.

These eight beatitudes are the diatonic scale of heaven's music. Its key-note is blessing; its upper octave, joy. Those who heard it first with quickened souls could no longer doubt that the kingdom of heaven was at hand; indeed, was there on the mountain that day!

## *2. In relation to the world (vv. 13-16).*

The original promise to Abraham was twofold: "I will bless thee," "Thou shalt be a blessing" (Gen. xii. 2). The beatitudes correspond to the former, the passage before us to the latter. The beatitudes are, so to speak, the home affairs of the kingdom of heaven; the passage which follows is occupied with foreign relations. Those spoke of blessedness within, this speaks of usefulness without; for the disciples of Christ are known not only by their personal character and disposition, but also by their influence on others.

The relations of the members of the kingdom to "those that are without" is a complex and difficult subject; but the essence of it is set forth with surpassing clearness, comprehensiveness and simplicity by the use of two unpretentious but most expressive figures, almost infinite in their suggestiveness – salt and light. This is our first experience of a well-known characteristic of the teaching of Christ – viz., His use of the simplest and most familiar objects of nature and circumstances of daily life, to convey highest and most important truth; and at once we recognise the touch of the Master. We cannot fail to see that out of all nature's infinity He has selected the two illustrations, – the only two, which exactly fit and fill the purpose for which He employs them. To the thoughtful mind there is something here which prepares for such tokens of mastery over nature as are found later on in the hushing of the storm and the stilling of the sea.

"Salt" suggests the conservative, "light" the liberal, side of the politics of the kingdom; but the two are not in opposition, they are in fullest harmony, the one being the complement of the other. Christian people, if they are what they profess to be, are all conservatives and all liberals: conservators of all that is good, and diffusers of all that is of the nature of light. Each of these sides of Christian influence is presented in succession.

"*Ye are the salt of the earth.*" The metaphor suggests the sad fact that, whatever tendency to upward development there may be in the world of nature, there is a contrary tendency in the world of men, so far as character is concerned. The world has often made great advances in civilisation; but these, unless counter-acted by forces from above, have always been accompanied by a degeneracy in morals, which in course of time has brought about the ruin of mighty states. All that is best and most hopeful in mere worldly civilisation has in it the canker of moral evil,

"That rotting inward slowly moulders all."

The only possible counteractive is the introduction of an element into society which will hold in check the forces that make for unrighteousness, and be itself an elevating and purifying influence. Such an element Christians were to be in the world.

Such, to a large extent, they have been. That they were the salt of the Roman empire during the evil days of its decline, no student of history can fail to see. Again, in the "dark ages" that followed, we can still trace the sweetening influence of those holy lives which were scattered like shining grains of salt through the ferment and seething of the times. So it has been throughout, and is still. It is

true that there is no longer the sharp distinction between Christians and the world which there was in days when it cost something to confess Christ. There are now so many Christians in name who are not so in reality, and, on the other hand, so many in reality who are not so in name, and moreover so many who are Christians neither in name nor in reality, but who are nevertheless unconsciously guided by Christian principles as the result of the wide diffusion of Christian thought and sentiment – that the conservative influence of distinctive Christianity is very difficult to estimate and is far less appreciated than it should be. But it is as real and efficient as ever. If Christianity, as a conservative force in society, were to be suddenly eliminated, the social fabric would fall in ruins; but if only the salt were all genuine, if Christian people everywhere had the savour of the eight beatitudes about them, their conservative power as to all that is good, and restraining influence as to all that is evil, would be so manifest and mighty that none could question it.

If the salt would only keep its savour – there is the weak point. We know and feel it after the experience of all these centuries. And did not our omniscient Lord lay His finger on it at the very outset? He needed not that any one should tell Him what was in man. He knew that there was that in His truth which would be genuinely and efficiently conservative; but He knew equally well that there was that in man which would to a large extent neutralise that conservative power, that the salt would be in constant danger of losing its savour. Hence, after the encouraging words "Ye are the salt of the earth," He gives an earnest warning which necessarily moderates the too sanguine anticipations that would otherwise have been excited.

Alas! with what sad certainty has history proved the need of this warning! The salt lost its savour in the churches of the East, or it would never have been cast out and trodden underfoot of the Mohammedan invaders. It lost its savour in the West, or there would have been no papal corruption, growing worse and worse till it seemed as if Western Christendom must in turn be dissolved – a fate which was only averted by the fresh salt of the Reformation revival. In modern times there is ever the same danger, sometimes affecting all the churches, as in the dark days preceding the revival under Whitefield and Wesley, always affecting some of them or some portions of them, as is too apparent on every hand in these days in which we live. There is as much need as ever to lay to heart the solemn warning of the King. It is as pungent as salt itself. "Of what use," He asks, "is tasteless salt? It is fit only to be cast out and trodden under foot of men." Equally useless is the so-called Christian, who has nothing in character or life to distinguish him from the world; who, though he may be honest and truthful and sober, a very respectable citizen of an earthly kingdom, has none of the characteristic marks of the kingdom of heaven, none of the savour of the beatitudes about him. It is only because there are still so many savourless Christians that the value of the Church as a conservative influence on society is so little recognised; and that there are so many critics, not all unintelligent or wilfully unfair, who begin to think it is time that it were cast out and trodden under foot of men.

"*Ye are the light of the world.*" We need not stay to show the liberality of light. Its peculiar characteristic is giving, spending; for this purpose wholly it exists, losing its own life in order to find it again in brightness diffused on all around.

Observe, it is not "Ye carry the light," but "*Ye are the light.*" We are apt to think of light in the abstract – as truth, as doctrine, as something to be believed and held and expounded. We quote the familiar words, "Great is the Truth, and it shall prevail," and we imagine they are true. They are true indeed, in the long run, but not as often understood, certainly not in the region of the moral and spiritual. Of course truth in the abstract, especially moral and spiritual truth, ought to prevail; but it never does when men's interests lie, or seem to lie, in the contrary direction. Such truth, to be mighty, must be vitalised; it must glow in human hearts, burn on human tongues, shine in human lives. The King of truth knew this well; and hence He placed the hope of the future, the hope of dispelling the world's darkness, not in abstract truth, but in truth incarnate in the true disciple: "*Ye are the light of the world.*"

In the strictest and highest sense, of course, Christ Himself is the Light of the world. This is beautifully set forth in discourses reported by another Evangelist (John viii. 12, ix. 5); and, indeed, it has been already taught by implication in the Evangel before us, where, as we have seen, the opening of Christ's ministry is likened to sunrise in the land of Zebulon and Naphtali (chap. iv. 16). But the personal Christ cannot remain upon the earth. Only for a few years can He be in this way the Light of the world, as He expressly says in one of the passages above referred to (John ix. 5); and He is speaking now not for the next few years but for the coming centuries, during which He must be represented by His faithful disciples, appointed to be His witnesses (Acts i. 8) to the ends of the earth; so at once He puts the responsibility on them, and says, "Ye are the light of the world."

This responsibility it was impossible to avoid. As a matter of course, the kingdom of heaven must be a prominent object in the sight of men. The mountain of the Lord's house must be established on the top of the mountains (Isa. ii. 2), and therefore may not be inconspicuous: "A city set on a hill cannot be hid." It has been often said, but it will bear repeating, that Christians are the world's Bible. People who never read a word of either Old or New Testament will read the lives of those who profess to draw their inspiration thence, and will judge accordingly. They will form their opinions of Christ and of His kingdom by those who call themselves or are called by others Christians. "A city set on a hill *cannot* be hid." Here we have a truth complementary to that other conveyed in the symbol of salt. It taught that true Christians exert a great deal of silent, unobserved influence, as of salt hidden in a mass; but, besides this, there is their position as connected with the kingdom of heaven which forbids their being wholly hid.

