

SKETCHES FROM THE GOSPEL OF MARK

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SKETCHES FROM THE GOSPEL OF MARK

1. Mark as a Writer

“John whose surname was Mark” (Acts 12). This is our first acquaintance with him who is numbered amongst the Evangelists. Of his family we only know that his mother was called Mary, and that he was related to Barnabas—probably his cousin (Col.4:10), and not nephew, as the Authorised Version states.

Never naming himself, it is only from the Acts and from the Epistles that we know anything of his history. His original name was John; and he was surnamed, for what reason is unknown, by the Latin name of Marcus, i.e., Mark. Such a practice was anything but uncommon. Simon, James, John, and Jude among the Apostles had each of them an appellation given to them. Joseph, called Barnabas, was surnamed Justus (Acts 1:23). Jesus was surnamed Barnabas by the Apostles (4:36), and Saul of Tarsus bore the name of Paul. Introduced, as Mark was, by both his names by his brother Evangelist Luke, who generally thus described him, his Jewish name, John, gradually dropped out of use, and is not met with after Acts 15:37; henceforth he is only mentioned by his surname of Mark (Col.4:10; 2 Tim.4:11; Phm.24; 1 Pet.5:13).

Called by Peter his son, who however uses a term never applied by Paul to his children in the faith, it has been commonly supposed that he was one of Simon’s converts, though when and where converted none can now say. Reading Mark’s gospel we cannot divest ourselves of the impression that he writes of many things therein as an eye-witness, thus leading his readers to conclude that he must often have been found in the company of the Lord, as He went about ministering amongst men; so if Peter claims him as his convert, he must probably have become that before the day of Pentecost.

His mother Mary had a house at Jerusalem, and was very early numbered amongst the Christians (Acts 12:12). Mark may, therefore, have been a native of that city, as his first recorded service was the accompanying Barnabas and Saul from Jerusalem on their return to Antioch (12:25), after carrying up to the brethren in Jerusalem the tribute of love from the Gentile converts in the ancient capital of the kings of Syria. For a time he would seem to have continued with them, for he subsequently started, as their minister or attendant, on their first great missionary journey. Such a

service, however, was evidently then not congenial to him; so, leaving them at Perga in Pamphylia, he returned to Jerusalem, which he probably still regarded as his home (13:5,13).

A second time we read of him at Antioch, and that after the memorable council at Jerusalem, and there he became the cause of that sharp contention between those two Apostles and fellow-labourers, which resulted in their separating, never, that we know of, to labour in company again. Barnabas had desired that his kinsman Mark should accompany them on their contemplated second missionary journey. Paul dissenting from that, seeing that he had departed from them at Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work (15:38), they parted company. Barnabas thereupon with Mark went to Cyprus, the country of that Apostle's birth. Henceforth the name of our Evangelist is found no more in the history of the Acts; and from the historian's notice that Paul, selecting Silas as his companion, was recommended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord, nothing of that kind being said about Barnabas, it would seem as if Paul's judgment about Mark's conduct was fully endorsed by the church at Antioch.

But though Luke has nothing further to tell us about him, for his narrative is henceforth confined to the acts of Paul, the great Apostle of the Gentiles has put on record his own appreciation in later years of his former attendant. He could twice commend him to the Colossian saints, as one who should justly be ranked amongst the honoured band of his fellow-labourers (Col.4:11; Phm.24). And that commendation, Paul, to the end of his life, saw no reason to modify. For in his latest canonical epistle, the second to Timothy, he wrote, "Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry" (2 Tim.4:11). It is pleasant to find that by true service he had reinstated himself in the good opinion of that Apostle.

Enjoying the confidence of Paul, and of Peter likewise, to the close, we may believe, of their lives, all historical details about him, as far as Scripture can teach us, come to an end. An ancient tradition makes him to have been founder of the church in Alexandria. More than that cannot be said, for we have no authentic record of it on which we can definitely rely.

He was profitable, writes Paul, for ministering (2 Tim.4:11). Of any service, however, in oral ministry we have no account. Nevertheless, the

whole church of God is deeply indebted to him for that gospel which bears, and has always borne, his name.

Tradition tells us that, learning much from Peter, and making notes of that which he heard, he used them in the composition of his gospel (Euseb.2:17). What measure of truth there may be in this, it is not for anyone in the present day to determine. This, however, should be borne in mind, that, tested by that which has come down to us, confirmation of the tradition in one important particular signally fails us. We refer here to the transfiguration, at which Peter was present, and to his account of the words which he then heard from the excellent glory—"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (2 Pet.1:17). Anyone comparing the different accounts of this, as related by Matthew, Mark, and Luke respectively, will see that the words in the Epistle of Peter are more in agreement with those given in Matthew than with those recorded by Mark. Both Peter and Matthew tell us of the Father's estimate of His Son—"in whom I am well pleased." Now Matthew alone of the Evangelists has preserved this, and Peter distinctly confirms it. How is it then, if the tradition referred to be correct, that Mark, who must surely have heard Peter's account of that scene, which evidently that Apostle had never forgotten, fails to record such an important addition to the utterance then heard from heaven? How is this to be accounted for, if that tradition is really to be depended upon? Corroboration of it fails us just where we should have expected to have found it substantiated, and that failure confirms the impression of Mark's independence as a writer.

This is more and more apparent as we examine the features of his narrative. Though the shortest gospel of the four, he has preserved many facts not found in the others.

And though travelling over much the same ground as that trodden by Matthew and by Luke, both of whom, in common with him, treat chiefly of the Lord's ministry in Galilee, he evinces his perfect independence of his fellow-biographers, not only by the many things which he alone notices, but also by that which he omits, as well as by the arrangement of his materials.

Dispensational teaching characterises much of Matthew's gospel. He alone makes mention of the church (16,18); and by the parables of the Kingdom of Heaven gives the fullest information of the character of things on earth between the Lord's ascension and His return. Doctrinal teaching about the

Lord is a marked feature of John's gospel. An arrangement of materials in what we may call a somewhat prophetic and moral outline is met with in Luke. Mark, on the other hand, presenting the Lord as the Prophet and Teacher, sets Him before us ministering amongst men, just as we might have seen Him had we lived at that time. Consequently he is generally more strictly chronological in his narrative than any of his fellow-evangelists. And portraying the Lord as the Prophet, he naturally commences with His ministry, the prelude to which, as he teaches us, was His baptism by John the Baptist. His birth and early years are therefore passed over. And in pursuance of his purpose to present the Lord as the Prophet, he calls attention at times to His occupation in teaching, where Matthew, referring to the same events, only notices that He was working miracles. Each writer keeps to his purpose, guided in it by the Holy Ghost.

In character with this, we find the Father so seldom mentioned in this gospel. By Matthew and John His name is very often introduced. Less frequently spoken of in Luke's gospel than in that of the two just mentioned, it is only on five occasions that He is expressly named by Mark (8:38; 11:25,26; 13:32; 14:36).

Then, future judgment, a theme by no means sparingly touched upon by Matthew and Luke, is but seldom alluded to in Mark. In confirmation of this let the reader compare Matthew (3:10-12; 7:22,23; 8:12; 10:15; 11:21-24; 12:31-32,36; 13:30,39-42,49,50; 21:44; 22:13; 23:37-38; 24:30,37-41,50,51; 25:30,31-46) and Luke (3:9,17; 10:12-15; 12:10,45,46; 13:24-28,34,35; 16:19-31; 17:26-37; 19:27,41-44; 20:18; 21:34-36; 23:30-31), with our gospel, remembering that the last part of 6:11 should probably be omitted. The consistency of this peculiarity will be evident, when it is borne in mind that Matthew presents the Lord as Messiah the King, and Luke introduces Him as Son of Man. With both these characters, and not with that of Prophet, the execution of judgment is connected.

Not less marked is the Evangelist's graphic manner of delineating scenes of which he writes. A touch here and there, as with the brush of an artist, brings out into bold relief some most interesting points.

Take the scene at the foot of the mount of transfiguration. The disciples were surrounded by a crowd, while scribes were questioning with them. In a moment the attention of the multitude is diverted from the disciples to the Lord, who had unexpectedly made His appearance. To Him the crowd at once ran. Then comes out the urgency of the father on behalf of his

afflicted son. Hope from the power of the disciples had failed him. He turns now, in his agony, to the Lord as his last resource. "If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us." We can well picture it.

Take another instance—the eagerness of the young ruler to know what he was to do to inherit eternal life. A momentous question surely. So he must *run to the Lord*, and, throwing himself on his *knees*, he asks his question of the Master. On that apparent eager scholar, seemingly so desirous to learn, the Lord looked, for as Mark alone tells us, He loved him. Can we not fancy it all?—the young man prostrate at the feet of Christ, and the Lord looking down on him in a manner which betokened the feelings of his heart.

To a third example we would refer—that of Bartimaeus. His cry, which the passing crowd had sought to stop, had reached the ears of the Lord. All progress was arrested, for Jesus stood and said, "Call ye him." Immediately the tone of the multitude changed from reproof to encouragement: never was more plainly exhibited the fickleness of a crowd. "Be of good comfort," they now cry. "Arise, He calleth thee." In a moment Bartimaeus threw away his garment, and rose up and went to Christ. How graphic is the narrative? The Lord's words, the change in demeanour of the crowd, the activity of the blind man, all told so simply, combine to present a picture which we may look for in vain elsewhere. What vividness and finish, too, do such details impart to the scene!

And not only are the *surroundings* of events brought thus into light, but the *feelings*, whether of the Lord or of others, are on several occasions recorded. Apparently nothing escapes him. And furnishing his readers with information about something which had been spoken, it will be found that at times, whilst his fellow-evangelists give only the substance, Mark reproduces the very *text* of the remark.

Then also he puts before his readers the Lord's *retiring* character, and impresses on all how He shunned and did not court *popularity*. "All men seek for Thee," said Peter (Mark 1:37). "Let us go into the next towns," was the Lord's immediate answer, "that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth." And when popularity awaited Him, consequent on the cleansing of the leper, Mark records how "He could no more openly enter into the city," but was without in desert places (1:45). He did return, but evidently having avoided a popular ovation, for "it was noised that He was in the house" (2:1). Again, when about to deliver the demoniac, at the

urgent entreaty of his father, Mark tells us, that “seeing the people running together, the Lord “rebuked the foul spirit” (9:25). Perfect Man, popularity so pleasing to the natural man He shunned, and in keeping with this we so often read of His being in a house. How interesting and instructive are these notices of the life and ways of Him who is both our life and our example!

In the *sketches* which follow, it has been attempted to present some of these salient features of this gospel, and to draw attention to details noted by him, which will often be found to give additional interest to the narrative. Such, when duly weighed, must, we think, force on the reader the conviction of Mark’s independence as a writer, and also that he was often recording for the benefit of his readers, not merely what he had heard from others, but much of that of which he had been personally a witness. Evidently with him the labour of writing his narrative, under the guidance of the Spirit, was a labour of love. The Holy Spirit would by him present to us the Teacher as He ministered here below; and Mark, delighting in that service, would vividly depict Him in His work.

2. One Day of Ministry. (1:21-30)

A life of untiring activity in service was that of the Lord after He began His ministry. He slept, but in the storm. (Mark 4:38). He was so pressed by the multitude that they could not so much as eat bread (Mark 3:20). He withdrew with the apostles to a desert place, north-east of the lake of Galilee, that they might rest after their mission on which He had sent them; for again we read that they had no leisure so much as to eat (6:31). To Mark we are indebted for this information on both these occasions. Activity characterised the Lord in life. He came to minister, and, while it was day, He worked the works of Him that sent Him (John 9:4). To an illustration of this we would call the reader’s attention, found in Mark 1:21-39, which gives us an account of just one day in the Master’s life of service on earth.

It was a Sabbath day, and He was at Capernaum, after His rejection by the people of Nazareth. He entered, we, read, into the synagogue, and taught. “And they were astonished at His doctrine; for He taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.” What He said is not here nor elsewhere recorded, only the effect of it on the hearers is stated. It was so different from that to which they had been accustomed. He taught as one who had authority. Clearly it was nothing merely traditional, nothing con-

ventional; no cold, formal utterance, as a scribe might have enunciated it. The speaker, they *felt*, had authority. We, know He had, for He was the Prophet of whom Moses had written, and He was the Son of God as well.

But not only did He teach that day. For a man was there with an unclean spirit, as Mark states—a demon, as Luke calls it. If the congregation listened to the Lord in silence, struck by His teaching, that man could not keep quiet. He attracted the Lord's attention by speaking to Him in a language all could understand—the language of man, yet giving utterance to the thoughts of the demon within him: ¹ “What have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus the Nazarene? Art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God” (1:24). The demon would bear testimony to the Lord; but the Lord would not receive it. What that spirit made its victim utter was all true. The Nazarene was the Holy One of God, and He will deal in judicial and almighty power with that spirit in a future day. Testimony, however, from such a source He would not accept, so He rebuked the demon, saying, “Hold thy peace, and came out of him” (v.25). The unclean spirit obeyed, and came out, having first torn the man, and having cried with a loud voice. Demoniacal possession is a reality. There was no illusion. That spirit's power was displayed, and its voice heard; but the power of the Lord was greater. And however unwilling to leave its victim, at the word of Christ, “Hold thy peace, and come out of him,” it came out.

The effect on all present was marked, and has been recorded. And our Evangelist has depicted the astonishment which reigned in the synagogue, and has acquainted us with words of the spectators on this occasion: “They were all amazed, inasmuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? a new teaching! With authority He commandeth even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him” (v.27) The demon obeyed the word of the Holy One of God. Men witnessed what passed, but did not intelligently understand it.

Teaching such as none heard from the scribes (Mark alone mentions them) they had listened to, and power such as mere men did not possess they had witnessed, and both in exercise for man's blessing. A memorable Sabbath that must have been.

¹ “Let us alone,” recorded by Luke, should probably be omitted in Mark.

Now, leaving the synagogue, the Lord entered Simon's house in company, as Mark tells us, of James and John; besides, doubtless, that of Simon and Andrew, who were brothers. His purpose in entering there was perhaps for refreshment and retirement. But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever, and anon, i.e., immediately, they tell Him of her. Hearing of the sickness, the Lord thought of the fever-stricken one, and "He came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them" (v.31). "He touched her hand," writes Matthew; "He took her by the hand," writes Mark. How perfectly independent is Mark as a narrator, though recounting the same history. Simon's mother-in-law was healed at once. She passed through no stage of convalescence; for the fever left her, and she ministered to them. Astonishment had reigned in the synagogue; joy must have pervaded that house.

The day declined, the Sabbath drew to a close, the shades of evening began to lengthen, when that house became a centre to which people might have been seen conveying with them the sick and those possessed with demons. The city was astir, alive, for the Sabbath was over. But why was the fisherman's abode the point to which all directed their steps? The Lord Jesus Christ was under that roof. Both Matthew and Luke tell us of the same scene, but Mark alone has informed us that "all the city was gathered together at the door." And now the happy quietness which had surely reigned within, was broken in upon by the troops of people with their sick and afflicted. To their call the Lord was not indifferent, "for He healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many demons; and suffered not the demons to speak, because they knew Him" (v.34). Activity in blessing to men characterised that day from morn to night. All flowed from One—the Holy One of God; yet, withal, the Nazarene; who, as Peter afterwards described Him, "went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38).

Darkness settled on the city, night asserted its sway, and quietness reigned in the streets of Capernaum. All went to rest. But how many must have lain dawn that night, some with hearts thankful to overflowing, and others with bodies at ease from racking, torturing pain. The morning carne, and inquiries were made about the Lord; for even Simon, under whose roof He had been, did not know what had become of Him. Unknown to them all He had gone forth. But whither? He had passed beyond the city's precincts and went unto a spot alone. For we read: "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there

prayed” (v.35). Again have we to record our thanks to Mark for telling us how He was engaged. He who had shown such power was found as a man in the attitude of dependence on God. He had cast out demons and healed diseases in His own name; He spake, and it was done. But now He prayed. The exercise of power, however wonderful, should never make a man renounce his position of dependence. If that could have been rightly done by any, it might have been by Him. But He has set the example of the opposite.

Sought after by Simon and those that were with Him, the Lord was found; and they tell Him of the favourable impression His works had made—“All men seek for Thee.” The tide of popular favour ran high in His behalf on that day in Capernaum. To one who courted it, it would have been the moment to have returned to the city; and all the more since, as Luke informs us, “The people sought after Him, and came unto Him, and stayed Him, that He should not depart from them” (Luke 4:42). If possible, they would constrain Him. But neither Simon, nor those with him, nor the people knew *what* the Lord was. What He could do they had witnessed, What He was had yet to be learnt. His answer to Simon brought this last out: “Let us go elsewhere,” He said, “into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth” (v.38). Popularity He did not seek. Indeed, Mark frequently notices His retiring character (1:44,45; 3:12,19; 5:43; 6:32; 7:17,24,33-36; 8:23-26; 9:25,28,30; 10:10). Popular favour, so alluring to men, did not divert Him from His mission. He would pursue that. Dependent, perfect, obedient: that is what He was as a Man.

