

## JESUS CHRIST.

### SECT. 22.

*Jesus was transfigured, and declared to be the Son of God—expelled an evil spirit, which his Apostles could not—warned them of approaching sufferings—paid the sacred tribute by a miracle—suggested solemn cautions against ambition, offences, contempt of any the weakest believers, severity and revenge towards an offending brother.*

THE Lord Jesus Christ appeared upon earth in a state of profound humiliation, the brightness of his original glory being obscured by the infirmities of humanity, and the external meanness of his condition. His example, indeed, his preaching and his miracles, proved him to be not only superior to the children of men, but “the Lord from heaven.” There were also certain occasions, on which his true dignity was displayed in a very signal manner. The following instance is of that kind; and it seems to have been intended, not for vain parade, but for important purposes to himself and others.

About a week after the solemn address to his disciples, which was last mentioned, he retired to a high mountain (supposed by some to be Mount Tabor), for the purposes of secret devotion\*. He selected three out of the twelve, Peter, James, and John, his favoured attendants, that they might be witnesses of a grand exhibition of his glory, as they soon afterwards were of his distressing agony in the garden of Gethsemane. In their presence, as he offered up his

\* Matt. xvii. 1—13. Mark ix. 2—13. Luke ix. 28—36.

fervent supplications, he assumed a most magnificent appearance, putting off, for a season, "the form of a servant and the likeness of men," and discovering his proper character, while he shone with the lustre of divine majesty. His countenance became bright and dazzling, as the sun in the firmament; and such a splendour covered his whole body, that the rays, as it were, darted through his garments, which also were luminous and sparkling as the light itself. Two eminent persons, likewise, who had been honoured in his service upon earth, Moses and Elijah, then attended him from the world of spirits, in a glittering resplendent form, and conversed with him on the grand design of his incarnation, the sacrifice which he was shortly to make for the sins of mankind, by his crucifixion at Jerusalem.

A sight so wonderful might well overwhelm the three Apostles. At first they had fallen asleep through fatigue; but being awakened, probably by the exceeding brightness of the appearance, they beheld the astonishing spectacle, and heard the conclusion of the conference. Peter, in particular, experienced so rapturous a surprise upon the occasion, that he exclaimed, "Master, it is good for us to be here," and proposed to erect tabernacles for the accommodation of their Lord and his two illustrious attendants, as if he could have spent his life upon the mount, amidst such transcendent glory, and with such exalted company. But he scarcely understood the meaning of his own words.

This was not the whole. Immediately a shining cloud, as a token of the divine Presence, perhaps resembling the ancient Shechinah, overshadowed them, and impressed them with solemn awe; while a voice from heaven proclaimed Jesus to be the Son of the eternal Father, and the object of his supreme complacency, and required an earnest regard and an unfeigned submission to him. Here, then, was a clear revelation and a near approach of the Deity. But was not the grand exhibition too much for human powers to sustain?



sustain? Alas! such is our state of infirmity, and such the effect of guilt upon the conscience, that the most advanced saints in this world would feel some degree of terror if God were to manifest himself to them in his glorious majesty, though sweetly tempered with grace and mercy. If our eyes should behold the Lord of hosts, we could not but adopt the language of Job, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes \*;" we could not help exclaiming, like the Prophet, "Wo is me! for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips †;" or we should say, as Peter, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord ‡." So these three distinguished disciples "fell on their face, and were sore afraid." But Jesus, who undertakes to introduce his people into the presence of God, and to give them confidence before him, immediately interposed for their support and comfort. He put his hands on them, and encouraged them to arise, and lay aside their fears.

The transfiguration was ended; the heavenly visitants disappeared; and Jesus, being left alone with his Apostles, charged them not to divulge what they had seen, till after his resurrection. Perhaps their account of it would not have been credited before that event, and it might have produced some dangerous consequences. It should seem that they expected Elijah's continuance among them, and were surprised at his being withdrawn; for it was commonly supposed, from Malachi's prediction, that he would return to dwell on the earth, to effect a general reformation, and thus prepare the way for the kingdom of Messiah §. But Jesus taught them that the prophecy had been already fulfilled in its spirit; John the Baptist, who resembled Elijah in his zeal and habits of austerity, had appeared for those purposes, which were predicted.

And what impression does the narration of this singular vision make upon our minds? It is circumstantially related, and confidently attested, not only

\* Job xlii. 6.    † Isa. vi. 5.    ‡ Luke v. 8.    § Mal. iv. 5, 6.

by three Evangelists, but by one of those who were eye-witnesses of it. St. Peter produces it as a strong proof that they had not "followed cunningly-devised fables," but that Jesus was indeed what they had heard him declared to be by a voice from heaven, "the Son of God \*." And are we receiving him as the Beloved of the Father? Do we admire, praise, and trust him? Are we also, as the Father, "well pleased" in him? Do we feel a holy complacency and delight in his mediation, as a sufficient ground of hope and confidence towards God? Do we hear him as our Teacher to instruct, our Saviour to comfort, and our Lord to command us? Then by faith we behold an unspeakable glory in him, though not that outward lustre, so dazzling to the bodily sight, upon the mount. Then we shall not only consider him as "the man Christ Jesus," but believe that the splendour of the divine Majesty resides in him, and we shall devoutly worship him as "our Lord and our God."

It is probable that the transfiguration was intended to animate and strengthen Jesus himself, who in his human nature might be ready to faint under the apprehension of his approaching sufferings, as well as to prevent his chosen companions from being staggered by the depth of his humiliation. They were, therefore, the better prepared to attend him in the garden of Gethsemane, and to stand by his cross on Mount Calvary. They beheld a token of his future glory, an emblem of that transcendent brightness which he should possess upon his return to heaven: and we consider it, also, as in some sort a representation of that magnificent and awful appearance, when, "being in the form of God," he shall come again "to judge the quick and dead," accompanied with a grand retinue, not merely Moses and Elijah, but "ten thousand of his saints." The prospect should cheer and revive your hearts, if indeed you are his faithful disciples. You shall be witnesses and partakers of his triumphant exaltation: "when Christ, who is our life, shall ap-

\* 2 Pet. i. 16—18. See also 1 John i. 1—3.



pear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory \*." You likewise shall be transfigured, "You shall be like him, for you shall see him as he is †," and "shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of your Father ‡." Then it may be said in the highest sense, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." From that holy mount you will never be called down: and the glory, which is there to be revealed, "fadeth not away."

When Jesus returned to his other disciples, whom he had left behind, he found them engaged in disputation with the Scribes, who, probably, were endeavouring to subvert their faith §. Upon his appearance, the vast multitudes of people who surrounded them ran with eager joy to express their respect. But they were struck with amazement; and, though we are not acquainted with the cause, it is possible that this effect might be produced by some remaining lustre which they observed in his countenance; for thus the face of Moses shone when he descended from Sinai.

Amongst the great numbers who flocked around him, one person in particular, under extreme anguish, solicited his aid. He brought his son, his only child, who, instead of being a comfort to him, was a spectacle of horror, afflicted with lunacy, convulsed with fits, and tortured in various ways through the possession of an evil spirit. The father, representing the case, kneeled as an humble supplicant at the feet of Jesus, and cried, "Lord, have mercy on my son:—if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us." In this very application the man discovered some degree of dependance; but doubt and hesitation seemed to be mixed with it: and perhaps his principles were shaken by the opposition of the Scribes, and by the failure of the disciples, who had tried in vain to effect the cure. Jesus, therefore, required a more decided testimony of his faith, and observed that no deliverances were too great to be ex-

\* Col. iii. 4.

† 1 John iii. 2.

‡ Matt. xiii. 43.

§ Matt. xvii. 14, &amp;c. Mark ix. 14—33. Luke ix. 37—45.

pected in an humble reliance upon him. The poor petitioner, being instantly convicted of his weakness, exclaimed, with evident marks of distress, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." The confession was accepted, and the prayer granted. The Saviour did not even upbraid him with his distrust, but proceeded to perform his request. He rebuked and expelled the devil, who seemed unwilling to relinquish his hold, and, even in the act of departing, grievously tormented the unhappy patient. After suffering some violent agonies, the son was restored in perfect health to his rejoicing parent.

You also, who now come unto Jesus, should disclose the troubles of your mind, and "pour out your heart before him:" in every instance, it will be proper for you to cry, "Lord, have mercy on us." But beware of entertaining any fears or suspicions, which are dishonourable to his character. No question ought to be made, concerning his ability, or his disposition, to help. "Canst thou believe?" is the grand inquiry: for his blessings are communicated only to them who confide in him. Difficulties, perhaps, arise, which stagger you, and fill you with misgivings. Confess and lament this weakness before him, praying that he may pardon and remove it, and not withhold his favour, through displeasure at the sin. "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Nor should you entreat him for yourselves alone, but for your friend, or your child in distress. In all circumstances, he can extend the relief which you want.

The disciples, as we have intimated, in vain attempted to expel the demon: and at this they expressed their wonder, when they had retired with their Master. They had wrought many miraculous cures before, and, perhaps, for that very reason, were too self-sufficient, or had forgot their entire dependence upon him for all their success. At least in this instance there was a failure of their faith; and, accordingly, he taught them, that it was only by maintaining a constant, though feeble and doubting, reliance



reliance upon him, they could perform the most astonishing operations. He further observed, that it was necessary to implore divine assistance, especially on solemn occasions and in great difficulties, by a more than ordinary measure of devotion and humiliation.