Indeed, it is their duty to see to it that they are not artificially hid: "Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under the bushel, but on the stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house" (R.V.). How beautifully does the illustration lend itself to the needed caution against timidity, without giving the least encouragement to the opposite vice of ostentation! Why does light shine? Simply because it cannot help it; it is its nature; without effort or even consciousness, and making no noise, it quietly does its duty; and in the doing of it does not encourage but even forbids any looking at itself – and the brighter it is, the more severely does it forbid it. But while there is no ostentatious obtrusiveness on the one hand, there is no ignoble shirking on the other. Who would ever think of kindling a light and then putting it under a bed? Yet how many Christians do that very thing when they are called to work for Christ, to let the light He has given them shine in some of the dark places where it is most needed!

Here, again, our Lord lays His finger on a weak spot. The Church suffers sorely, not only from quantities of savourless salt, – people calling themselves Christians who have little or nothing distinctively Christian about them, – but also from bushel-covered lights, those who are genuinely Christian, but who do all they can to hide it, refusing to speak on the subject, afraid to show earnestness even when they feel it most, carefully repressing every impulse to let their light shine before men, doing everything, in fact, which is possible to render their testimony to Christ as feeble, and their influence as Christians as small, as it can be. How many in all our Christian communities are constantly haunted by a nervous fear lest people should think them forward! For one person who makes a parade of his Christianity there are a hundred or a thousand who want always to shrink into a corner. This is not modesty; it is the sign of an unnatural self-consciousness. The disciples of Christ should act simply, naturally, unconsciously, neither making a display on the one hand nor hiding their light on the other. So the Master puts it most beautifully and suggestively: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works" (not the worker – that is of no consequence – but the works), "and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

So closes the first great division of the Manifesto of the King. It had begun with "goodwill to men"; it has shown the way of "peace on earth"; it closes with "glory to God in the highest." It is a prolonged echo of the angels' song. The Gospel of the Kingdom, not only as set forth here in these beautiful paragraphs, but in all its length and breadth and depth and height, in all its range and scope



and application, is but an expansion of its very first proclamation: "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill to men."

## **II. The Law of the Kingdom (v. 17-vii. 12)**

### *1. General principles (vv. 17-20).*

After blessing comes obligation – after beatitude, law. It is the same order as of old. The old covenant was in its origin and essence a covenant of promise, of blessing. Mercy, not duty, was its key-note. When God called Abraham to the land of promise, His first word was: "I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing" (Gen. xii. 2). Later on came the obligation resulting, as in Genesis xvii. 1: "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." So in the history of the Nation, the promise came first and the law followed it after an interval of four hundred years – a fact of which special use is made by the Apostle Paul (Gal. iii. 17, 18). The Mosaic dispensation itself began by an acknowledgment of the ancient promise ("I am the God of your fathers" – Ex. iii. 6), and a fresh declaration of Divine mercy ("I know their sorrows, and am come to deliver them" – Ex. iii. 7, 8). When Mount Sinai was reached, the entire covenant was summarised in two sentences, the first reciting the blessing, the second setting forth the resulting obligation: "Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself. Now, therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people" (Ex. xix. 3-5). The very Decalogue itself is constructed on the same principle; for before a single commandment is given, attention is called to the great salvation which has been wrought on their behalf: "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Thus closely does the proclamation of the new kingdom follow the lines of the old; far above and beyond it in respect of development, in essence it is the same.

It was therefore most appropriate that, in entering on the subject of the law of His kingdom Christ should begin with the caution, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets." On this point there would necessarily be the greatest sensitiveness on the part of the people. The law was their glory – all their history had gathered round it, the prophets had enforced and applied it; their sacred Scriptures, known broadly as "The Law and the Prophets," had enshrined it. Was it, then, to be set aside for new legislation? The feeling was quite natural and proper. It was necessary, therefore, that the new King should set Himself right on a matter so important. He has not come to overturn everything. He accepts the old covenant more cordially and thoroughly than they do, as will presently appear; He will build on it as a sure foundation; and whatever in His legislation may be new grows naturally out of the old. It is, moreover, worthy of notice that while the Mosaic economy is specially in His mind, He does not entirely leave out of consideration the elements of truth in other religious systems; and therefore defines the attitude He assumes as a Legislator and Prophet, in terms of the widest generality: "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."

While in the widest sense He came not to destroy but to fulfil, so that He could with fullest liberality acknowledge what was good and true in the work of all former teachers, whoever and wherever they had been, thus accepting and incorporating their "broken lights" as part of His "Light of the world" (compare John i. 9), He can speak of the old covenant in a way in which it would have been impossible to speak of the work of earth's greatest and best. He can accept it as a whole without any reservation or deduction: "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Observe, however, that this statement is not at all inconsistent with what He teaches concerning the temporary character of much of the Mosaic legislation; it simply makes it clear that whatever passes away, does not pass by destruction, but by fulfilment — *i. e.*, the evolution of its hidden life – as the bud passes into the rose. The bud is there no longer; but it is not destroyed, it is fulfilled in the rose. So with the law as infolded in the

Old Testament, unfolded in the New. How well fitted to inspire all thoughtful minds with confidence must have been the discovery that the policy of the new kingdom was to be on the lines, not of brand-new experimental legislation, but of Divine evolution!

Not only does He Himself do homage to the law, but takes order that His followers shall do the same. It is no parting compliment that He pays the old covenant. It is to be kept up both in the doing and in the teaching, from generation to generation, even in its least commandments. Not that there is to be such insistence on very small matters as to exclude altogether from the kingdom of heaven those who do not press every jot and tittle; but that these will be reckoned of such importance, that those who are lax in doctrine and practice in regard to them must be counted among the least in the kingdom; while those who destroy nothing, but seek to fulfil everything, will be the great ones. What a foundation is laid here for reverence of all that is contained in the law and the prophets! And has it not been found that even in the very smallest features of the old covenant, even in the details of the tabernacle worship, for example, there is for the devout and intelligent Christian a treasury of valuable suggestion? Only we must beware of putting jots and tittles in the place that belongs to the weightier matters of the law, of which we have warnings sufficient in the conduct of the scribes and Pharisees. Their righteousness had the appearance of extending to the minutest matters; but, large as it seemed in popular eyes, it was not nearly large enough; and accordingly, in closing this general definition of His relation to the old covenant, our Lord had to interpose this solemn warning: "I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven." Theirs was a righteousness as it were of the tips of the fingers, whereas He must have "the whole body full of light"; theirs was a righteousness that tithed mint and anise and cummin, and neglected judgment, mercy and faith; theirs was in the narrow sphere of the letter, that which He demanded must be in the large and lofty region of the Spirit.

## 2. *Illustrations from the Moral Law* (vv. 21-48).

The selection of illustrative instances is made with consummate skill. Our Lord, avoiding that which is specially Jewish in its interest, treats of matters that are of world-wide importance. He deals with the broadest principles of righteousness as adapted to the universal conscience of mankind, starting at the lowest point of mere earthly morality and rising to the very highest development of Christian character, thus leading up to the magnificent conclusion: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

He begins with the crime which the natural conscience most strongly and instinctively condemns, the crime of murder; and shows that the scribes and Pharisees, and those who had been like them in bygone days, really destroyed the sixth commandment by limiting its range to the muscles, so that, if there were no actual killing, the commandment was not broken; whereas its true sphere was the heart, the essence of the forbidden crime being found in unjustifiable anger, even though no word is uttered or muscle moved, – a view of the case which ought to have been suggested to the intelligent student of the law by such words as these: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart" (Lev. xix. 17); or again: "Whoso killeth his neighbour ignorantly, whom he hated not in time past, ... is not worthy of death, inasmuch as he hated him not in time past" (Deut. xix. 4). Hatred in the heart, then, is murder. How searching! And how terribly severe the sentence! Even in its least aggravated form it is the same as that decreed against the actual shedding of blood. All the three sentences are death-penalties, only there are aggravations in the penalty where there are aggravations in the offence. Such is the Saviour's teaching on the great subject of sin. Yet there are those who imagine that the Sermon on the Mount is all the gospel they need!