What He could do on men’s behalf, we have said, had been seen in the city. What He was, Simon and others learned outside of it. He taught, and He delivered;—taught and delivered as no one had done, or could do. But He was found, after all that display of power, to be a *dependent* Man, for He prayed; a *perfect* Man, for popular favour did not attract Him, nor guide Him in His service; and an *obedient* Man, for He steadfastly carried out the mission He had undertaken upon earth; for “He want preaching,” we read, “in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons” (v.39).

We have thus had described about *twenty-four hours* of the Lord’s life on earth, commencing with the morning of one day, and going on to the morning of the next. What a day it was! Astonishing to those who witnessed it; instructive to us who read about it.

3. Efforts to Hinder. (3:20-35)

The Lord's presence amongst men had a marked effect on people. If without in desert places, unable openly to return to Capernaum, because that leper whom He had healed could not keep silence, yet people went to Him from every quarter (1:45). After some days, returning to Capernaum, it was noised that He was in the house.² Immediately many were gathered to it, "insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and He preached the word unto them (2:1-2). From the house He went forth to the lake side, and all the multitude resorted to Him, and He taught them (v.13).

Accepting Matthew's hospitality, He met a large company of publicans and sinners at the table, added to which there were Pharisees and scribes looking on. (v.15).

Entering the synagogue on another Sabbath day, many eyes were on Him, watching to see if He would heal a man there present with a withered hand. The synagogue service was probably little heeded by His enemies; the Lord was the One with whom they were occupied. He healed the man, having first challenged His observers about it. Opposition was stirred. Such, an attack, as they deemed it, on their traditional teaching must be resented. So the Pharisees, with whom, as Mark tells us, the Herodians were here associated, took counsel to kill Him; but, as we know, such counsels had to prove abortive, for it was not possible that a prophet should perish out of Jerusalem.

Leaving the synagogue, the Lord withdrew with His disciples to the sea. Still was He the object, the centre of attraction. And now a great multitude followed from Galilee, and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and from beyond Jordan, and they of Tyre and Sidon even went after Him, and swelled the crowd. His popularity seemed unbounded. And so great was the concourse that the Lord, as we may learn from our Evangelist, in order to prevent pressure from the crowd, made His disciples procure a small boat to wait upon Him (3:9). For, having healed many, they pressed upon Him for to touch Him, as many as had plagues. And unclean spirits, when they saw Him, fell down before Him, and cried saying, Thou art the Son of

² The house probably in which He dwelt. – So *Meyer*.

God. But He straitly charged them that they should not make Him known (3:11-12), He declined such aid.

Rejected by the Pharisees and scribes, was God's work to languish for lack of labourers? No. The Lord therefore proceeded to call the Twelve, both to be with Him, as Mark tells us, and to go out and preach, when He should have commissioned them (3:13-15). Leaving the mountain on which He had called them, He was found again in a house, and, as before, the multitude congregated there, so that He with His disciples was not able even to eat (v.20).

Such was the interest that His presence excited! No one in Galilee could be ignorant of it. And however much He sought retirement, He could not ensure it, for the crowd pursued Him, whether to the wilderness, the lake side, or into the house. Those who had need of healing rejoiced evidently at the power which He could put forth, and sought it earnestly. But everyone was not sick, nor possessed by an evil spirit; so it was not all that witnessed what was passing who understood what a time of blessing it was. Some then would fain interpose to check, as they would view it, such uncalled-for excitement. Of course there might be that which is mere excitement—but if God is working in power, no wonder could it be that such a movement as has been referred to was witnessed. To allow it to go on, and probably gather power, it was felt would not do. An enemy there was, and is, too watchful and wily to allow of that without attempting to stop it, or at least to discredit it. Of efforts in that direction the Evangelist Mark now informs us.

Of the counsel of the Pharisees and Herodians we hear no more. It was not the purpose of God that Herod should deal with the Lord as he did with the Baptist. The time for the Lord's death had not come, so all plans with that in view must for the time fail. Other means must be found to stop, if possible, the Lord in His work.

And, first, there were those who doubtless thought themselves calm, sober judges of the situation; men who would not allow themselves to be carried away by passion, nor by the excitement of the moment. Such men came forward. And the historian Mark—and he alone has recorded this attempt—introduces them to his readers as *friends* of the Lord. Probably they had known Him for long, when yet He was to them but the carpenter's son, and a carpenter Himself previous to His commencing His ministry in Israel. Who was such an One, to become the centre and cause of such

excitement? No time to eat! He must be beside Himself! Friendliness dictated their course. They must stop this, so they went out to lay hold on Him (3:21). But in vain. What they said to Him, if they ever reached Him, is hidden from us. The Lord, it would seem, did not interfere with their judgment. Perhaps He ignored it. They might say He was beside Himself. They might go out to check the movement, yet it went on. Beside Himself! Had they asked the cleansed leper, what would he have said? Had they questioned those who had been restored to health, and those delivered from demon power, what would have been their judgment of Him? Had they taken counsel even with those whose households and whose families had been gladdened by their sick being healed, would they have agreed that He was beside Himself? No. The judgment of His friends told a tale; for it was a convincing proof that none of them, in their person or in their families, had known the blessing of His healing power.

They went out to lay hold on Him. Evidently they must have returned, having failed in their self-imposed mission. Another attempt then was made. If the enemy could not stop the Lord by His friends, he would do his utmost to have Him condemned in the eyes of the people, and for this purpose his tools were selected from the teaching class, the scribes, and scribes from Jerusalem. Now we all know the effect on ignorant people produced by the judgment of those viewed as men of reputation: how it carries weight. To such a class were people now directed. Their judgment is given. The work was Satanic. His miracles none could dispute, but the power by which He worked them was another matter. Of that they had no doubt. "He hath Beelzebub, and, By the prince of the devil (or demons) casteth He out demons" (v.22). Such was their recorded judgment. And they were scribes, and from Jerusalem too! Ignorant Galileans might be taken in; they, scribes as they were, learned in all Jewish wisdom, could see it all at a glance. It was Beelzebub working, and not God. An awful, awful statement!

Hitherto the Lord had apparently taken no notice of the efforts to stop Him. Now He speaks, and demonstrates the folly of those would-be wise men, "How can Satan," He asked them, "cast out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end. But no one can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house" (Mark 3:23-27).

The Lord's answer was conclusive. None answered Him. The folly of those scribes He made evident—and, may we not suppose it, even to themselves? If they acknowledged He did the miracles, and that they could not deny, the power by which He worked them was not of the prince of the demons. The educated scribes were foolish indeed.

How foolish! What had the demons expressed in the most public way, and in the most public places? It was no secret what had been uttered in the synagogue. “What have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus the Nazarene? art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God” (1:24). Again, when the Lord was surrounded by the crowd of people collected from all parts, to which we have referred above, we read that “unclean spirits, when they saw Him, fell down before Him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God” (3:11). Now, though Mark alone, it would seem, has preserved a record of this last quoted testimony to His Person, yet it must have been well known. It was not a thing done in a corner. How foolish, then, were those scribes? The testimony of the demons refuted their awful assertion. To what egregious folly will not men stoop in their attempts to oppose the work of God!

But it was more than folly. Such a course as they had embarked on would imperil the salvation of their souls, and cause them to be in danger of eternal sin. Of this the Lord now warns them: “Verily I say unto you, all sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin” (rather than condemnation). And to make it clear what the Lord referred to as blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, Mark, and he alone, explains it: “Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit” (3:28-30). Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, an unpardonable sin, consists in attributing the power of the Spirit to evil agency. How many a person with a morbid conscience has been troubled, thinking he has committed that sin. A simple reference to Mark 3:30 would at once have set such an one at rest.

Another attempt to stop the Lord in His work has now to be recorded; but, like the others, its failure to effect the purpose intended was as signally manifested. Friends had found they could do nothing. The scribes from Jerusalem had been silenced. Perhaps His mother and His brethren might be able effectually to interpose. That was next to be tried. A wily plan, surely, of the enemy. Family relationships the Lord as Creator had

originated. How could He disown them? How could He disregard the claims which they might justly have on Him? We know He could not, and would not in their right place disown them. Of that there is proof; for, as He hung on the cross, He provided a home for His mother with her nephew,³ John the Evangelist (John 19:26-27). The Word, too, exhorts us to recognise them. Woe be to him who ignores them.

If, then, His mother and His brethren came to Him, He must, it would be thought, give heed to them. But on this occasion natural claims were put forward to take precedence of the carrying on of God's work. That He would not admit. "There came," we read, "His mother and His brethren, and, standing without, sent unto Him, calling Him." The house was full; they could not enter it (Luke 8:19). So standing without, they sent unto Him to come out to them. Had He done that, He must have paused in His work, for a multitude sat about Him, and He was talking to them (Matt.12:46). "They say unto Him, Behold Thy mother, and Thy brethren, and Thy sisters (so some read) without seek for Thee" (Mark 3:32). Family influence it was sought to bring to bear upon Him to get Him out of that crowd around Him. Either, it would seem, He must stop in His work, or disown the claim of natural ties. It looked like an artfully concocted plan of the enemy, in which His mother certainly was an unconscious instrument. What did He do? His answer silenced His mother and His brethren, as He had just before silenced the scribes: "Who is My mother and My brethren?" Then, answering His own question, He said, after looking round on those which sat about Him, "Behold My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, and My sister, and mother" (3:33-35). Natural ties there are, but there are spiritual ties as well. Those who did God's will were evidently born of God; so He would regard them in the light of His mother, sister, and brother. Sister, He said, for Mark, as we have noticed, very possibly mentioned them as coming with His mother and His brethren.

Did these without think they should be heeded because of their relationship? Relationship was the ground He would take for continuing His work within. He owned the existence of a spiritual relationship with those who did God's will; and elsewhere we read that He is not ashamed to

³ John's mother was Salome, the Virgin's sister. Compare, in proof of this, Mark 15:40 with John 19:25.

call such brethren (Heb.2:11). Hence He refused to go out to His mother, etc.

All these attempts failed; but were they isolated efforts? Surely, as we see them brought thus together by Mark, we must admit that the whole looks like the conception of one mastermind. It was a skilful plan, devised by Satan to neutralise the Lord's influence with the people. We all know how the populace can be swayed by a cry of the moment. What an appeal to make to them! Why, His friends, who have known Him for long, agree that He is beside Himself. Who will follow such an one? Then the scribes from Jerusalem, competent judges, have declared that He is working by demon power. Who would listen to such an, one? And last, but not least, His nearest relatives, His mother, brethren, and sisters, desire to stop His strange career. Who would put their Judgment against that of His friends, the scribes, and His relatives? How plausible that might have sounded, and how much weight it might have had, if the Lord had not silenced the scribes, and replied to the request of His mother and His brethren as He did!

4. The Apostles at School. (4 – 6:6)

The Lord's presence on earth was the beginning of a new order of things. God was speaking by His Son (Heb.1:2). The kingdom of God was upon earth, and was preached (Luke 16:16), and the heavenly calling had begun to be unfolded (Matt.5:12). Teaching far in advance of that to which the people had been accustomed was now heard (Matt.5-7), though all the counsel of God was as yet unrevealed (John 16:12-13). It was evident, therefore, if the Lord meant, as we learn, to send out the twelve to preach (Mark 3:14), that they must be instructed ere they went forth on their mission, both as to the character of the times, and also as to that which God was doing, and would do. That instruction the Lord provided, and in the gospel of Mark we are best made acquainted with it.

In ch.3:13-19 we read of His calling the twelve. In ch.6:7-12 we learn that He sent them out to preach, but not before they had been made acquainted with a great deal, as detailed in ch.4 to 6:6. We may view them, then, in this portion, as it were, at school; but at school under the tuition of a wise Teacher, who spake as never man spake, and who was competent to teach, for He spoke of that which He knew (John 3:11). By parables and by miracles He taught them. The parables opened up the character of the work

which was commencing; the miracles illustrated other things with which the disciples had need to become acquainted. Let us look at this in order.

The kingdom of God was to be advanced not by the sword, but by the word. Hearts were to be won, and not simply knees bent to render outward homage. Israel had fought under Moses, and under Joshua. David had extended his kingdom, which Solomon inherited, by the power of the sword to the limits predetermined by God—compare Gen.15:18 with 2 Chron.9:26. God's kingdom, however, was to be advanced in a new and very different manner, viz., by the Word effecting a lodgement in the heart and acting on the conscience. This the parables teach; and though addressed to crowds on the shore by the Lord in the boat, the disciples were evidently to learn by them the character of that work, and to note the effects which had begun to manifest themselves already.

Accordingly, the first parable that we meet with is that of the Sower. In this case it was the Lord. Now, the need for such a service indicated the moral condition of men. In them by nature there was nothing which could make them fruitful for God. A field is sown because there is no crop in it. Since, then, the Lord came, and began to sow the seed which alone can make anyone fruitful. His coming and service proclaimed the ruin of man by the Fall. By nature none of us can be fruitful for God. What is wanted at the outset is the seed, and that must come from without. The seed is the word of God. (Luke 8:11). Nothing short of that will do. Civilisation, training, education, example, all useful in their way, cannot singly or collectively be a substitute for the seed. God's voice must be heard in the soul. Of man's *need* the parable teaches. Would, then, all the labours of the Sower be crowned with success, for clearly there was no adulteration nor lack of germinating power in the seed? Other things, however, must be taken into account in spiritual as in natural husbandry. One has not only to consider the seed, but the ground as well. Hence man's spiritual *condition* must also be remembered. How many a person freshly converted, and rejoicing in truth for the first time opened up to him, has thought he had only to speak to others, and the effect on them would correspond to that on himself. But disappointment, it may be, after disappointment, he has experienced, as he found he was speaking to dull hearts and to deaf ears. He had left out of account an important consideration, viz., that relative to the soil, in which he was trying to implant what he had so gladly received. Now the Lord, we here learn, as the Sower, made no such mistake. He was not disappointed; He knew what was in man (John 2:25). He knew beforehand, and in the

parable He indicated it, how little result there would be from His labours. He wished His disciples to understand that. To the question of the soil, then, were they turned, as well as to the nature of the seed.

On four kinds of ground the seed would fall, but only on the last did it in the parable become fruitful. What fell by the wayside never got into the ground at all; the fowls of the air rapidly took and devoured it. There are wayside hearers who hear indeed, but on whom the Word makes no impression. Then the enemy, ever on the watch, comes and takes away the seed that was sown. The devil's watchfulness and activity is graphically described. Like birds of the air who, unseen before, rapidly appear, and carry off crumbs that may be thrown down, so does the enemy take away the seed sown, because it was uncared for by the individual.

Of the stony ground we next read. There are those who seem most apt in receiving—they hear with gladness; but evidently conscience has never been reached. Hence there is no root; and let persecution arise because of the word, immediately they are offended, or stumble. They do not stand; they are like plants where there is no depth of earth, which rapidly spring up, but under the sun's heat are scorched, and wither away. The labour of the sower here, too, comes to nothing.

A third class is likened to ground in which seed is sown, but among thorns. As in nature, the latter springing up choke the seed, and it becometh unfruitful, so the cares of this world (or age), the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things, entering in, choke the word. The seed was good, it was alive, for it germinated; but fruit was hindered, it was choked in its growth. The word of God, and that only, was the seed. The Sower used nothing else. A lesson this to all. Let it be the word, and that in its simplicity. If labour at times seems unproductive of fruit, it is only what the Master experienced; so we may expect it. In these classes the cause of the unproductiveness demonstrated the state of the soul.

But a fourth class is mentioned. They bring forth fruit to maturity. The ground was good into which the seed fell; the soil, too, evidently was deep enough, and no thorns choked it. It produced fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, some an hundredfold. The seed in all cases mentioned was the same. The responsibility, therefore, of each person could not be denied. For of each class we read—they *heard* the Word; though only by the last class

was the desired result displayed in fruit being matured. Yet even in that the yield varied.⁴

A few remarks may here be made. The parable was addressed to the multitude in the audience of the disciples. The state of each person, or, to speak in parabolic language, the nature of the soil, was thereby proved. All heard, but how few cared to know the interpretation. An illustration this was of that which would be frequently met with; a justification, too, of the parable just propounded. The twelve did ask for the interpretation; and Mark tells us, what the others do not, that there were some who with the twelve asked for an understanding of that which had been set forth (4:10). The Lord, willing to teach, opened up the parable at once. There were those *without*—alas! how many—who cared not to know (v.11). There were some, evidently but a small number, who, desiring to understand, showed they were *within*. To such was “given the mystery of the kingdom of God,” as we should probably read verse 11. Great favour was this, but accompanied by responsibility; for the light received was to be manifested. Hence they must take heed what they heard. To those who had would more be given. From those who had not should be taken away what they had (v.21-25).

Of the character, and of the manner of working, and of results, the Lord had spoken. Now, in a Parable peculiar to Mark (v.26-29), He intimated that, as there is a time in nature between the sowing and the reaping, during which the seed is left to itself, so there would be an interval between His then present labour and the harvest, during which He would not directly appear. In other words, He would be away till the harvest. Hence the time for His taking the kingdom in power could not arrive till the field was ready for reaping (Rev.14:15-16). So this parable is a similitude of the kingdom of God; for parables are thus designated which describe a condition of things in connection with the kingdom whilst the King is absent in heaven. It was then an important matter. The King was then on earth; but He would leave it for a time, after which He would return to the field—the world (Matt.13:38).

