

**Volume 22—Studies in the Scriptures—May, 1943**  
**GOD GOVERNING THE NATIONS.**

*“If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them”* (Jer. 18:8). Then is no “if” in connection with what God has foreordained, and the history of nations has been as truly and definitely predestinated as the destiny of each individual. “Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18), and they are known to Him because they were decreed by Him. Now if God decreed an event He either foresaw what would be the issue of it or He did not. If He did not, where is His infinite wisdom and understanding? On the other hand, if He foresaw an event would not be, why did He purpose it should be? If God purposed a thing, then either He is able to bring it to pass by His wisdom and power, or He is not. If not, where is His omniscience and omnipotence? From the horns of that dilemma there is no escape. If God be *God* then there can be no failure with Him “The counsel of the LORD standeth forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations” (Psa. 33:11).

“If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto it.” There is always an “if” in connection with human responsibility, for man is as “unstable as water” being influenced by many things both from within and without; nevertheless he is held strictly accountable unto God. Nations, equally with Christians, are responsible: the Lord is their Maker, their Ruler, their God. His Moral Law is as binding upon kingdoms as it is upon the Church. *If* the rulers of the nations acknowledge God in the discharge of their office, if their laws be equitable and beneficent, maintaining a balance between justice and mercy, if the Sabbath be duly enforced, if the Lord be owned in prosperity and sought unto in adversity, *then* the smile of Heaven will be upon that people. But if He be slighted and defied His frown will be experienced. As effects are dependent upon the operation of causes, and the character of the one determines the nature of the other, so a course of obedience is followed by very different consequence from one of disobedience, be it the case of a nation or individual.

“Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34) expresses a foundational principle and an unchanging fact. Right doing or walking according to the Divine Rule is the basic condition of national prosperity. A righteous administration of government and the public worship of God gives an ascendancy to a people over those where such things prevail not. Nothing so tends to uphold the throne, elevate the mind of the masses, promote industry, sobriety and equity between man and man, as does the genuine practice of piety, the preservation of the virtues and suppression of vice, as nothing more qualifies a nation for the favour of God. Righteousness is productive of health, of population, of peace and prosperity. But every kind of sin has the contrary tendency. “The prevalence of vice and impiety is a nation’s reproach, conduces to disunion, weakness and disgrace, and exposes any people to the wrath and vengeance of God” (Thomas Scott). When sin has become a public “reproach” then ruin is imminent.

We repeat, then, that Jeremiah 18 portrays not Jehovah as the Determiner of eternal destiny but rather as the Dispenser of temporal benefits, not as decreeing the hereafter of individuals but as distributing the portions of the kingdoms. “Thou art the God, even Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth” (2 Kings 19:15), and as such He governs them on the basis of His moral Law and in accordance with the discharge of their responsibilities thereto. Jeremiah 18 reveals to us the fundamental principles which

sibilities thereto. Jeremiah 18 reveals to us the fundamental principles which regulate the dealings of the Most High with the nations and the relations which He sustains to them. First, He is shown as an absolute Sovereign over Israel in particular and over all peoples in general: "as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in Mine hand, O house of Israel" (v. 6). Jehovah has the most incontestable and immediate power over them. This shows the infinite ease with which He can deal with the most fractious. "He increaseth the nations and destroyeth them: He enlargeth the nations and straiteneth them" (Job 12:23).

Second, the Lord is here depicted as the righteous Governor of the nations, dealing with them according to their deserts. In the exercise of His high and unchallengeable authority the Most High is pleased to act according to the principles of goodness and equity. There is no arbitrary caprice in the infliction of punishment: "the curse causeless shall not come" (Prov. 26:2). The Lord "doth not afflict willingly ("from the heart," margin) nor grieve the children of men" (Lam. 3:33), but only because they give Him occasion to and because the honour of His name requires it. "O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments, then had thy peace been as a river and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea" (Isa. 48:18) is His own avowal. Yea, had they respected His authority "I should soon have subdued their enemies and turned My hand against their adversaries" (Psa. 81:14) He declares. Let it be definitely recognized that God's dealings with the nation of Israel illustrate His administration of the nations today.

Third, the justice of God is tempered with mercy in His government of the nations. "The Lord is of great mercy" (Num. 14:18) and "plenteous in mercy" (Psa. 86:5), and therefore, "His tender mercies are over all His work" (Psa. 145:9). Consequently, when the dark clouds of Divine wrath gather over a kingdom, yea even when His thunderbolts have begun to be launched, genuine repentance will check the storm. When a people humble themselves beneath God's almighty hand, evidencing the genuineness of their repentance by turning away from their wickedness and doing that which is pleasing in His sight, His judgments are turned away from them. "And the children of Israel (1) did evil in the sight of the LORD and forgat the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves. Therefore (2) the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel and He sold them into the hand of Chushanrishathaim and the children of Israel served Chushanrishathaim eight years. And (3) when the children cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them" (Judges 3:7-9). The same order—sin, punishment, penitence and merciful deliverance—is repeated again and again in the book of Judges.

That these principles of the Divine administration apply to the Gentiles, equally with the Jews, is unmistakably clear from the case of Nineveh a heathen city, concerning which the Lord said "their wickedness is come up before Me" (Jonah 1:2). Unto the vast metropolis the Prophet was sent, crying, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (3:4). But note well the sequel: "So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them... And he (the king) caused it to be proclaimed . . . Let neither man nor beast, herd or flock, taste anything: let them not feed nor drink water . . . let them cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God

repented of the evil that He had said that He would do unto them, and He did it not” (Jonah 3:5-10).—A.W.P.

## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

26. *Profession Tested.* Matthew 7:21.

“Not everyone 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.” Last month we sought to provide an exposition of this verse: explaining the meaning of its terms, pointing out its bearing upon the Jews of that day, and its application unto our own. On this occasion we propose to deal with it more in a *topical* manner. Obviously the theme of this verse is the inadequacy of a mere lip profession of Christian discipleship, and since so many are fatally deceived at this very point we deem it advisable to devote another article to the subject. We shall now endeavour to show something of the attainments possible to the formalist and how near he may come to the kingdom of Christ without actually entering it. It is the third class of professors, the *deceived* ones, that we have chiefly in view. We shall seek to examine and test them at four simple but essential points and show of each one wherein they come short of that which is the experience and portion of the regenerate.

1. *Knowledge.* It is plain from the teaching of Holy Writ that there are two distinct orders or types of knowledge of spiritual and Divine things, and that the difference between them is not merely one of degree but of kind, a radical and vital difference. There is a knowledge of God and of His Word which is a saving one, but there is also a knowledge of the same Objects which—though it may be accurate and extensive—is a non-saving one. Thus it is of vast importance that everyone who values his soul should be properly informed as to the essential differences between these two kinds of knowledge, so that he may diligently examine himself and ascertain *which* of them is *his*. That the above distinction is no arbitrary one, no imaginary one of ours, is evident from many passages. When the Apostle declared that the Colossian saints “*knew* the grace of God *in truth*” (1:6), he was employing discriminating language, for there are others who know the grace of God only in *theory*. “This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent” (John 17:3), which is a saving knowledge. “When they knew God they glorified Him not as God,” but became idolaters and were abandoned of Him (Rom. 1: 21-24): that was a non-saving knowledge of God.

“Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge . . . and have not charity (love), I am nothing” (1 Cor. 13:2). Nor is that an altogether unlikely case. Far from it. It is possible for the natural man to acquire a much fuller and more intelligent grasp of the Truth than that which is possessed by the majority of genuine Christians. If he be endowed with competent intellect, if he has received a good education, if he closely applied himself to the study of Scripture (as he might to one of the arts or sciences), then he may become expertly proficient in a letter knowledge and notional understanding of the same. By patient industry he may master the Hebrew and Greek languages in which they were originally written. By reading and re-reading sound theological works he may secure a comprehension of the whole doctrinal system of Truth. By consulting able commentators he may obtain light upon perplexing passages. He may even arrive at an understanding of the “mysteries” of iniquity and of godliness, so that he is quite sound in the Faith. And if he is a fluent speaker, he may discourse upon Divine things so that none may legitimately take issue with his orthodoxy, yea, many, may find his preaching instructive and helpful.