The two practical applications which follow press the searching subject home. The one has reference to the Throne of Grace, and teaches that all offences against a brother must be put away before approaching it. The other has reference to the Throne of Judgment, and teaches by a familiar illustration drawn from common experience in the courts of Palestine that it is an awful thing to think

of standing there with the memory of a single angry feeling that had not been forgiven and utterly removed (v. 26).

The crime of adultery furnishes the next illustration; and He deals with it on the same lofty principles and with the same terrible severity. He shows that this crime, too, is of the heart – that even a wanton look is a commission of it; and again follows up His searching exposition by a twofold practical application, first showing that personal purity must be maintained at any cost (vv. 29, 30), and then guarding the sacredness of home, by that exaltation of the marriage bond which has secured the emancipation of woman and her elevation to her proper sphere, and kept in check those frightful evils which are ever threatening to defile the pure and sacred spring from which society derives its life and sustenance (vv. 31, 32).

Next comes the crime of perjury – a compound sin, which breaks at the same time two commandments of the Decalogue, the third and the ninth. Here, again, our Lord shows that, if only due homage is paid in the heart to reverence and to truth, all swearing is superseded. Let a man habitually live in the fear of the Lord all the day long, and "his word is as good as his oath" – he will always speak the truth, and will be incapable of taking the name of the Lord in vain. It is of course to be remembered that these are the laws of the kingdom of Christ; not laws meant for the kingdoms of this world, which have to do with men of all sorts, but for a kingdom made up of those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, who seek and find purity of heart. This passage accordingly has no bearing on the procedure of secular courts of justice. But, though the use of oaths may still be a necessity in the world, in the kingdom of heaven they have no place. The simple "Yea, yea," "Nay, nay," is quite enough where there is truth in the inward parts and the fear of God before the eyes; and the feeling of reverence, not only for God Himself but for all the works of His hands, will effectually prevent the most distant approach to profanity.

The sin of revenge furnishes the next illustration. The Pharisaic perversion of the old law actually sanctioned private revenge, on the ground of a statute intended for the guidance of the courts of justice, and given for the sake of curbing the revengeful spirit which without it would lead a prosecutor to demand that his enemy should suffer more than he had inflicted. In this way they really destroyed that part of the Mosaic legislation, whereas He fulfilled it by developing still further, – bringing, in fact, to perfection, – that spirit of humanity which had dictated the law at the first. The true spirit of the Mosaic legislation was to discourage private revenge by assigning such cases to the courts, and curbing it still further by the limitation of the penalty imposed. Was not this spirit most nobly fulfilled, carried to its highest development, when the Saviour laid it down as the law of His kingdom that our revenge is to be the returning of good for evil?

The four practical illustrations (vv. 39-42) have been a source of difficulty, but only to those who forget that our Saviour is all the while warning against "the letter that killeth," and showing the need of catching "the spirit" of a commandment which "giveth life" to it. To deal with these illustrations according to the letter, as telling us exactly what to do in particular cases, is not to fulfil but to destroy the Saviour's words. The great thing, therefore, is to catch their spirit; then they will be found of use, not for so many specified cases, but for all cases whatever. As an illustration of the difficulties to which we refer, mention may be made of the prejudice against the passage which suggests the turning of the other cheek, on the ground that it encourages a craven spirit. Take it as a definite command, and this would be in many cases the result. It would be the result wherever fear or pusillanimity was the motive. But where is there in all this passage the least trace of fear or pusillanimity? It is all love and magnanimity. It is the very antipodes of the craven spirit. It is the heroism of self-denying love!

The last illustration cuts at the root of all sin and crime, the tap-root of selfishness. The scribes and Pharisees had made use of those regulations, most needful at the time, which separated Israel from other nations, as an excuse for restricting the range of love to those prepared to render an equivalent. Thus that wonderful statute of the old legislation, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as

thyself," was actually made a minister to selfishness; so that, instead of leading them to a life above the world, it left them not a whit better than the lowest and most selfish of the people. "If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?" Thus was the noble "royal law according to the Scripture" destroyed by the petty quibbling use of the word "neighbour." Our Lord fulfilled it by giving to the word neighbour its proper meaning, its widest extent, including even those who have wronged us in thought or word or deed, "I say unto you, Love your *enemies*, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."

How lofty, how far beyond the reach of the natural man! – but not impossible, or it would not have been demanded. It is one of the things of the kingdom concerning which the assurance is given later on: "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find." Still, the Master knows full well that it is no small demand He is making of poor human nature. So at this point He leads our thoughts upward to our Father in heaven, suggesting in that relationship the possibility of its attainment (for why should not a child be like its father?) and the only example possible, for this was a range of righteousness beyond the reach of all that had gone before – He Himself as the Son of the Father would later set it forth before the eyes of men in all its lustre. But that time is yet to come, and meantime He can only point upward to the Highest, and urge them to this loftiest height of righteousness by the tender plea, "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

How beautiful and expressive are these symbols from nature, and how encouraging the interpretation of nature His use of them suggests! And what shall we say of their suggestiveness in the higher sphere of the spirit? Already the Sun of Righteousness is rising with healing in His wings; and in due time the rain of the Spirit will fall in fulness of blessing; so shall His disciples receive all that is needful to raise them to the very highest in character and conduct, in beatitude and righteousness; and accordingly their Master may well finish His whole exposition of the morals of the kingdom with the stirring, stimulating call, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

### 3. *Illustrations from Religious Duty* (vi. 1-18).

The righteousness of the kingdom is still the great subject; for the reading of the Revised Version in the first verse of the chapter is evidently the correct one. The illustrations of the preceding passage have all come under the head of what we call morality as distinguished from religion, but it is important to observe that our Lord gives no sanction to the separation of the two.

Morality divorced from religion is a flower without root, which may bloom for a while, but in the end must wither away; religion without morality is – nothing at all; worse than nothing, for it is a sham. It is evident, of course, that this great word "righteousness," as used by our Lord, has a far wider scope than is given to it by those who take it merely as the equivalent of truth and honesty, as if a man could in any proper sense of the word be righteous, who was ungenerous to his neighbours, unfilial to God, or not master of himself.

Again, we have a principle laid down: "Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them" (R.V.). It is the same great principle as before, though the caution in which it is embodied is different. For if we compare ver. 20 of the preceding chapter, and remember its subsequent development in the verses which follow, we find that it agrees with the warning before us in insisting on righteousness of the heart as distinguished from that which is merely outward. The difference lies in this, that whereas, in the cases already dealt with, external conformity with the law is good so far as it goes, but does not go nearly far enough ("except your righteousness shall exceed," exceed, *i. e.*, by reaching back and down to the deepest recesses of the heart), in the cases now to be taken up external conformity is not good in itself, but really evil, inasmuch as it is mere pretence. Accordingly the caution now must needs be much stronger: "*Be ye not* as the hypocrites."

It is not, however, the being seen which is condemned, otherwise the caution would be at variance with the earnest counsel in chap. v. 16, and would, in fact, amount to a total prohibition of

public worship. As before, it is a matter of the heart. It is the hidden motive which is condemned: "Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, *to be seen of them.*"

The principle is applied in succession to Almsgiving, to Prayer, to Fasting.