⁴ In Matthew the order of the amount of yield is reversed. There it begins with the greatest, one hundredfold. In Mark it begins with the least, thirtyfold. In Mark the Lord is introduced as the Teacher; so the order there seems fitting, leading on to that amount which *might* be reached. Matthew, whose gospel is more dispensational in character, may suggest the decline in fruitfulness to be expected as the dispensation advances

Another similitude of the kingdom follows, describing its outward appearance during the Lord's absence. For since the Messianic hope was not to be fulfilled at that time, He would have them to become acquainted with the outward appearance which the kingdom would assume during the interval. It would resemble "a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: but when it is sown it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it (4:31-32).

Many other parables the Lord spoke that day, of which we learn in Matt.13. But what Mark gives afforded a good outline for the instruction of the disciples. The Lord stated how the work commenced, and what was to be expected from the seed, considering the different soils with which it would be brought into contact. The seed, as we have remarked, was the same throughout—the word of God. He used nothing. Nothing else *was* to be used. Great results could come from it, though much of the sowing would not be fruitful, and even where it was fruitful the yield would vary greatly. Then, between the sowing and the harvest, which, of course, must await the maturing of the crop, He would be away from earth; and what would appear to outward eyes would be just what we see today, that Christendom, overshadowing a good part of the earth, has become a shelter for all kinds of evil to find a resting-place. Very full was the outline presented by the Teacher as He sat in the boat. And wise, how wise! was His manner of presenting it. By such a method of teaching He tested everyone in the vast crowd who heard what He said, to see who were desirous to learn. For we read: "Without a parable spake he not unto them;" yet he spake, as Mark alone informs us, "as they were able to hear it" (4:33). The profit of souls was His aim, and all who desired it had the interpretation.

Leaving the multitude, the Lord crossed the sea with His disciples. Still were they at school. They had heard much in parables, in common with the multitude. The parables, too, had been expounded privately to them. But more was needed for those who were to labour for the Master; and our Evangelist now proceeds to show how by miracles that instruction was conveyed.

Crossing over, they experienced a storm, and evidently one of unusual severity. In all the gospel history we read of just two storms on that lake.

On this occasion the Lord was with them. On the other (Matt.14:25), the Lord walked on the water to join them. With them, then, but asleep—and here Mark’s contribution to the gospel history has to be acknowledged—asleep, he tells us, on a pillow in the stern of the vessel, the disciples awoke Him, fearing they would perish, for the waves, he states, beat into the ship. Their exclamation, “Master, carest Thou not that we perish?” (v.33) intimates that the storm was not a common one. His words addressed to the raging elements, “Peace, be still”—for the knowledge of which, also, we are indebted to our Evangelist—show the perfect command He had over the elements. He spake and it was done. It was the voice of the Creator, and there was instant obedience. The wind ceased, and there was a great calm. It was not a gradual subsidence, but evidently an immediate calm. Astonishment seized all; and they said one to another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (4:41).

Two lessons surely they were to learn by this voyage, needful for them, and how needful too, for us. The one, that in following Him they were not always to expect smooth water; the other, that He has absolute power, and can make, if it please Him, the storm a calm. So with Him in the vessel it was impossible for them to sink. If He is with us, we shall not be overwhelmed. To these may be added another, viz., that we may not always be able at first to see the cause of the tempest. Time and the unfolding of events may be required to make that plain. So, doubtless, was it in this case. As they thought of that voyage afterwards, and remembered what awaited Him among the Gadarenes, they would see plainly that there had been a power at work to hinder, if possible, a safe passage, and thus to prevent the deliverance from demoniacal thralldom of two of the enemy’s victims. How different was it on the return voyage! No storm then. The Lord was not going to new ground. All was, calm.

Reaching the shore, He was immediately met by the demoniac. There were, Matthew informs us, two of them, though Mark and Luke mention but one. Delivered by the word of Christ, the one of whom our Evangelist writes was found by his countrymen when they came thither, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind. He who had been a terror to the neighbourhood, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass that way, was now quiet, peaceful, and contented at the feet of his Deliverer. The restless spirits which had possessed him, forced to leave him by the word of Christ, had, with the Lord’s permission, entered into the herd of swine, but only to destroy them. The men of the place were alarmed. Their swine

were drowned, their property lost. Self, and nothing else, governed them. The happy deliverance of the demoniac was nothing to them. The Lord's presence, they reasoned, had brought that about, so they asked Him to depart out of their coast. He took them at their word and departed. Solemn thing for them.

To two requests the Lord had returned affirmative replies. The demons had asked to be allowed to enter the swine, for they could not stir one step without His leave: they were permitted to do that. The Gadarenes, had asked the Lord to leave them; He consented, and was departing. Now a third petition was presented. The delivered one prayed Him that he might be with Him. That was refused. Happy the man thought it would be to be with his Deliverer. The Lord, however, had other thoughts about him: He was to be a worker for Christ, and where could he be a better witness for Him than in the country where he was so well known? He would give that man the singular honour of witnessing in Decapolis for the rejected and absent One. The man went his way, we are told, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him, and all men did marvel (v.20).⁵ The Lord left the country, but the fame of His work and a worker for Him remained behind. He might leave, but the record of His power could not be blotted out.

Later on, we learn (7:31), the Lord was found in Decapolis. Then His presence was welcomed. Was this change the result of that man's labour? We know not. But contrasting the reception met with on the first visit with that He found on His second, may we not view them as a little picture of His first and second coming? Where rejected of old, He will be welcomed when He comes back (Matt.23:39). But to return. A lesson surely there was for the time being in the Lord's reply to that man, teaching the disciples, and us also, that the ranks of true labourers for an absent Lord are recruited by those who have tasted for themselves what it is to be subjects of divine grace.

⁵ We would point in a note to other instances of Mark's minuteness of observation. He tells us that this demoniac was in the habit of cutting himself with stones, and that he saw Jesus afar off. He also lets us know the proximate number of the herd of swine, all of whom were drowned; it was about 2000. And we learn the effect on men of that demoniac's labour for Christ. "All men did marvel" (v.5, 6, 13, 20).

Recrossing the sea, the disciples were with Him. Nothing exceptional characterised the voyage, it would seem, but a welcome awaited the Lord on His disembarkation. Much people gathered unto Him, and He was nigh unto the sea. And now one with a real want came, and besought His help and His presence in the chamber of sickness. Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue at Capernaum, had an only daughter (Luke 8:42) who was at the point of death. The father's heart was evidently bowed under the sorrow, for, falling at the feet of Christ, "he besought Him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: come and lay Thy hands on her, that she may be healed, and live." He was sure of the result, if only the Lord would go to the house. At once the Lord responded, and went with him.

But the ruler was not the only one who had need of Christ, and who desired to draw upon His resources. A woman, it was found afterwards, was in the crowd that thronged Him who had urgent need of His healing power. Her disease was of long standing. Her efforts to get healed had all failed. Human skill and human resources were powerless to meet her case. She would now get into contact with the hem of the Lord's garment, and see if virtue from Him could not reach her. Unknown to anyone in the crowd, she did that. She went behind, and touched the hem of His garment, and her cure was instantaneous. Virtue had gone out of Him, and she was healed. She had received from Him; now she must acknowledge it. In secret she got it; openly must she confess it. All will agree that this was but right. Is it not the same now? If we have received yet greater blessing, even life and salvation, and that at the cost of His atoning death, should we not openly confess it? Healed then in grace, the woman was openly to confess it. And for that the Lord graciously gave her the opportunity, as He turned and said, "Who touched My clothes?" Here again we note the accuracy of our Evangelist. "Who touched Me?" we read in Luke. "Who touched My clothes?" is the question asked in Mark.

A moment of anxiety it now was for her, but only a moment. She had got what she wanted without asking His leave. Would He be angry, and chide her? Fearing and trembling, she had to come forth from concealment. She had gone behind Him; she now had to face Him, and before all to tell the truth. A moment indeed of suspense; but, as we have said, only a moment. She confessed all. He at once set her in perfect liberty before Him. "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague" (v.34). Matthew tells us that the Lord said, "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole;" Luke adds to that, "Go in peace", and Mark, whilst

endorsing the correctness of his brother Evangelists, adds what they have not, “And be whole of thy plague.” How much we should lose had Mark’s shorter gospel not come down to us!

Whilst all this had been taking place the daughter of Jairus had died, and some came from the house of sorrow to acquaint the father with the sad news. He heard their tidings, and apparently was silent. The Lord heard them also, and immediately spoke to encourage him, “Be not afraid, only believe.” He who could raise the dead would first encourage the drooping spirit. Entering the house with Peter, James, and John, and proceeding to the chamber of death, He in the presence of the parents raised the dead, speaking to her, as Mark informs us, in Aramaic, not in Greek, “Talitha cumi:” which is, being interpreted, “Damsel, I say unto thee, Arise.” The effect on all is noticed: “And straightway they were astonished with a great astonishment” (v.42).

Thus by miracles, instruction was conveyed which concerned the Apostles and others, as we have already pointed out. And now it was intimated that the *way* of blessing was by faith, as the woman found for herself, and Jairus for his daughter.

One more lesson was needed, and that was furnished by the Lord’s visit to His own country, Nazareth. They had formerly rejected Him (Luke 4:28-34). How would they treat Him now? The people there, it was found, remained for the most part unchanged, and the Lord had to leave them. So the disciples were to learn that whilst faith can draw down blessing, unbelief restrains it, “He could do there no mighty work, save (and we are indebted for what follows wholly to Mark) that he laid His hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief” (6:5-6).

The Apostles were now sufficiently instructed to be sent forth on their mission.

5. In the Wilderness and on the Sea. (6:12-52)

The disciples, instructed as to the character of the work, and the principle on which blessing was dispensed, viz., faith, went forth on their mission, and preached that men should repent; and they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil, as Mark informs us, many that were sick, and healed them (Mark 6:12-13). That mission bore fruit in temporal blessing to many an afflicted one. But though the twelve rendered an account to the Master,

as Luke has stated (Luke 9:10), no particulars of their preaching, nor of the success they met with, has been put on record. The day will declare it, for surely it is not forgotten on high.

One effect, however, of this mission seems to have been that it reminded Herod the king of the murder of John the Baptist; and whilst people had varied thoughts as to who the Lord, was, yet all wide of the mark, Herod settled the matter for himself, and declared that He was John the Baptist risen from the dead. “John,” writes Mark, giving most probably, more particularly than Matthew, the very words of the guilty monarch, “whom I have beheaded, he is risen” (Mark 6:16). Conscience was speaking, and perhaps regret for his deed the king in measure felt, coupled with the conviction that his victim had done nothing worthy of death, else how could he suppose that he was risen, and that mighty works did show forth themselves in him (14).

The forerunner had been beheaded—but the Christ of God was there. The king had shown his enmity to God in his treatment of His servant. An opportunity had been afforded him of repentance for his sin of incest. He refused to avail himself of it. And as one sin leads on so often to another, he, at the instance of the daughter of Herodias, who in that was guided by her mother, put his reprover to death. Later on, Herod and the Lord, about whom he was now hearing, did meet, but evidently no conscience-work had wrought repentance in the king’s soul. The murderer of John set the Lord at nought, mocked Him, and in derision arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. At length, about A.D. 40, his hitherto unchecked career of crime was arrested. He was deprived of his tetrarchy by Caligula, and banished to Gaul, and, as some state, died in Spain. He died in exile; his victim died in prison at the hand of the executioner. John will reign with Christ. Herod—where will he be?

It was shortly after John’s death that the twelve, having accomplished their mission, returned to the Lord, and, as His servants, told Him what they had done. But here Mark gives proof of independence as a writer; for whilst agreeing with his brother Evangelist Luke that the Apostles told the Lord all that they had done, he adds— and it is in character with his gospel— “and what they had taught” (6:30). Teaching has a prominent place in his gospel.

Another thing we learn from him—and it is a refreshing thought for the weary servant—viz., that the Lord and Master, in consideration for the

twelve, took them apart, saying, “Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat” (31). No other evangelist has recorded this, or hinted at it, though all of them mention the Lord’s departure at this time. In fulfilment, then, of the Master’s desire for the Apostles, they departed by ship privately. But the multitude, Mark informs us, “saw them departing, and many knew Him,⁶ and ran afoot thither out of all cities.” The Lord went by ship, though He might have gone by land. Privacy being His object, and the securing rest for the twelve, He chose the voyage rather than the journey. His thoughtful consideration was thus marked. But the desired rest was not obtained, for the multitude, in their eagerness, went after Him on foot; and again we have to own our indebtedness to Mark, who tells us they “outwent them” (33). So that on landing from the vessel, the Lord saw a great multitude already collected. He looked on them and had compassion on them. What a heart was His! Consideration for the twelve, pity for the multitude—these moved the Lord. He cared for His servants, He compassionated the multitude; and from this Gospel we learn the reason of that compassion—“for they were as sheep not having a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things” (34).

The crowd was a large one and a mixed one, for there were sick folk amongst them. Had we been present, we might have seen many an one whose countenance bore on it the trace of bodily suffering. Had we been able to lift the veil and read the heart, we should have probably marked some burdened in spirit on behalf of their sick, and anxiously hoping that such might be subjects of the Lord’s healing power. For John (6:2) tells us that “a great multitude followed Him, because they saw the miracles which He did on them that were diseased.” In a desert place this crowd had collected and the Lord ministered to them—teaching them, says Mark; healing them that were sick, writes Matthew; and though the son of Levi was present and heard the teaching, he has omitted all notice of it, and merely tells us of the healing. Had we only his gospel, we should but have known of healing power put forth that day. Had we only Mark’s gospel, we should have known nothing about healing, but only have been made aware of the teaching. Now this is very interesting and instructive; for the feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle, wrought by the Lord in His life,

⁶ Or, as some, “them”; or, as others, “understood it”.

which has found a place in all the gospels. And the manner of its introduction in each gospel will furnish the reader with a clue to the character in which the Lord is presented by each of the Evangelists.

A few words on this will not be out of place. In Matthew, we have the Lord as the Messiah and Emmanuel, the Son of David and the Son of Abraham (ch.1). In Mark, He appears as the Prophet, or Teacher. In Luke, He is presented as the Son of Man (ch.3). And in John, He is a Divine Person, the Word who was in the beginning (ch.1). In character, then, with this, Matthew prefaces the feeding of the five thousand with the Lord healing the sick. Now, it was the work of Messiah, as the blind men well knew (Matt.9:27; 20:30), to heal those who had need of healing. So, as occupied in that line of ministry, Matthew has described Him. But He was the Prophet or Teacher (Deut.18:15), so it is to His teaching, and that alone, that Mark here directs attention. Besides this, as Son of Man it was that the Lord was on earth. So Luke, who presents Him in this character, tells us of His double occupation on that day, both healing and teaching—in a word, ministering in full grace to meet not only the need of the body, but that of the soul as well. Then John, who writes of Him as the One who was in the beginning, the Word of God, notices neither the healing nor the teaching, though he was certainly present, but introduces the miracle by a question put to Philip to prove that Apostle, for “He Himself,” writes John (6:5-6), “knew what He would do.” Both knowledge and power were His, for He is God.

Another remark may be made. Each Evangelist supplies something that the others, have not given to their readers. For instance, Matthew tells us of the presence of women and children; and Luke alone gives us the subject, of the Lord’s teaching. Now, had we all the histories but Matthew’s, we should not have known of the presence that day of women and children. And while under those circumstances, we should have been justified in saying there was no evidence that any of them were present, he who affirmed positively that they were not, would have been greatly mistaken. It is perilous thing, unless assured of it, to assume that we are perfectly acquainted with all the circumstances of a case, and so to draw conclusions which may be false. We can stand on that which we have got, but should be careful how we intrude on the domain of the unknown, and affirm that this and that could not have been, because it has not been recorded in the Word. How many a difficulty we cannot now fully solve for want of more

acquaintance with details. But we may be content to wait till we know as we are known.

To return. Healing and teaching went on that day; but no record has been preserved for us of the cases healed, nor have any notes of the teaching come down, beyond just the subject of it as given us by St. Luke. All that is passed over, our attention being fixed on the miracle and subsequent voyage, though two, if not three, of the Evangelists were present. We say two, if not three; for whilst Matthew and John, as Apostles, were certainly there, it would be hazardous to deny, with Mark's circumstantial account of things before us, that he was not a witness likewise of the healing, and a listener to the teaching; an observer, too, of the arrangement of the multitude, as well as a partaker of the loaves and fishes.

Let us look at the miracle. The crowd had apparently no thought of foraging in the surrounding country for themselves, though the disciples suggested that to the Lord, little thinking how they were to be taught that day their place of service in relation to the Lord and to the multitude. So, addressing them, the Lord said, "Give ye them to eat;" their ascertained resources being limited to five barley loaves and two fishes, which a lad, Andrew announced (John 6:9), had brought with him. That, however, was enough; and the Lord commanded that they should all sit down. On the *green* grass, as our Evangelist takes care to state, the whole company was seated; arranged, too, in perfect order, in rows, by hundreds and by fifties. We can, therefore, picture the scene—no disorder, no confusion, but all seated, and that in most orderly way; so that, viewing the different companies, we should probably have seen them composed of rows containing one hundred persons each, there being fifty of such rows. It is remarkable that neither of the two Apostles Matthew or John gives us the least clue to the arrangement of the vast multitude. That was left to Mark and to Luke; and Mark's account of it is the most minute, and just such as an eye-witness might have drawn up.