There are also very many unregenerate listeners who by waiting upon the ministry of the Word may obtain a wide knowledge thereof. A considerable number are possessed with an insatiable curiosity, or appetite for the acquisition of religious information, and who by regular attendance at church, close attention to what they hear and the aid of retentive memories, become well instructed in spiritual things, especially where this is supplemented by the reading of a considerable amount of devotional literature. Though unregenerate, they obtain clear views of the whole Gospel scheme and those gifted with clear minds often grasp more of the profounder aspects of Truth than many of God's own children are capable of understanding (for "not many wise men after the flesh" 1 Cor. 1:26, are among His elect). They often dig more deeply into the mines of Truth and make greater discoveries than do the saved. They may apprehend things so clearly as to satisfy their judgment and express their notions so distinctly to others as to convince, yea, to defend, their beliefs so tellingly and argue about the same to such effect as to silence any who differ from them.

Nor is this knowledge limited to the doctrinal side of the Truth. They may attain unto well-proportioned conceptions of the Divine character and perfections and correct views of the Person and work of Christ and the office and operations of the Holy Spirit. By sitting under the faithful preaching of God's servants and by reading articles of a searching nature they may secure a good understanding of the experimental side of things. They may be quite clear upon the miracle of regeneration and be able to draw the lineaments of the new creature so true to life as though they had the image thereof in their own souls. They may be able to describe the work of grace as accurately as though they had an experience of it in their own hearts. They may depict the conflicts between the flesh and Spirit as though such opposition were taking place within themselves. They may speak as glowingly of the Christian's graces as if they were the possessors of them. They may narrate the actings of certain graces and such-and-such a temptation as though they were recounting their own history. They may have the exact idea and true notion of all these things in their heads when there is nothing whatever of them in their hearts.

Yet in spite of all that we have predicated above of these unregenerate yet orthodox preachers and hearers, authors and readers, they are those who are "ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the Truth" (2 Tim. 3:7), that is to say, they do not and cannot arrive at the *saving* knowledge of it. And why is this so? Because they lack the necessary faculty for its entrance. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). A saving knowledge of the Truth is impossible unto the unregenerate. There must be a suitability between the instrument and its task, between the agent and that which is to be apprehended. An animal is incapable of entering into what the human intellect may comprehend, and one who has no spiritual faculty is unable to receive spiritual things in a *spiritual* way. The natural man may acquire a theoretical and notional knowledge of things, but he cannot obtain a spiritual or saving knowledge of them, for he is totally devoid of spiritual life.

Let us now attempt to answer the question, What is the essential difference between these two kinds of knowledge? wherein does a natural and notional knowledge of Divine things come short of a spiritual and saving knowledge of them? Consider the following: "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee" (Job 42:5). We give not an exposition of those words, but use them illustratively of this contrast. One

may listen for years to sermons but when the soul actually has Christ revealed *in* him (Gal. 1:16) he learns the tremendous difference there is between a hearsay knowledge of Him and a spiritual perception as He stands manifested to the soul as a living Reality. Let us endeavour to still further simplify by a human analogy. A child is born with such a filament over his eyes that he is quite blind. He receives a good education and loved ones seek to use their eyes on his behalf and take pains in describing to him some of the beauties and wonders of Nature—by their word pictures he obtains clear concepts of many objects. But suppose a specialist performs a successful operation and vision is vouchsafed him: how vastly different his own sight of a glorious sunset from the previous notion he had formed of it!

No matter how carefully and accurately his friends have described a sunset to him, how vivid the contrast when he beheld one for himself! Equally real, equally radical, equally vivid is the difference between a second-hand knowledge of the Truth and a personal acquaintance and experience of its power. Following out the analogy a little further—while blind that man may have thought his friends exaggerated the grandeur of a sunset, but as soon as he has seen one for himself he knows that neither poet's tongue, nor artist's brush could possibly do it justice. He may even have entertained doubts as to the thing itself, wondering if his friends were but drawing upon their imagination and seeking to amuse him with a fairy tale, but now all uncertainty is at an end. So with the regenerate soul and Christ: once his sin-blinded eyes are opened to behold the Lamb, he exclaims with one of old, "I *know* that my Redeemer liveth." A saving knowledge of Christ ravishes the soul and so draws the heart unto Him as to esteem all else as dross in comparison with the excellency of the knowledge of Him (Phil. 3:8).

A Laplander may have read about honey, but not until he has eaten some does he really know what it is like. Nor does the soul truly know the Lord until he has "*tasted* that He is gracious" (1 Peter 2:3). The formalist knows God is omniscient, the Christian has an inward experience thereof, by His detecting to him the heart's deceitfulness and discovering secret sins. The former knows God is all-mighty, but the latter has felt His omnipotence working within him enabling him to believe (Eph. 1:19), subduing his lusts, overcoming the world. The one kind of knowledge then is speculative, the other practical; the one is merely notional, the other experimental; the one is acquired second-hand, the other is communicated directly. He "hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). Natural knowledge puffs up, but spiritual humbles and makes the soul painfully conscious of its spiritual ignorance: observe how in the 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm David prays no less than eight times, "Teach me." Natural knowledge produces no spiritual fruit, and it is vain to boast of spiritual learning if it be not accompanied with a holy life.

2. *Repentance.* There are four principal acts and exercises in repentance—confession of sin, hatred of sin, sorrow for sin, resolution against sin—and each of these may be and has been performed by the unregenerate. Cain cries out at the weight and grievousness of his sin, saying, "my punishment (or "iniquity") is greater than I can bear" (Gen. 4:13). Pharaoh acknowledged his sin and condemned himself for it (Exo. 9:27), so did Israel when they had provoked the Lord (Num. 14:40), so did Saul (1 Sam. 15:14), so did Judas (Matt 27:3). As to hatred of sin, Jehu detested the idols of Baal and destroyed them, yet his heart was not upright (2 Kings 10:26-28, 31). After their lengthy captivity in Babylon Israel were delivered from their love of idolatry, so that the Spirit said, "thou that abhor-

rest idols" (Rom. 2:22). Many there are who hate injustice and oppression, lying and dishonesty. Concerning sorrow for sin: Israel mourned after their worship of the golden calf (Exo. 33:4) and "mourned greatly" (Num. 14:39) after they had sorely provoked the Lord, and yet continued in their provocations (v. 44). As to resolution against sin, a strong case of such is seen in Balaam (Num. 22:18, 38).

If the unregenerate may go thus far in a way of repentance, wherein do they fall short? If theirs be not "repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18) where is it to be found? Saving repentance proceeds from sorrow for sin, whereas the sorrow of the formalist is defective at many points. First, they *mourn not for sin itself*, but over its *consequences*. Not as their deeds are contrary to God, a violation of His Law, opposed to His holy will, but because they involve unpleasant effects. Second, not for consequences in reference to God, but themselves, not because He is dishonoured. His authority spurned, and the creature preferred above Him. If they mourn because of His displeasure it is rather for the effects of His anger. They care nothing about Satan being gratified and the cause of Christ reproached so long as they are not afflicted in their persons or estates. Third, they mourn not for all its consequences in reference to themselves: not as it defiles the soul, keeps at a distance from God, hardens the heart and renders it more incapable of holy duties: but only as it deprives mercies and produces miseries.

Their *hatred of sin* is defective. It is not extended to all sin: they cannot say, "I hate every false way." They may hate gross sin such as the State penalizes but wink at lesser ones. They may hate open wickedness but not secret faults. They may abominate theft and uncleanness, yet make no conscience of pride and self-righteousness. They may hate those things which are cried down by people among whom they now live, and yet enter into the same heartily if they move to another part of the earth. They may hate an unprofitable sin, but refrain not from those which bring them in a revenue. They may hate a sin which is contrary to their peculiar temperament, but not that which is agreeable to their constitution. They may hate others' sin rather than their own, as Judas complained at the prodigality of Mary; but such hatred is directed rather against the persons than the sins of others. Their hatred is superficial. It is not with all their heart: it reaches not to the corruptions of their nature, nor is it accompanied with mortifying endeavours.