We are not called to the same high office, or invested with the same powers, as the Apostles. But we have all, in our respective places, continual need of God's strengthening and supporting hand. In the view of our several duties and trials, we may see reason to cry out, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Perhaps our good endeavours have miscarried because of our unbelief. With what temper of mind have we set ourselves to combat our spiritual enemies? Shall we wonder that we have been defeated, or that our corruptions still retain their ascendancy, notwithstanding our opposition? For is it not true here, also, that the victory we seek cannot be obtained "but by prayer and fasting?"

From the mount of transfiguration Jesus passed through different parts of Galilee. There he sought opportunities of privacy, that he might open to his disciples, more fully than he had done before, his approaching sufferings, death, and resurrection. The subject had been repeatedly mentioned, but they were dull of apprehension, and unwilling to admit it. They still looked for temporal dominion, and therefore could not bear to hear of his losing his life in an ignominious and violent manner. They were distressed and confounded, and yet afraid to disclose their difficulties. He, however, enduring with much indulgence their ignorance, ambition, and unbelief, continued to suggest his cautions, that he might gradually correct their mistakes. The cross of Christ has ever been matter of offence, and is so in our own day. This humbling scheme is what a proud and carnal mind cannot relish; and therefore it is accounted "foolishness." We are infinitely indebted to the mercy of God, who has rectified our notions and subdued our prejudices, if we  
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are brought to admire it, to trust and rejoice in it. For, after all the vain cavils of presumptuous men, it is "the power of God and the wisdom of God." But you, who are averse to this method of salvation, should consider that it is not for you to prescribe unto God. Submit implicitly to his gracious appointment, nor dare to quarrel with his terms. Beg of him to pardon your perverseness, and give you more clearly to comprehend what may for the present appear obscure or inconsistent.

When Jesus came to Capernaum, it was inquired by the collectors whether he did not usually pay the tribute; and his conduct upon that occasion was narrowly watched. Jesus discussed the subject in private with his Apostle Peter. He argued that he, as the Son of God, might plead a peculiar exemption from bearing the expense of supporting his Father's house (for the levy was probably that for the service of the temple), and that this should be laid upon strangers rather than upon him. But, to avoid offence, and to guard against a dangerous abuse of his example, he agreed to discharge the claim. But whence was the money to be furnished? According to his directions, Peter cast a hook into the sea, and a fish, bearing in its mouth a silver coin to the full amount of the tribute, presented itself as an easy prey, at the very time and place in which it was wanted. This extraordinary method of payment displayed his power and condescension: his condescension, in submitting to such a state of extreme poverty, though he was Lord of all, that he could not without a miracle produce the very small sum sufficient to answer the demand; and his power, inasmuch as all creatures were compelled to yield obedience to him, in whatever way they were required.

Let us not then complain of our contracted circumstances, while we contemplate Jesus in so mean a condition; nor let us hesitate to trust ourselves under his care, when we see how easy it is for him to procure money for necessary uses. He has taught us to contribute



tribute cheerfully, in our respective stations, whatever may be needful for the support of religion and civil government. "Render, therefore, to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom \*." Withhold not from any their just or reasonable demands. If you profess to be followers of Jesus, you will feel the force of his motive, and study to give no offence. The fear of increasing the prejudices of the world against the Gospel will make you circumspect in this as well as in other instances of your conduct.

Our Lord, having called the twelve around him, in the house where he was retired, addressed them with all the affection of a father, instructing, warning, and reproving them, as might be most expedient, according to their circumstances †. He had overheard them debating upon the road, concerning the right of precedency in his kingdom; for, still expecting a temporal dominion, and being too much under the influence of an ambitious spirit, they were all eager to obtain the highest places of preferment. But, when he had inquired the subject of their dispute, and they seemed ashamed to avow it, he spoke to their secret thoughts, and suggested, that, to be truly honourable in his account, they must possess other dispositions, and excel in humility. At length they introduced the matter openly, finding that it was not concealed, and asked plainly, "Who is the greatest?" To this he replied, while he took an infant in his arms, that, except they were converted to God, and rendered meek, teachable, and free from designs of guile and aspiring views like little children, they would not only attain no exaltation, but have no share at all in his kingdom; and that the person, who discovered most of an unfeigned lowliness of mind, stood the highest in his favour. And are we duly sensible of the spiritual nature of our religion? Are we not aiming at worldly grandeur and pre-eminence, instead

\* Rom. xlii. 7.

† Matt. xviii. 1, &c. Mark ix. 33, &c. Luke ix. 46—48

of attending to the frame of our souls? What have we known of real conversion of heart? Is not the very term treated with profane ridicule, as if the mention of it proved a man a visionary and an enthusiast? But, surely, if conversion were so absolutely necessary in our Lord's time, it cannot now be dispensed with, however the idea may be scorned among us. Where shall we look for Christian humility? Do all, who pretend to be the disciples of Jesus, bear evident marks of a child-like simplicity, submission, and dependence? Or, rather, is not such a disposition derided as despicable meanness? How strange that those should retain the name of Christianity, who are ashamed of its peculiar excellencies and most essential attributes! Do we judge of our growth in grace by the criterion here laid down? Do we become more and more abased in ourselves? Have we a deeper sense of the malignity of sin, and of our extreme depravity? Do we learn to trust more unreservedly to the help of God, and daily to maintain faith in the Redeemer, more firmly, for every blessing? Thus only shall we prove our advancement in the divine life, and our progress towards heaven.

Jesus, having mentioned one distinguishing part in the character of his people, proceeded to show what a tender regard should be paid to them. He declared, that whatever favour was done unto any of them; though it were one as feeble as the infant in his arms, he would consider it as done unto himself; but that a contempt of them, or a deliberate purpose to turn them out of the way, or interrupt them in their course, would be followed by a punishment infinitely more tremendous than any temporal destruction. Alas! how many such stumbling-blocks are laid before us, as not only obstruct the weak, but prove fatal to the souls of thousands? So circumstanced, indeed, as we now are, these things are to be expected: by inevitable consequence they will occur. But how provoking to God! how terrible the effects! "Wo unto the world, because of offences!



fences! Wo to that man by whom the offence cometh!"

Would you avoid the awful denunciation? Then beware, lest there be something in your temper and conduct which may be the means of seducing others, or prejudicing their minds against the truth of God. Attend to what the Saviour has suggested in his solemn exhortation. Whatever gratification or prospect of gain may obstruct the great business of salvation, you must totally relinquish it, though as dear to you, and in your estimation as necessary, as a hand, a foot, or an eye. Do not hesitate because the mortification is painful. It were far better, surely, to suffer the severest operation, to cut off the hand or the foot, or to pluck out the eye, than expose yourselves or others to eternal misery. No inconvenience or distress, to which you can be called here, is to be compared to those endless torments which are reserved for the ungodly. Does not the description excite a horrible dread, while it is expressly declared, three times together, that in hell "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched?" The sacrifices under the Mosaic law were sprinkled with salt\*; in allusion to which it is asserted, that "every one," falling a sacrifice to the justice of God, "shall be salted with fire;" and this represents the fierceness and durable nature of those flames to which the impenitent will be doomed. Would you escape them? The direction is clear: "every sacrifice shall be salted with salt †;" that is, everyone truly devoted to God, and whom he will accept, must be consecrated to his service by his grace, which alone can purify and preserve the soul. This is "the salt" which you must obtain; or else, notwithstanding your religious profession, you will be worthless and contemptible.

The subject being important, Jesus continued to enforce an affectionate regard to the least and meanest of his members. While he held the child in his

\* Lev. ii. 13.

† See Bishop Hurd's Sermon on this text.

arms, he observed, that we ought not to despise even such an infant, upon which the very angels are commissioned to attend: much less, then, should we disdain the weakest believers (represented by the babe), to whom the highest order of the exalted spirits before the throne of God continually minister. Nay, to rescue them from destruction was the end for which "the Son of man" came into the world. He is that "good Shepherd," who seeks the wandering sheep, and rejoices in its recovery, even more than in the rest of his flock, which are already secured within his fold. We, also, should possess a similar disposition; and, therefore, so far from obstructing the salvation of any soul, we should delight in promoting it.

Even a Christian brother may sometimes act inconsistently, and we may suffer through his misconduct. But we are not therefore rashly to abandon him, or indulge a vindictive temper. We are immediately to attempt his restoration, first by private admonitions, then by the interference of a few common friends, and, if that method should be ineffectual, by the more public censures of the religious community to which we belong. It is only when every effort fails that we may proceed to the painful extremity, and renounce all fellowship with him. Perhaps this expedient may be salutary; at least it will be proper. And, that discipline might be maintained in his church, our Lord has assured us that the decisions of his ministers and people, acting in his name and from a regard to his glory, shall be ratified in heaven. Not only for the regulation of a Christian society, but for the encouragement of all to meet and offer their united prayers in a dependence upon him, he solemnly promised that their petitions should be granted, and their assemblies honoured with his own immediate presence. Even for the smallest companies the blessing is intended. "There," said he, "am I in the midst of them." How exalted is the language! How gracious the declaration! He can be no other than



than the omnipotent Jehovah, who "fillet heaven and earth," since he engages to manifest himself, in all the various places where his people meet, at the same moment of time. He speaks also in terms peculiar to the Deity, "I AM." Yet "as his majesty is, so is his mercy." He will not be unmindful of them who seek him. Let them associate together in his name, professing their regard to him, and offer up their joint petitions; "with one mind and one mouth" pleading its merits, and they shall know that he is in the midst of them, by the strength and comfort of his Spirit. Surely the promise should enliven our affections, and enlarge our expectations in his service.