All thus arranged, the Lord and the twelve occupying the centre, "having taken, the five loaves and the two fishes, He looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided He among them, all. And they did all eat, and were filled. And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes." How circumstantial is Mark in his account! To make the five loaves meet the need of all was wonderful; but to make two little fish

suffice for all, and for fragments of them, too, to be left, seems more wonderful still. Jehovah was there. John the Baptist, Herod would have said; Elias, others would have affirmed; but it was Jehovah who, by His own power, and not in the name of another, multiplied the loaves and the fishes.

To the disciples He gave, and they distributed to the multitude. They received from Him, and gave what He had given them. A little picture of true ministers of the Word, and a foreshadowing of that which was to be their service when the Lord should depart from this scene; for till then He taught the people.

Evening was drawing on (v.35). The Lord constrained the disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida,⁷ whilst He sent the multitude away. The disciples on the water without the Lord, He went up into a mountain to pray. And when the evening was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and He alone on the land (v.47). Another picture of that with which they would become well acquainted after His ascension, when He would be on high, above and beyond the storms, and they would be left an earth to battle with them, and to be buffeted by the tempest. On the mount in prayer, He must have continued there for some time, for darkness settled on the scene (John 6:17), and hours passed ere He rejoined the twelve. At length He went, descending into the stormy atmosphere which encircled them, and about the fourth watch of the night it was that He drew near to them.

He saw them toiling, etc.; or, as some read, and probably more correctly, "And seeing them toiling, etc., He cometh unto them." This gives more point the passage. He saw them, and went to their assistance. Blessed Master! we may well say. As then, so now. He sees His people in all their troubles and difficulties, and in His own way sustains and delivers. But here again we have to own our indebtedness to Mark, who alone has recorded His seeing them in the darkness on the lake.

We have said He delivers in His own way; for this passage in the gospel history has a dispensational bearing, as will be found by the remnant of the

⁷ This Bethsaida was on the west shore of the lake; for, Mark tells us, they reached the land of Gennesaret (6:53); and John writes (6:17), that they went over the sea towards Capernaum.

earthly people by and by. So, in character with that, He left the mountain and descended to the lake. But we do not dwell on that here, as it is more in keeping with Matthew's gospel than Mark's, with which at present we are occupied.

Walking on the water He drew near, and, as having perfect power and no need of assistance from any in the vessel, "He would," Mark tells us, "have passed by them" (6:48). "All saw Him, and were troubled," so writes Mark. The Apostles and the rest with them (for there were others in the boat, as Matt.14:33 seems to intimate) were of one mind, that it was an apparition. But He spake, and set them at rest: "Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid." Then entering the ship, the wind ceased. The Lord had rejoined them, and the elements were still. So will it be in the future, when He appears to and for His earthly people. He will in the fullest sense make the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof will be still (Psalm 107:29).

What a time it had been. In the wilderness, Messiah, the Prophet, and Jehovah had been displayed, and all in the Person of the Lord. In that night at sea, near day-dawn, the Creator was seen in the same Person. What teaching for the twelve! In service to distribute what they had received from the Lord in troublous circumstances to await His interposition, assured that, however dark it may be, He could and does see His own.

Shall we say all this has no teaching for us who are part of the Church, and not of the remnant? May we not learn what should characterise any in ministry? and what should be laid hold of by all true saints on their pathway through this world? remembering, too, the Lord's gracious consideration for His working servants, and His perfect knowledge of where His people are, and of all that surrounds them in this chequered scene. He does not, it is true, come now walking on the water as He then did. That will have its fulfilment in the future. But He is watching over His own, thinking of His own, sustaining His own, and is coming, not to be with them here, as He will be with the remnant, but to take His heavenly saints away to be with Him in the house He has made ready on high.

6. On the Border of Phoenicia and on the Farther Side of Jordan. (7 – 8:10)

A new circuit the Lord now made. He had returned to the west side of the lake, to the land of Gennesaret, and ministered to those who had need, even to all who touched the border of His garment (Mark 6:53-56). But the

determined opposition on the part of the Pharisees and scribes was afresh manifested. In the happiness of such as were healed those wretched people had no part. For healing power in exercise had no interest so long as the disciples kept not the tradition of the elders! So the bright sky was to be clouded over. The tradition of the elders was, in their eyes, of all importance. Now an opportunity was found to attack Him whose teaching condemned these sticklers for tradition, by bringing a charge against the disciples of neglecting the traditions. "Thy disciples" they said, desiring to engage Him in controversy about their eating with unwashed hands. Any pretence is good enough if it can stop or hinder in measure the working of God in grace.

The Lord met the attack with a charge which they did not expect. They found fault with His disciples for not keeping the traditions of the elders; He charged them with rejecting the commandment of God for their tradition, a very grave matter. Zeal for human enactments characterised them, who in their teaching inculcated open disregard of one of the ten commandments (Mark 7:8-13). The Pharisees, thus convicted of hypocrisy, were offended, Matthew tells us (15:12). The Lord then left the place, and started on a circuit northward into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and found there something to rejoice His heart in the faith of a Syrophenician woman.

What a trial the persistent opposition of the Pharisees must have been to Him! What joy, on the other hand, to find one of the doomed race who desired His help, and who would not be denied the relief for which she petitioned. For though Matthew as well as Mark relates this incident, the latter it is who tells us of the woman's persistency in seeking relief. For the Lord, he writes, after whom that woman had been crying in the way, had entered a house, desiring that no one should know where He was. He sought retirement from popular attention or observation. But He could not be hid, writes our historian (Mark 7:24). Her want was as yet unmet, and her faith in Him remained unshaken. Into the house, therefore, she went after Him. Faith in that woman was active. It prompted her to appeal to Him, to whom, probably, she had been hitherto a perfect stranger. "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil" (or rather, demon). So writes Matthew (15:22), who gives us the very words of her supplication in the way. Traditions of the elders occupied the Pharisees. Pressing need stirred her. It moved her to follow Him. It urged her, regardless of her being very probably the only

woman in the midst of a company of men, and all strangers to her, to enter the house after Him, and there, in the presence of the disciples, and prostrate before the Lord, to press her suit. We may picture it—a sorrowful, burdened creature in the midst of a company of men, and at the feet of the Master; she a Gentile, He a Jew. The disciples, doubtless, were silent, but not unconcerned spectators. She *had* pressed her suit in words which told of the heaviness of her afflictions. “Have mercy on me: my daughter is grievously vexed with a demon!” She still pressed it, as she “besought, Him that He would cast forth the demon out of her daughter” (Mark 7:26). Nor did she press it in vain.

Her faith, shown in following the Lord till He responded to her petition, was further shown in her leaving His presence to return to her house in the full confidence that her daughter was healed. She found it was true what He had said, “the demon is gone out of thy daughter;” for, when she re-entered her house, she found the girl laid on the bed and the demon gone out (Mark 7:30). Ere she had regained the threshold of her abode, and even ere she left Him, the deliverance for which she had asked had been effected. The daughter had been the subject of divine, delivering power whilst the mother was still absent on her errand. The deliverance, too was complete without the Lord seeing the girl, and without one audible word of command escaping His lips. The demon had gone out, for the Lord would not suffer it any longer to possess that poor creature. It submitted to the exercise of His power, and the mother and the daughter could now rejoice together in the cure. That mother got what she did not deserve, and what she never could have earned. It was the answer to her faith. A Gentile, and a Canaanite, she proved there was mercy for her as well as for others; for God can have mercy upon all, if only all are willing to be subjects of it. Israel will learn that by and by, and rejoice in it as meeting, and fully so, their case (Rom.11:32). Who has learnt, or is learning that now? How did she find it out? She came to the Lord and got it. How can any prove the same for themselves? By believing in Him now as the Saviour of the lost (John 3:16).

The Lord, who had gone into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, now went out from those of Tyre, and went through Sidon unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis (Mark 7:31). In Decapolis it was that the Gadarene demoniac had published the tidings of his cure (5:20), after the Lord, at the request of the Gadarenes, had left the country. Were people there in consequence more ready now to receive Him? It

would be seen so. For great multitudes, Matthew writes (15:29-31) came with lame, blind, dumb, and maimed, and many others, and cast them down at His feet, and He healed them; insomuch that the multitude wondered when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see. And they glorified the God of Israel.

What a scene it must have been! The subjects of delivering power, enjoying and displaying the grace shown them. Speech, sight, activity, and use of limbs—all this heard or seen by the wandering crowds. How many cases of cure, each full of interest in itself, could have been recounted. But, Matthew passes them all over. Not so Mark, who has related (7:31-37) one deeply interesting and instructive case—that of the deaf man, who had an impediment in his speech. He could not hear; he could not speak aright. Had we seen him at a distance, or in the crowd, we should probably have thought him like other men, till coming to close quarters we should have discovered his defects, and have heard that he could not properly articulate. The ears were there, the tongue too was there; but the former were useless, and the latter was inefficient.

How long he had been in that condition is not stated. Human skill and human resources were evidently powerless to remedy the defects. They brought him now to the Lord, and supplicated Him for the desired relief. The Lord graciously acceded to their request, and that at once. He took the deaf man aside from the multitude. The two were now alone together, the deaf man in the company of the Son of God. Attention was first directed to his ears, then to his tongue. He must hear sounds aright before he could speak intelligibly. Now this act of the Lord, in first putting His fingers into his ears, would strengthen the supposition that he had been deaf from his birth, and therefore had never heard the articulate sounds of human speech. Soon, however, was he to hear that most pliable and melodious of musical instruments—the human voice; for he was in the company of Him who made the ears, and who also formed man's mouth, and who was not indifferent to his condition; for the Lord, looking up to heaven, sighed a token, surely, of His sympathy with His creature, and a proof how fully He felt the consequences of the Fall. And then, but not till then, He uttered that one word in Aramaic, which Mark has preserved: "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." How often are we reminded, in reading the gospels, of that graphic description in the Psalms (33:9) of the exercise of the Creator's power. "He spake, and it was done." If was thus in the storm; it was thus with the leper; it was thus with the deaf man. "Ephphatha" was the word of

command, and it was done. The effect on the man was instantaneous: "His ears were opened, and the string (or rather, bond) of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain." The effect on the crowd was marked also. The Lord "charged them to tell no man; but the more He charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it. And they were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well; He maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak" (7:33-37). May we not be thankful, to Mark for recording, under the guidance of God, this most interesting incident, which both Matthew and John have wholly passed over? The healing of the Syrophenician woman's daughter, and the curing the deaf man, are both of them striking instances of the Lord's power, and of His willingness to meet the need of fallen creatures. Yet the circumstances in these cases are very different. That woman's daughter was delivered from the tyranny of the demon without her ever seeing her deliverer. The mother had asked for the daughter, and the Lord delivered the child, illustrating, in her case, how grace could flow out to one who could not claim it. It was mercy from first to last. The deaf man had to be taken aside by the Lord, to be alone with Him, ere he heard a sound or could articulate correctly. Now, if the former case reminds us, as it surely does, of mercy flowing out to a *sinner*, does not the latter illustrate to us mercy flowing out to one hitherto a mere *professor*? With all his organs, both ears and tongue, he did not hear; he could not speak plainly. He must have appeared outwardly like one who ought to hear and to speak well. But he could do neither, for he was deaf; he needed intercourse with the Lord ere he could utter vocal sounds intelligibly.

Are there not some even now, and have, there not been some in past times, who, taking the place of Christians, have been found lacking in that which should characterise the believer the power to give God thanks for saving grace known and enjoyed? Professors they are with a name, and a reputation, perhaps, amongst men, yet who have never heard the quickening voice of the Son of God (John 5:25). Do these lines meet the eye of any such? What is needed? Just that which the deaf man proved the blessedness of being alone with the Lord; taken aside, as it were, from the crowd to experience His sovereign power in grace. That man could tell of the graciousness and grace of the Lord; so will any who, like him, are willing to receive what is needed, but from Christ.

We have spoken of the circumstances of the daughter and of the deaf man; we would add a few words about the fitness of the way in which the Lord

ministered in these cases. Both were indebted to Him for their deliverance, yet they got it very differently. The suppliant mother had to own herself, and, by consequence, her daughter, as no better than a dog beneath the children's table. In the case of the deaf man, there was no such dispensational barrier. The Lord at once acceded to the request of those who brought him. The fitting subjects for divine grace must take their right place before God as claiming nothing His hand, and they must be willing receive from the crucified One all that is required. But it should be remarked, in the case of the deaf man, that his ears were first attended to, then his tongue—he had first to hear ere he could speak correctly. Suggestive is this. He who has been a mere professor must first hear the voice of the Son of God, then he will be able to tell out the praises of the Saviour. Nor will praise for that blessed result be confined to the fresh subject of grace; for others, witnessing the effect on such an one, will be constrained to thank the Lord also.

The crowd, Matthew has related, gave glory to the God of Israel, and specially dwelt, Mark tells us, on the Lord's power in giving hearing to that deaf one—power put forth on that man's behalf of which they had no need. Now, however, as ears are unstopped, and tongues set free to praise the God of all grace, thanks and praises ascend not merely from eye-witnesses of that which has taken place, but from such as have also themselves been previously subjects of the same saving grace.

Another incident of interest connected with this circuit is next related, and both by Matthew and by Mark, though by John, who was present, it has been wholly passed over, and Luke, who searched out much, has left it wholly unnoticed. The Lord still on the farther side of the lake, with the multitudes around Him, consideration not merely for the sick, but for them all, is now displayed. For three days had they been with Him. At length, destitute of supplies, and in a region where it was impossible to procure them, the Lord called the attention of the disciples to the want, and declared His compassion for them all. Three days had they been with Him. He noted the time. They had nothing to eat; He informed the disciples of this. Two courses were there of acting, either to send them all away to provide for themselves, or (as He had done before) to supply their need miraculously in the wilderness. To send them away He would not. He took account of their natural, bodily weakness. "If I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way; and" (as Mark alone has recorded the end of His speech) "divers of them have come from far." The,

better reading here brings out His intimate acquaintance with their circumstances, and He would have that to be known.

The disciples had forgotten the lesson taught them on that same side of the lake not long before. Slow to learn! How like us, we may say. Unbelief is natural to fallen man. Often is that seen. So here. “From whence” said the disciples at once, “can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?” Had the Lord, they seemed to say, forgotten where they were? The disciples it was who were forgetful, not the Master. They forgot who the Lord was—the Messiah of Israel. His quiet reply both the Evangelists have recorded: “How many loaves have ye? and they said, Seven.” That was sufficient. He therefore addressed the company and commanded them to sit down on the ground. All seated, He took the loaves and gave thanks and brake them, and gave them to His disciples to set before them. And a few little fishes which they had also distributed in a similar way, having first blessed them. It was enough. All were fed. All were satisfied, for the disciples took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets⁸ full. Four thousand men, besides women and children, had been fed by the Lord in the wilderness; then, not till then, did He dismiss them.

They had come to Him, and had continued with Him. To send them away hungry and faint He would not. None who have ever come to Him have found Him indifferent to their condition, or incapable of fully meeting it. On the former occasion the disciples first told Him of the want, as the three synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke agree in stating. On this He told them. He was aware of it, and thus showed it. Again, on the former occasion He said to the twelve, “Give ye them to eat.” In that again the three evangelists are agreed. This time we read nothing of that. Then, the Lord was instructing the disciples in that which was to be their service. Here, He was teaching them and all of us that none following Him should lack that which was needed. Hence the absence, surely, of the command on this occasion.

⁸ The baskets here were larger than those used on the former occasion. Those called *cophinos* were round, plaited, hand baskets. These called *spyris* were used for fish. In one such it was that St Paul was let down out of a window at Damascus, and so escaped (Acts 9:25).

These different events of this circuit are narrated in their historical order; but are they not found in a moral order likewise? Grace, we learn, can flow out, however undeserving are the subjects of it; and to utter aright the language of a Christian, there must first be intercourse between the soul and Christ. The individual must hear before he can speak plainly. Then for all who follow Christ He will provide; He knows the need, and never will and never did send the hungry away.

After feeding the four thousand, He recrossed the lake to its western side. Happy indeed had been the seasons enjoyed in, that circuit which had just closed. “He filleth the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away,” said His mother, speaking of God. How true was it of her Son, who is God as well as Man?

7. To the Mount of Transfiguration and back. (8:13 – 9:50)

“We” (so perhaps it should be read) “must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4). So spake the Lord in Judaea, at probably a later date in His ministry than that of His transfiguration. In perfect accord, however, with that announcement, we have the Lord starting forth on a new journey, when met by the Pharisees in the parts of Dalmanutha with a request for a sign from heaven, tempting Him (8:10-12). On this occasion, and it is the solitary instance in the gospels, the Sadducees combined with the Pharisees to tempt Him.⁹ This fact we learn from Matthew, and from Matthew alone.