Their *resolutions against sin* are defective. In their *rise*. They issue not from a renewed heart, from a principle of holiness and love to Christ, but from apprehensions of unpleasant effects and future damnation. Or from the restraining power of God, which keeps them from purposing to sin rather than moves them to full resolution against it: so that their resolutions are negative rather than positive. Thus it was with Balaam, he said not, "I will not," but "I cannot" (Num. 22:18, 38)—he had a mind to, but the Lord prevented him. In its *continuance*. Their good resolutions are not followed out to full execution, but are quickly broken. The cause from which they proceed is not constant, and therefore the effects are evanescent. They flow no longer when the spring from which they issue runs dry. That spring is but a momentary anguish or flash of fear, and when that vanishes their resolutions fail. Their goodness is but as "the morning cloud" and "early dew" (Hosea 6:4) which quickly disappears. David feared the danger of this when he prayed, "Keep this forever in the imagination of the hearts of Thy people, and *stablish* their hearts unto Thee" (1 Chron 29:18).

3. *Faith*. We read of those who "stay themselves (rely upon) the God of Israel," yet it was "not in truth or in righteousness" (Isa. 48:2), for they were obstinate and their neck

“as an iron sinew.” There are those who have a faith which is so like unto a justifying one that they themselves take it to be the very same and even Christians regard it as the faith of God’s elect. Simon Magus, for example, “believed” (Acts 8:13), and gave such a profession of it that Philip and the local church received him into their fellowship and privileges. Those that received the Seed into stony ground did for a “while believe” (Luke 8:13), and according to its description it differed nothing from saving faith except in its root—the difference not being evident but lying under ground. The unregenerate may have a faith which receives unquestioningly the Bible as the Word of God, for the Jews entertained no doubts that the Scriptures were the very Oracles of God. Agrippa believed in the veracity of the Prophets and received their testimony without question (Acts 26:26, 27). They may have a faith which leads to the owning of Christ as their Lord and worshipping Him as such (Matt. 7:21). They may even have a faith which produces strong assurance: those who opposed Christ were quite sure they were “the seed of Abraham” and not the slaves of Satan (John 8: 33, 34).

Wherein does this faith come short of a saving one? wherein is it defective? It is merely an intellectual assent to the letter of Scripture and not “with the heart” (Rom. 10:10) so as to bring Christ *into* it (Eph. 3:17), just as one may read and accredit an historical work and no spiritual effect be produced thereby. It is a faith which is “alone” (James 2:17) for it is unaccompanied by other graces, whereas a saving faith has as its concomitants love, meekness, holiness, perseverance, etc. Such a faith consents not to take a whole Christ: it will embrace Him as a Saviour but is not willing for Him to reign over them as King. Those with such a faith desire Christ’s pardon but not His sceptre, His peace but not His yoke. They will accept Him to deliver them from Hell, but not to sanctify and cast out of their temples whatever God abominates. They are not willing to subscribe to Christ’s terms of discipleship, which are the denying of self, the taking up of the Cross, and following Him whithersoever He leads: such terms they consider harsh and unnecessary.

The faith of the formalist and empty professor is a lifeless and barren one. “As the body without the spirit is dead so faith without works is dead” (James 2:26). In that chapter the Apostle points out, first, the worthlessness of a bare profession of charity. To give good words to a brother in need, bidding him, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” yet withholding those things needful to him, is cruel hypocrisy (vv. 15, 16). Equally so to say we believe the Holy One and a Day of judgment and yet live impiously is such a mockery of faith (v. 17). Second, such faith is inferior to that of the demons for they “believe and tremble” (v. 19), whereas empty professors are not afraid to mock God. Third, such a faith is radically different from that possessed and exercised by the father of all who believe, for he rendered unreserved obedience unto the Divine commands (vv. 21-24). A faith which does not purify the heart (Acts 15:9), work by love (Gal. 5:6), overcome the world (1 John 5:4), and bring forth fruit acceptable to God, will not conduct anyone to Heaven.

4. *Good works.* The unregenerate may make an exceedingly fair show of the practical side of religion, that is in their deportment, both in their addresses to God and dealings with men, in public and private alike. They may go far in their external conformity to the rule of righteousness and visible compliance with the revealed will of God, both as to moral and positive precepts. The outward carriage of the Pharisees, by Christ’s own testimony, was “beautiful” (Matt. 23:27) and among their fellows they were esteemed as



exceptionally holy men. Such may not only abstain from all gross sins but meet all the external requirements of morality and piety. Paul declares that, while unconverted, he was "blameless" as to his observance of the Law (Phil. 3:6). The rich young ruler affirmed of the Commandments, "all these have I kept from my youth up" (Luke 18:21), nor did Christ charge him with idle boasting. They may practice great austerities in order to mortify the flesh, as some of the Gnostics had for their rule, "Touch not, taste not, handle not" (Col. 2:21). A spirit of fanaticism may induce some of them to suffer martyrdom (1 Cor. 13:3).

Wherein lies the defectiveness of the works of the unregenerate? First in the state of the persons performing them. They are not reconciled to God, and how can He accept aught from His enemies! The individual must first be reconciled to God before He will receive anything at his hands: "the Lord had respect to Abel *and* to his offering" (Gen. 4:4). Second, in the root from which their actions proceed: their fruits are but the wild grapes of a degenerate vine: they must be renewed in the inner man before anything spiritual can be borne. Third, in the motive which prompts them, which is either servile or a spirit of legality rather than love; a dread of Hell, or an attempt to gain Heaven instead of from gratitude. Fourth, in the end which they have in view which is a selfish one instead of seeking to promote the Divine honour: it is to pacify God rather than glorify Him. Fifth, in the absence of Christ's merits their works are neither wrought for Christ's sake nor offered in His name, and since none may come unto the Father but by Him (John 14:6) all their works are refused, as Cain's offering was.—A.W.P.

## THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA.

### 5. *Second Miracle.*

“And they said unto him, Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of the LORD hath taken him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley” (1 Kings 2:16). Two things must be borne in mind in connection with this request, lest we be too severe in our criticism of those who made it. First, these young Prophets had known that Elijah was to be removed from Elisha that day, as is clear from their words to him on a former occasion: “Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head today?” (v. 5). As to how they had learned of this we cannot be sure, nor do we know how full was their information, yet it seems clear they knew nothing more than the general fact that this was the day which would terminate the earthly career of the renowned Tishbite.

Second, in verse 7 we are told, “And fifty men of the sons of the Prophets went and stood to view afar off; and they two (Elijah and Elisha) stood by Jordan” (v. 7). Here again we cannot be certain what it was or how much they actually beheld. Perhaps some are ready to exclaim, If they were definitely on the lookout, they must have seen the remarkable translation of Elijah, for the “chariot of fire and the horses of fire” in mid-air would surely have been visible to them. Not necessarily so: probably that “fire” was very different from any that we are acquainted with. Moreover we must bear in mind that on a later occasion, “the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha” yet his own personal attendant saw them not until the Prophet asked “LORD, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see” (2 Kings 6:17)! We are therefore inclined to believe that as these young Prophets watched, Elijah suddenly and mysteriously disappeared from their view without their actually beholding his miraculous translation to Heaven. Consequently they felt that something unprecedented and supernatural had taken place, and they ascribed it to a Divine intervention, as their reference to “the Spirit of the LORD” intimates.

Though they must have realized that an event quite extraordinary had occurred, yet they were uneasy, fearful that something unpleasant had befallen their teacher. They were deeply concerned, and veneration and love for Elijah prompted their petition. Let us seek to put ourselves in their place and then ask, Had we acted more intelligently? At any rate, was their request any more foolish than Peter’s on the Mount of Transfiguration when he said to Christ, “if Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles: one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah” (Matt. 17:4)! Moreover it should be observed that they did not rashly take matters into their own hands, but respectfully submitted their request unto Elisha. Before criticizing them too harshly let us make sure that *our* hearts are as warmly attached to God’s servants as theirs, and that we are as troubled over their departure as they were.

Elisha tersely refused their request: “Ye shall not send.” But why did he not explain to them the uselessness of such a quest, by informing them exactly what had happened to Elijah? Probably because he concluded that if the Lord had intended them to know of His servant’s miraculous exit from this scene, He had opened their eyes to behold what himself had been permitted to see—not all of the Twelve witnessed Christ’s transfiguration! Moreover, is there not hint here as to why this privilege had been withheld from them, in the statement that, “they stood to view *afar off*”—not so Elisha, who followed his master fully: it is only those who “draw near” that enjoy the highest privileges of grace. Finally

we may learn from Elisha's reticence that there are some experiences which are too sacred to describe unto others. O for more of such holy reserve and modesty in this day of curiosity and vulgar intruding into one another's spiritual privacy.