*Almsgiving* is no longer regarded as distinctively a religious duty. Nor can it be put under the head of morality according to the common idea attached to that word. It rather occupies a kind of borderland between them, coming under the head of philanthropy. But whence came the spirit of philanthropy? Its foundation is in the holy mountains. Modern philanthropy is like a great fresh-water lake, on the shores of which one may wander with admiration and delight for great distances without discovering any connection with the heaven-piercing mountains. But such connection it has. The explorer is sure to find somewhere an inlet showing whence its waters come, a bright sparkling stream which has filled it and keeps it full; or springs below it, which, though they may flow far underground, bring the precious supplies from the higher regions, perhaps quite out of sight. If these connections with the upper springs were to be cut off, the beautiful lake would speedily dry up and disappear. Almsgiving, therefore, is in its right place here: its source is in the higher regions of the righteousness of the kingdom. And in these early days the lakes had not been formed, for the springs were only beginning to flow from the great Fountain-head.

The general object our Lord has in view, moreover, leads Him to treat the subject, not in relation to those who receive, but to those who give. There may be good done through the gifts of men who have no higher object in view than the sounding of their own trumpet; but, so far as they themselves are concerned, their giving has no value in the sight of God. Everything depends on the motive: hence the injunction of secrecy. There may indeed be circumstances which suggest or even require a certain measure of publicity, for the sake of the object or cause to which gifts are devoted; but so far as the giver is concerned, the more absolute the secrecy the better. For though it is possible to give in the most open and public way without at all indulging the petty motive of ostentation, yet so weak is human nature on that side of it, that our Lord puts His caution in the very strongest terms, counselling us not only to avoid courting the attention of others, but to refrain from even thinking of what we have done; for that seems to be the point of the striking and memorable words "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth."

The trumpet-blowing may be a great success. What the Master thinks of that success is seen in the caustic irony of the words "Verily I say unto you, they have their reward." There it is – and you can see just how paltry and pitiful it is; for there is nothing a man is more ashamed of than to be caught in even the slightest attempt to parade himself. But if the praise of men is never thought of, it cannot be said "they have their reward." Their reward is to come; and though it doth not yet appear, it will certainly be worthy of our Father Who seeth in secret.

Under the head of *Prayer* two cautions are given. The one may be dismissed in a few words, not only because it exactly corresponds with the preceding case, but because among us there is scarcely any temptation to that against which it is directed. The danger now is all the other way. The temptation for true children of the kingdom is not to parade their devotion for show, but to conceal it for shame. Still there are some directions in which even yet the caution against ostentation in prayer is needed – as, for instance, by those who in public or social prayer assume affected tones, or try in any way to give an impression of earnestness beyond what is really felt. Of the sanctimonious tone we may say that it has its reward in the almost universal contempt it provokes.

The other caution is directed, not against pretence, but against superstition. It will be seen, however, that the two belong to the same category, and therefore are most appropriately dealt with together. What is the sin of the formalist? It is that his heart is not in his worship. What is the folly of the vain repetitionist? It is the same – that his heart is not in his words. For there is no discouragement of repetition, if it be prompted by genuine earnestness. Our Lord again and again encouraged even importunate prayer, and Himself in the Garden offered the same petition three times in close succession. It is not, then, repetition, but "*vain* repetition," – empty of heart, of desire, of

hope – that is here rebuked; not much prayer, but "much speaking," the folly of supposing that the mere "saying" of prayers is of any use apart from the emotions of the heart in which true prayer essentially consists.

To guide us in a matter so important, our Lord not only cautions against what prayer ought not to be, but shows what it ought to be. Thus, incidentally as it were, He hands to us this pearl of great price, this purest crystal of devotion, to be a possession of His people for ever, never to lose its lustre through millenniums of daily use, its beauty and preciousness becoming rather more and more manifest to each successive generation.

It is given especially as a model of *form*, to show that, instead of the vain repetitions condemned, there should be simplicity, directness, brevity, order – above all, the plain, unadorned expression of the heart's desire. This main object is accomplished perfectly; a whole volume on the form of prayer could not have done it better, or so well. But, besides this, there is instruction as to the *substance* of prayer. We are taught to rise high above all selfish considerations in our desires, seeking the things of God first; and when we come to our own wants, asking nothing more than our Father in heaven judges to be sufficient for the day, while all the stress of earnestness is laid on deliverance from the guilt and power of sin. Then as to the *spirit* of prayer, mark the filial reverence implied in the invocation, – the fraternal spirit called for by the very first word of it, and the spirit of forgiveness we are taught to cherish by the very terms in which we ask it for ourselves. All this and more is superadded to the lesson for the sake of which the model prayer has been given.

The third application is to *Fasting*. In another place (ix. 14) will be found the principle to be followed in regard to times of fasting. Here it is taken for granted that there will be such times, and the principle announced at the beginning of the chapter is applied to the exercise. Let it be done in secret, before no other eye than His Who seeth in secret; thus only can we have the blessed recompense which comes to the heart that is truly humbled in the sight of God.

This principle plainly condemns that kind of fasting which is done only before men, as when in the name of religion people will abstain from certain kinds of food and recreation on particular days or at appointed times, without any corresponding humbling of the heart. The fasting must be before God, or it is a piece of acting, "as the hypocrites," who play a part before men, and when they go home put off the mask and resume their proper life. "Be ye not as the hypocrites;" therefore see that your fasting is before God; and then, if the inward feeling naturally leads to restriction of the pleasures of the table or of society, or to any other temporary self-denial, let it by all means be followed out, but so as to attract just as little attention as possible; and not only so, but if any traces of the secret exercise still remain when the penitential hour with God alone is over, these are to be carefully removed before returning to the ordinary intercourse of life. Our "penitence and prayer" are for ourselves only, and for God. Before men our *light* should shine.

The three illustrations cover by suggestion the whole ground; for prayer may well be understood in that large scriptural sense in which praise is included, and fasting is suggestive of all mortification of the flesh and humbling of the spirit. The first shows true religion in its outgoing, the second in its upgoing, while the third abases self; and all three are mutually helpful, for the higher we soar Godward in praise and prayer, the lower shall we bend in reverent humility, and the further will our hearts go out in world-wide charity.

All depends on truth in the inward parts, on the secret life of the soul with God. How impressively is this stated throughout the whole passage! Observe the almost rhythmical repetitions: "Be ye not as the hypocrites," three times repeated; "Verily I say unto you, they have their reward," the very words three times repeated; "Let thine alms be *in secret*," "Pray to thy Father which is *in secret*," "That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is *in secret*"; and once more, three times repeated, "Thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee." No vain repetitions these. They press the great lesson home with a threefold force.

4. *Duty in relation to the World and the things of it* (vi. 19-vii. 12).

From this point onwards the plan of the discourse is not so apparent, and some have given up the idea of finding orderly sequence in it; yet there seems to be no insuperable difficulty, when the right point of view is taken. The perplexity seems to have arisen from supposing that at this point an entirely new subject begins, whereas all that follows on to chapter vii. 12, arranges itself easily under the same general head – the Righteousness of the Kingdom. According to this arrangement of the discourse there is an introduction of fourteen verses (v. 3-16), and a concluding passage of almost exactly the same length (vii. 13-27); while the main discussion occupies nearly three chapters, the subject throughout being the Righteousness of the Kingdom, dealt with, first as morality (v. 17-48), second as religion (vi. 1-18), and finally as spirituality (vi. 19-vii. 12), beginning and ending with a general reference to the law and the prophets (v. 17, vii. 12). The first of these divisions had to do with righteousness as between man and man;<sup>5</sup> the second with righteousness before God alone; while the third, on the consideration of which we now enter, deals with righteousness as between the children of the kingdom and the world in the midst of which it is set up. And just as in the paragraphs already considered we have been shown that our Lord came not to destroy but to fulfil the code of ethics, and the rules for Divine service in the law and the prophets, so in this it will be made equally apparent that He came not to destroy but to fulfil the principles involved in the political code by which Israel was separated from the nations of the world to be the Lord's peculiar people.