To their united opposition the Lord was not indifferent. He refused, indeed, and justly, to give them a sign, who had witnessed so many of His mighty works, and in vain. Gracious in His ways, bearing with ignorance most patiently, He yet withheld what those people had asked. There is a time when the wilfully blind should be left to themselves. In His judgment, that time for those before Him had come. So He left them. Yet their unbelief affected Him. In what light they viewed His treatment of them is unrecorded, and it matters not. All now will justify Him. But how He felt because of their unbelief is told us, and it is instructive: “He sighed deeply

⁹ Differing as the Sadducees did on some vital points from the Pharisees, denying a resurrection and the existence of angels and spirits (Acts 23:8), yet their countenance and their aid were not refused by the Pharisees, the professedly orthodox party of the Jews, if thereby they could hinder the Lord in His work. What an exposure of the Pharisees!

in His spirit.” He knew, what they did not believe, the awful and eternal consequences of persistent unbelief.

Nor is this a solitary instance of Mark’s carefulness in noting the feelings of the Lord. From him we learn how in the synagogue (3:5). He looked round about on the Pharisees with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts. From the same Evangelist we learn what the Lord felt when the disciples rebuked those who sought to bring young children to their Master, that He might touch them: “He was much displeased” (10:14). In John we read of the sympathy and sorrow that He felt for those two at Bethany whom He loved: He wept and He groaned. To weep with those who weep seems perfectly in season; but to sigh deeply at the persistent unbelief of those who were bitterly opposing Him, and were indifferent to their own everlasting welfare, speaks of a chord in His heart of which otherwise none would have conceived.

But more. He felt the need of warning the disciples against those thus tempting Him. And when in the boat on their way to the eastern side of the lake, from the forgetfulness of the disciples to provide themselves with bread for the whole company (having, as Mark informs us, with his accustomed attention to details, but one loaf), an opportunity was afforded to put them on their guard against the leaven of the Pharisees, and as our Evangelist adds, “the leaven of Herod.” Dull of comprehension, they thought He referred to actual bread. Perceiving their thoughts, He made His meaning plain, whilst reminding them that the miraculous multiplying of bread, which they had twice witnessed, should have kept them from such a misconception. They should better have profited by that which they had witnessed.

Disembarking with His disciples, He reached Bethsaida Julias, formerly a village, but rebuilt and adorned by Philip the Tetrarch, and raised to the dignity of a town, with the additional name of Julias, in honour of the daughter of the Emperor Augustus. Here the Lord was met by some who desired His help on behalf of an afflicted creature. A blind man (Mark alone has recorded this miracle) was brought to Him that He might touch him. When people have a real want they are wont to be simple, for they are in earnest. Doubtless those in that vicinity had not enjoyed all the privileges of which those on the west side of the lake could boast. Bethsaida, on the western side of the lake, had been more highly honoured with proofs of the Lord’s divine mission than Bethsaida Julias. Yet they

doubted not in this last-named town either His power or His willingness to help. With them it was no question of the need of a sign to establish His divine mission. They wanted His power put forth in healing that blind man, and in confidence of heart, without the slightest hesitancy, they brought him, assured that if the Lord touched him he would regain his sight. Cavillings and unbelief characterised the Pharisees on the west of Jordan. Faith was manifested by people on the east. The latter were in earnest; the former were not.

Their request was immediately responded to. The Lord took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town, or village as Mark described it. Then spitting on his eyes, and putting His hands upon him, He asked him if he saw aught. Looking up, the blind man said, "I see men; for I behold them as trees walking." Sight was returning, for it would appear from that which follows that he had lost it. The Lord then again "laid His hands on his eyes: and he looked steadfastly, and was restored, and saw all things clearly" (Mark 8:25). The Lord had manifested great interest in that man. He took great pains with him, for He did not leave him till his sight was restored. He perfected that which concerned him (Ps. 138:8). He acts in that way still (Phil. 1:6). Apart from the multitude He had taken the deaf one. Outside the city He led the blind man. His work in the synagogues in Galilee seems to have been over. Rejected by the leaders of the people, He worked outside.

Going on His way towards the mount of transfiguration—the great object, it would seem, of this circuit—He entered the villages of Caesarea Philippi, situated under the shadow of Mount Hermon. As was usual, many followed, not disciples only, but a multitude also (Mark 8:34). Eliciting first from the Twelve the current thoughts of men about Him, all wrong as they were, though interesting as an evidence that man, unaided by revelation, could have no right thoughts about the Lord's person, He drew forth from Peter what the disciples knew about Him. He was the Christ, or Anointed One of God. Now, further revelations were vouchsafed; for, though He was the Christ, nevertheless He would die. "The Son of Man," He said, "must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." "And He spake that saying openly," so Mark has added, whereupon Peter "began to rebuke Him." The Lord immediately sharply rebuked His Apostle. "Get thee behind Me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men." Unwittingly Peter was taking the

place of an adversary, which the word Satan means, viewing the matter after human thoughts, and not as taught of God.

The rebuke administered, the Lord turned to the disciples, and to the crowd as well, and told them all that suffering, and willingness to suffer for Him, must characterise those who would follow Him. Martyrdom for Christ's sake, and, as Mark adds, "for the Gospel's," they must lay their account for. In that way they would save their life and not lose it, and that was most important; for if the soul, more precious than all the riches and honours of this life, is lost, no means will there be found for its recovery. "For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"¹⁰ "Whosoever," the Lord goes on to say, "shall be ashamed of Me, and of My words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father, with the Holy Angels" (8:37-38). The Son of Man, who would suffer, would also reign in heavenly and divine glory, for He is God as well as Man, the only begotten Son of the Father.

A word here ere, following the narrative, we go farther. The clue to Peter's conduct—which otherwise would have appeared very strange, contradicting as he did his Master—our Evangelist is the only one who furnishes. It is found in the mention of the *crowd* which followed them, as distinguished from the *disciples*. The humiliation to death of the Son of Man must have been a startling announcement to them all, but the open declaration of it when a crowd was within earshot would operate, so Peter perhaps feared, to the lowering of the Lord in their eyes. His rejection by the leaders of Jewish thought, and by the Sanhedrim, and His subsequent death, worldly wisdom might suggest were subjects to be kept in the background. Hence, probably it was that, fearing the effect on the *multitude*, Peter deprecated the possibility of such rejection and humiliation. The Lord, however, at once rebuked the Apostle; and then, calling the crowd around Him, announced in the plainest language, what discipleship might involve, and the awful and final result of being ashamed of Him who *is the King*, and who will certainly appear in His kingdom.

¹⁰ It is the same word in the original which is translated by the AV *life* in 5:35 and *soul* in v.36-37. The distinction for the English reader is right, as Luke 9:25 shows. The *soul's* future the Lord spoke of. Luke writes, "lose, or forfeit his own self."

Of this kingdom He next speaks (9:1), for the earnest of it some were soon to behold. So, moving on to the spot where the great purpose of this journey was to have its accomplishment, He took Peter, James, and John into a high mountain apart by themselves, and was transfigured before them. They saw and they heard wonderful things. They saw Him for a brief space in His millennial glory, when his raiment, we learn, became glistening, exceeding white, so as no fuller on earth could whiten them (9:3). Mark tells us of His raiment,, noting especially that. Matthew and Luke speak also of His face. Besides this they saw, whom none of their generation had ever beheld, Moses and Elias, and they heard them talking with Him of His decease, as Luke has recorded (9:31), which He should ere long accomplish at Jerusalem. It was then well understood in heaven that which men on earth had not yet apprehended. The three disciples knew Moses and Elias. In what company did they find themselves? And how striking it must have been to Peter to hear them talk with the Lord of that very matter for which he had rebuked his Master.

Peter desiring the prolongation of the scene, suggested the making of three tabernacles, one for the Lord, one for Moses, and one for Elias. This is confirmed by Luke's account, which tells us that he spoke thus as Moses and Elias were departing (Luke 9:33), and Matthew probably means us to understand the same, as he intimates Peter's readiness to erect the tabernacles himself, if we read with some goad authorities. "I will make," etc. (Matt.17:4). "But he wist not what to answer, for" (as Mark here adds, supplementing the other account) "they became sore afraid" (9:6). Transient, however, was the vision, for a cloud, the cloud of glory, overshadowed them, and a voice was heard proceeding from it—the voice of the Father attesting the Sonship of the Lord: "This is My beloved Son: hear ye Him." The scene was terminated. Moses and Elias had departed, having, as Luke states, entered the cloud. And Jesus was seen alone. The full import of the vision, as the Lord in Matthew (17:9) called it, Peter has taught us in his second epistle (1:16-18). On that, one can not here enlarge. The King of Israel, however, had been seen on the mount, whom Isaiah of old (6) had beheld as the Lord of Hosts (John 12:41). David, too, had sung of this same One, who would be the King's Son (Ps.72:1), and therefore a man. Now all was made plain. The King was a man, David's son, but Jehovah too, God and man in one person. Man, so able to die, and about to die; yet the beloved Son of the Father as well—His only-begotten Son.

Coming down from the mount on the following day (Luke 9:37), the Lord charged them to tell no man what they had seen till the Son of Man was risen from the dead. “And,” so adds Mark, “they kept the saying, questioning among themselves what the rising from the dead should mean” (Mark 9:10). This truth was new to them. Resurrection *of* the dead was a doctrine with which every orthodox Jew was acquainted (Heb.6:2). Resurrection *from* the dead was to them all quite new. This last is Christian doctrine, connected with the truth of the two resurrections, of which the Lord first spoke (John 5:28-29). Resurrection unto life there will be for some; and resurrection only to judgment for others, raised as such will be to be finally judged, and to be everlastingly condemned (Rev.20:5,11-15). It is plain, then, that these acts of the Lord’s power—for he will call forth both classes from the tomb—need not take place at one and the same moment. In fact, as we know, they will not; for a long interval, even a thousand years, will intervene between them. Hence resurrection *from* the dead speaks of a resurrection whilst some are left still in their graves. A new truth this was, and the three disciples discerned at once that it was something new, for they questioned among themselves what the rising *from* the dead should mean. They did not, however, it would appear, bring this difficulty to the Lord for solution. In this case patient waiting would be rewarded. When He was risen they must have grasped the meaning of His words spoken on their descent from the mount.

But there was a difficulty they asked about. They had seen the Lord in His millennial, kingly glory. He was the Christ—the Anointed. He had come. Now, the scribes taught that Elias must precede and herald the advent of Messiah. Were the scribes right? Or was that current teaching to be abandoned? The Lord at once answered. The scribes were right. But the Baptist had come in the spirit and power of Elias. The Lord, it is to be observed, does not negative the thought of Elijah’s appearing, but points to John the Baptist as His own immediate forerunner, who came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). For there are two advents of Christ—one in humiliation, the other in glory. The former had then taken place. For the latter Israel must wait. The scribes thought only of the latter, overlooking the prophecies about Messiah’s humiliation and death.¹¹ Hence the

¹¹ The Baptist declared, and rightly, that he was not Elijah (John 1:21). And though the Lord distinctly applied Mal.3:1 to John, yet 4:5-6 of that prophet is nowhere in the New Testament applied to the son of Zacharias.

difficulty, which was a real one: how could the prophecy of Malachi be harmonised with the fact of Messiah's appearance at that time, of which fact the three disciples had not the shadow of a doubt? "It is written of the Son of Man" (Mark adds, v.12) "that He should suffer many things, and be set at nought." Now, had that been laid hold of by the scribes, they would have discerned that a path of humiliation, ending in death, must precede His advent in power (Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12). And Elijah's appearing is connected with the great and terrible day of the Lord (Mal.4:5). That clearly had not come when the Lord was on earth, nor has it yet. A herald, however, was to precede Messiah (Isaiah 40). The herald had come and gone; John the Baptist had appeared. Here was the solution of the difficulty. With the second advent Elijah is connected, and not with the first. Very possibly the scribes were using the non-appearance of the prophet to discredit the Lord's claim to be the Messiah. Hence the disciples asked their question, which the Lord here graciously answered. How startled would the scribes at the foot of the mount have been had they known what Elijah had been heard saying on the top of it! Care in discriminating differences is needed in the study of the Word. For lack of that the scribes were at fault. How often since their day has the same lack been manifested by opponents of the truth.

Rejoining the others below, it was seen what was occupying them. A great multitude surrounded them, and scribes were questioning with them. The Lord's reappearance turned the attention of all to Himself. They were greatly amazed, and, running to Him, saluted Him. Mark, it will be observed, has noticed what Matthew and Luke do not—the effect on the multitude at beholding the Lord at that juncture. He inquired what they were questioning with His disciples. What follows we give in the words of our Evangelist, and according to the better readings. It will be found that he records some most interesting details, which otherwise we might never have known.

"And one of the multitude answered Him, Master (or Teacher), I have brought unto Thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit: and wheresoever it taketh him, it teareth him (or dasheth him down): and he foameth, and grindeth his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to Thy disciples that they should cast it out, and they could not. He answereth them, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? Bring him unto Me. And they brought him unto Him: and when He saw him, straightway the spirit tare him grievously; and he fell an the

ground and wallowed foaming. And He asked his father, How long time is it since this hath come unto him? And he said, From a child. And oftentimes it hath cast him both into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us. And Jesus said unto him, If thou canst! All things are possible to him that believeth. Straightway the father of the child cried out, and said, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief. And when Jesus saw that a multitude came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I command thee come out of him, and enter no more into him. And having cried and torn him much, he came out; and the child became as one dead; insom^uch that the more part said, he is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and raised him up; and he arose” (9:17-27).

Reading the above, who would not conclude that it comes from the pen of an eye-witness? The scene so circumstantially described! A crowd surrounding the disciples, with whom scribes were intermixed. A demoniac, far the child clearly was one, was in their midst, brought by his father to get relief at the hands of the Lord. Not finding Him, he appealed to the disciples to cast out the demon. But in vain. They could not cast it out. At last, then, it would appear that a demon existed which could successfully refuse subjection to that power which had by human instrumentality displaced so many (Mark 6:13). For now all saw that the disciples were powerless. A painful position for them to be in. Added to that, and this was calculated to lower them in the eyes of the multitude, scribes were questioning with them, perhaps emboldened to take advantage of their discomfiture, that they might gain a victory by arguments over the simple fishermen of the lake. At that Juncture it was that the Lord reappeared, and immediately addressed the scribes, inquiring what it was all about. The better reading in v.19—*them* for *him*—confirms what we have expressed, that the inability of the disciples to exorcise the demon gave point and apparent force to the attack of the scribes.

Now the Master was there; and to Him the father explained all. He had brought to the Lord his son, possessed by a dumb spirit, which tyrannised frightfully over its victim, and had oftentimes attempted the child's destruction. The father described the case, stating the symptoms from time to time manifested: “It casteth him down, and he foameth, and grindeth his teeth, and pineth away.” As yet the Lord had not seen the poor creature; but at His command the child was produced, when the power of the demon over its victim was again, but for the last time, displayed. “It tare him

grievously, and he fell on the ground and wallowed foaming.” It was no delusion. It was demoniacal possession.

The father had correctly described the case (v.18). Now, in answer to the Lord’s inquiry as to the duration of the affliction, he told Him that his boy had suffered thus from a child, and that often his life had been endangered by fire and by water. To the last resource was the parent now reduced. Ordinary human means could avail nothing. The disciples, too, had failed. Could the Lord give the desired relief? “If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us.” How these few words tell of the heaviness of the affliction, in which, as the father expressed, he was not alone.

He had presented his case with all the urgency of parental feeling. What more could he do? The Lord next spoke, taking up the poor father’s words and applying them to the suppliant, “If thou canst! All things are possible to him that believeth.” The difficulty in the case lay not with the Lord, but with the father, who immediately replied, “I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.” That was enough. There was faith in the father to count on divine power, and on the willingness on the part of the Lord to heal. Then, seeing that a multitude came running together, the Lord addressed the demon with authority, “Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I command thee come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit having cried out and torn him much, he came out,” The child was now freed from demoniacal possession, and that for ever, though it left him for the moment utterly exhausted, so that the more part of the crowd declared that he was dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

Thus the day, which for the disciples had begun with apparent defeat, closed with signal victory. The father could rejoice, the disciples were cheered, the scribes were silenced, and the demon utterly worsted, and that by Him of whose divine commission Pharisees and Sadducees on the west of the lake professed to be in doubt.

The Prophet, or Teacher, was an earth, and He cleared up to His disciples a difficulty raised by the scribes. The King, too, was in their midst, whose dominion will be bounded by nothing short of the limits of the universe. The Son of God He had been proclaimed by the One most competent to declare it—the Father Himself. And His absolute power over demons was openly acknowledged by that creature who had the greatest interest in denying it, the dumb and deaf spirit. Added to all this, the efficacy faith to call forth what was needed had been illustrated in that child’s case, as

detailed by Mark. How fruitful had been that day and that journey in instruction and blessing! The One rejected by the leaders of the people, and before whom loomed the cross, dispensed favours to those who asked for them: the blind man's sight was restored, and the child was delivered from the demon's oppressive thralldom.