"And when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men, and they sought three days, but found him not" (v. 17). Let it not be forgotten that up to this time only one individual from all mankind has gone to Heaven without passing through the portals of death, and it is very doubtful if the contemporaries of Enoch (or those who lived later) knew of his translation, for the words "he was not found" (Heb. 11:5) intimate that search was also made for him. By Elisha's being "ashamed" we understand that he felt if he were to continue refusing them they would likely think that he was being influenced by an undue desire to occupy Elijah's place of honour. "And when they came again to him (for he tarried at Jericho) he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not?" (2 Kings 2:18). Now *they* must have felt ashamed. "This would make them the more willing to acquiesce in his judgment another time" (Matthew Henry).

This brings us to Elisha's next miracle. First, let us consider the *order* of it. It was Elisha's second one and the Scriptural significance of that numeral casts light upon this point. *One* expresses unity and sovereignty. It stands all alone, but where there are *two* another has come in. So in the first miracle Elisha acted alone and none contributed aught thereto. But here in this one Elisha is not alone: a second party is seen in connection with it—the "men of Jericho," and they were required to furnish a "new cruse" with "salt therein" before the wonder was performed. Probably this very fact will prove a serious difficulty to the thoughtful reader. Those who have followed closely the preceding articles of this series will remember how we pointed out again and again that Elisha is to be regarded as a representative character, as a figure of the servants of Christ. Some may conclude the type fails us at this point, for it will be said, Surely you do not believe that ministers of the Gospel demand something at the hands of sinners in order to their being saved! Our answer will be given under the meaning of this miracle.

Second, let us take note of *the place* where this occurred: it was at Jericho. This, too, is very illuminating. Jericho had been the first city of the Canaanites to defy the children of Israel, for it was closed and barred against them (Josh. 6:1). Whereupon it was pronounced "accursed" and orders were given that Israel should not appropriate anything in it unto themselves: "And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing" (v. 18). By the power of Jehovah, Jericho was overthrown, following which His people "burnt the city with fire and all that was therein" (v. 24). After which the fearful denunciate went forth, "Cursed be the man before the LORD that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho" (v. 26). But both of those Divine prohibitions were flouted. The first by Achan, who "saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonian garment and two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold" (7:21), which he coveted and stole, for which he and his family were stoned to death and their bodies destroyed by fire.

The second prohibition was broken centuries later, in the reign of the apostate Ahab: "In his days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho" (1 Kings 16:34). Thus Jericho was the city of *the curse*. It was the *first* place in Canaan where defiance of the Lord and His people was displayed. It was there that Israel, in the person of Achan, committed their *first* sin in the land of promise. A fearful curse was denounced against the man who should

have the nerve to rebuild the city. That there is an unmistakable parallel between these things and what occurred in *Eden* scarcely needs pointing out: but we must not anticipate. That which is now before us is the fact that, in defiance of the Divine threat, Jericho had recently been rebuilt—probably the attractiveness of its locality was the temptation to which Hiel yielded (as the pleasantness of the fruit in Eve's eyes induced her to partake: Gen. 3:6), for we are told, "And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city *is pleasant*" (2 Kings 2:19).

Third, the *objects* of it, namely the springs of water. "And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth, but the water is naught and the ground is barren" (v. 19). Herein God had evidenced His displeasure on that accursed rebuilding of Jericho by making its water unwholesome and the ground barren, or as the margin gives, "causing to miscarry." The Jewish commentators understood this to mean that these waters caused the cattle to cast their young, the trees to shed their fruit before it was mature, and even the women to be incapable of bearing children. The Hebrew word which is rendered "the water is *naught*" ("ra") is a much stronger one than the English denotes. In the great majority of cases it is translated "evil" (as in Gen. 6:5; Prov. 8:13), "bad" (as Gen. 24:50, etc) and "wicked" no less than thirty-one times. Its first occurrence is in "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:9)! But it signifies not only evil but that which is harmful or injurious to others, being translated "the *hurtful* sword" (Psa. 144:10).

Jericho, then, was pleasant for situation but there was no good water for its inhabitants or their flocks and herds. This was a serious matter, a vital consideration, for the Israelites were an essentially pastoral people—observe how often we find mention of the "wells" in their early history: Genesis 16:14; 21:25; 26:15, 22; 29:2; Numbers 21:16-18, etc. These men of Jericho then lacked the one thing needful. How this reminds us of another and later incident in the career of Elisha: "Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, *but* he was a leper" (2 Kings 5:1). In spite of his exalted position, his endowments, his exploits, he lacked the one thing needful—health. He was a leper and that neutralized, spoilt everything else. And thus it is with every man in his natural condition, however favoured by creation and by providence—the springs of his life are defiled.

Fourth, the *means used*: "And he said, Bring me a new cruse and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. And he went forth unto the springs of water, and cast the salt in there" (2 Kings 2:20, 21). The appropriateness of this particular means for counteracting the effects of the curse is at once apparent. Salt is the grand purifier and preserver. It is by means of the salty vapours which the rays of the sun distil from the ocean that the atmosphere of our earth is kept healthy for its inhabitants—that is why the sea breezes act as such a tonic to the invalid and the convalescent. Salt prevents putrefaction, hence after the backs of prisoners were scourged salt was rubbed into the wounds—though extremely painful it prevented blood poisoning. Salt is the best seasoning for how insipid and unsavoury are many foods without a sprinkling of it. Salt is the emblem of Divine holiness and grace, and so we read of the "covenant of salt" (Num. 18:19; 2 Chron. 13:5). Hence also the exhortation "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6)—with the savour of true piety. The ministers of Christ are therefore denominated "the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13).

Fifth, the *instrument* of it. Obviously the salt itself could not heal those unwholesome waters, any more than the “rods” or twigs of the trees with their “white streaks” that Jacob piled in them and set before the flocks were able to cause the cattle to bring forth young ones that were “ringstreaked, speckle and spotted” (Gen. 30:37-39). Though the men of Jericho were required to furnish the salt and though the Prophet now cast the same into the springs, yet he made it clear this would avail nothing unless the blessing of Jehovah accompanied the same. *His* power must operate if anything good was to be accomplished, therefore we find that as Elisha cast in the salt he declared, “Thus saith the LORD, I have healed the waters, there shall not be from thence any more death or causing to miscarry” (2 Kings 2:21). Thereby the Prophet disclaimed any inherent power of his own: yet he was instrumentally employed of God, for the very next verse says, “So the waters were healed unto this day, according to *the saying* of Elisha which he spake”! “I have planted, Apollos watered (they were the instruments); but *God* gave the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6).

Sixth, the *meaning* or typical significance of it. The first key to this is found in the *order* of it. Under that point we intimated that probably some readers would find a difficulty in the men of Jericho being required to furnish the salt and be inclined to object, Surely the minister of the Gospel (for as figure of such Elisha is here to be viewed) does not demand anything at the hand of sinners in order to their being saved. But such a difficulty—like most, if not all others—is self-created, and that through entertaining vague and general concepts instead of distinguishing sharply between things that differ. When we speak of “salvation,” we refer to something that is many-sided. If on the one hand we must guard most carefully against the error of man’s contributing anything unto his regeneration, on the other we must watch against swinging to the opposite extreme and denying that man is required to concur with God in connection with his reconciliation, preservation, etc. The typical picture which is here set before us is Divinely perfect, yet we need to view it closely if we are to see its details in their proper perspective.

The first miracle, the smiting of the Jordan, adumbrates the ministerial power of the evangelist over death, and in connection with the new birth man contributes nothing whatsoever unto it: see John 1:13. But this second miracle images a *later*, the second experience in the history of those truly converted. This miracle at Jericho speaks of neutralizing the effects of the curse, overcoming the power of innate depravity; and here the minister of the Gospel acts not alone, for in this matter there is the conjunction of both the Divine and the human elements. Thus the second key to its meaning lies in the *place* where it occurred. It is true that the conjunction of the Divine and human elements of conversion cannot be so closely defined as to express the same in any theological formula, nevertheless the reality of those two elements can be demonstrated both from Scripture and experience. We do not like the expression “man co-operating with God” for that savours too much of a dividing of the honour, but man’s “concurring with God” seems to be both permissible and necessary.