As our Lord had insisted on the manner in which dissensions between Christians should be healed, Peter took occasion to propose the inquiry, how often forgiveness should be extended to an offending brother, as if some limits should be affixed to the exercise of our patience and forbearance. But Jesus, in his reply, has taught us, that, if injuries should be multiplied against us without number, we should still be ready to pardon not merely "until seven times, but until seventy times seven;" and even that our lenity to others should be as unbounded as that of God is towards us. This astonishing compassion and grace of our God is represented in an affecting parable. He is the great King, who "takes account of his servants," and to whom we are indebted in a larger sum than we are able to compute. Should he rigorously demand payment, our case would indeed be desperate. Let us try the effect of an humble application to his mercy. He will not proceed in strict justice against us, if, under a deep conviction of our wretchedness, we cry "Lord, have patience with us." He will instantly and freely remit the whole claim. Has he done this for us? And do we not feel a grateful sense of his goodness? Or, where is the person, who, with the hope of having received such a gracious discharge from his Lord, can retain sentiments of anger

celebration of that solemnity, he delayed his journey for some days, that he might attract the less notice. But his brethren (which expression includes all those who were nearly related), knowing his constant practice, wondered at this delay, and, with an insolent taunt, desired him to take that opportunity of going to display his works at Jerusalem. They meant to insinuate that he courted popularity, and aimed at nothing more than the public applause. Never was any objection more groundless or more invidious than this. His whole deportment manifested a contrary disposition. But men with a malevolent heart are capable of the basest misrepresentations. There were unbelievers, we perceive, among the kindred of Jesus, and probably in the same house with him, who, though witnesses of his exemplary holiness and miraculous operations, derided and rejected him. They who dwell in a pious family, or are intimately connected with a person eminently religious, enjoy peculiar advantages for their own spiritual improvement; but, even in so favourable a situation, they may remain in ignorance and contempt of those principles, the excellency of which is continually before their eyes. We do not wonder, therefore, that the faithful servants of Christ are often shamefully calumniated by those who are nearly allied to them; especially as we observe such malignant reproaches cast upon their Lord and Master.

Jesus replied that he was aware how much hatred he had incurred by his severe reproofs, and, therefore, that he should not yet venture himself amongst his decided enemies. He further remarked, that this reason need not detain them, since their conduct was so agreeable to the spirit of the world, as to excite no disgust or malevolence. The observation accounts for all the violence of persecution which is raised against those who boldly condemn the sinful practices of their own times, and shows also that it may be avoided by a mean and servile compliance with the general sentiments and manners. Perhaps  
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our Lord could not trust himself even in the company of his own relations; and therefore he followed them, after some days, with the greatest privacy. Had he neglected this service, he would, probably, have been censured as a despiser of religion; for there was an universal expectation of him at the festival, and, as he did not appear at the beginning, there was much inquiry made concerning him. It is evident, then, that he was regular in his attendance on divine ordinances; thus he "fulfilled all righteousness," and left a perfect example to his people. What resemblance of him do they bear, who neglect the sacred institutions of God's house? Do not their very excuses convict them of profaneness, indolence, or avarice? To tread in his steps, we must carefully observe the appointed times and solemnities of public worship.

It might be also to avoid ostentation, as well as danger, that Jesus travelled to Jerusalem in private. Perhaps even there he concealed himself upon his first arrival; while warm debates were held concerning him, some allowing his integrity, others condemning him as a deceiver, and none daring to avow an attachment to him. But, about the midst of the festival, he appeared in the temple, and delivered his holy instructions with an unshaken firmness and intrepidity, through a pure zeal for the honour of God, and compassion for the souls of the numerous congregation then assembled. The Jews immediately perceived such a depth of sacred knowledge as they could not account for, considering the meanness of his education: but he proceeded to declare that he was invested with a commission from Heaven, and that his doctrine was not the fruit of human learning, or the deductions of reason, but a direct revelation from God. He observed that the evidences were such as would convince an honest inquirer, and that the man who was seriously disposed to do the will of God would certainly attain a right understanding of the truth, however obscure

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or absurd it might seem to others. As to himself, he maintained that he sought nothing but the divine glory, and therefore that they should receive him, at least, as no impostor.

The Gospel, then, which Jesus taught, demands our unfeigned regard, because it is a message from God. Herein he still preaches to us, as he did to the Jews of old. Let us examine whether we "know of the doctrine." Are we persuaded of its authority and excellence? Have we a clear perception of its grand design? And have we carefully traced its distinguishing lineaments? If otherwise, we should suspect in ourselves an unsoundness of heart, a determined love of sin, and a spirit of presumptuous disobedience to God. These are the chief causes of infidelity and ignorance where the truth of God is sent: and it is generally evident that men's difficulties and objections betray a perverse and unholy disposition.

Jesus, by a bold appeal, accused his hearers of transgressing the law of which they boasted: some he even charged with harbouring designs of violence against his person. They denied the imputation, and insolently reviled him for it, as if he were under the possession of the devil. He, however, continued to assert that their persecution was most unreasonable and malignant, since they made the cure of diseased and impotent poverty, which he had performed on the sabbath\*, a plea for slander, rage, and murder. He showed how inconsistent it was to condemn his miraculous work of mercy, which, in fact, broke not the law of the day, and on the same sacred season themselves to practise the rite of circumcision, out of regard to Moses, who had appointed it, and yet was not its original founder. Why should their decisions be regulated by appearances? Why would they not form a just and impartial judgment?

Many of the people were impressed with an admiration of his courage, especially when they knew

\* John v. 1—16.



that there were serious intentions of destroying him; and yet they foolishly concluded that he could not be the Messiah, because his extraction seemed incompatible with that high character. To these captious adversaries he replied, that, notwithstanding their supposed acquaintance with him and his origin, he came to them with an express and full commission from that God, of whom they were ignorant, and with whom he had the most intimate communications. Alas! how many deceive themselves in boasting of their clear perceptions of the divine nature, and their sincere regard to the true God, while they reject or pervert the Gospel! Their very objections to the scheme of salvation by Jesus Christ generally arise from gross misapprehensions, or a fixed hatred, of God's righteous perfections. Let us be willing, that He, who alone hath known the Father, should declare him unto us.

So pointed a reproof and such high claims were more than they could bear. They were filled with rage, and were only prevented from acts of violence by a strong impression upon their minds, which restrained their malice. It was not possible that they should have power to destroy him till the purposes of Heaven were accomplished. Yet there were many of the lower order who seemed convinced that he was indeed the Christ; for they argued rightly, that the promised Deliverer could not perform more astonishing operations than Jesus had done. These favourable dispositions in the people alarmed the great council of the sanhedrim, which was then assembled; and officers were immediately sent to apprehend him. But the malevolent design was baffled. Jesus continued to preach, even before the face of those who were charged with a commission to seize him. He warned them that, notwithstanding their opposition, he should proceed in his work a little longer; that shortly, returning to the state of glorious exaltation which he had left, he should be removed beyond the reach of their violence; and that

that they would seek in vain to be admitted into his presence. How solemn the admonition! Alas! how few considered the time of their visitation! How few, in our own day, consider that Jesus, who waits upon them in the ministry of his word, will soon withdraw himself, that the gracious offers now made will never be renewed, and that an eternal separation must take place between them and that Saviour whom they despise! "Where He is, thither they cannot come."

While they were puzzled to comprehend his meaning, he proclaimed aloud the rich mercy of the Gospel, inviting the application of all who were truly desirous of spiritual blessings. To such persons he promised to dispense the abundant influences of the Holy Ghost, for their support and refreshment. He also described those precious emanations, as proceeding from believers, and blessing their numerous connexions, like streams which scatter wide their plenty. This wondrous, this encouraging address to the whole body of the people, was pronounced on the last day of the feast, at a time when it is probable the assembly was larger than usual; and when, as it is supposed, the officers of justice stood before him. On that day it was customary to fetch water from the fountain of Siloam, and pour it on the altar with great exultation. Perhaps, too, in testimony of this, they sung at the time that remarkable sentence, where the allusion gives life to the description of the Prophet, "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation \*." It is thought that upon this occasion Jesus stood on an eminence, and, exerting his voice, that he might be heard by the surrounding multitudes, directed their attention to himself, as intended to be represented in that ceremony as "the fountain of living waters," communicating the most plentiful supplies of grace to every thirsty soul.

To us, also, the same blessing is offered, the same kind invitation is given. His ambassadors still ad-

\* Isa. xii. 3. See Bishop Lowth on that passage.



dress us, with similar proposals, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters \*!" The grand source, to which we are referred, remains inexhaustible as ever; nor is there any thing to obstruct our access except our own indifference or aversion. "Let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely †." Have we any ardent desires for those spiritual benefits which Jesus confers? It is well if we be truly sensible of their excellence and importance. Let our application be made unto him without delay, and with earnest solicitation. He will not disappoint our wishes, but even exceed our largest expectations and conceptions; and perhaps the mercy which we receive may be conveyed to others also, through our means, for their effectual relief and salvation.