The subject before us now, therefore, is the relations of the children of the kingdom to the world; and it is dealt with —

(1) *As regards the good things of the world.* From the Beatitudes we have already learned that the blessedness of the children of the kingdom is to consist not in the abundance of the things they possess, but in qualities of soul, possessions in the realm of the unseen. Yet the children of the kingdom cannot do without the good things of this world; what, then, has the law of the kingdom to say in regard to their acquisition and use? The subject is large and difficult; but with amazing clearness and force, comprehensiveness and simple practical utility, it is set forth in a single paragraph, which is also characterised by a surpassing beauty of language. As before, the straight and narrow path is marked off by cautions on the right and on the left. On the one side must be shunned the Scylla of *greed*, on the other the Charybdis of *care*. The one is the real danger of seeking too much, the other the supposed danger of having too little, of "the good things of life."

It is not, however, a question of quantity. As before, it is a question of the heart. On the one hand, it is not the danger of having too much, but of seeking too much; on the other, it is not the danger of having too little, but of fearing that there will not be enough. It is a mistake, therefore, to say that the one caution is for the rich and the other for the poor. True, indeed, the rich are in greater danger of Scylla than of Charybdis, and the poor in more peril from the pool than from the rock; still a rich man may be, often is, a victim of care, while a poor man may readily have his heart far too much set on the yearly or weekly increase of his little store. It seems better, then, to make no distinction of classes, but to look at each caution as needed by all.

(a) Against seeking the good things of the world too earnestly (vv. 19-24). It is important to notice the strong emphasis on the word "treasure." This is evident not only from the reduplication of it – for the literal translation would be, "Treasure not for yourselves treasures upon the earth" – but also from the reason against it assigned in ver. 21: "Where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also." It is clear, then, that there is no prohibition of wealth, but only of making it "thy treasure." But against this the law of the kingdom is in the highest degree decided and uncompromising. The language is exceedingly forcible, and the reasons marshalled are terribly strong. With all faithfulness, and with growing earnestness, the Master shows that to disobey this law is foolish, pernicious, fatal. It

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<sup>5</sup> It is true that under the head of oaths comes the duty of reverence, which scarcely seems to fall under this head; but it will be remembered that this point comes in by way of a very natural suggestion in dealing with falsehood and the regulation of conversation, which evidently belongs to righteousness as between man and man.

is *foolish*; for all earthly treasures are perishable, eaten by moth, consumed by rust, stolen by thieves, while the heavenly treasures of the spiritually-minded are incorruptible and safe for evermore. It is not only foolish, but most *pernicious*, – injurious to that which is most sensitive and most precious in the life, that which is to the soul what the eye is to the body, the darkening of which means the darkening of the whole body, not the mere clouding of the vision, but the condition suggested by the awful words "full of darkness"; while the corresponding deterioration in the lower ranges of the life is indicated by what follows: "If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" It is not only foolish and most pernicious, but *fatal*, for "No man *can* serve two masters"; so that to set the heart on the world means to give up the kingdom. It is vain to try to satisfy two claimants of the heart. One or other must be chosen: "Ye *cannot* serve God and mammon."

(b) Against anxiety about the things of the world. The Revised Version has, by its correct translation, now removed the difficulty which seemed to lie in the words "Take no thought." To modern ears these words seemed to encourage thoughtlessness and to bless improvidence. Our translators of the seventeenth century, however, had no such idea. It is the result of a change of meaning in a current phrase. At the time the translation was made, "to take thought" meant to be anxious, as will appear from such a passage as that in the first book of Samuel (ix. 5), where Saul says to his servant, "Come and let us return; lest my father leave caring for the asses, and *take thought* for us," evidently in the sense of "be anxious about us."<sup>6</sup> It is then, manifestly, not against thoughtfulness and providence, but against anxious care that the caution is directed.

Although this evil seems to lie in the opposite direction from that of avarice, it is really the same both in its root and its fruit, for it is due to the estrangement of the heart from our Father in heaven, and amounts, in so far as it prevails, to enslavement to the world. The covetous man is enslaved in one way, the anxious man in another; for does not our common language betray it every time we think or speak of "*freedom* from care"? We need not wonder, then, that our Lord should connect what He is about to say on this evil so closely with what He has said on the other, as He does by use of the word *therefore*: "Therefore I say unto you, Be not anxious for your life."

But though, like the other, it is slavery, the sin of it is not nearly so great, and hence the difference of tone, which cannot but be observed as this new caution is given. It is no longer strong condemnation, but gentle expostulation; not dark threatening now, but tender pleading. As before, reason after reason is given against yielding to the all too natural weakness of the human heart. We are encouraged to remember what God has given already: the life, with such amazing powers and capabilities; the body, with all its marvellous intricacy and adaptation: and can it be supposed that He is likely to withhold the food to maintain the life, the raiment to clothe the body? – to remember how the little birds of the air and the modest lilies of the field are not forgotten: how then can we think that our Father would forget us, who are of so much more value than they? – to remember that the very fact that we know Him as our Father should be guarantee enough, preventing us from an anxious solicitude pardonable in the heathen, who have no such knowledge of a Father in heaven Who knoweth what His children need; – to remember also how vain and fruitless is our care, seeing we cannot in the very smallest lengthen the life for which we fret, while our times are wholly in the hand of Him Who gave it at first and daily satisfies its wants. Such is a bare outline of the thought in this passage, to attempt to expound or illustrate which would be to spoil it. The best way to deal with such a passage is first to study it carefully to see that its meaning and the point of all its parts is clearly apprehended, and then quietly, slowly, lovingly to read it over and let its heavenly music enter into the soul. Then, when the reading is finished and the great lesson has filled the heart with trustful love, we may look back upon it and observe that not only is a great spiritual lesson taught, but

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<sup>6</sup> This complete change of meaning, amounting in fact to the destruction and almost to the inversion of the sense, is one of many illustrations of the absolute need of revision from time to time of translations, not only to make them more correct, but even to keep them as correct as they were at first.



incidentally we are encouraged and directed to interrogate nature and learn what she has to teach, to gaze on her beauty and lovingly look at what she has to show. Thus we find, as it were by the way, in the simple words of our King, the germ principles of science and of art.

But these are wayside pearls; no special attention is called to them. These glimpses of nature come so naturally from the Lord of nature that nothing is made of them – they "flash along the chords and go"; and we return to the great lesson which, now that the cautions have been given, can be put in its positive form: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (vi. 33.). Seek ye first *His* kingdom, and *His* righteousness. Already, as we have seen, this lesson has been implied in the Lord's Prayer; but it is well that it should be expressly set down – this will insure that the treasure is above, that the eye is clear, that the life is one: "and all these things shall be added," so that to-morrow need not trouble you. Trouble there must be in the world, but no one need have more than each day brings: "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

(2) *As regards the evil in the world.* The transition from the good things of the world to the evil that is in it comes quite naturally from the turn the Master's thought has taken in the close of the preceding paragraph. It is important to observe, however, that the whole subject of the evil in the world is not in view at this point. Has not the evil in the world in the large sense been in view from the beginning throughout; and has not the great subject of righteousness had all along as its background the dark subject of sin? The one point here is this: the attitude of the children of the kingdom to the evil which they cannot but see in the people of the world by whom they are surrounded.

Here, as before, there are two warnings, each against a danger lying in opposite directions: the one, the danger of making too much of the evil we see, or think we see, in others; the other, that of making too little of it.