The third key is contained in the fact that these men of Jericho are represented as taking the initiative, coming unto Elisha, acquainting him with their need, supplicating his assistance! Apparently they knew from his dress that Elisha was a Prophet and as he no doubt still carried Elijah’s mantle, they hoped he would use his power on their behalf. The servant of God ought to be readily identified by his (emblematic) “garments” or spiritual graces, easily accessible and approachable, one to whom members of a commu-

nity will gladly turn to in their troubles. Elisha did not repulse them by saying this lay outside his line of things, that his concern lay only with the young Prophets. Instead he at once intimated his willingness to help. Yet something was required of them: compare 4:41 and 5:10 for further illustrations of the same principle. *They* were told to provide the “new cruse” with salt therein. That put them to the proof: it was a test as to whether they were willing to follow the Prophet’s instructions. They promptly heeded—how different from many who disregard the directions of God’s servants!

This miracle, then, does not give us a history of the servant of God going unto those who are utterly unconcerned, dead in trespasses and sins, but rather that of awakened souls, seeking help, acquainting the minister with their need. In the first miracle it is God acting in sovereign power, enabling His servant to ministerially triumph over death: here it is His servant addressing human responsibility. In bidding awakened and inquiring sinners provide a “new cruse and put salt therein” he is but saying to them, “Cast away from you all your transgressions whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit” (Ezek. 18:31 and cf. James 4:8). These men of Jericho could not have procured the new cruse and the salt unless God had first placed it at their hands, and the sinner cannot bring a responsive and obedient heart unto the minister until God has previously quickened him. That this miracle is, instrumentally, attributed to the “saying of Elisha”—the Hebrew term (*dabar*) is rendered “word” in 1 Kings 17:2, 8—denotes that awakened sinners are delivered from the effects of the curse as they obey the instructions of God’s faithful servants.

Seventh, the *permanency* of it. “Thus saith the LORD, I have healed these waters: there shall not be from thence any more death or causing to miscarry: so the waters were healed unto this day, according to the word of Elisha which he spake” (1 Kings 2:21, 22). It was no superficial and temporary change that was wrought, but an effectual and permanent one. “I know that whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it” (Eccl. 3:14). Herein we see again the appropriateness of the *salt*, the emblem of incorruption—hence, used in the covenant to express its perpetuity. Placed in a “new cruse” and then cast into “the springs of water” we have a figure of the new and honest heart, out of which are “the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). The nature of fallen men, even the most attractive specimens, is like unwholesome water and barren soil: it must be renewed by God before any good works can be produced—make the tree good and its fruit will be good. The miracle is attributed, instrumentally, not to the faith or the prayer of Elisha (though there was both), but to his *word*. By His response God avouched His Prophet and sustained his testimony in Israel.—A. W. P.

## DOCTRINE OF SAINTS' PERSEVERANCE.

### 8. *Its Safeguards.*

There may be some who will at once take exception to the employment of this term in such a connection, affirming that the Truth of God requires no safe-guarding at the hands of those called by Him to expound it: that their business is to faithfully preach the same and leave results entirely to its Author. We fully agree that God's eternal Truth stands in no need of any carnal assistance from us, either in the way of dressing it up to render it more attractive or in toning it down to make it less offensive. We heartily subscribe to the Apostle's dictum that, "we can do nothing against the Truth, but for the Truth" (2 Cor. 13:8)—God overrules the opposition of those who hate it and makes the wrath of His enemies to praise Him. Nevertheless in view of such passages as Mark 4:33; John 16:12; 1 Corinthians 3:2, and Hebrews 5:12 it is clear that our presentation of the Truth needs to be regulated by the condition of those to whom it is ministered. Moreover, this raises the question, What is *faithfully* presenting the Truth? Are there not other modifying adverbs which are not to be omitted?

The Truth should not only be preached "faithfully" but wisely, proportionately, seasonably as well. There is a zeal which is not according to knowledge nor tempered by wisdom. There is an unbalanced presentation of the Truth which accomplishes more harm than good. We read of "the present Truth" (2 Peter 1:12) and of "a word in due season" (Prov. 15:23 and cf. Isa. 50:4), which implies there is such a thing as speaking unseasonably, even though it be the Truth itself which is spoken and that "faithfully." What is a "word in season"? Is it not a timely and pertinent one, a message suited to the condition, circumstances and needs of the persons addressed? In His wisdom and goodness God has provided cordials for the faint and comfort for those who mourn, as He has also given exhortations to the slothful, admonitions to the careless, solemn warnings to the reckless, and fearful threats to those who are defiant. Discrimination needs to be used in our appropriation and application of the Scriptures. As it would be cruel to quote terrifying passages to one who is already mourning over his sins, so it would be wrong to press promises of Divine preservation upon a professing Christian who is living a carnal and worldly life.

"Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41). Those words furnish an illustration of a "word in due season." The disciples (not Peter only) had boasted, "though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee." They were so confident and temporarily blind to their own instability. Their Lord therefore bade them guard against self-reliance and seek grace from above, and though they were quite sincere in their avowal, yet were they much too feeble to resist Satan's attacks in their own strength. They thought themselves immune from such a horrible sin as denying their Master, but instead of bolstering them up in their sense of security, He warned them of their danger. Another example of a seasonable word is the Apostle's exhortation to the one who claims that he "standeth by faith," namely, "Be not high-minded, but fear. For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on those that fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, *if* thou continue in His goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (Rom. 11:20-22).

But it is rather those safeguards by which God Himself has hedged about the subject of the everlasting security of His people that we would now particularly consider, those

defenses which are designed to shut out unholy trespassers from this garden of delights; or to change the figure, those descriptions of character and conduct which serve to make known the particular persons to whom alone His promises belong. Last month we dwelt at some length on how this blessed doctrine is misrepresented by Arminians and perverted by Antinomians. To use a term employed by an Apostle, it has been grievously “wrested,” torn from its setting, disproportionately contorted, divorced from its qualifying terms, detached from the necessary means by which it is attained, applied unto those to whom it does not belong. Hence our present object is to direct attention unto some of the principal bulwarks by which this precious truth is protected and which must be duly emphasized and continually pressed by the servants of God if it is to be portrayed in its true perspective and if souls are not to be fatally misled. Only thus shall we “faithfully” present this truth.

1. By insisting that it is the preservation of *saints* and not everyone who deems himself a Christian. It is of deep importance to define clearly and sharply the character of those who are Divinely assured of being preserved unto the heavenly kingdom—that God be not dishonoured, His Truth falsified, and souls deceived. “He preserveth the souls of His *saints*” (Psa. 97:10), but of none others. It is so easy to appropriate (or misappropriate) such a promise as, “Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel and afterward receive me to glory” (Psa. 73:24), but before so doing, honesty requires that I ascertain whether the experiences of the one described in the context are those of *mine*. Asaph confesses to being envious at the prosperity of the wicked (vv. 3, 12) until he felt he had cleansed his own heart and hands “in vain” (v. 13). But he checks himself, tender lest by such murmuring he should stumble God’s children (v. 15), recording how his “heart was grieved” and his conscience pricked at giving way to such foolish repinings, until he owned unto God, “I was as a beast before Thee” (v. 22). The recollection of God’s gracious forbearance (v. 23) moved him to say, “it is good for me to draw near to God” (v. 28).

When I can find such marks *in myself* as the Psalmist had, such graces operating in my heart as did in his, then—but not before—am I warranted in comforting myself as he did. If I challenge the utterances of my mouth as to whether or no they are likely to offend God’s little ones, if I make conscience of envying the prosperity of the wicked and mourn over it, if I am deeply humbled thereby, if I realize “my steps had well nigh slipped” (v. 2) and that it was a longsuffering God who had “holden me by my right hand,” alone preserving me from apostasy; if this sense of His sovereign goodness enables me to affirm, “Whom have I in Heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee” (v. 25)—if all of this produces in me such a sense of my utter insufficiency as to own, “My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart” (v. 26), then am I justified in saying, “Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel and afterward receive *me* to glory.” Yes, God “preserveth the souls of His saints,” but what avails that for me unless I be one of them!?