These surprising declarations of Jesus excited various debates among the people. Some were disposed to honour him as a Prophet, others to acknowledge him as the Christ; but, as they hastily concluded that he was born in Gallilee, it was argued that he could not fulfil the ancient prophecies concerning the Messiah, and they were too careless or too bigoted to enter into further inquiries. The very men who were employed to apprehend him, and some of whom were disposed to take him by force, listened to his words, till, under the strongest impressions of admiration and reverence, they were unable to execute their purpose. They returned without their prisoner, and were constrained to allege, in excuse for not fulfilling their commission, "Never man spake like this man." How easily can the Lord God overawe and confound his enemies! "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain ‡." We have known many instances of those, who, unaccountably to themselves, have been suddenly obliged to relinquish their designs of violence, and even to plead the cause of persons whom they had vowed to

\* Isa. lv. 1.

† Rev. xxii. 17.

‡ Psal. lxxvi. 10.

destroy. Not a few have been brought to a state of penitence, under a sermon, while they were seeking objections, and forming malevolent intentions against the preacher.

The sanhedrim, however, were the more exasperated, and represented all, who favoured Jesus, as ignorant, deluded, and infatuated wretches, not worthy to be regarded. Nicodemus attempted to moderate their rage; but he met with a severe rebuke for the prudent advice which he suggested; and perhaps the council broke up in confusion.

The evening approached, and Jesus retired, not to indulge in sensuality or indolence, nor even to obtain the necessary refreshment of sleep. He withdrew to the mount of Olives, at some little distance from the city, where he might give vent to the ardent affections of his soul in secret prayer\*. The night, therefore, as well as the day, was devoted to the service of God, with a view probably to the salvation of sinners, for whom he was most anxiously concerned. Let those, who minister in holy things, be instructed from him to mix the duties of private devotion with their public labours, if they wish to be supported and to prosper in their work.

Early in the morning he returned to the temple, and, not discouraged by the opposition he had met with, resumed his employment, teaching the people with the same freedom as before. His insidious adversaries also renewed their attempts with much vigilance and assiduity, though their former schemes were defeated. Some of the Scribes and Pharisees brought an adulteress before him, and desired his decision upon the case, whether or no she should be stoned, according to the Mosaic injunctions. Their intention was to reduce him to a difficulty, and, from his judgment, whatever it might be, to prefer a serious charge against him. Had he pronounced sentence upon her, they would probably have accused him as an enemy to the Roman government; or, if he had acquitted her, they

\* John viii. 1, &c.



might have calumniated him as subverting their law, and favouring the sin which she had committed. For some time he seemed to pay no regard to their question; but when they urged him to reply, he showed his knowledge of their hearts, and displayed his power as well as wisdom by confounding their purpose. His answer was, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her:" and it was such a pointed application to their consciences, and so forcibly impressed, that it obliged them to depart, and thus tacitly to acknowledge their own guilt. Immediately, the gracious Redeemer dismissed the poor criminal without condemnation; for he acted not as the civil magistrate, and would not pronounce her offence unpardonable: but he solemnly admonished her to sin no more. Who, then, shall presume to contend with Him? "He disappointeth the advices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise \*." But transgressors, even of the most atrocious kind, who tremble before him, need not despair of his mercy. Only let them remember his salutary caution, nor dare, in any future instance, to renew their wicked practices.

Jesus continued to deliver his instructions to the people, still maintaining his own divine character, and exhibiting himself as the Author of all spiritual blessings. Perhaps from the view of the sun, then breaking forth upon them, he took occasion to compare himself to that grand luminary, declaring that only by a regard to him we can be rescued from fatal delusion, and conducted in the paths of peace and joy to a state of eternal blessedness above. As the festival was ended, many of his hearers, probably, were preparing to return to their respective abodes, and their common occupations. The brightness of the day was the traveller's opportunity; but Jesus exhorted him to remember the presence of a better light, which would never leave him benighted. Are

\* Job v. 12.

our eyes then directed unto Him, as the only source of wisdom, strength, and comfort to the soul? Do we discover any glory in him, which may properly, though inadequately, be represented by that most resplendent body in the firmament? Do we walk by his light; or are the benefits which we receive from him adequate to such an exalted description as this?

It was objected that his doctrine rested merely on his own assertion, and therefore could not be credited. But he replied, that sufficient testimony of his high character had been already given, and that they condemned him through the influence of carnal prejudices. He argued, also, that his declarations demanded their implicit assent, as he had produced the strongest proofs of his Father's presence with him; but that, while they cavilled at his claims, they showed their entire ignorance of his Father, as well as of him. This was a bold charge indeed; and, considering his situation and their malevolence, it was wonderful that they bore it. But they were still under an invisible restraint, as the full time for his being delivered into their hands was not arrived. He continued, therefore, to warn them that he should shortly leave them to perish in their unbelief, and that then it would be too late to solicit an admission into his presence. When they turned his very warning into ridicule, he declared more plainly that he descended from the heavenly world, and properly belonged to it; but that they were entirely earthly in their views, affections, and pursuits, and that by rejecting him they would sink under the curse of their sins into final destruction.

Ah! how foolish as well as wicked is the conduct of those who persist in opposing the Saviour, to their own inevitable ruin! They trifle away their precious moments in raising one petulant objection after another, while they stand on the brink of eternal misery. Should we not desire to rouse them from their lethargy? What mean your indifference and levity?

Have



Have you forgotten that the grand concerns of your souls are still unsecured? Instead of replying to your subtleties, we would faithfully denounce "the terrors of the Lord," and entreat you, without delay, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, lest you "die in your sins."

Still unwilling to admit, perhaps deriding, his claims, some insolently asked whom he pretended to be. He confirmed his former assertions, and replied, that, though he had many charges to bring against them, he should only for the present maintain that he acted by a sacred commission, and delivered no other doctrine than what he had received from the Father. Yet, plain as these declarations were, the people, blinded by their prejudices, did not comprehend his meaning. He, however, foretold, that, after taking him off by the violent death of the cross, they would be struck with a conviction of his divine character and high office; and he solemnly assured them, that, though rejected and scorned by sinners, he was not deserted of his heavenly Father, but was the constant object of his complacency and delight. O, let us fear to indulge a captious disposition, lest we be given up to a reprobate mind! Is not this exalted Teacher "worthy of all acceptance?" Why, then, do we not sincerely and thankfully submit to his instructions? Does not our perverse opposition evince a proud and an earthly mind?

His bold and serious harangue, though generally despised, produced an evident impression on some of the company, who, therefore, professed to regard him as the Messiah. Addressing himself to these persons, in particular, he exhorted them to yield a steadfast and persevering attention to his word, and thereby to prove themselves, beyond a doubt, his faithful disciples. He subjoined a most gracious promise, that in this way they should be enlightened with such a knowledge of his doctrine, as would establish them in a state of glorious freedom. Yet so captious

were the multitude, that even this very promise gave offence. His proposal of conferring freedom implied that they had been in servitude; which they resented as a gross insult, boasting of their high privileges as the children of Abraham. Their proud and ignorant objection, however, led him to show that his meaning was spiritual; and he replied to the following effect:—

“Little as you may be aware of the melancholy truth, I solemnly assure you, that every one practising iniquity is actually a slave to sin, the worst of tyrants. So circumstanced, then, notwithstanding your descent from Abraham, you are not the children of God, and may expect to be excluded from his household. But I, his only-begotten Son, who am entitled to all the honours of his family, am empowered likewise to confer them upon you; so that, if you receive the liberty which I bestow, you will be rescued from a state of miserable bondage, and the most exalted privileges be secured to you for ever. You boast, and I allow, your extraction from an illustrious Patriarch; but his genuine offspring are not, as you are, incensed at my doctrine, nor filled with murderous rage against me. My word has place in them, though not in you. I declare the will of my Father, that which I know to be so, from the most intimate acquaintance with his mind: and you also shew by your deportment what you have learned from your father.”

Here they interrupted him, still maintaining that they sprang from no other than Abraham. But Jesus proceeded:—“Were you indeed the children of Abraham, you would tread in his steps: but how widely do you differ from him in your spirit and conduct, while you are aiming at my life, for boldly asserting among you the truth of God! Your actions correspond with the original from which you are derived.” This insinuation they considered as reproachful to their character, and contended that God was their Father. The Saviour answered:—“If such were your near relation



lation to God, you would discover an affectionate regard to me, who am his immediate offspring, and have received my commission from him alone. To what shall I ascribe your ignorance of my meaning, but to your carnal dispositions, which have effectually stopped your ears against me? You, therefore, belong to another family, and are evidently the children of the wicked one, whose very tempers you betray: he has been uniformly seeking the destruction of mankind, and, by the basest treachery and falsehood, opposing divine truth: he is the parent of murder and of lies. You reject me merely because I have faithfully declared to you the counsel of God. I dare appeal to you, prejudiced as you are, that you cannot bring any charge of guilt against me: and, if you must admit my integrity, why will you not credit my assertions? Every one who is born of God, and under the influence of his grace, will yield a serious attention and an unreserved submission to his will, in whatever manner it be revealed: this, therefore, cannot be your character, as you prove by your perverse and obstinate unbelief."