(a) As against making too much of it – the danger of censoriousness (vii. 1-5). Here, again, the language is very strong, and the warning given is solemn and earnest – a sure sign that the danger is real and great. Again, too, considerations are urged, one after another, why we should beware. First, there is so much evil in ourselves, that we should be most careful how we condemn it in others, for "with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Moreover, severity is a sign not of purity but of the reverse: "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" Our severity should be applied to ourselves, our charity to others; especially if we would have any success in the correcting of our neighbour's faults: "How wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me cast out the mote out of thine eye; and lo, the beam is in thine own eye?" (R.V.) Otherwise we are hypocrites, and we must thoroughly reform ourselves before we have any idea even how to begin to improve others: "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." Of what exceeding value is this teaching just where it stands! The Saviour has been summoning His people not only to pure morality and true godliness, but to lofty spirituality of mind and heart; and knowing what was in man – knowing that dangers lurked on his path at every turn, and that even the highest spirituality has its special danger, its besetting sin – He points it out, paints it in all its blackness, spares not the sin of the saint any more than the sin of the sinner, calls the man that gathers his skirts about him with the word or the thought "I am holier than thou" by the same ugly name with which He brands the poor fools who disfigure their faces that they may be seen of men to fast. Yet, severe as it is, is it not needed? does not our best judgment approve and applaud? and are we not glad and grateful that our Lord has warned us so earnestly and impressively against a danger it might never have occurred to us to fear?

But there is another side to the subject; so we have another warning, in relation to the evil we see in the men of the world. It is —

(b) Against making too little of it (ver. 6). Though we may not judge, we must discriminate. It may be wrong to condemn; but it may be necessary to withdraw, otherwise sacred things may be profaned and angry passions stirred, and thus much harm may be done though only good was

intended. Such is the manifest purport of the striking caution: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you."

The Saviour is now about to close what He has to say on the Righteousness of the Kingdom in its relation to the Law and the Prophets; and He does it by setting forth in most memorable words a great privilege and a compact, comprehensive, portable rule – a privilege which will keep the heart right with God, a rule which will keep the heart right with man (vv. 7-12). The former is of course the more important of the two, so it comes first and has much the larger space. It is the mighty privilege of prayer. When we think of the height and the depth, the length and the breadth, of the righteousness of the kingdom – when we think of the dangers which lurk on every hand and at every stage in our life-journey – we may well cry, "Who is sufficient for these things?" To that cry of the heart this is the answer: "Ask, and it shall be given you." We have had prayer before; but it was prayer as a part of righteousness, prayer as a religious duty. Now it is prayer as a power, as the one sure and only means of avoiding the terrible evils on every side, and obtaining the unspeakable blessings, the "good things" (ver. 11) of the kingdom of heaven. This being so, it was of the greatest importance that we should have faith to use it. Hence the repeated assurance, and the plain strong language in which it is conveyed; hence, too, the simple, strong and touching arguments to dispel our doubts and encourage our trust (vv. 9-11).

Here, again, of what priceless value are these few words of our blessed Lord! Just where they are needed most they come, bringing "strength to the fainting heart" in view of the seemingly inaccessible heights of God's holy hill, on which the city of His kingdom is set. Why need we faint or fear, now that we can ask and be sure of receiving, can seek and be sure of finding, can knock at door after door of these halls of Sion, and have them, one after another, opened at our touch?

Again as before, prayer to God is closely connected with our behaviour to men. In the model prayer we were taught to say "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors"; and not only so, but a special warning was added, that if we do not forgive others, we cannot be forgiven. So here too we are reminded that if we are to expect our Father to act in a fatherly way to us by giving us good things, we must act in a brotherly way to our neighbours. Hence the golden rule which follows, and hence its connection with the prayer-charter by the word "therefore." And now that our relations to God and man have been summed up in the filial relation embodied in prayer, and in the fraternal relation embodied in the golden rule, all is complete, and the proof of this is furnished in the appropriate concluding words: "This is the Law and the Prophets."

### **III. Invitation to enter the Kingdom (vii. 13-29)**

The Master has now said everything necessary in order to clear away popular misapprehensions, and place the truth about His kingdom fairly before the minds of His hearers. He has explained its nature as inward and spiritual, setting forth the character of those who belong to it, the blessedness they will enjoy, and the influence they will exert on the world around them. He has set forth clearly and fully the obligations that will rest upon them, as summed up in the comprehensive requirement of righteousness understood in a larger and deeper sense than ever before – obligations of such stringency as to make it apparent that to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness is no holiday undertaking, that it is no easy thing to be a Christian, but that it requires self-restraint, self-humbling, self-denial; and that therefore His kingdom cannot be attractive to the many, but must appeal to those who are earnest-spirited enough to ask and seek and knock for admittance.

Now that all has been fully and faithfully set forth – now that there is no danger of obtaining disciples under misapprehension – the great invitation is issued: *Enter ye in*. It is the free universal invitation of the Gospel, as large and liberal as that later one, "Whosoever will, let him come," though given in such a way as to keep still prominently before the minds of all comers what they may expect,

and what is expected of them: "Enter ye in by the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many be they that enter in thereby. For narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, that leadeth unto life, and few be they that find it" (R.V.).

The terms of this first invitation are very significant. The motives of fear and hope are appealed to; but not directly or specially. In the background lies, on the one hand, the dark doom of "destruction," and on the other the glorious hope of "life"; but neither the one nor the other is made emphatic. The demand for "righteousness" has been elaborated in full, and warnings against sin have been multiplied and pressed with intensest earnestness; but Christ does not now, as on account of the hardness of men's hearts He felt it needful later on to do, set forth in language that appeals vividly to the imagination the fate of those who take the broad way of easy self-indulgence; nor does He endeavour to picture the things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived, which God hath prepared for them that love Him; He simply suggests in the briefest manner, by the use of a single word in each case – and that word characterised not so much by strength as by suggestiveness what will be the fate of the one, the goal of the other. Suggestive as both words are in the highest degree, they are not emphatic, but lie as it were in the background, while the attention is kept on the present alternative: on the one hand the wide gate, the broad way, the many thronging it; on the other, the narrow gate, the straitened way, the few finding it. Our Lord summons not so much to a choice that will pay, as to a choice that will cost; and in so doing makes His appeal to all that is noblest and highest and best in human nature.

Throughout the whole discourse He has been leading up to this point. He has been setting forth no prospect of happiness "to draw the carnal eye," but an ideal of blessedness to win the spiritual heart. He has been unfolding a righteousness, which, while it cannot but be repulsive to man's natural selfishness, profoundly stirs and satisfies his conscience; and now, in strict keeping with all that has gone before, the appeal is made in such a way as shall commend it, not to the thoughtless, selfish crowd, but to those whose hearts have been drawn and whose consciences have been touched by His presentation of the blessedness they may expect and the righteousness expected of them. From all this there is surely to be learned a most important lesson, as to the manner in which the Gospel should usually be presented – not by sensational descriptions of the glories of heaven or the horrors of hell, nor by the mere reiteration of exhortations to "come to Jesus," but by such information of the mind, awakening of the heart, and stirring of the conscience as are found in perfection in this great discourse of the Master.

It is characteristic of the large view our Lord takes of human life that He speaks of only two paths. There seem so many, leading off in all different directions; and so there are on a limited view of life's horizon; but when eternal issues are in sight, there are but two: the easy path of self-indulgence leading down to death, and the difficult path of duty<sup>7</sup> leading up to life.

It is worthy of remark that there is not a trace of asceticism in our Lord's representation. The straitness referred to is not outward, any more than the righteousness is; so that there is no encouragement given to self-imposed restrictions and limitations, as in the monastic vows of "poverty, chastity, and obedience." The way is strait enough in itself without any effort of ours to make it straiter. It is enough that we set ourselves to keep all the commandments; so shall we have a sufficiency of exercise to toughen our spiritual fibre, to strengthen our moral energies, to make us men and women instead of slaves of lust or tools of mammon. For, be it ever remembered, the way we take leads on naturally and unavoidably to its end. Destruction is no arbitrary punishment for self-indulgence; nor is life an arbitrary reward for self-discipline and surrender to the will of God. The path of self-indulgence "leadeth to destruction," by a law which cannot be annulled or set aside. But the path of self-restraint and self-surrender (for these are what make of us men, and not "blind mouths," as

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<sup>7</sup> Duty of course in its largest sense – to God and man and self – including all "righteousness" in the Master's sense of the word.