Again—how many there are who eagerly grasp at those words of Christ concerning His sheep, who have only the vaguest idea of the ones whom He thus designates: “And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of My hand” (John 10:28). The very fact that the verse opens with “and” requires us to ponder what immediately precedes, and because His flock is but a “little” one (Luke 12:32) it behooves each one who values his soul to spare no pains in seeking to ascertain whether *he* belongs to it. In the context the Saviour says, “My sheep hear My voice, and I



know them, and they follow Me.” Observe diligently the three things which are here predicated of them. First, they *hear* Christ’s voice. Now to hear His voice means far more than to be acquainted with His words as they are recorded in Scripture—more than believing they *are* His words. When it was said unto Israel, “the LORD will not hear you in that day” (1 Sam. 8:18) it signified that He would not heed their requests or grant their petitions. When God complained, “When I spake, ye did not hear,” it was not that they were physically deaf but their hearts were steeled against Him, as the remainder of the verse indicates: “But did evil before Mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not” (Isa. 65:12).

When God says, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased: *hear ye Him*” (Matt. 17:5), He is requiring something more of us than that we simply listen respectfully and believingly to what He says: He is demanding that we submit ourselves unreservedly to His authority, that we respond promptly to His orders, that we obey Him. In Proverbs 8:33 “hearing” is contrasted from refusing, and in Hebrews 3:15 we read, “If ye will hear His voice harden not your hearts.” When Christ declares of His flock, “My sheep hear My voice” it signifies they *heed* it—they are not intractable but responsive, doing what He bids. Second, He declares, “and I know them,” that is, with a knowledge or approbation. Third, “and they *follow Me*”: not the bent of the flesh, not the solicitations of Satan, not the ways of the world, but the example which Christ has left them (1 Peter 2:21). Of them it is said, “they follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth” (Rev. 14:4). But in order to follow Christ, self has to be denied and the cross taken up (Matt. 16:24). Only those who thus “hear,” are “known” of Christ, and who “follow” Him, shall “never perish.”

2. By insisting that no person has any warrant to derive comfort from the doctrine of Divine Security until he is sure that he possesses *the character or conduct* of a saint. This naturally grows out of the first point, though we have somewhat anticipated what should be said here. Not everyone who bears the name of Christ will enter Heaven, but only His sheep. It is therefore folly that only those bearing the marks of such have any claim upon the promise made to that favoured company. And the burden of proof always rests upon the one who affirms. If one answers some advertisement from an employer for labour for a skilled workman, he is required to give evidence of his qualifications by well-accredited testimonials. If a person puts in a claim to an estate he must produce proof that he is a legitimate heir and satisfy the court of his bona fides. If a captain requires an additional hand for his ship he demands that the applicant show his papers or give demonstration that he is a fully qualified seaman. Before I can procure a passport I must produce my birth certificate. And one who avers himself a saint must authenticate his profession and evidence his new birth before he is entitled to be regarded as such.

God’s saints are distinguished from all other people, not only by what He has done for them but also by what He has wrought in them. He set His hand upon them from all eternity, having loved them “with an everlasting love” (Jer. 31:3) and therefore were they “blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ,” chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, predestinated “unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself,” and “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:3-6). It is true that they fell in Adam and became guilty before God, but an all-sufficient Redeemer was provided for them, appointed to assume and discharge all their liabilities and make full reparation to the broken Law on their behalf. It is also true that they are “by nature the children of wrath even as others” being born into this world “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1-3); but at the

ordained hour a miracle of grace is performed within them so that they become “new creatures in Christ Jesus” (2 Cor. 5:17) and their bodies are made “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19). Faith and holiness have been communicated to them, so that though they are still in the world they are not of it (John 17:14).

The saints are endowed with a new life, with a spiritual and supernatural principle or “nature” which affects their whole souls. So radical and transforming is the change wrought in them by this miracle of grace that it is described as a passing from death unto life (John 5:24), from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son (Col. 1:13), from “having no hope and without God in the world,” to being “made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:12, 13), from a state of alienation to one of reconciliation (Col. 1:21), out of darkness into God’s marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9). Of them God says, “This people have I formed for Myself: they shall show forth My praise” (Isa. 43:21). Obviously such a tremendous change in their state and standing must effect a real and marked change in their character and conduct. From rebellion against God they are brought unto subjection to Him, so that they throw down their weapons of opposition and yield to His sceptre. From love of sin they are turned to hate it, and from dread of God they now delight in Him. Formerly they thought only of gratifying self, now their deepest longing is to please Him who has shown them such amazing grace.

The saints are those who enter into a *solemn covenant* with the Lord, unreservedly dedicating themselves unto Him, making His glory their paramount concern. “Formerly soldiers used to take an oath not to flinch from their colours, but faithfully to cleave to their leaders; this they called *sacramentum militare*, a military oath; such an oath lies upon every Christian. It is so essential to the being of a saint, that they are described by this: ‘gather My saints together unto Me; those that have made a covenant with Me’ (Psa. 50:5). We are not Christians till we have subscribed this covenant, and that without any reservation. When we take upon us the profession of Christ’s name we enlist ourselves in His muster-roll, and by it do promise that we will live and die with Him in opposition to all His enemies . . . He will not entertain us till we resign up ourselves freely to His disposal, that there may be no disputing with His commands afterwards, but, as one under His authority, go and come at His word” (W. Gurnall, 1660).

3. By insisting that perseverance is an *imperative necessity*. Adherence to the Truth no matter what opposition is encountered, living a life of faith in and upon God despite all the antagonism of the flesh, steadfastly treading the path of obedience in face of the scoffs of the world, continuing to go forward along the highway of holiness notwithstanding the hindrances of Satan and his emissaries is not optional but obligatory. It is according to the unalterable decree of God: no one can reach Heaven except by going along the only way that reaches there—Christ “endured the Cross” *before* He received the crown. It is according to the irreversible appointment of God: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). It is according to the established order of God, “that ye be not slothful but followers of them who through faith and patience (the Greek word may be rendered, “perseverance” with equal propriety) inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:12): It is according to the design of the Atonement, for Christ lived and died that He might “purify unto Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14).

Assurance of Divine preservation no more renders less imperative the saint’s own perseverance than God’s informing Hezekiah he should live a further fifteen years abol-

ished the necessity of his eating and drinking, resting and sleeping, as hitherto. "The elect are as much chosen to intermediate sanctification on their way as they are to that ultimate glorification which crowns their journey's end, and there a no coming to the one but through the other. So that neither the value, nor the *necessity*, nor the practical value of good works is superseded by this glorious truth . . . It is impossible that either the Son of God who came down from Heaven to propose and make known His Father's will; or that the Spirit of God, speaking in the Scriptures and acting on the heart, should administer the least encouragement to negligence and unholiness of life. Therefore that opinion that personal holiness is unnecessary to final glorification is in direct opposition to every dictate of reason, to every declaration of Scripture (Augustus Toplady). Alas, the attitude of multitudes of professing Christians is, "Soul, thou hast much good laid up . . . take thine ease" (Luke 12:19), and the doom of the fool will be theirs.

Concerning the imperativeness of perseverance C. H. Spurgeon said in the introductory portion of his sermon on, "The righteous also shall hold on his way" (Job 17:9), "The man who is righteous before God has a way of his own. It is not the way of the flesh, nor the way of the world; it is a way marked out for him by the Divine command, in which he walks by faith. It is the king's highway of holiness, the unclean shall not pass over it: only the ransomed of the Lord shall walk there, and these shall find it a path of separation from the world. Once entered upon the way of life, the pilgrim must persevere in it or *perish*, for thus saith the Lord, 'If any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him.' Perseverance in the path of faith and holiness is a *necessity* of the Christian, for only 'he that endureth to the end shall be saved.' It is in vain to spring up quickly like the seed that was sown on the rock, and then by-and-by to wither when the sun is up; that would but prove that such a plant has no root in itself, but 'the trees of the Lord are full of sap' and they abide and continue and bring forth fruit, even in old age, to show that the Lord is upright.