Retiring from the multitude into the house, the disciples asked the Lord privately, saying, "We could not cast it out?" His answer was an immediate one, "This kind can come forth by nothing but by prayer"¹² (9:28-29). The efficacy of faith He had taught that father. The need of prayer He spoke of to His disciples, and His answer indicated the great power of that spirit, one of a class, whilst assuring all of the prevailing power of prayer. Passing through Galilee on His way to Capernaum, His own city, another announcement of His coming death He made to His disciples (v.31-32). Of His rejection by the elders, etc., He had spoken in 8:31. Of men, which includes Gentiles, He now spake. "But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask Him" (9:32).

Re-entering Capernaum, this journey ended, and His ministry in Galilee, as far as Mark has related it, was shortly to close (9:33-53). But ere it closed, we get what in our Evangelist is rare, when compared with the narratives of Matthew and Luke—warnings of coming judgment, with that solemn addition peculiar to him, written probably but once, "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (48).

After that, beginning with ch.10, the Lord is seen leaving Galilee for the last time, to be there no more till He should meet His disciples after His resurrection, on that mountain where He had appointed them (Matt.28:16).

8. Across the Jordan to Jericho. (10)

In company with His disciples, the Lord having left Galilee, proceeded towards Jerusalem by the farther side of Jordan. On His way several incidents that took place are related, each of which, as He journeyed to Jericho, was made to furnish instruction for His own. Marriage, children, this world's wealth, and the true spirit of service—these are subjects which came up as they went along. And first of marriage. Multitudes resorted to the Lord, and He received them; healing them, as Matthew (19:2) writes;

¹² "And fasting" should probably be omitted.

teaching them, “as He was wont,” as Mark (10:1) informs us. These two Evangelists, who alone record the Lord’s deliverance on the subject of marriage, thus describe His occupation in their own characteristic way, as we have previously pointed out. Presented as the Messiah in Matthew, that Evangelist tells us how the Lord was healing the sick. In Mark, brought forward as the Prophet, or Teacher, this Evangelist notices that He was engaged in teaching. But as now in the work of God, so then, interruptions were attempted (surely they were of the enemy), to hinder, if possible, its progress. And again the Lord’s persistent opponents, the Pharisees, are the tools employed to bring that about.

A question was raised by them concerning marriage; why, exactly, is not made plain to us. “Is it lawful,” it was asked, “for a man to put away his wife?” The insincerity of the questioners is made manifest. They put that question tempting Him. Now, who instituted marriage? We all know, and they knew. It was God. What, then, was the Divine mind on the matter was the real question; not what any one, however famous as a teacher, might enunciate. And this the Lord upheld, as He turned them to the Word of God. “What did Moses command you?” He asked them. They replied, and correctly. Then they knew that divorces were allowed to the Jews. Why did they come to the Lord to question Him about it? It was hypocrisy.

Now the same lawgiver who sanctioned divorces had, in a previous part of the Pentateuch, made known the original institution of marriage, in which there was no clause permitting divorce to be practised. Both portions (Deut.24:1; Gen.2:23-24) were God’s Word. The former was a provision for the hardness of their hearts, and doubtless often made use of without the qualifying ground therein stated, “Because he hath found some uncleanness in her” (Deut.24:1); the latter (Gen.2:24) taught the sacredness and the real character of the tie. This latter was God’s original institution. The tie, except for fornication (Matt.19:9), should be held inviolable. “What God hath joined together let not man put asunder” (Mark 10:9) is the Lord’s declaration about matrimony. We are thus taken back to its original institution, and are reminded of the light in which God regards it—two made one flesh, whom He has joined, and whom therefore man must not sever.

The Pharisees apparently left Him, unable to find any ground on which to found an accusation. Subsequently the disciples, in the house as Mark carefully notes, asked more about it; and the Lord reaffirmed the

inviolability of the tie, if neither party had virtually broken it. Of this condition Matthew alone makes mention. Mark, as we see, does not mention it, as he wrote, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her; and if she herself shall put away her husband, and marry another, she committeth adultery” (Mark 10:10-12). Thus, whilst the law permitted divorces, the disciples of Christ were to remember the original institution of marriage, and the Lord’s deliverance about it (v.9). How the rights of the wife are safeguarded as well as those of the, husband, hers being the first mentioned! And in this matter of marriage as of the woman’s position on earth and in the assembly, we are taken back by God in His Word to the order established at the beginning. Scripture was to guide the disciples, and is to guide us. And the question of the Pharisees furnished the occasion for an authoritative announcement to guide Christians in this important matter.

Next of children do we read (Mark 10:13-16). Mothers, or those interested in them, brought some to the Lord, that He might touch them. The disciples rebuked them, resenting, apparently, such an intrusion and encroachment on their Master’s time and attention. The Lord saw that, and, as Mark alone has told us, “was moved with indignation.” His feelings were deeply stirred at their unauthorised conduct; the Evangelist here using a term concerning Him which is elsewhere only found as descriptive of the disciples (Matt.20:24; 26:8; Mark 10:41; 14:4), of the chief priests and scribes (Matt.21:15), and of the synagogue ruler (Luke 13:14). He evidently felt this intrusion keenly. But though Mark notices that, and has given elsewhere several proofs, as we believe, of his personal observation, there is one interesting fact, for the knowledge of which we have to thank Luke. He tells us that the Lord, after rebuking the disciples, Himself called the little ones to Him. Then, in the presence of such a troop, He announced His willingness to receive them. Creatures of God, whose angels do always behold the face of His Father in the heavens, they must even on that account have been of interest in His eyes. But He seized the opportunity to instruct all as to the character which becomes those who shall enter the kingdom: “Suffer the little children to come unto Me; forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shalt not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein” (10:14-15). The disciples looked on them just as babes (Luke 18:15). The Lord saw in them a character which should be true of the children of God—that childlike simplicity and confidence so pleasing to God.

Having thus spoken with all the little ones about Him, He graciously responded to the desires of those who had brought them, and took them up in His arms and blessed them. Many a parent undoubtedly has rejoiced in heart over this account. Their young ones, so dear to them, are not beneath the notice of the Lord; and though Matthew and Luke have put this fact on record in common with Mark, this last Evangelist only it is who has told us how the Lord took them up in His arms and blessed them (16). What interest did He show in them individually? What a sight to have witnessed, babe after babe taken up into His arms by the Saviour! What parents are there who care for their offspring, but will be thankful for the touches in this picture to which they are indebted to Mark? What disciple is there who may not find this history speak also to his heart? The parent can know that the Lord will receive a little child. The disciple may be reminded of that which becomes him as a child of the Father who is in heaven.

The Lord proceeded on His way, the disciples accompanying Him. Next one came running to Him, and fell on his knees before Him (17). The earnestness, the eagerness thus displayed in running, and the position immediately assumed on bended knee before the Lord, are just such notices as an eye-witness would be likely to record. In Mark's gospel only are they found. Now, in that attitude the question was put which the young ruler, as Luke tells us he was, seemed so desirous to have answered. "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" As man, the Lord challenged the appellation "Good." "Why callest thou Me good? There is none good but One, that is God." Men too often delight in such an address. The perfect man refused it. "One there is who is good" (Matt.19:17). The young ruler profited by the Lord's reply, for when next he addressed Him, he dropped the appellation Good (v.20). But he must be answered, and disciples taught; so the Lord proceeded to deal with him.

Now, his question was a virtual assumption that no light could be found in the written Word on the important subject—how to inherit eternal life. If so, God had left His people for fifteen centuries without any guidance concerning it. Was that credible? The Lord by His farther reply repels such a suggestion, as He reminds him of the seventh, the sixth, the eighth, the ninth, the tenth, and the fifth commandments, telling him, "If thou wilt enter into life,¹³ keep the commandments." For the dispensation of the law

¹³ "If thou wilt enter into life", He said, not into *everlasting life*, though it would have been everlasting if the commandments had been really kept. But taking him on the ground

was in force till the cross. Now, both the law (Deut.30:15; 32:47) and the prophets (Ezek.33) held out life as the fruit of obedience, leaving for the New Testament to teach how it is now received, viz., by hearing the voice of the Son of God (John 5:25). The Lord had thus turned him to part of the decalogue. The young man declared he had kept all that from his youth. He thought he could stand that test. Was his heart really right with God? We know, as the sequel shows, it was not. But how could that be demonstrated? Wisely, indeed, was he dealt with. A beautiful natural character he surely was, yet he was born in sin. And Mark tells us, what neither of the others have recorded, that the Lord, ere again replying, “looking on him, loved him” (21). There was that in him, the work of God, which was attractive, so the Lord loved him. He was, doubtless, what we should call a naturally lovable person. There are such in the world. And natural amiability of character, though very different from the fruit of the Spirit, is part of the Creator’s work. We all feel it to be attractive. The Lord evidently marked it. He loved him.

But such a character is not everything. So, desiring his everlasting welfare, the Lord once more addressed him, and tested him in a way he had not expected. To convict him by the second table of the law seemed, humanly speaking, hopeless. He now tested him to show on what his heart was set. “One thing thou lackest; go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come,¹⁴ follow Me” (21). Was Christ more to him than all his possessions? “He was sad at that saying, and went away grieved; for he had great possessions” (22). His heart was probed, its state was detected. He left the Lord. In a moment that which had appeared so fair became clouded, and the bud of promise never opened into a flower, but withered away. He who had run to the Lord with such eagerness, turned from Him with a sad and burdened heart. What an appeal to the law did not effect, Christ as a touchstone demonstrated. The heart of the ruler was not right with God. Surely the lesson thus taught of

of law, the term *everlasting* would not have been in place, for obedience in that case must be continuous to enjoy life. One can understand, therefore, why in the law that designation of life, telling of its enduring character, is not used. In the Old Testament, we only meet with that thought in connection with millennial times (Ps.133:3; Dan.12:2). We know we have it now as soul blessing, looking for it in its fulness for our persons (Jude 21) in the future.

¹⁴ “Take up the cross” should very probably be omitted.

the way of dealing with such a character was not lost on the disciples. Is it not a lesson still for us? Here, as far as we know, that man's history ended, yet not the instruction to be deduced from it. For now, looking round, as Mark relates that the Lord did, the disciples get a word in the moral, drawn from it: "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" The effect of the Lord's answer on the young man we have seen. Now the effect of the Lord's words to the disciples we are to learn. "They were astonished." He repeated them—"Children, how hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God!" (24-25). What apparent eagerness had that young ruler displayed; like the early dew, how quickly did it pass away. But how earnest was the Lord to use the occasion to teach His disciples a needful lesson, repeating, as He did, what He wished to impress upon them. It was the part of a teacher to do that; and Mark it is who, in harmony with the special character in which he presents the Lord, alone notices this. Vivid, too, is his delineation of the scene. We can almost picture it: first the Lord looking on the young man in a manner which unmistakably evidenced that He loved him; then His looking around on all the company just after that ruler had left Him; and His looking again on the disciples when they were expressing one to another their great astonishment at His announcement, saying, though not to Him, "Then who can be saved?" The Lord's answer put the case in its right light. "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible." It becomes a question of the heart and nature, and not of wealth; God only can deal with the former.

Granting, as is commonly supposed, that Mark may have got much information for his gospel from Peter, we cannot but think, as we study it, and note the touches of the artist's pencil with which it abounds, that he must have been an eye-witness of this as of other scenes, and had them indelibly fixed in his remembrance. He wrote of them as if still under his eye, and so presents pictures from real life, and not merely facts derived from another.

At the Lord's reply, Peter comes forward. They had done what that rich ruler would not. Such conduct, Matthew tells us (19:28), will not be forgotten. Mark, however, passes over that, and records, but in a fuller way than either of the others, the rest of the Lord's reply: "There is no man that

hath left house, or brethren, or sister, or mother,¹⁵ or father, or children, or lands, for my sake, and for the gospel's sake, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come, eternal life. But many that are first shall be last, and the last first" (10:29-31). We should mark the disjunctive conjunction *or* in v.29, and the copulative conjunction *and* in v.30. One might be called to surrender "houses, *or* brethren, *or* sisters," etc. Such shall receive an hundredfold, which is amplified into "houses, *and* brethren, *and* sisters," etc. These two little words, *or*, *and*, add point and weight to the gracious declaration.

Thus teaching as He journeyed on, going up to Jerusalem with the Twelve, the Lord led the way, going in front of them all. His position in relation to the company Mark thus notices, and acquaints us, likewise, with the feelings of the disciples: "They were amazed, and, as they followed." (or, as some read, they who followed), "were afraid" (32). Of persecution to be expected He had just spoken, yet He steadfastly went forward to Jerusalem. The disciples were afraid, nor would their fear be lessened, since He now, for the third time, and more in detail, announced His rejection and death, painting out the different parts that would be played by the Jews and by the Gentiles. But, as before, He also foretold His resurrection on the third day. "After three days," were His words, "He shall rise again."

At this juncture, as both Mark and Matthew agree, the request for the two sons of Zebedee was preferred. Matthew tells us their mother, Salome, the Virgin's sister, preferred it. Mark mentions James and John as presenting it. Evidently they looked for a personal reign of the Lord, a thought which He fully confirmed by His answer (v.40); and the near advent of the kingdom in power was at that time a very common expectation. (Luke 19:11). The cross for Him, and subsequent suffering for His followers, lay, however, between it and the then present. So He challenged the petitioners: "Ye know not what ye ask. Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? or be baptised¹⁶ with the baptism that I am baptised with? And they said unto Him, We can." The cup and the baptism He promised them;

¹⁵ "Or wife" should be here omitted, as also in the parallel passage in Matthew. It is met with really only in Luke.

¹⁶ This reference to His baptism is also peculiar to Mark. It should be omitted from Matthew's account.

the places of honour He did not. They were not His to give, but are for them for whom they have been prepared.

Indignation moved the rest when they heard what had been asked. The Lord, then calling all to Him, drew the contrast between the great ones of earth and the greatest in His kingdom. These will be they who follow Him the closest. “Whosoever will be great among you shall be your minister; and whosoever of you will be the chiefest (or first among you), shall be servant of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; and to give His life a ransom for many” (10:43-45).

How all in the Master’s hand turned to gold! The question of the Pharisees, the forwardness of the disciples, the incident of the young ruler, the request of James and John—each furnished an occasion of which the Lord made use to bring out important teaching, of which all disciples have need to be reminded; and the last, not the least important, nor the least precious. The example of the Master, and the way He spoke of it, must ever be precious to His own. He “came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; and to give His life a ransom far many.” That should for ever silence any thought of self-seeking on behalf of His followers.

Jericho was next reached, an important stage in this journey to Jerusalem. The three Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke all notice it. There grace was manifested to two blind men, writes Matthew, whilst Mark and Luke tell us only of one of them, whom Mark mentions by name, the son of Timaeus, and therefore called Bartimaeus. A blind beggar he was, and sitting by the wayside where Jesus was to pass as He was leaving the city. This fact, also, Mark makes perfectly plain (52). And as one who was present might naturally write, if a careful observer, he informs his readers that a great crowd was with the Lord, which he distinguishes from the disciples. Bartimaeus could not see, but he could hear. The noise of a crowd passing by where he sat attracted him, and he asked what it meant. Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. For him that was everything. He was the Son of David; as such he claimed His help: “Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.” Many, however, as they passed, rebuked him, that he should hold his peace. Why should he trouble the Master? Ah, but they had no want. Bartimaeus had a crying one; he was blind, and desired sight. He had faith, too, as to the power and the willingness of the Lord. The present was his opportunity; he took it, “He cried the more, a great deal: Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.”

One knows what noise a passing crowd makes. The tramp of feet, and the talking one to another, could easily drown the voice of a wayside beggar. The Lord, however, heard it. No one, it appears, told Him of it. No noise, however great or distracting, hinders a petition for mercy reaching His ear, "He stood still." All progress was arrested at the sound of the beggar's voice. The Lord spoke, saying, as we should probably read, "Call ye him." All for Bartimaeus was at once changed. Rebukes ceased; encouragement followed. And as Mark has put on record the Lord's word of command, he, and he alone, has preserved the words of the crowd: "Be of good comfort; rise, He calleth thee." Nor that only: for from him we learn of the ready response on the part of Bartimaeus, who, "casting away his garment, sprang up, and came to Jesus." How graphically described! The company arrested, the word of command uttered, the language of the crowd changed, and the blind man starting up. What a scene! A blind beggar in the presence of the Lord, the crowd looking on, and the narrator of the history an eye-witness, and probably near to the Lord; for he wrote, "He *came* to Jesus," A few words from Christ, an immediate reply from Bartimaeus, and the favour was accorded: "Go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole." He received his sight. He did go his way, but that way was to follow his benefactor, a living example of His power and of His grace. For it was grace—sight freely given—grace to a beggar, but grace to one who had faith to count on the Lord's power, and on His willingness to meet him. It is the same still, though it be spiritual blessing which is desired and is received.

The Evangelist next carries on his readers to the Mount of Olives, to describe the Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

9. The Last Week. (11-13)

From Jericho to Jerusalem, distant about seventeen miles, the Lord next proceeded, stopping, as John tells us, one night certainly at Bethany, when Mary, the sister of Lazarus, anointed Him with the precious ointment. Of incidents or of discourses by the way, as they passed through the desolate region, and kept mounting upwards along the track which led from the Jordan valley to Jerusalem, we have not a word from any one of the Evangelists. For a desolate district for hours it was, as travellers have described it, that had to be traversed, and one frequented by robbers as well (Luke 10:30).