These severe reproofs exasperated the Jews still more, so that they replied, with manifest rancour, that they were now justified in their suspicions of him, as being an enemy to their religion, like the Samaritans, and acting under the instigation of the devil. He repelled the blasphemous charge with singular meekness, observing, that so far from having connexions with Satan, he had uniformly shown what had brought their contempt upon him, a zealous regard to his Father's glory; that, though he might be indifferent about his own personal honour, yet there was One, who would assert it to their entire condemnation. He added, also, the most gracious and solemn protestations, for the encouragement of the penitent, that the sincere believer in him should never taste the bitterness, or come under the power, of death. The precious promise, no less than his reproofs, incensed them, and confirmed them in the

penetration and discernment, when they are deluded by "the father of lies," and, through the ascendancy of carnal principles, "cannot hear" the pure doctrine of the Gospel. Let us pray that we may not be given up to such infatuation.

Do we, then, believe in Jesus, as he is here exhibited? Do we triumph in that Saviour whom Abraham beheld with joy? Do we trust in him, adore, praise, and serve him, as being no other than JEHOVAH, the great "I AM," "God over all, blessed for ever?" Surely his character will justify our strongest confidence. Let us not renounce our faith, or be ashamed of our attachment. He himself exhorts us "not to be moved away from the hope of the Gospel." How animating are his promises to those who "continue in his word!" He will afford us increasing knowledge of his truth, gradually dispersing the darkness of our minds; he will break off the fetters in which sin has long held us captive, and bring us into the glorious liberty of the children of God. He will even disarm death of its terrors, enable us to smile in the near prospect of it, and give us a perfect and everlasting deliverance. May every reader, then, possess such a firm and unshaken dependence upon him, as to say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day\*!" Amen.

\* 2 Tim. i. 12.



## JESUS CHRIST.

### SECT. 24.

*Jesus sent out seventy disciples to preach—received and addressed them upon their return—replied to the captious lawyer, and delivered the parable of the good Samaritan—visited Martha and Mary at Bethany—taught and encouraged his disciples to pray—dined with a Pharisee, and gave the most severe reproofs.*

IN this practical review of the life of Jesus, it is intended to introduce the principal occurrences according to their regular order, where it can be ascertained; but on some occasions we may be allowed to depart from it, for a more convenient division of the subject into different sections. It is not of so much importance to arrange and harmonize the four Gospels, as to obtain a right knowledge of the glorious Character there delineated, and participate the rich blessings proposed to us.

As Jesus designed to take one more journey through Galilee, he chose out a large company of assistants, whom he sent before to every town which he himself meant to visit, that, by their preaching, a serious attention might be excited among the people, and their minds disposed to receive him upon his personal appearance \*. The twelve Apostles had already gone forth with his commission, and now he selected SEVENTY other persons, the exact number fixed on for the relief of Moses in his office †. These also he divided into pairs, that they might strengthen each other's hands; and, upon their departure, he gave them instructions similar to those which he had de-

\* Luke x. 1, &c.

† Numb. xi. 16.

livered

livered to the Apostles. This appointment, probably, took place before his attendance at the feast of tabernacles, last mentioned.

He addressed them to the following purpose:—  
“Unite your fervent prayers for more labourers to be sent out into the very extensive field which lies before you, that the harvest may be gathered in; for, though a large addition is now made, there is sufficient work to call for a further increase. And, as none should presume to intrude themselves into this employment, your application should be to the great Lord of the harvest, who alone can discern the proper persons, and furnish them with all necessary preparations for the sacred function. You go forth under my directions “as lambs among wolves,” in the face of furious adversaries, who will endeavour to harass and destroy you. But commit yourselves to the care of divine Providence; nor take with you any supplies for your temporal support. Like men in haste, who are despatched upon urgent business, you are to lose no time in vain compliments\*: yet neglect not to give the strongest proofs of your benevolence, by praying for every family which you visit: and You at least, if not They, shall receive the benefit. Whatever entertainment may be offered, you will not scruple to accept it, as the wages earned by your labour; but remove not from one house to another for your own indulgence, or in search of better accommodations. In confirmation of your doctrine, and as an intimation of its benign tendency, I now invest you with full powers to heal the sick; but at the same time you must proclaim the approach of the Saviour, coming to establish his kingdom. While you depart from the people who despise your message, solemnly warn them of their sin and danger, since aggravated ruin will come upon them for their contempt of mercy. The curse of an incensed God awaits the inhabitants of those cities which have scornfully rejected my ministry; and, however ex-

\* 2 Kings iv. 29.



alted their privileges have been, they shall finally perish with a much more tremendous destruction than even those abandoned places, Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon, which have already felt the weight of divine vengeance. Thus, also, I shall consider myself, and my Almighty Father likewise, either as regarded or condemned by the persons among whom you shall discharge your embassy; and upon their conduct towards you their everlasting salvation or perdition will depend."

What eager solicitude, what a generous concern, did Jesus discover for the welfare of mankind! What various methods he devised, to save immortal souls! He sent out, we observe, a numerous company of harbingers and heralds, proclaiming pardon and peace; and he himself took one laborious journey after another, for the same benevolent purpose. Nor was his love less conspicuous when he warned the despisers of his Gospel that the most tremendous woes were coming upon them; for he poured out his heart in deep distress on their account. Still he presides as Head over his church; and still, with a view to rescue sinners from eternal misery, he raises up and employs many ambassadors in his service, to whom he "commits the word of reconciliation." And, as it seems most probable that he will promote the cause of truth and righteousness in the earth by means of faithful and evangelical ministers, we should unite our prayers to him for their increase, that by their testimony his name may be declared from town to town, and from one kingdom to another. Where he sends his messengers, we are encouraged to hope that he himself will soon appear, for the advancement of his own glory. Yes; he will be present to support and prosper them in their arduous and important work. He has promised, "Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world \*."

We would, therefore, entreat those, among whom this proclamation of mercy is made, to consider how

\* Matt. xxviii. 20.

much depends upon it. "It is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life \*." If it be not effectual to save you, it will aggravate your condemnation. Those, who "watch for your souls," will finally witness either for or against you, according to the reception which you give to their words. They are the representatives of their adorable Lord and Master, who will shortly arise to vindicate his own cause: and how will you meet him, if you treat his gracious proposals with scorn or indifference?

The seventy disciples returned to Jesus, perhaps about the feast of tabernacles, with an account of their ministry. They appeared to be elated, as having succeeded beyond their expectation; and expressed their grateful surprise, because the very devils were subject to them through his name, as if nothing, from that time, should be able to stand against them. Jesus himself, also, triumphed in the downfall of Satan, not only as approving the punishment inflicted on him for his original apostacy, but as foreseeing the ruin of his interest and kingdom in the world to be approaching. He promised, therefore, to confirm to his disciples the miraculous powers which they had exercised, and to support them against every snare and danger. But, lest they should "be exalted above measure" through their distinguished privileges, he reminded them that these were comparatively of little worth, and that it was a far greater cause of thankfulness and joy to be admitted into the family of God, and enrolled among the heirs of heaven, than to possess the most absolute dominion over the infernal spirits.

On this occasion the Saviour exulted in his heart, and broke forth into expressions of grateful satisfaction, from the prospect of what these feeble instruments should accomplish, though opposed by persons of consummate wisdom and prudence. But how profound the mystery! Salvation is revealed to those who are weak, and of as little account as babes,

\* Deut. xxxii. 47.



while men of admired abilities and high rank remain in ignorance and contempt of it. In this inscrutable dispensation Jesus acquiesced and rejoiced. The Lord God is a righteous Sovereign; and, under a full conviction of his equity, we should submit implicitly to his appointments, though we see not the reasons of them. It should suffice us that "so it seemed good in his sight."

Jesus took that opportunity, also, to direct the regard of his disciples to himself, as united with the Father in the grand economy of grace, as possessing an extent of power and understanding far beyond the reach of any creature, and as the only One, who, from his own immediate and intuitive knowledge, can declare the nature and will of God. Then likewise, to excite their thankfulness for being acquainted with him, he congratulated them apart from the rest, because they were favoured with higher privileges, and clearer discernment in divine things, than many of the most eminent characters in old times, prophets and kings, who were beloved of God.

And are not our obligations immense, if we "have obtained like-precious faith," and can on solid ground conclude that our "names are written in the book of life?" For, "how great things hath God done for us!" We need not envy those who were invested even with the apostolical commission and miraculous powers. That grace, which is infinitely more valuable, is bestowed upon us. Our distinguished felicity appears the more remarkable, when we observe that many are destitute of it, who in every other respect are far advanced above us. Are we the "babes," to whom God "hath revealed these things?" The reason must be sought, not in us, but in his unsearchable counsels. Surely in the contemplation of this mercy we shall cry out, with wonder, love, and praise, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." Let us also pray for those, who are yet in darkness, that they may partake of our happiness, by being "called into marvellous

vellous light:" that their eyes may be blessed, in beholding the glory and excellency of our Redeemer.

During some part of our Lord's address to the seventy upon their return, it should seem that he was surrounded by a large company. Among the rest was a certain lawyer, one of those who studied and expounded the law of Moses. He, professing some regard, but designing to involve him in a difficulty, came forward, and proposed a question. It is likely that he felt much self-confidence, or entertained a secret contempt of Jesus, while he begged to be informed what he must do for the attainment of eternal life. The subject is indeed important above all others; and, had the information been asked with an humble teachable disposition, Jesus would not have refused a direct and explicit answer. But, as he knew the proud and captious temper of the man, he replied in a way which might tend to humble or silence him. He referred him to the demands of the law (upon his obedience to which the Scribe placed his dependence), assuring him that an entire compliance with those claims of perfect love, both to God and men, would entitle him to the blessedness of heaven, as the just recompense of his deeds; "This do, and thou shalt live:" as if he had said, "Perform, in their utmost extent, without diminution or interruption, all the injunctions of God's righteous commands, and sure and everlasting reward will await thee: but the least deviation or defect will expose thee to condemnation \*."