"There is a great difference between nominal Christianity and real Christianity, and this is generally seen in the failure of the one and the continuance of the other. Now, the declaration of the text is that the truly righteous man *shall* hold on his way: he shall not go back, he shall not leap the hedges and wander to the right hand or the left, he shall not lie down in idleness, neither shall he faint and cease to go upon his journey; but he 'shall hold on his way.' It will frequently be very difficult for him to do so, but he will have such resolution, such power of inward grace given him, that he will hold on his way with stern determination, as though he held on by his teeth, resolving never to let go. Perhaps he may not always travel with equal speed; it is not said that he shall hold on his *pace*, but he shall hold on his *way*. There are times when we run and are not weary, and anon when we walk and are thankful that we not faint; ay, and there are periods when we are glad to go on all fours and creep upwards with pain; but still we prove that 'the righteous shall hold on his way.' Under all difficulties the face of the man whom God has justified is steadfastly set towards Jerusalem, nor will he turn aside till his eyes shall see the King in his beauty."—A. W. P.

### BEHOLDING THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST.

“They crucified Him....and sitting down they watched Him there” (Matt. 27:35, 36). The reference is to the Roman soldiers, as is clear from John 19:23, confirmed by Matthew 27:54. They were the ones authorized to carry out the death sentence which had been passed by Pilate, and into their hands the governor had delivered the Saviour (Matt. 27:26, 27). With coarse scurrility they executed their task. Adding insult to injury they exposed the Lord Jesus unto the indignities of a mock coronation: robing Him in scarlet, crowning Him with thorns, hailing Him as King of the Jews. Giving full expression to their enmity they spat upon Him, smote Him with a reed, mocked Him. Restoring to Him His raiment, they conducted Him to Golgotha and affixed Him to the Cross. Having gambled for His garments, they sat down to watch Him—to frustrate any attempt at rescue which His friends might make, and to wait until life was extinct. By way of introduction let us briefly take note of three things.

First, *the circumstances*. The initiative had been taken by the religious leaders of Israel, for there “assembled together the chief priests and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtlety and kill Him” (Matt. 26:3, 4). How many of the foulest crimes which have blackened the pages of history were perpetrated by ecclesiastical dignitaries? Yet the common people were in full accord with their leaders, for “the multitude” (Mark 15:8) requested Pilate to adhere to his custom of releasing a prisoner unto them, and when he gave them the choice between Christ and Barabbas, they preferred the latter; and when the governor asked what was their pleasure concerning the former, they cried “Crucify Him” (Mark 15:13). And it was to “content the people” Pilate released Barabbas (v. 15). When Pilate expostulated with them “all the people said, His blood be on us and on our children” (Matt. 27:25). And Pilate, the administrator of the Roman law, which boasted of justice, acceded to their unjust demands.

Second, *the scene*. This was the outskirts of Jerusalem, a city more memorable than either Rome, London or New York. This was the residence of David, the royal city, the seat of Israel’s kings. It had witnessed the magnificence of Solomon’s reign. It was here the temple stood. It was here the Lord Jesus had taught and wrought miracles, and into which He had ridden a few days earlier seated upon an ass, the multitudes crying, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest” (Matt. 21:9)—so fickle is human nature! Israel had rejected their King and therefore He was conducted beyond the bounds of the city, so that He “suffered without the gate” (Heb. 13:12). The actual place of the crucifixion was Golgotha which signified “the place of a skull.” Nature had anticipated the awful deed, the very contour of the ground resembling a death’s head. Luke gives the Gentile name “Calvary” (23:33), for the guilt of that Death rested on both Jew and Gentile, as its saving efficacy was to be experienced by each.

Third, *the time*. This was as significant and suggestive as the historical and topographical associations of the place itself. Christ was crucified on the fourteenth of Nissan or about the beginning of April. It was the first of Israel’s great national feasts, the most important season in the Jewish year. It was the Passover, when solemn celebration was made of that night when all the firstborn sons of the Hebrews were spared from the angel of death in the land of Egypt. At this season Jerusalem was thronged by immense multitudes, for it was one of the three annual occasions when every male Israelite was com-

manded to appear before Jehovah in the temple (Deut. 16:16). Thus, huge crowds had journeyed thither from all parts of the land. It was in no obscure corner nor in secret that the Great Sacrifice was offered up to God. And the fourteenth of Nissan was the day appointed for it, for the Lord Jesus was the antitypical Lamb—"Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). On no other day *could He* be slain: at an earlier date they "sought to take Him: but no man laid hands upon Him, because His hour was not yet come" (John 7:30).

"They crucified Him....and sitting down they watched Him there." My divisions will be simple: what they saw; what I see; what do you see?

#### I. What they saw.

1. They beheld *the most amazing event* of all history, the most awe-inspiring spectacle ever set before the eyes of men, the most tragic and yet the most glorious deed ever performed on this earth. They beheld God incarnate taken by wicked hands and slain, yet at the same time the Redeemer voluntarily laying down His life for those who have forfeited every claim upon Him. To those soldiers it was an ordinary event: the execution of a criminal. And thus it is with most of those who hear the Gospel: it falls upon their ears as a religious commonplace. To those Roman soldiers, at least for awhile, Christ appeared to them only as a dying Jew. Thus it is with the multitude today: to them the Lamb of God possesses neither form nor comeliness and when He is set before them in the mirror of the Word they see in Him no beauty that they should desire Him. His peerless Person attracts them not. His righteous claims are disregarded—His sceptre is flouted—for His atoning blood they feel no need.

2. They beheld *the incomparable perfections of the crucified One*. How immeasurably different the mien of the suffering Saviour from what they had witnessed from others in similar circumstances! No cursing of His lot, no reviling of His enemies, no maledictions upon themselves. The very reverse—His lips are engaged in prayer! "Father," He says, "forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). How amazed they must have been as they heard that Blessed One on the tree making "intercession for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12). The two thieves who were crucified with Him mocked the Redeemer (Matt. 27:44), but at the eleventh hour one of them was "granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18) and turning to Jesus he said, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom" (Luke 23:42). The Lord did not decline his appeal and say he had sinned beyond the reach of mercy but answered, "Verily, I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise" (v. 43). Thus they witnessed an unparalleled display of sovereign grace unto one of the greatest of sinners.

3. They beheld *most mysterious phenomena*. They had sat down to "watch Him," but after a while they were no longer able to do so. At midday it suddenly became as midnight: "from the sixth hour (after sunrise) there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour" (Matt. 27:45). It was as though the sun refused to shine on such a scene, as though nature itself was mourning over such a sight! During those three hours there took place a transaction between Christ and God which was infinitely too sacred for finite eyes to gaze upon—a mystery which no mortal mind can fully enter into. As soon as the Saviour committed His spirit into the hands of the Father, "Behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose" (Matt. 27:51,

52). No ordinary sufferer was this. It was the Creator of Heaven and earth, and Heaven and earth here expressed their sympathy.

4. They beheld and heard *that which was blessed to their conviction and conversion*. Pharaoh witnessed the most remarkable display of God's power in the plagues which He sent upon Egypt, but so far from inclining him to repentance he continued to harden his heart. Thus it ever is with the unregenerate while then are left to themselves: neither the most astonishing tokens of God's goodness nor the most awe-inspiring of His judgments melt or move them. But in the case before us God was pleased to soften the callous hearts of these Roman soldiers and illumine their heathen minds, for we are informed, "Now when the centurion and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earth quake and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, truly this was the Son of God" (Matt. 27:54). Personally we regard this as another of the miracles which took place at Calvary—a miracle of amazing grace, and it is our expectation to meet in Heaven the very man who hammered the nails into the Saviour's hands and feet and thrust the spear into His side: God's answer to Christ's prayer, "Father, forgive them." Thus there is hope for the vilest sinner out of Hell if he will surrender to the Lordship of Christ and trust in His all-sufficient blood.

## II. What I see.

I perceive here *an unveiling of the character of man*. "Now all things that are discovered (margin) are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light" (Eph. 5:13). Now Christ is "the true light" (John 1:9)—the essential, Divine, all-revealing light; consequently all men and all things stood exposed in His presence. The worst things predicated in Scripture of fallen human nature were verified and exemplified in the days of Christ. God says that the heart of man is "desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9), and it was demonstrated to be such by the treatment meted out to His beloved Son. Scarcely was He born into this world than a determined effort was made to slay Him. Though He constantly went about doing good, relieving the distressed and ministering to both the souls and bodies of the needy, yet so little was He appreciated that He had to say, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head" (Matt. 8:20). On one occasion, "they besought Him that He would depart out of their coasts" (Matt. 8:34).