Reaching Bethany, the last week of the Lord's life had commenced (John 12:1). Ere another Sabbath's sun had set He had died, and the stone rolled to the door of the tomb concealed from human eyes the body which Joseph and Nicodemus had reverently, but hastily, laid in it, time not allowing of more than just enwrapping it in a linen cloth, with 100 pounds weight of myrrh and aloes mixed together, provided by the latter.

Events of the deepest importance were therefore nigh at hand; and Mark has noted those of each day from the *fifth* to the *third* before the Passover included. On the *fifth*, as we gather from John's gospel (12:12), the triumphal entry into Jerusalem took place—an event unpremeditated as far as man was concerned, and which took the inhabitants of the holy city by surprise. But who was thus to enter the city? The Prophet of Nazareth of Galilee? That was true. The raiser of Lazarus? That was also true. But more. It was Jerusalem's King, who would that day enter, as such, the city of the Great King (Ps.48:2). In a becoming way great monarchs enter their capitals. In a suited manner would He enter His. And centuries before had that been declared by Zechariah, one of the post-captivity prophets (9:9), who must have keenly felt, in common with his countrymen returned from captivity at Babylon, the low and servile state to which they were reduced. Traditions of the past they might cherish, recalling to mind the palmy days of the Jewish monarchy, and of national independence, when orders issued at Jerusalem had been law up to the banks of the Euphrates.

But all that was passed, and the kings of Persia ruled over them. Yet the Jewish monarchy would be restored, and in the hour of the returned remnant's felt weakness Zechariah predicted it. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass." Thus wrote the prophet (9:9), and in measure, the prophecy has been fulfilled. We say in measure, for Matthew, who quotes it (21:5), carefully omits the words, "Just, and having salvation;" as the time of Jerusalem's redemption had not then drawn nigh, though the King, on that fifth day before the passover, entered as King in the manner predicted, riding on a colt, the foal of an ass.

But who suggested that? The multitude did not bring an animal richly caparisoned. The disciples did not furnish the colt, and ask the Lord to mount it. The Lord took the initiative by sending two of His disciples to the entrance of Bethphage to get it. For the foal was there, tied, Mark

informs us, at a door without in the open street, or perhaps a crossway leading round the house. He told them where to find it, what to do, and what to say to the owners. Zechariah had foretold that the foal would be forthcoming for the King's use. The Lord made known where it was actually standing at that moment. Who tied it up, and why, are matters buried in oblivion. That it was there ready to carry its first rider—the King—is the point of interest for us.

The owners (Luke 19:33) of the animal saw the disciples loosing the colt, and inquired the reason. They answered as directed by the Master: "The Lord has need of him, and straightway He will send him back hither." So it seems Mark wrote (11:3), thus telling what none of the others have recorded, that the Master required it for a temporary purpose, and would restore it when done with. That satisfied the owners. They let it go. Maybe they were disciples in truth, known as yet only to the Lord as such.

Covered with the garments of the disciples the young ass was ready for the Lord. He mounted it, and they all proceeded on the way, crossing the Mount of Olives, which lay between Bethany and Jerusalem. A multitude was with them, attracted to Bethany by hearing of the resurrection of Lazarus, many of whom strewed their clothes in the way, whilst others littered the road with branches cut out of the fields. One spirit pervaded all. They would honour Him, and give Him a triumphant entrance into the city. Thus they passed over the crest of the mountain, and began the descent on the western side, the crowd now vastly increased by a multitude which had come out of Jerusalem to meet them, drawn together by the report of the miracle at Bethany (John 12:18). This explains to us the language of both Matthew and Mark, who notice those who went before and those who followed; the second company, which had that day come forth from Jerusalem, most probably turning and heading the procession into the city.

"The Prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee," they were escorting, as Matthew informs us (21:11), was the answer of the crowd to the inquiry of people in the city. But the Prophet from Nazareth they declared was the King (Luke 19:38), and that in the language of Psalm 118:25-26. "Save, now, I beseech Thee (*i.e.*, Hosanna), O Lord: O Lord, I beseech Thee send now prosperity. Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord." So wrote the Psalmist by the spirit of prophecy; for that composition has reference to the coming day of Israel's final deliverance. "Hosanna," cried the multitude, as they descended the slopes of Olivet and passed into the

city; “Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father, David. Hosanna in the highest”. The One mentioned in the Psalm was in their midst. He was the King,¹⁷ the heir to David’s throne, under whom it will be re-established. Yet He was also the Prophet from Nazareth of Galilee. “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Nathanael had once asked (John 1:46). “Search and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet,” was the dictum of the Pharisees (John 7:52). Nathanael had long ere this discovered that good could come from Nazareth. The vociferous multitude could assure the Pharisees that their dictum had no weight with them. The Prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth, they were escorting into Jerusalem, and that Prophet was her King.

The Lord in this triumphant manner entered the city, and went to the temple, and looking round about upon all things, it being now eventide, he went out unto Bethany with the Twelve. For this note of time, marking especially the close of that day, we are wholly indebted to Mark. And as he alone has recorded the Master’s promise to return the ass, we can see how easily that could have been fulfilled, if the disciples led it back to Bethphage ere resting at Bethany for the night. They would, in that case, have restored it ere nightfall. The *fifth* day now closed, for ever to be remembered by that triumphal entry, in fulfilment of the words of the prophet.

The *fourth* day began to run its course. How different was to be the experience of the disciples! They had seen their Master on the previous one receiving the homage of multitudes, and conducted over Olivet into the capital by a joyous crowd. Now He re-entered the city and temple, retracing His steps over Olivet, but it was as a hungry man, of whom none of the crowd thought, and to whom none came to minister. A fig tree by the wayside, clothed doubtless with its dark, glossy leaves, betokening a tree professedly fruitful, the Lord saw, and went up to it. Covered with foliage, the promise of fruit should have been there, since the time to gather the crop had not come. “The *time of figs*,” notes Mark, “was not yet.” But it was fruitless, a fit emblem of the nation which, boasting of being God’s people, was destitute of fruit for Him. The Lord cursed the tree, and the disciples heard it.

¹⁷ The words of the crowd in verse 10 are peculiar to Mark, the last clause, “Hosanna in the highest,” excepted.

A popular ovation! What was it worth? He, the, subject of it on the past day, was hungry now. Did He get His want supplied? No historian has told us. But who was He? Just the popular idol of the moment, to be thrown aside when done with? So people might think. But the chief priests should learn about Him, for He entered the temple, and proceeded to exercise authority within its precincts, claiming it to be His house. The traffickers in things used in its service He cast out. The money-changers' tables He threw down, as well as the seats of them that sold doves. Further, and our Evangelist alone records it, He would not permit the temple court to be desecrated for the convenience of those carrying vessels from one place to another. "He would not suffer," we read, "that any man should carry any vessel through the temple" (v.16). The sacredness of the house, the holiness of the enclosure, all should respect. The chief priests, the guardians of the sacred precincts, had failed in this matter. He, then, must maintain the holiness of the place. For the house was His. Jehovah Himself in the person of the Lord was present, and no one resisted Him. All evidently bowed to Him. "My house," He said, quoting the prophet Isaiah (66:7), "shall be called an house of prayer for all the nations; but," and here He referred seemingly to Jeremiah 7:11, "Ye have made it a den of thieves."

With this, His work on the *fourth* day, as far as any Evangelist has recorded it, was ended. And in the evening He went out of the city. The fig tree cursed and the temple cleansed, these were the great events of that day. The King had entered His capital. Jehovah had visited His house. The effect of the triumphal entry on the Pharisees John has told us (12:19). The effect on the scribes and on the chief priests of the cleansing of the temple both Mark and Luke have noticed. They sought to kill Him, for they feared Him, for all the people were astonished at His teaching (Mark 11:18).

The *third* day now dawned; a busy day, as the three synoptic gospels show. It began, as far as Mark has noticed, with the lesson deduced from the withered fig tree (11:20-26), and ended with the prophetic forecast of Jerusalem's troubles till the Lord returns, given to the disciples in response to the question privately put to Him, when sitting on the Mount of Olives, by Peter, James, John, and Andrew (13:37).

The fig tree was withered. They all saw that. It was dried up from its roots. Peter called the Lord's attention to it, who thereupon told them of the power of faith for those who ask in prayer, believing that they shall

receive. "Have faith in God. Verily, I say unto you, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou taken up, and cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he saith cometh to pass; he shall have it. Therefore, I say unto you, All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them. And whensoever ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any one: that your Father also which as in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (9:22-25). We have quoted the Revised Version, for there are several important differences in the passage, as well as the omission of verse 26. Believing prayer! What results from it may there be! What mighty deeds may be effected! A mountain like Olivet removed, and the heart realise the calming power of faith, "Believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them." This, it seems, Mark wrote, preserving the utterance of the Master in a way no one else has done. But such prayer can only proceed from one in charity with those who have offended him. Forgiveness must be accorded to any offending party ere the prayer of faith can be presented to God.

They reached the temple once more, when the Lord began afresh to teach the people. Engaged in that and walking about, as Mark especially notes, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders approach Him with a question relating to His, in their eyes, startling acts on the previous day. Probably taken by surprise, they were then struck dumb. Now recovered from their astonishment, they ask for His authority for what He did, and from whom He, confessedly not of Aaron's line, had received authority to order people and things within the precincts of God's house. But were they sincere? He would test them. And this He proceeded to do. A question about John's baptism would prove them. Was his mission from heaven or from men? They knew whence it was. But to have answered aright would have condemned themselves. To have denied its heavenly authority would have brought them into conflict with the populace. They answered that they could not tell whence it was. They showed what they were. The Lord, therefore, refused to answer their questions about Himself. Such people might fittingly be left to themselves.

But a multitude was present. The Lord thought of them (Luke 20:9), and spoke that parable of the husbandmen, which clearly showed not only who He was—the heir, but the designs also of the husbandmen, and their doom. The beloved Son of His Father they would kill, so destruction must overtake the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees who opposed Him

(Matt.21:45; Luke 20:19). The bearing of the parable His questioners perceived. They sought, therefore, to kill Him, but in the meantime they left Him, says Mark (13:12), and went their way. Yet they did not leave Him alone, for they sent some of the Pharisees and of the Herodians to catch Him in His words (13-17). It was an artfully laid plot. Pharisees and Herodians! Who will not combine to oppose God and his Son? Pharisees and Sadducees had made common cause (Matt.16:1) and tempted the Lord. Pharisees and Herodians now unite, so as, if possible, to deliver Him to the power and authority of the governor (Luke 20:20). But in vain. Their question about the lawfulness of paying tribute was answered in a way they had not expected, and they marvelled at Him.

Sadducees next came forward with their question, involving, as they thought, the denial of a resurrection. To them he replied. They had referred to the Pentateuch (Deut.25:5).¹⁸ He answered them from it (Ex.3:6). The provision for a levirate marriage demonstrated, they thought, the impossibility of a resurrection of the body. Two important things, however, they left out, viz., the power of God, and the teaching of the Word of God (Mark 12:24). Men in the resurrection state will be equal to the angels, and will never die; so marriage, which now perpetuates the race, will not be required. Further, God's word to Moses (Ex.3:6) implied resurrection. Hence they greatly erred.

Sadducees put to silence, a scribe, perceiving that He had answered them well, brought up a question in debate, it seems, amongst the orthodox party, viz., which was the first commandment of all? The Lord's reply from Deut.6:4-5 and Lev.19:18 more than answered the question asked. And the scribe, as Mark alone has recorded it, acknowledged the truth of the answer, and confessed that loving God and loving one's neighbour—in a word, the manifesting the divine nature—was more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices. Love is the fulfilling of the law, wrote Paul (Rom.13:10); and he taught the Corinthians that it is the greatest of Christian graces (1 Cor.13:13). "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and do his commandments." wrote John

¹⁸ "Moses wrote unto us," they said, affirming their belief *that the* provision in the law to which they referred was promulgated by Moses. The Lord's reply gave no countenance to any supposition that the law referred to was of a later date, any more than that of Deut.24 relating to divorces, which He definitely ascribed to Moses (Mark 10:5).

(1 John 5:2). We can understand the Lord's prompt reply to that scribe, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God;" for to *acknowledge* the teaching as true is one thing, to carry it out is another! That question answered, the Pharisees, the Herodians, the Sadducees, and scribes all were silent. In wisdom had He met some; from the Word had He answered others. Now the Lord questioned them about David's Son being David's Lord, as the former prophetically writes in Ps.110. How much light could that psalm cast on the difficulty the Jews felt, in that He being a man made Himself God! (John 10:33). The Lord here pointed to that which could solve what to them was an enigma. But who of all that heard Him profited by His question? With a warning against the pretentious scribes, so fair in profession, but so defective in practice, followed by the commendation of the poor widow, whose practice, as proved by her self-denying offering, was in harmony with her profession, the Lord's stay in the temple court that day came to an end. He was walking in the temple when the chief priests challenged His authority for having cleansed it. He was sitting over against the treasury when that widow east in her two mites. Thus Mark, with his usual careful attention to details, describes Him. Now leaving the temple, and predicting its overthrow, His attention having been called by a disciple to its stones and its buildings, He crossed the valley which separated it from Olivet, and sat down on the slope of the mountain, facing, as our Evangelist alone has told us, the sacred enclosure of that which has been described as "one of the most splendid architectural combinations of the ancient world."¹⁹

There, at the request, we now learn, of Peter, James, John, and Andrew, who asked Him privately, the Lord foretold the fortunes of the city and temple, and the time of trial which His saints will experience, just previous to His return in power. Of the three Evangelists who record this prophecy, Luke dwells on the capture of the city by the Romans under Titus, whereas Matthew and Mark, dwell especially on the troubles in the future consequent on the setting up in the temple of the abomination of desolation, as mentioned by Daniel the prophet. Reading what Mark has written, we find little that has not been recorded also by Matthew, the instruction to disciples in verse 11 and the warning in verses 33-35 being the two chief exceptions. Yet there are enough of variations to sustain the Evangelist's

¹⁹ Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, vol.3. p.1464.

character as an independent writer. Into the details of this prophecy, however, we cannot here enter.

And now, as far as Mark is concerned, the instruction of that day is brought to an end, though much more is related Matthew (21:28-32; 22:1-14; 23; 24:45—25:46), who, for the most part, has alone preserved what these several portions set forth.

The *third* day before the passover closed. Nothing more is told in this gospel of the Lord's movements after that, beyond the giving directions to Peter and John to prepare for the paschal feast, till He sat down with the Twelve in the upper room on the night before His death. The events of the fifth, the fourth, and the third days Mark has carefully distinguished, as none of the others have done. The last week, therefore, is pretty well described. Activity in service characterised the Lord on that *day* of His life, recorded in 1:21-38. Activity characterised Him during the last *week* of His life. Now the time for His ministry whilst upon earth was drawing rapidly to a close, for the hour of His passion approached. About that the son of Mary, in common with the other Evangelists, has written. In another sketch we hope to look into it.

10. The Last Day. (14-15)

The last day of the Lord's life in humiliation drew nigh. The chief priests and scribes were now intent on compassing His death, little knowing that the time of year and the very day for it had been foreshadowed about fifteen centuries previous, when their forefathers kept their first Passover in the land of Egypt. Hatred and expediency, however, governed them, so they sought how they might take Him by craft and put Him to death.

Fearing the populace, they counselled not to carry out their purpose during the feast. Their fears, however, were groundless, as it turned out, and they did put the Lord to death on the very day of the Passover. And unexpectedly they were aided in their designs by the unsolicited offer of Judas Iscariot to betray his Master. For, nettled it would seem by the Lord's rebuke in the house of Simon the leper, at Bethany, the design was formed in his heart to betray Him. Hence it was that both Mark and Matthew introduced the account of the supper at Bethany out of its chronological order, but just previous to telling their readers of Judas' treachery. And Mark, with his usual characteristic attention to details, informs us that Mary *broke* the box of alabaster, and poured the ointment

on His head. The ointment was costly, but not too costly to be all bestowed on her Lord. And the box could never be used again for any purpose, for she broke it. As an earthen vessel in which the remains of the sin-offering had been sodden was broken, that it should not be devoted to common use (Lev.6:28), that box or flask was broken, never to be refilled with ointment for any ordinary use. All in that vessel was for Him, and that vessel was never to be profaned.

Some sitting there were indignant at the apparent waste, and Judas (John 12:4) led them in the expression of their feelings; so that, as Mark writes (14:9), they murmured against her. The Lord, thereupon, undertook her defence. And this, the shortest gospel of the four, gives us more fully than the others the text of the Master's rebuke, as well as that of His commendation. Replying to the objection speciously urged, that Mary was depriving the poor of that which would have been to their advantage, we learn here, in addition to what the others have recorded, that the Lord said "and whensoever ye will ye may do them service." Opportunities to minister to the poor were abundant and would not fail. Opportunities to minister to Him in humiliation would be but few now. Then commending Mary, He said, "She hath done what she could," words which have never been forgotten, though for their preservation we are again wholly indebted to our Evangelist. Nor is this all. For the Lord added in explanation of her act, "She is come beforehand to anoint my body."