In the same manner it may be proper to treat all such persons as value themselves on their supposed goodness. This method seems calculated to convince them of their ignorance and presumption; so that the law may serve "as a schoolmaster to bring them unto Christ, that they may be justified by faith †." We ask, if your hopes are built on your own duties, are you aware how much is required of you? Have you never failed of loving God supremely

\* See Gal. iii. 10—13.

† 24.



and fervently, with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind; or your neighbour as yourselves? If these dispositions have had their constant and full influence upon you, from your earliest moments to this present hour, you need not implore mercy, or be indebted to the Saviour: on the ground of justice, according to "the law of works," you may expect and even claim eternal life. But does not this very representation awaken your fears, rather than flatter your pride, or confirm your vain confidence?

What effect was produced upon the Scribe? He was neither humbled nor silenced; but still desirous to stand upon his own defence, and perhaps in order to evade conviction, he proposed another question, "Who is my neighbour?" From this circumstance our Lord took occasion to confute the erroneous notion, then generally prevalent, that neighbours included only particular friends, and such as were situated near to each other, or connected by the bonds of kindred or religion. The sense of the law was confined within a narrow compass, while it was thought that none but persons of this description only have any claim upon our benevolence. Jesus, however, showed that we are indispensably required to extend our utmost kindness to all our fellow-creatures in distress, of whatever nation or profession, though separated from us, or even incensed against us, by party quarrels or distinctions. This he did, in the parable of the good Samaritan, an affecting and instructive little history, the circumstances of which are so naturally combined, and related with such simplicity, that it cannot fail to interest every reader.

A Jew is represented as reduced to the most calamitous and dangerous condition, through the violence of robbers. Two men of sacred character, a Priest, and a Levite, travelling the same road, were witnesses of his misery: and though their office, in an especial manner, should have disposed them to every act of tenderness and compassion, they turned away from the painful sight, without even attempt-

ing

ing his relief. But a Samaritan, who was taught from his earliest years to hate and avoid the Jews, felt commiseration upon the first view of the wretched object. Forgetting the odious contentions between the two nations, he ran to his assistance, and, with peculiar kindness, made effectual provision for his support. Such a conduct was the strongest proof of benevolence. He bound up the wounds of a stranger in misfortune, and supplied the necessities of a plundered enemy. Even this bigoted Scribe was constrained to admire the Samaritan, and to confess that he had shown himself a neighbour indeed.

The proper application is pointed out. To each of us, as well as to the lawyer, the Saviour says, "Go, and do thou likewise." There cannot be a more delicate or more forcible reproof of a cruel, covetous, and narrow mind; or a more striking representation of the necessity and happy effects of an enlarged charity. How unbounded, how active and generous, should our love be! But do we really appear to possess such a disposition? Where are the fruits? Do we not betray a proud, contracted, and unfeeling spirit? Are we not restrained from doing good, sometimes by selfishness, sometimes by malevolence? Alas! who can say that he has uniformly looked upon all men as his neighbours, and treated them with the same kindness which he should expect for himself in similar circumstances? How little do we resemble our great Pattern, who has exhibited the most extensive and disinterested benevolence! The Lord Jesus "remembered us in our low estate," and, though we were "sinners and enemies," not only stretched out his arm to rescue us from misery, but gave himself a sacrifice, and "died for the ungodly\*." May the contemplation of this love excite us to "love one another, with a pure heart fervently †!"

At Bethany, about two miles distant from Jerusalem, lived an amiable family, to which our Lord seems to have been much attached. It was probably

\* Rom. v. 6-10.

† 1 Pet. i. 22.



upon his return from the feast of tabernacles that he called at this village to visit Lazarus and his sisters. The interview is mentioned, chiefly that we may remark the different kinds of attention which these two pious women paid to Jesus. They both received him with great affection. Mary placed herself at his feet, like an humble scholar, with an eager desire to imbibe his important instructions. But Martha, to whom perhaps the chief care of their domestic affairs belonged, discovered her regard to him by her solicitude to provide a proper entertainment. The latter, however, being too intent upon that object, complained, with some marks of peevishness, that her sister did not help her. Their Visitant, upon this, with much tenderness reproved Martha for her unseasonable and immoderate anxiety about the various concerns of the family, or the preparing of such accommodations as were trifling, if not needless; and at the same time solemnly reminded her, that, while many lower matters engaged her attention and distracted her thoughts, "one thing" was of absolute necessity, and that all others should give place to it. On this ground he commended the conduct of Mary, who appeared to be more "spiritually minded," as improving the opportunity for her own greatest advantage. He declared that Mary had acted wisely in preferring "the good part," because it is excellent in itself, and infinitely more valuable than all earthly possessions. It is, what they are not, secure and inviolable.

The example as well as the observations of Jesus, upon this occasion, will furnish solid instruction. We should learn from him to show the influence of our religion, as well in our common intercourse with each other as in the temple and closet. In every house where he was admitted he delivered his heavenly doctrines, "his mouth speaking wisdom, and his tongue talking of judgment\*." And shall we be unwilling or ashamed to introduce any mention of

\* Psal. xxxvii. 30.

our spiritual concerns, wherever we may be? How do we appear to have the mind of Christ, if divine things engage no part of our private conversation? Do not some plead the cares of a family, the hurry of business, and an attention to company, as if these were of the first consequence, or as if God were to be regarded, and the interests of the soul consulted, only in the second place? What, then, has Jesus taught you? He declares "One thing is needful:" but how many things are so in your estimation! That which he enjoins you, as important above all others, is either totally forgotten, or thrust aside, that you may be more at leisure to pursue what is of little worth, and cannot long be secured. Even some pious persons are much obstructed in their spiritual progress through an excessive anxiety about their secular affairs. They do not, therefore, as they ought, glorify God by bringing forth fruit abundantly, nor do they enjoy the comforts of religion in themselves. But the greater part of mankind seem entirely carnal; for they propose no higher object to themselves than to gratify their animal nature; as if "the one thing needful" were to make the most of the present life, to eat, drink, and be merry. A zealous regard to religion is condemned and derided, as extreme folly, though it be the truest wisdom. The servant of Jesus, who is observed to "sit at his feet and hear his word," is complained of as deserting his post. But his divine Master will plead his cause to the confusion of his opponents; and, when they shall be forever separated from all that is now dear to them, he will possess a treasure and a happiness in the heavens, "which shall not be taken away from him."

On another occasion, and in a different place, where Jesus had retired, he was requested by one of his disciples, at the conclusion of his devotions, to teach them to pray, as John also had taught his followers\*. It cannot be supposed that they had con-

\* Luke xi. 1—13.



tinued so long with him in ignorance or neglect of this duty; for they must have learned the necessity of it both from his example and his exhortations. But they now desired some particular instructions, perhaps some form of prayer, to be delivered to them: and it is supposed that the most eminent Jewish masters, as well as John the Baptist, gave their respective scholars and adherents a short model for their worship. In compliance with their wishes, then, he repeated, with certain trifling alterations, that brief but comprehensive address to God, with which he had furnished them before, as a directory for their devotions; and now he appointed it to be used as a stated form\*.

It has been already observed that it might be adapted to the peculiar situation of the disciples, and intended only for that period. We could not, however, at the same time, help remarking, that, as the expressions are suitable for Christians in all ages and circumstances, it may still be retained with great propriety, both in public and private worship, though not to the exclusion of other petitions. The composition is wonderful and excellent, beyond any commendation which we can offer. We call upon those, who desire to serve God acceptably, to study the full sense of all its parts distinctly, and endeavour to enter into its true spirit. Consider how you pray. You are here taught to approach to God with affection and confidence as to your Father, yet with profound reverence as to him who "hath prepared his throne in the heavens." His name should be dear to you; and you should implore grace for others, that it may be known and sanctified in every place, requesting also that he would establish his kingdom in righteousness by the everlasting Gospel, and that all the inhabitants of the earth may unite with those of heaven in yielding him a cheerful and perfect obedience. Looking up in faith, you must ask your daily support from him. You must confess to him

\* See Sect. 10.

your numerous and aggravated offences, humbly seeking his forgiveness, and declaring your readiness to pardon every injury received from your fellow-creatures. Yet, as you will be constantly exposed to fresh temptations, entreat him to strengthen and preserve you by the power of his Spirit, and to rescue you out of the hands of your enemy.

Such are the supplications which you are taught to offer; but you should pray as persons in earnest, who are unwilling to take a denial. Our Lord assures you, that, as one man prevails upon another, if not by argument, or through the influence of friendship, yet by his incessant solicitation, you also, by the fervour and importunity of your requests, may have power with God, and obtain his blessing. The promises of Jesus for your success are absolute and inviolable. No instance can be produced of any one continuing to wait upon God with unwearied diligence and ardent devotion, who was finally rejected. You are encouraged to expect a favourable answer, from God's parental disposition. If you feel the affection of a father, what would you not grant to your beloved offspring, who earnestly entreat your assistance? You, indeed, who are "evil," may easily be warped from your duty, under the influence of corrupt passions; yet you cannot refuse to relieve your children. And shall God withhold any thing really good from those who send up their unceasing petitions to him? No: he will give them his Holy Spirit, which will "fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness." But, ah! how cold, how lifeless, are your prayers, if the duty be at all attempted! Shall you complain, or wonder, that you succeed no better? Will you not be roused to greater fervour? But, if you "restrain prayer before God," and call not upon his name, your guilt is extreme; and his tender mercies in waiting to be gracious will render you the more inexcusable.