Milton expressively puts it), the path which is entered by the strait gate, and is continued along the narrow way, is one which in the course of natural development "leadeth unto life."

The call to enter is followed by words of solemn warning against certain dangers which might beset even those who wish to enter. First, the danger of false guidance: "Beware of false prophets." The danger lies in the future. Hitherto, while speaking throughout of present duty, there have been backward glances over the past, as our Lord has made it evident, point after point, that the righteousness of His kingdom was not the destruction but the fulfilment of the law and the prophets. Now, however, He anticipates the time when there will be those claiming to speak in the name of God, or in His own name, whose doctrines will not be a fulfilment but a destruction of the Truth, and a constant danger to those who may be exposed to their wolf-like ravages. There is manifestly no reference to such differences of opinion as divide real Christians from each other in these days. The doctrine throughout this manifesto is not speculative, but practical; it nowhere brings into prominence matters of opinion, or what are called theological tenets, but everywhere lays stress on that which immediately and powerfully affects the life. So it is here also, as is evident from the criterion suggested for the detection of false teachers: "By their fruits ye shall know them." Besides, the connection in which the caution occurs makes it evident that our Lord had specially in view those teachers who would lead their disciples astray as to the way of life, especially those who would dare to make that easy which he had shown to be "strait," who would set before their hearers or readers a broad path instead of the narrow one which alone leadeth unto life. This is a danger which besets us in these days. There is so strong a sentiment abroad in favour of liberality – and liberality properly so called is so admirable, and has been so much a stranger in times past – that we are in danger of accepting in its name easy-going representations of the Christian life which amount to a total abolition of the strait gate and the narrow way. Let us by all means be liberal enough to acknowledge all who have entered by the strait gate of genuine repentance, and are walking in the narrow way of faith and obedience, however much they may differ from us in matters of opinion, forms of worship, or modes of work; but let us beware how we give even the smallest encouragement to any on the broad road to imagine that they can continue as they are, and find it all right in the end. So to tamper with truth in the guise of liberality is to play the wolf in sheep's clothing.

The test our Lord gives for "discerning the spirits" is one which requires time for its application, but it is the only sure one; and when we remember that the Master is now looking forward into the future history of His kingdom, we can see why He should lay stress on a test whose operation, though slow, was sure. It is of course assumed that the first criterion is the Word of the Lord Himself. This is the law of the kingdom; but, knowing well what was in man, the Lord could not but foresee that there would be those who could so twist any words that might be spoken on those great subjects as to lay snares for the unwary; and therefore, besides the obvious appeal "to the law and to the testimony," He supplied a practical test which, though less speedy in its application, was perfectly sure in its results.

The announcement of so important a test leads to the development of the general principle on which its validity depends – viz., the vital connection between essential doctrine and life. In the long run the one is always the outcome of the other. In the spiritual as in the natural world every species brings forth fruit "after its kind." "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." The law being so absolute, making it certain, on the one hand, that where there is truth in the inward parts there will be good fruit in the outward life, and on the other, that where there is corrupt fruit in the outward life there must be that which is corrupt in the hidden man of the heart, it follows that the criterion is so sure as to be without appeal: "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (ver. 19), and therefore may well determine the question as to who are trustworthy teachers in the Church: "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

In the development of the principle the Master's thought has been enlarged so as to include not teachers only, but all His disciples; and His range of view has been extended so as to embrace the last things. The great day of Judgment is before him. He sees the multitudes gathered around the throne. He foresees that there will be many on that great day who will discover, when it is too late, that they have allowed themselves to be deceived, that they have not been careful enough to test their spiritual guides, that they have not been careful enough to try themselves and make sure that their fruits were such that the Lord of the vineyard could recognise them as His own. He is filled with sympathy and sorrow at the prospect; so He lifts up His voice in earnest warning, that, if possible, none of those to whom the words will ever come may allow themselves to fall into so fatal an error: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven."

How naturally, and as it were unconsciously and inevitably, He has passed from the Teacher to the Judge! Not as a personal claim. In His earliest teaching He kept personal claims as much in the background as possible. But now it is impossible to avoid some disclosure of His divine authority. He must speak of the Judgment; and He cannot speak of it without making it appear that He is Judge. The force of this is all the greater that He is, as it were, surprised into it; for He is evidently not thinking of Himself at all, but only of those who then were or would afterwards be in danger of making a most fatal mistake, leading to consequences awful and irreparable. We can well imagine that from this point on to the end there must have been a light on His face, a fire in His eye, a solemnity in His tone, a grandeur in His very attitude, which struck the multitude with amazement, especially at the *authority* (ver. 29) with which He spoke: "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by Thy name, and by Thy name cast out devils, and by Thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (R.V.).

Again, observe the form the warning takes, revealing the consciousness that to depart from Him was *doom*—one of the many tokens throughout this discourse that none else than the Lord of life and glory could possibly have spoken it. Yet how many vainly think that they can accept it without acknowledging Him!

The same solemn and regal tone is kept up throughout the impressive passage which closes all, and presses home the great warning against trusting to any experience short of the surrender of the life to do the will of God as set forth in the words of Christ His Son. The two classes He has now in view are not the two great classes who walk, the one in the broad and the other in the narrow way. They are two classes of *hearers*. Most of those that throng the broad way are not hearers at all; they have no desire or intention of seeking any other than the broad way – they would as little think of going up into a mountain and listening to a discourse on righteousness, as they would of wearing a hair shirt or doing any other kind of penance; but those our Lord has now in view all have the idea of seeking the right way: their very attitude as hearers shows it – they are all of the church-going class, to translate into modern phrase; and what He fears is that some of them may deceive themselves by imagining that because they hear with interest and attention, perhaps admiration, therefore they are in the narrow way. Accordingly He solemnly warns them that all this may amount to nothing: there may be attention, interest, admiration, full assent to all; but if the hearing is not followed by doing, all is in vain.

It may almost go without saying that, after what our Lord has just been teaching as to the vital connection between the faith of the heart and the "fruits" of the life (vv. 15-23), there is no "legalism" here. In fact, the doing is not outward; it is a doing of the heart. The righteousness He has been expounding has, as we have seen, been a righteousness of the heart, and the doing of it, as a matter of course, is a heart-work, having its root in faith, which is the beginning of the doing in every case, according to His own word in another place: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him Whom He hath sent."

The illustration with which He presses home the warning is in the highest degree appropriate and forcible. The man who not only hears, but does, makes thorough work, digs deep (as St. Luke puts it in his record), and founds the house he is building for time and eternity upon solid rock; while the man who hears but does not, is one who takes no care as to his foundation, but erects his house just where he happens to be, on loose sand or earth, which the first storm will dislodge and sweep away. Meanwhile testing times are coming – rains, floods, winds – the searching trials of life culminating in the final judgment in the life to come. These all test the work of the builder, and render apparent the wisdom of the man who provided against the coming storm by choosing the rock foundation, for his house abides through all; and the folly of the other, who without a foundation carelessly risked all, for his house gives way before the storm, and great is the fall of it.

Alas for many hearers of the Word! Alas for many admirers of the "Sermon on the Mount"! Where will they be when everything turns on the question "Wert thou a doer of it?"

## VIII. *THE SIGNS OF THE KINGDOM*

### Matt. viii. – ix. 35

REFERRING to chapter iv. 23, we find the work of Christ at the beginning of His ministry summarised as teaching and preaching and healing all manner of diseases. Of the teaching and preaching we have had a signal illustration in what is called the Sermon on the Mount; now the other great branch of the work is set before us in a group of miracles, filling up almost the whole of the eighth and ninth chapters.