Seemingly the matter there ended. The murmurers were silenced. With all but one it went no further. That one, however, was the most interested of the company. He had the bag, and purloined what was put therein. Had he sold the ointment, he could have pocketed the money, equal in value to about £10²⁰. He lost that, and betrayed the Lord for something between £3 and £4 of our money.

And now the son of Mary (Acts 12:12) tells us of that man's interview with the chief priests, who had already assembled in council in the hall of Caiaphas, the high priest (Matt.26:3). Volunteering to do their work, the terms were quickly arranged, and the silver was weighed unto him (Matt.26:15); for they were glad (14:11) when they heard of his offer.

²⁰ Editor's note: Comments like this provide no frame of reference outside the time and country of writing. 300 denarii is 300 day's wages. Knowing this, an enquirer may readily calculate the value in a currency relevant to their personal circumstances.

Murmurings in Simon's house, rejoicing amongst the chief priests, these points our Evangelist has carefully noted.

The chief priests thus engaged planning the Lord's death, He, who knew all that was going on, desired to keep the Passover with His disciples. For that preparations must be made, and two disciples, Peter and John, were commissioned to make them. But where? for the Lord had no abode in the city. Fully directed, however, by Him how to find the house, what to say to the owner of it, and how they would know the room, they went on their errand; and accosting the owner of the house in the words put into their mouths by the Lord, they found, as He had foretold, a large upper room furnished, and as Mark adds, ready. There they prepared the Passover.

Touching the supper, and the events connected with it, we have little peculiar to our gospel. Yet Mark's character as a narrator comes out, as he tells us "They began to be sorrowful, and to say unto Him one, by one, Is it I?" So far he agrees with Matthew, but now adds, what imparts graphicness to his account, "and another said, Is it I?" We can picture the scene, as each one distrusting himself asked "Is it I?" No one apparently kept silence but Judas, who at length—for continued silence he must have felt would betray him—had the effrontery to say, as Matthew has recorded, "Rabbi, Is it I?"

Coming to the scene in the garden, we may remark that the Lord in the agony in Gethsemane most probably addressed His Father in Aramaic (14:36); and on the first occasion said to Him, in addition to that which others have recorded, "all things are possible unto Thee." Then, on rejoining the disciples the first time, He addressed Peter directly and by name, "Simon, sleepest thou?" for he and the others were sleeping. Again leaving them, and returning, He found them overcome with sleep, "sleeping for sorrow," writes Luke (22:45), their eyes being heavy. And we learn from Mark (14:40) that on this occasion "they wist not what to answer Him."

And now we meet with that which is nowhere else recorded, the incident of the young man who followed the Lord on His apprehension, with just a linen cloth cast about him over his naked body. Possibly a night-dress, as the term used, *sindon*, leads us to suppose.²¹ Finding himself in danger of

²¹ *Sindon*—a linen or cotton garment in which people slept, and in which the Lord's dead body was wrapped by Joseph (Matt.27:59; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53).

being arrested, for they laid hold of him, he left the linen cloth, and fled away naked (14:51-52). Conjecture of course has been busy about this one. Unnamed, and without any clue by which to identify him, it is wise to confess our ignorance, and to leave it as a matter which we cannot clear up, noting, however, how the introduction of this episode into the narrative evidences Mark's complete independence of his fellow-biographers. He presents us, not with a compendium derived from Matthew and Luke, but with a history equally authentic, and fully as independent, recording too, in confirmation of this, the words of Judas to the officers, not only "Hold him fast," but also, "and lead him away safely." From the garden we now are taken to the palace of the high-priest, and, in common with Matthew and Luke, Mark acquaints us with the Lord's examination before Caiaphas; that informal inquiry before Annas, of which John writes, being by those three wholly passed over.

False witnesses, we learn, came forward in numbers, but to no avail. Their witness did not agree. At last came forward two who professed to have heard Him themselves. The text of their testimony, Mark only in fulness has preserved. "We have heard Him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands." Very definite was the statement, and very distinct was the difference between the temple to be destroyed and the one to be built. Surely such witnesses could be relied on? We read, however, the quiet remark of the inspired historian, "And not even so did their witness agree together," The Lord's condemnation by subornation was impossible, He was condemned for speaking the truth, for He will be seen sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven. Blasphemy, cried out the high-priest. Solemn truth, we have to call it. Condemned thereupon to death, spat upon, buffeted, with His face covered, that He might not see from whom the strokes came, and contemptuously called on to declare as a prophet who thus smote Him, another act of indignity is mentioned. The officers, Mark has noted, received Him with blows of their hands.

We must turn now to another matter—the account of Peter's fall. Even in this we find we should have lost something had not the gospel of the son of Mary come down to us. The Lord, in warning Peter, had been very precise in His language, yet no evangelist save Mark has noticed that. "Before the cock crow *twice*, thou shalt deny me *thrice*," had been the words addressed to the self-confident disciple (14:30). The historian, who preserved that

utterance, is the one who carefully noticed its fulfilment. A cock crew just after Peter's first denial. And again after the interval of an hour (Luke 22:59), the cock crew a second time, Peter having just denied his Master for the third time (Mark 14:68-72). The words of the Lord came true indeed. Peter, we read, recalled them to mind, and wept. Humbled he must have felt himself. What were his boastful assertions of devotedness worth?

The night passed, the morning came, and the council was assembled formally to condemn the Lord. Little time was occupied in that, we may well believe. All professed to be clear about his guilt. He was, they agreed, deserving of death. So to Pontius Pilate He was taken; and we are introduced, as it were, to the scene. On the one hand were the chief priests, accusing Him of many things; on the other was the Lord, perfectly silent to all their charges against Him. Then Pilate's surprise is expressed, and his words to the Lord, in consequence, seem reported in full: "Answerest Thou nothing? Behold how many things they accuse Thee of" (15:3-4). Still the Lord was silent, His conduct being so different from that which Pilate, as a judge, was accustomed.

Now began the abortive attempts of the governor to release Him, in accordance with the custom at that feast to release one prisoner, whom they would. Barabbas or Christ, that became the question. So in answer to the clamour of the multitude that he would do as he had ever done unto then, the governor's voice was heard saying, "Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews?" Vain, however, was this attempt to escape from unrighteously condemning the Just One. The chief priests stirred up the populace to clamour for Barabbas. Again the governor's voice was heard, "What then shall I do unto Him whom ye call the King of the Jews?" Poor Pilate, seeking to keep in favour with the people, and yet desirous to set the Lord free, puts the issue in their hands. "What shall I do...", he asked. The answer came, as the cry from the multitude again arose, "Crucify Him!" One more attempt on Pilate's part, "Why, what evil hath He done?" only met with a most persistent demand for His death. The judge had not only publicly cleared the Lord from any charge worthy of death, but now he asserted His innocence of any evil whereof they had accused Him. Yet, to content the people, that unhappy man yielded to their clamorous demand. Judgment and righteousness were that day separated, to be found together again when the King shall return, as Ps.94:15 long ago predicted.

The Lord and Herod had that day met, as Luke has recorded—Pilate and the Lord had now met, and were about to part, but to meet again at another tribunal, when He who was that day unrighteously condemned will sit on the judgment-seat, and before Him both Herod and Pilate shall stand.

From the judgment-seat to the Praetorium, Mark next carries his readers. Now, in the court made the sport of the soldiers, fresh indignities and mockings the Lord patiently endured. For what Isaiah (50) had predicted was carried out. After that they led Him away to be crucified, compelling on the way one Simon, a Cyrenian, an Hellenistic Jew, to bear the cross behind Him. Was he a disciple? Evidently he had taken no part with the populace, for he was coming from the country, and so must have met the procession on its way to Golgotha. He was also, as Mark takes pains to inform us, the father of Alexander and Rufus—that Rufus, very likely, who is mentioned by Paul in his epistle to the Romans (16:13).

The account of the crucifixion supplies little that is not found in one or more of the others. Indeed, the history here agrees very closely with that furnished us by Matthew, though the latter presents the darkest picture of all of that solemn time. Still, we have to thank our Evangelist for a few facts not recorded elsewhere. He tells us that it was the *third* hour when they crucified Him (15:25); and he gives us, very probably, a translation of the Latin inscription which was put over the Lord's head on the cross (26). To him, too, are we indebted for the name of the Virgin's sister, the wife of Zebedee, who with other women mentioned was present at the cross, and subsequently, on the resurrection morning, visited the tomb. John writes of her, who was his own mother, as the sister of the Virgin. Mark informs us that her name was Salome (see 15:40, compare with John 19:25, and also 16:1). She with others, when in Galilee, had followed the Lord, and had ministered to Him of her substance. To the close she was soon at the cross, and was early too at the sepulchre.

And though these women, with others from Galilee, faithful to the last, stood beholding the cross from afar, they were, all will understand, quite separate in heart, and perhaps also in position, from the taunting crowd. Their hearts were full of sorrow; and whilst powerless to help, or in any way to hinder the awful crime that was being committed before their eyes, their devotion to the Lord remained unshaken. His death on the cross as a malefactor could in no way weaken that.

They saw Him die, as did the centurion on duty, who was struck with the closing scene. They witnessed too, doubtless, the melting away of the vast multitude when all was over.

The burial now followed, a matter of interest to but few of all who had stood before the cross. But who was to undertake the office of placing the body in a grave? One of the Sanhedrim, who was a rich man of Judea (Luke 23:51), Joseph by name, a disciple of the Lord Jesus, went to Pilate and asked for the body. Was He really dead? Had he expired so soon? The thieves were still alive. Death by crucifixion was generally anything but rapid. So Pilate marvelled if He were already dead, not knowing that in the counsel of God the Lord would give up His life, no man taking it from Him (John 10:18). Calling for the centurion, as Mark alone has noticed, he inquired if He had been any-while dead. Ascertaining that He was dead, he granted the *corpse*, as our Evangelist probably wrote, to Joseph. It was buried, wrapped in the linen sheet he had bought for the purpose. Joseph was looking for the kingdom of God (15:43). Was his faith upset by what had just happened? It would seem not. Like the penitent thief, he awaited the kingdom, and, we may well believe, discerned in the crucified One the King who is to come. So, as Matthew records, he reverently laid in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out of the rock, the body of Israel's King—Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses looking on.

11. The Resurrection. (16)

Joseph's work was done. He disappears from the page of history as suddenly as he came upon it. We had not heard of his existence before, we know nothing of his end; yet of this we are sure, that, though hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God, he stands out as one who, possessed of wealth, and held, too, in reputation amongst men, through the sovereign grace of God, became an inheritor of the kingdom of the heavens. Helped by Nicodemus, who furnished the spices of about a hundred pounds in weight, he did what the women could not have done, and then closed the door of the sepulchre by rolling into its place the stone, which was very great. Work for the women, however, remained. So when the Sabbath was past (for they rested on it), Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought sweet spices, that on the following morning they might come and anoint Him.

Morning came, and they, very early astir, were on their way to the tomb, saying among themselves, as Mark records, "Who shall roll us away the

stone from the door of the sepulchre?" Nearing it, their question, they saw, had received its solution. The stone had been rolled back, for it was, we read, very great. With characteristic eagerness, the impediment removed, they entered the sepulchre, but found not the body. Had the sepulchre been rifled? Impossible, for it had been carefully guarded. Surprised they must have been. But quickly were they set at rest, for an angel was sitting in the tomb, we learn, on the right side, and arrayed in a white robe. Was he there to affright them? Was he there to guard the sacred spot from pollution by the presence of men? He was there with a message to the women, and through them to the disciples. He forthwith delivered it, and the women explicitly believed it. For service to the body within the tomb they had come prepared, and all that was needful for that they had brought. Service, however, of a different character was appointed them—that of messengers, bearing to the disciples the joyful news of the Lord's resurrection. Jesus the Nazarene, who had been crucified, they sought. He was not there. He was risen. And now to tell the disciples, and Peter, adds Mark, that He would go before them into Galilee, was to be their occupation that morning. And here some little touches peculiar to this gospel must be noticed. "They fled," wrote Mark, trembling and astonishment having seized them, and "said nothing to any man, for they were afraid" (16:8).

Thus far (16:8) all are agreed that Mark wrote. Did his gospel end there? Certainly, if that be the case, it ended most abruptly, so different from his brother Evangelists, whose histories are not in any such manner apparently cut short. Now, the genuineness of what follows (9-20) has been much questioned. Of several manuscripts, the two oldest omit the remainder; on the other hand, by far the greater number have it, though in some few it appears with variations; and versions of greater antiquity than any manuscript that we possess, exhibit the passage as part of the gospel of Mark. Attempts have been made to discredit its genuineness, on the ground of words found in this section not elsewhere met with in the gospel. Against this we would remark, that certain characteristics of Mark's gospel are found in this portion. First, like other parts of the book, the passage manifests a perfect independence of the other historian, narrating facts not mentioned by them; second, in common with that which we have remarked from time to time, we find the writer remarks on the feelings of some to whom he refers (10); and third, the text of the Lord's address (15-18) seems professedly given as He delivered it. We have seen, Mark has elsewhere done that. With these remarks we leave this question as one not

suitied for further discussion in these pages, belonging, as it does, to the domain of textual criticism. But believing the verses in question are part of inspired Scripture, and as they have always been found at the end of the gospel of Mark, we shall notice the chief features of this section, taking it to have proceeded from the pen of our Evangelist, for the contrary has yet to be established.

In Matthew's gospel we have the meeting mentioned (and nowhere else) of the Lord and the Eleven in Galilee on the mountain where had appointed, and the commission entrusted to them, to make disciples of all the nations. In Luke we meet with incidents of the day of the Lord's resurrection illustrative of grace, which is such a characteristic feature of that gospel. Here in Mark we have prominence given to the unwillingness of the disciples to accredit the testimony of Mary that she had seen the Lord, as well as that of the two who had journeyed that day to Emmaus. That the Lord had appeared to Peter, an apostle, was credited (Luke 24:34), His appearance to the others was not. Of this these verses are the only clear witness. The state, too, of the disciples when Mary went to them we also here only learn. "They mourned and wept" (16:10). This is in perfect character with the behaviour of Cleopas and his companion, who, when accosted by One, as they thought a stranger, "stood still, looking sad" (Luke 24:17). Two manifestations noticed, and the testimony of those favoured with them discredited, the third is described somewhat at length. On the evening of that same day, the Lord appeared to the Eleven as they sat at meat. That they were thus occupied Luke indirectly confirms, as, in response to the Lord's question, "Have ye any meat?" they handed Him a piece of a broiled fish. Now of this interview both John and Luke have written, and each somewhat in character with his own gospel. The former tells us that when the doors were shut for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst; for shut doors could not bar the entrance of One who is divine (John 20:19). The latter tells us how terrified and affrighted they were at His sudden appearance, supposing that they saw a spirit (Luke 24:37). Evidently they were wholly unprepared for His appearing among them, which is consistent with their disbelief of the testimony of others relative to His manifestation. Mark tells us, however, nothing of the effect of His presence on the company, but only of the Lord upbraiding them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, in not accrediting the testimony of Mary and of the other two that they had seen Him. Then, as also in Luke, the Lord, we learn, acquainted them with their future field of

labour—the world—and of their service in preaching likewise. The form of the announcement we probably read in these closing verses of Mark's gospel: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned." The character of their message is learnt from Luke 24:47; whilst for their authority to receive into fellowship those who should believe, we have to turn to John 20:21-23. Very different, then, is the account of that interview in each of those gospels which mentions it, for Matthew wholly omits it. Yet each contributes to our knowledge and for our instruction what otherwise we should not have known.

Further, the concluding verses of this section show that the Lord, who by Matthew is represented as giving the formula for baptism, and then authorising His disciples to baptise, here insists on the need of every convert, whether from Jews or from Gentiles, submitting to that rite, if spiritual blessing is to be enjoyed. So, if Matthew authorised the apostles and others to baptise, Mark teaches the subjects of it of the Lord's mind about it for themselves. And whilst Matthew and Luke suppose the spread of the work by the gospel, Mark acquaints his readers (16:17-18) with the signs which should follow those who believed. Of the fulfilment of this the Acts bear full testimony (2:43; 3:7; 5:12-16; 6:8; 8:6; 7:13; 14:10; 19:11-12; 28:3,9).

And now, of the ascension, mentioned elsewhere only by Luke, Mark writes, but briefly, stating "that the Lord Jesus was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God." To this he adds, what comes in as a complement to Matthew's gospel, that the disciples "went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following" (16:20). Thus the promise of the Lord's presence with His servants, recorded only in Matthew 18:20, is declared to have been verified by his co-evangelist Mark. "I am with you always, even to the end of the age," is the promise in Matthew. "They went forth preaching everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following," is the fulfilment noted by Mark.

How much there is in these closing verses of interest to us all! And whilst the account of things differs much from what we have elsewhere, yet, as one may see, it dovetails into the history of the resurrection recorded by others. And not the least interesting is that last verse of this gospel, which testifies to the faithfulness of the ascended Lord.

Here these sketches from the Gospel of Mark end. If the reader has derived any profit from them, and has become better acquainted with the Evangelist, they will not have been outlined in vain.