But not only was Christ unwelcome here, men *hated Him* and that "without a cause" (John 15:25). He gave them every reason to admire and adore Him, but they had an inveterate aversion for Him. The Word of Truth declares that "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7). Men do not believe it, in fact most of them affect the very opposite; nevertheless, at Calvary they gave proof of it. Multitudes go through the form of paying homage to God, but it is a "god" of their own imagination. They hate the true and living God, and were it possible would rid the universe of His existence. This is clear from their treatment of Christ, for He was none other than "God manifest in flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16) and Him they hated and hounded to death, and nothing short of death by crucifixion would appease them. Here at Calvary the real character of man was revealed and the desperate wickedness of his heart laid bare. There it was shown that he was capable of the blackest of all crimes. Then let us not be surprised that the history of mankind is written in tears and blood.

2. I perceive here *an unveiling of sin*. Sin! that "abominable thing" which the Lord hates (Jer. 44:4), but which is regarded so lightly by those who commit it. Sin! which

caused our first parents to be banished from Eden and which is responsible for all the want and woe that is in the world. Sin! which produces strife and bloodshed and has turned this “land of the living” into a mammoth cemetery. Sin! that hideous monster we so much dislike hearing about and which we are so ready to gloss over and excuse. Sin! over which Satan employs all his subtle arts to render attractive, setting it forth in the most appealing colours and winsome garbs. One of the great designs of the Incarnation was to bring to light the hidden things of darkness. The personal presence here of the Holy One acted like a brilliant light being turned on in a long-neglected room, revealing its squalor and filth. “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin, but now they have no cloak for their sin” (John 15:22).

In the passage just quoted Christ was speaking *comparatively*. Evil as man had shown himself all through his history, the coming of Immanuel to this earth brought sin to such a head that all that which had gone before was relatively but a trifling thing when compared with the monstrous wickedness which was done against Love incarnate. In the treatment which the Son of God received at the hands of men we see sin in its true colours, stripped of a disguise, exposed in its hideous reality, revealed in its true nature as contempt of God, rebellion against Him. Here at Calvary we behold the climax of sin and the fearful and horrible lengths to which it is capable of going. That which germinated in Eden culminated in the crucifixion. The first sin occasioned spiritual suicide, the second took the form of fratricide (Cain murdering his brother), but here at Calvary it issued in Deicide—the slaying of the Lord of Glory. We see also the fearful wages which sin pays—death, departure from God. Since Christ hung there as the Sin-bearer of all who believe in Him, He received the punishment which was due unto them.

3. I perceive an *unveiling of the character of God*. The heavens declare His glory and the firmament shows His handiwork, but nowhere are His perfections more awfully and illustriously displayed than at the Cross. See here His *ineffable holiness*. The holiness of God is the delight He has in all that is pure and lovely, and therefore does His nature abominate and burn against whatever is evil. God hates sin wherever it is found and He made no exception of Christ when He beheld it lying by imputation upon His beloved Son. There God had “laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6)—that is, all His people—He dealt with Him accordingly, pouring out His holy wrath upon Him. God is “of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Hab. 1:13) and therefore did He turn His back upon the Sin-bearer. “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” the suffering Saviour cried, and then answered His own query: “Thou art holy” (Psa. 22:1, 3).

See here God’s *inflexible justice*. The pronouncement of His Law is, “the soul that sinneth it shall die” (Ezek. 18:4), and no deviation from it can be made, for Jehovah has expressly declared that He, “will by no means clear the guilty” (Exo. 34:7). But will He not make an exception of that One whom He testifies is the Lamb “without spot and without blemish” (1 Peter 1:19)? No, for though Christ was sinless both by nature and by action yet because the sins of His people had been laid upon Him, God “spared not His own Son” (Rom. 8:32). Because sin was transferred to Him punishment must be visited upon Him, and therefore did God cry, “awake O sword against My Shepherd, against the Man that is My Fellow, saith the LORD of hosts, smite the Shepherd” (Zech. 13:7). God would not abate one iota of His righteous demand or allow sentiment to sully the fair face of His government. He claims to be par excellence the Judge who is “without respect of

persons” and fully was that demonstrated at Calvary by refusing to exempt the Person of His Beloved, the One in whom His soul delighted (Isa. 42:1), when occupying the place of the guilty.

See here God’s *amazing grace*. “God commendeth His love toward us (His people) in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Had He so pleased, God could have consigned the whole of Adam’s race to everlasting woe. That is what each of us richly deserve. And why should He not do so? By nature we are depraved and corrupt; by practice incorrigible rebels—with no love for Him and no concern for His glory. But out of His own goodness and benignity He determined to save a people from their sin, to redeem them by Christ, “to the praise of the glory of His grace” (Eph. 1:6). He determined to pluck them as brands from the burning, that they might be the eternal monuments of His mercy. And because it was wholly outside of their power to make atonement for their fearful crimes, He Himself provided an all-sufficient Sacrifice for them. He is “the God of all grace” (1 Peter 5:10) and innumerable tokens and proofs has He given of this, but nowhere were the “riches of His grace” so lavishly and so wondrously displayed as at Calvary.

See here God’s *manifold wisdom*. The Word of Truth declares, “There shall in nowise enter into it anything that defileth, neither worketh abomination” (Rev. 21:27), then how is it possible that I can ever gain admittance into the heavenly Jerusalem? How can it be that one so completely devoid of righteousness as I am and so filled with unrighteousness could ever receive the Divine approbation? The Law says, “The soul that sinneth it shall die” and I have sinned and broken the Law—how then can I escape its penalty? Since I am a spiritual pauper how can the necessary ransom be procured? Those are problems that no human intelligence can solve. Nor is the knot to be cut by an appeal to the bare mercy of God, for His mercy is not an attribute which overrides His justice and integrity. But at the Cross the Divine perfections shone out in glorious unity like the blending of the colours in the rainbow: there “mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Psa. 85:10). God’s justice was satisfied by Christ and therefore His mercy flows freely to all who repent and believe. God’s grace reigns “through righteousness,” and Christ’s blood can cleanse the foulest. The wisdom of God appears in creation and Providence but nowhere so grandly as at the Cross.

4. I see myself. What? Yes, as I turn my gaze to the Cross I behold myself, and so does each other who looks with the eyes of faith. Christ hung there as the Sponsor and Surety of His people, and there cannot be representation without identification—Christ identified with those whose sins He bears—believers identified with Him. In the sight of God they are one. Christ took my place and faith appropriates that fact. In the Person of my Substitute I satisfied every requirement of God’s Law. In the Person of Christ I paid the full price which Divine justice demanded. In the Person of Christ I stand approved before God, for I am clothed with His meritorious perfections (Isa. 61:10). The whole ransomed Church of God can say of Christ, “He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities” (Isa. 53:5), “Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24). And faith individualizes it and declares, “I am crucified with Christ....who loved me and gave Himself *for me*” (Gal. 2:20). Hallelujah! What a Saviour.

### III . What do you see ?



I mean those of you who are unsaved. 1. You behold One whom you *despise and reject*. Perhaps you deny it, saying your attitude is merely negative—indifference. You err. If you are not the friend of Christ you are His enemy—there is no third class. “He that is not with Me is against Me” (Matt. 12:30) is His own verdict, and from that there is no appeal. You have despised His authority, flouted His laws, treated His claims with contempt. You reject His yoke and sceptre, refusing to be ruled by Him. Thus you unite with those who cast Him out and hounded Him to death.

2. You behold One who is *presented as Saviour*. Yes, despite your wicked treatment of Him hitherto. He is set before you in the Gospel as One willing and able to heal the wounds that sin has made and save your souls from eternal death. If you will throw down the weapons of your warfare against Him, surrender to His Lordship and trust in His redeeming blood, He will accept you now—“him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). But if you refuse to do so, then—

3. You behold the One who is to be *your Judge*. Come to Him now as a repentant sinner, as a spiritual pauper, casting yourself upon His grace, and He will pardon your iniquities and give you a royal welcome. “Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28) is His own invitation and promise. But continue turning your back upon Him and He shall yet say to you, “Depart from Me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41).

[A sermon—slightly revised—preached by the editor in Colorado in 1911.]