It may be difficult, nor is it of any real importance, to ascertain the exact connexion of the following narrative.



narrative. But at another time, when Jesus was delivering his instructions to the people, he received an invitation to dinner from a Pharisee, which he immediately accepted with his general affability and condescension \*. It should seem from the sequel, and from the manner of our Lord's address, that a scheme was formed to insnare him, and that for this purpose a large company of his usual opponents was collected together. But their malicious project was baffled; and they met with a most severe reprehension for their odious hypocrisy, and the numerous inconsistencies of their conduct.

Jesus sat down to eat without observing the common ceremony of washing his hands; when the master of the house, who narrowly watched him, secretly condemned him for the neglect. Our Lord was aware of the objection, though it was not avowed; and therefore he took the opportunity, not so much of vindicating himself, as of exposing the folly and dissimulation of the Pharisees in general. Many were then before him, and yet with remarkable plainness and courage he reproved them, while he detected their avarice and oppression, their pride and malignity of heart. He pointed out their absurdity in paying such scrupulous attention to external purifications, while their minds were filled with schemes of rapine, and various kinds of wickedness. He exhorted them to consider that the God who made them would not be satisfied with any outward observances, and that their great object should be to approve themselves to him. He urged them to renounce their covetousness and cruel exactions, and to be kind and liberal to the poor; in which way their food would be much more effectually sanctified to them than merely by the cleansing of their hands.

Their danger was not to be concealed; and therefore, that they might no longer flatter themselves, he addressed them in language the most authoritative and majestic, and denounced against them one tre-

\* Luke xi. 37, &c.

mendous wo upon another for their neglect of real and inward holiness while they boasted of their formalities. He exposed, also, their ostentation and ambition, and their egregious hypocrisy, by which so many were deceived to their utter ruin.

Jesus having included the Scribes in one of his reproofs, a person then present, belonging to that profession, expressed some degree of warmth that they too should be so severely censured. But neither fearing their anger nor courting their favour, he proceeded to condemn them for enjoining so many burdensome rites upon the people, by their absurd interpretations and traditions, while they themselves observed not their own precepts. They pretended a regard for the ancient prophets, and built the tombs of the men whom their fathers had slain. But, as they inherited the cruel and persecuting disposition of their ancestors, they were convicted of the grossest hypocrisy; and the very sepulchres which they erected witnessed against them. Jesus therefore, knowing what was in their hearts, and what terrible consequences would follow from their violent opposition to the Apostles and preachers of the Gospel, solemnly declared that God, in righteous judgment, would shortly reckon with that generation, and bring the most awful desolations upon them for all the blood of his martyred saints which had been shed from the foundation of the world. These perverse expounders of the law had to answer likewise for the general ignorance of the people. By their false, though specious comments, they locked up the grand treasury of divine knowledge, and prevented others from receiving the Saviour. How great an aggravation of their own guilt! How could it be otherwise than that the curse of God should rest upon them?

Such were the reproofs of Jesus, suited, no doubt, to the state and temper of his hearers. It is not for us, who possess not his information or authority, to thunder out anathemas in the same manner. But his ministers, surely, should learn from him to be bold



and strenuous in rebuking sin, and to declare, without respect of persons, that "the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience \*." Very frequent occasions call for language of this kind: for how numerous is the company of gross offenders, as well as ceremonious hypocrites! Shall the servant of the Lord, then, keep silence, or debase his office by smooth and flattering addresses? No: "whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear," he must "cry aloud and spare not," while he faithfully "shows them their transgression." The event must be left to God.

What effect had our Lord's address upon his proud and captious auditors? Their indignation was kindled, and yet they knew not how to vent it. They set upon him with fury, urging him to speak on various subjects, only that they might bring an accusation against him. But such was his wisdom, that their schemes could not prevail. Their case stands as an admonition to future ages: and from them we should be warned to beware of formality, and of opposition to Christ or his people. How terrible the condemnation of those who are incensed by the very word which should humble them! "Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts †."

\* Col. iii. 6.

† Heb. iii. 7, 8.

## JESUS CHRIST.

## SECT. 25.

*Jesus warned his disciples of hypocrisy and cowardice—delivered the parable of the rich fool—gave cautions against worldliness—exhorted to prepare for his coming—foretold violent persecutions—preached the necessity of repentance, on the massacre of the Galileans—described the barren fig-tree—healed an infirm woman on the sabbath—showed that many will be shut out of heaven—his message to Herod, and lamentation for Jerusalem.*

THE conclusion of the preceding section represented our Lord in the midst of malicious enemies, at the house of a Pharisee, where he was invited to dine. During his continuance there, so great was the eagerness of the people without to hear his instructions, that an immense company, consisting of many thousands, assembled together, and even trampled on each other, from an earnest desire to be near him \*. To gratify their wishes, therefore, he went out, and, in the presence of them all, gave a solemn charge to his disciples, that they might not be misled or discouraged by the opponents with whom he had been contending. He cautioned them to beware of that dissimulation which he had just condemned in the Pharisees, and which would operate in them like leaven, imperceptibly spreading its influence around. It were easy to assume the garb of religion, and make high pretences to a peculiar sanctity. But what would this avail? As it cannot impose upon God, so there is a day coming, when it shall be published to

\* Luke xii. 1, &c.



the whole world; for every secret thing shall be brought to light. Ah! how different from our present apprehension will many characters then appear! What dishonesty, treachery, and oppression, what malice and revenge, what lewdness and intemperance, will be discovered, which are now concealed from human observation, and often cloaked under a show of piety! Who shall stand the test of that scrutiny? Those who now possess no more than a painted outside will then be the objects of contempt and abhorrence.

The disciples had seen something of the furious opposition of these insidious adversaries, which might have had a bad effect upon their minds, in deterring them from a bold profession of the Gospel. Jesus, therefore, thus exhorted them to maintain a holy firmness in their adherence to his cause:—"You, my friends, must prepare to meet with cruel persecution; but in my service it will be dishonourable for you to dread those who may resist, however great and powerful they may be. You cannot suffer much or long from their rage. They may, possibly, be permitted to take away the life of your bodies; but their malicious efforts can extend no further. Let the Lord God Omnipotent be the sole object of your fear. His influence reaches to the eternal world, and, if he be your enemy, he can render you miserable both in your bodies and your souls for ever. Commit yourselves to his care, and he will provide for your support. He, who forgetteth not the sparrows, worthless as they may seem, is constantly mindful of your minutest concerns: "the very hairs of your head are all numbered." But, whatever temporal advantages you may lose for your attachment to me, I, your Lord and Master, whom you are not ashamed to follow, will acknowledge, approve, and honour you, before that glorious assemblage of angels, who shall attend me in the day of my future appearance. Then the persons who have declined an open profession of my  
name,

name, through cowardice or other worldly motives, shall meet with a different recompense; in a manner equally public they shall be disowned and rejected, as base and detestable characters. They, indeed, who now oppose Me, may yet obtain forgiveness: I am the Son of man, who come in mercy, not in judgment. But the case of those, who continue to despise the multiplied testimonies of the Holy Ghost, and blasphemously ascribe his operations to the influence of Satan, is remediless and desperate, their sin unpardonable. That divine Agent, whom they treat with impious scorn, will afford You his most gracious direction and support in your severest trials. Depending on his aid, you may cheerfully face your persecutors, when you are called to answer at their tribunals: He will inspire you with wisdom and courage, and furnish you with words and arguments to plead my cause, so that you shall never be confounded before them."

Such were the Saviour's exhortations to his ancient disciples: and surely of us also he requires the same steadfastness of faith, the same contempt of the rage and threatenings of men, the same unshaken adherence to him and his service. Have we any reason for dread, while the God of heaven is engaged to sustain, protect, and comfort us, and a crown of glory is secured to us at the end of our warfare? Let those tremble for the consequences, who, in opposing Christ, undertake to "fight against God." However his patience may bear long with them, at last he will arise to execute judgment, when they shall be driven away "as chaff before the wind," and overwhelmed with everlasting horror and despair.

After this address, Jesus was desired by one of the company to persuade his brother to agree to a fair division of their paternal inheritance. This our Lord declined, as being a matter totally foreign to his character and office. His grand design was to draw men's attention to their spiritual concerns; and therefore he took occasion, from this dispute between



the brothers, to warn his hearers against covetousness, one great cause of contentions in the world. He observed, that an eager solicitude to procure temporal possessions is absurd, since the largest property will not prolong our lives, or render them truly comfortable.

He then showed the fatal tendency of an immoderate attachment to present things, by a very striking parable. A person is described as receiving a vast augmentation of fortune by the fertility of his ground, and intent upon making the most of his substance. He proposed to erect more capacious granaries, in which his increasing store might be secured, and flattered himself with the prospect of affluence, ease, and sensual indulgence, for many years. Having attained the summit of his wishes, he determined to retire from the hurry of business, and take all the enjoyments which his wealth could furnish. Who would not have pronounced him a wise and happy man? But his schemes of pleasure and earthly felicity were suddenly broken; and, in the midst of his plans for the gratification of his animal nature, he was summoned away into the presence of an angry God. He was condemned in the court of heaven for the most egregious folly, and his soul was required to enter upon a far different state of existence; while his boasted possessions were consigned to others, not being able to protract the execution of the sentence for one moment. Alas! how common the character! Our Lord declared that all those are in a similar situation who are anxious to become opulent, and wish to spend their substance upon themselves, without consulting the will of God, or regarding the necessities of others, and who at the same time are at no pains to obtain the far more valuable riches of divine grace.