The naturalness of the sequence will be at once apparent. If men had needed nothing more than counsel, guidance, rules of life, then might the Gospel have ended when the Sermon on the Mount was concluded. There are those who think they need nothing more; but if they knew themselves they would feel their need not only of the Teacher's word, but of the Healer's touch, and would hail with gladness the chapters which tell how the Saviour dealt with the poor leper, the man with the palsy, the woman with the fever, those poor creatures that were vexed with evil spirits, that dead damsel in the ruler's house. We may well rejoice that the great Teacher came down from the mountain, and made Himself known on the plain and among the city crowds as the mighty Healer; that His stern demand for perfect righteousness was so soon followed by that encouraging word, so full of comfort, for such as we: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (ix. 13). The healing, then, is quite as essential as the teaching. The Sermon points out the way, unfolds the truth; but in the touch and word of the King Himself is found the life. The Christ of God had come, not as a mere Ambassador from the court of heaven to demand submission to its laws, but as a mighty Saviour, Friend, and Comforter. Hence it was necessary that He should make full proof of His mission in this respect as well as in the other; and accordingly the noble ethics taught on the mount are followed by a series of heavenly deeds of power and loving-kindness done in the plain.

The group in chapters viii. and ix. is well fitted to give a comprehensive view of Christ's power and willingness to save. If only they were looked at in this intelligent way, how the paltry prejudices against "miracles" (a word, let it be observed, not once to be found in this Gospel) would vanish. Miracles, wonders, prodigies – how incredible in an age of enlightenment! Yes; if they were introduced as miracles, wonders, prodigies; but they are not. They are signs of the kingdom of heaven – just such signs of it as the intelligent reason demands; for how otherwise is it possible for One Who comes to save to show that He is able to do it? How could the people have been expected to welcome Him as a Saviour, unless He had taken some means to make it evident that He had the power as well as the will to save? Accordingly, in consonance with what enlightened reason imperatively demands of such an One as He claims to be, we have a series of "mighty deeds" of love, showing forth, not only His grace, but His power – power to heal the diseases of the body, power over the realm of nature, power over the unseen world of spirit, power to forgive and save from sin, power to restore lost faculties and conquer death itself. Such are the appropriate signs of the kingdom spread before us here.

Let us look first at that which occupies the foremost place, – power to heal disease. The diseases of the body are the outward symptoms of the deep-seated malady of the spirit; hence it is fitting that He should begin by showing in this region His will and power to save. Yet it is not a formal *showing* of it. It is no mere demonstration. He does not seek out the leper, set him up before them, and say, "Now you will see what I can do." All comes about in a most simple and natural way, as became

Him Who was no wonder-worker, no worker of miracles in the vulgar use of that word, but a mighty Saviour from heaven with a heart of love and a hand of power.

### **The Leper (viii. 1-4)**

"And when He was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, there came to Him a leper." What will He do with him? Should He say to him, "Poor man, you are too late – the sermon is done"? or should He give him some of the best bits over again? No, there is not a sentence in the whole of it that would be any answer to that cry, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." What does He do, then? "Jesus put forth His hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed."

Is it, then, a great stumbling-block in your way, O nineteenth-century critic, that you are expected to believe that the Lord Jesus actually did heal this leper? Would it take the stumbling-block away to have it altered? Suppose we try it, amended to suit the "anti-supernaturalism" of the age. "And behold, there came a leper to Him, saying, Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put out His hand, and motioned him away, saying, Poor man, you are quite mistaken, I cannot help you. I came to teach wise people, not to help poor wretches like you. There are great laws of health and disease; I advise you to find them out, and obey them: consult your doctor, and do the best you can. Farewell." Oh, what nonsense many wise people talk about the difficulty of believing in Divine power to heal! The fact is, that if Christ had not proved Himself a healer, men could not have believed in Him at all.

There could have been no better introduction to the saving work of the Christ of God. Leprosy was of all diseases the most striking symbol of sin. This is so familiar a thought that it need not be set forth in detail. One point, however, must be mentioned, as it opens up a vein of tender beauty in the exquisite simplicity of the story – the rigorous separation of the leprous from the healthy, enforced by the ceremonial law, which made it defilement to touch a leper. Yet "Jesus stretched forth His hand, and *touched* him." "He was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners;" therefore He could mingle with them, contracting no stain Himself, but diffusing health around Him. He could take no defilement from the leper's touch; the current was all the other way: "virtue" went out of Him, and flowed in healing streams through the poor leper's veins. O lovely symbol of the Saviour's relation to us sinners! He has in His holy Incarnation touched our leprous humanity; and remaining stainless Himself, has set flowing a fountain of healing for all who will open to Him hearts of faith and let Him touch them with His pure heart of love. Those were most wonderful words spoken on the mount: they touch the conscience to the quick and fire the soul with heavenly aspiration; but this touch of the leper goes to our hearts, for it proves to us that, though the time is coming when He shall sit as Judge and say to all the sinful, "Depart from Me," as yet He is the loving Saviour, saying, "Come unto Me, ye weary," and touching the leprous into health.

That our Saviour was totally averse to anything at all sensational, and determined rather to repress than encourage the mere thirst for marvels, is evident from the directions given to the leper to say nothing about what had happened to him, but to take the appointed method of giving thanks to God for his recovery, at the same time registering the fact, so that while his cure should not be used to gather a crowd, it might be on record with the proper authorities as a witness to the truth of which it was a sign.

### **The Centurion's Servant (5-13)**

This case, while affording another valuable illustration of the Master's willingness and power to save, differs in several important points from the first, so that the lesson is widened. First and chiefly, the application was from a Gentile; next, it was not on his own behalf that the centurion made it, but



on behalf of another, and that other his servant; and, further, it was a request to heal a patient out of sight, out of knowledge even, as it would seem. Each of these particulars might suggest a doubt. He has healed this Jew; but will He listen to that Gentile? He has responded to this man's own cry; but will He respond when there is no direct application from the patient? He has cured this man with a touch; but can he cure a patient miles away? The Saviour knew well the difficulties which must have lain in the way of this man's faith. He has evidence, moreover, that his is genuine faith, and not the credulity of superstition. One could readily imagine an ignorant person thinking that it made no difference whether the patient were present, or a thousand miles away: what difference does distance make to the mere magician? But this man is no ignorant believer in charms or incantations. He is an intelligent man, and has thought it all out. He has heard of the kingdom of heaven, and knows that this is the King. Reasoning from what he knows of the Roman kingdom, how orders given from a central authority can be despatched to the outskirts, and be executed there with as great certainty as if the Emperor himself had gone to do it, he concludes that the King of the spiritual world must in like manner have means of communication with every part of His dominion; and just as it was not necessary, even for a mere centurion, to do personally everything he wanted done, having it in his power to employ some servant to do it, so it was unreasonable to expect the King of heaven Himself to come in person and heal his servant: it was only necessary, therefore, that He should speak the word, and by some unseen agency the thing would be done. At once the Saviour recognises the man's thoughtful intelligence on the subject, and, contrasting with it the slowness of mind and heart of those of whom so much more might have been expected, "He marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

The thought of this immediately suggests to Him the multitudes that shall exercise a similar faith in ages to come, and in lands far off; and, as on the mount, when He looked forward to the great future, His heart yearned over the mere hearers of the word shut out at last; so here He yearns with a great yearning over His unbelieving countrymen, whose exclusion at last from the heavenly kingdom would be felt with all the sharper pain that such multitudes from far less favoured lands were safe within – at home with the patriarchs of the chosen nation – while they, the natural heirs of the kingdom, were exiles from it for evermore. Hence the wail and warning which follow His hearty appreciation of the centurion's faith: "And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven: but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth into the outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

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