Jesus proceeded to caution his disciples against an inordinate attention to worldly circumstances, as being inconsistent with the true spirit of the Gospel, as implying a distrust of God, and a comparative neglect

neglect of eternal things. On this occasion repeated some sentiments, which he had before advanced in his sermon upon the mount, while he to the following purpose:—"I charge it upon you not to distract your minds with any secular not even for the necessary provision of food and raiment. Will not He, who gave you life, and you with the proper means of supporting it, great God sustains the ravens without any contrivance on their parts; and will he forget you are so much more valuable in his sight? If your utmost solicitude cannot effectually secure you the least advantage: it cannot add, in degree, to your stature or your age. Look also at the inanimate world, and observe God's munificence to the very lilies, which, without their labour, he has decked with glorious ornaments, far surpassing the richest attire of the most powerful monarchs. Shall he, then, bestow such a profusion of beauty upon the short-lived flowers, and deny you with suitable apparel? You are the object of his choice and love, though you are so base as to trust him. It is incongruous to your character to be intent upon such trifling concerns, and to be about your temporal support. This, indeed, is the case with those who know not God; but you should leave the care of yourselves with the Father in heaven, who is your Father, and who, as he pleases, can readily bestow what is needful for you. Only be you vigorously pressing towards his kingdom of glory; and, in addition to better, you shall possess those earthly blessings, which shall be a reward and a pendent for you. In the prospect of that kingdom go forth with courage, feeble and defenceless as you may seem: for, though you are a "little flock," your Father has decreed, and will rejoice, to fill you in that blissful inheritance to which He calls you. This hope, surely, will render you comparatively indifferent about your worldly property, and dispose you to part with it, if God shall call you.



the trial. This expectation will kindle a feeling regard for the poor. They demand a share in your wealth, and you will not refuse it. You will be chiefly solicitous to secure to yourselves those treasures of which you cannot be deprived, and which will preserve their value and their lustre for evermore. These alone merit the affections of your hearts; and if indeed you have chosen them for your portion, your thoughts and desires will be directed to that more than to any other object."

Such manner of persons were the primitive Christians required to be: and is it allowable for modern Christians to be engrossed with secular pursuits, or principally attentive to the supports and comforts of the animal life? No: it is still as necessary as ever for the disciples of Jesus to be "spiritually minded," and weaned from this present world. If, then, our happiness be placed upon any temporal possessions or carnal gratifications, we have not imbibed the spirit of the Gospel: and this very criterion, we fear, will prove that many among us have never felt the real influence of that religion which is so generally professed. Let us beware for ourselves, and listen more carefully to our divine Teacher, whose continued exhortations call off our regard from all inferior concerns, that we may be waiting for our dismissal from the body, and seeking a suitable preparation for eternity.

Our Lord proceeded:—"You are stationed here only for a short season, and on a particular service. You are, therefore, to be constantly expecting the return of your Lord, diligently attending to your proper work, with "your loins girded about," like men in readiness for a journey, or any vigorous exertions, and with "your lights burning," standing in a proper posture for the honourable reception of your Master. He may come suddenly; and therefore it is for you to be watching every moment, lest you be confounded at the intimations of his approach. The faithful and the active servant, thus persevering to

the end, shall be gloriously distinguished when the Son of man appeareth."

Peter inquired whether the exhortation was designed for all, or for the Apostles in particular. Jesus replied, "Wherever the steward of approved fidelity and prudence shall be placed, if his Lord shall find him performing the duties of his office, and discharging his important trust, he shall obtain peculiar notice, and be advanced to a state of high dignity. But the careless and slothful servant, who, presuming upon the delay of his Lord's return, shall abuse the confidence reposed in him, and proceed to acts of oppression and intemperance, shall be awfully surprised in the midst of his sin and folly, and instantly destroyed without remedy. The man who clearly understands, and yet despises, his Master's will, shall feel the greatest severity; for the degree of future punishment shall be proportionate to the advantages and opportunities enjoyed upon earth, according to that equitable maxim, "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required."

The admonition should rouse us to a serious inquiry how we are acquitting ourselves in our respective places. Are we properly fulfilling our trust? If our Lord should appear, could we meet him with joy, or expect a favourable reception from him? Are we waiting for his coming? On the contrary, are we not negligent and treacherous, endeavouring to put away from us the thought of death and judgment? One thing, however, we must allow; we have had clear information in our duty: repeated calls and exhortations have been addressed to our consciences by religious books, by friends and ministers. Much, indeed, in various ways, has been committed to us; which, if we remain impenitent, will render our guilt more heinous, and our condemnation more aggravated.

Many might be looking for temporal advantages from the service of Jesus; and therefore, to obviate their mistake, he observed, "The most violent contentions



tentions will prevail, in consequence of my Gospel; yet, afflictive as these may be, I cannot but earnestly wish that they were already begun. I have myself extreme agonies to endure; and, though I see the whole before me, I long to enter upon the conflict, and feel the most ardent desires for the great event to be accomplished. Let my followers, therefore, be content to be opposed and hated; for my kingdom, though calculated to produce universal peace, will occasion the most unnatural and furious contests, because of the general prejudice and enmity against it. Many of those, who are united by the strongest ties of kindred, will now forget their obligations, and show a violent aversion to such as claim their tenderest regard. This must be ascribed to the perverseness of men, who reject my doctrine in contempt of the clearest evidences. They are attentive enough to the common concerns of life, and discover much ingenuity in judging of the wind and the weather: but, ah! how stupidly unmindful of the surprising testimonies which God has given of his Son! Might not reason itself have led them to a more consistent determination? Is there any one liable to be convicted of an offence, for which he may suffer the severest penalties of the law, who will not be disposed to seek reconciliation with his adversary, while any favourable terms can be obtained? Give diligence, then, to procure forgiveness with your offended God, before he proceed against you and summon you to judgment, when nothing but rigorous justice can be looked for, and the everlasting punishment due to your iniquities will be inflicted."

Let us seriously attend to these declarations of our Redeemer. The effects which he foretold have taken place: furious and bloody persecutions have been raised against his faithful disciples; and even to this day these persons are generally opposed and hated by some of their nearest relatives. Let us not, however, be intimidated, by the prospect of any difficulties in his service, but, while we contemplate his

his courage and zeal in meeting death itself for our sakes, let us cheerfully follow. We blame the stupidity of the Jews in their obstinate rejection of the Messiah; but do We discern the character, and unfeignedly submit to the authority, of Jesus? O, let us gladly accept his mediation, that we may not come under the wrath of Almighty God, as we have deserved, nor be cast into that prison, from whence there can be no deliverance!

Some of our Lord's audience acquainted him with the terrible slaughter of certain seditious Galileans, whom Pilate had put to death, even while they were offering their sacrifices\*. But, without passing any judgment on their case, he endeavoured to turn the attention of the people to their own perilous situation, representing them all as equally in a state of ruin, and exposed not merely to temporal calamities, but to eternal perdition, without an entire change and renovation. Those who are destroyed suddenly, and by any singular affliction (as the Galileans, and others who had been killed by the fall of the tower of Siloam), are often considered as offenders of the most atrocious kind, marked out, by the visitation of an angry God, as monuments of his peculiar vengeance. Jesus, however, has here taught us not to decide against them in so rash a manner, or to set ourselves above them, but seriously to remember our own danger, and the absolute necessity of our conversion. He solemnly declared, twice together, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Is this awful assertion sufficiently regarded? Do not many draw the most uncharitable conclusions against others, and presumptuously flatter themselves on their supposed comparative excellence? It is allowed that persons of a very profligate character have incurred the divine displeasure, and must be reformed; but those, who have been regular in their conduct, cannot bear to be ranked upon a level with them, or believe that there is any need of deep contrition for

\* Luke xiii. 1, &c.

themselves.



themselves. This is indeed a fatal delusion : since all inherit a natural depravity, all must be renewed and sanctified ; to those, who are not, salvation is impossible.

To impress them with a sense of their danger, Jesus delivered a parable. A fig-tree, planted in a well-cultivated soil, disappointed the owner's wishes for three successive years. As it produced nothing, it cumbered the ground. Its foliage, unaccompanied with fruit, was no compensation for the pains and expense of the proprietor, who therefore directed it to be cut down. The servant to whom the care of the trees was committed requested that it might be spared one year longer, till further expedients were tried ; and then it was agreed, that, if it still continued barren, it should be destroyed as utterly hopeless. The instructions hereby conveyed are obvious. It is, surely, a reasonable injunction, that those who are placed in the church, under the culture of religious means and ordinances, should bring forth fruit unto God. But, ah ! how many, even in such a favoured situation, remain unprofitable, and therefore must necessarily be displeasing to God ! Through the intercession of his Son, or the prayers of his ministers, he may graciously delay his threatened vengeance ; but the time of his patience is limited, and, if repeated warnings produce no good effect upon them, the stroke of justice must fall : they shall feel the weight of his indignation.

As Jesus travelled through Galilee, he attended the public worship of the synagogues on the sabbath. In one of these assemblies, a poor unhappy woman, who had been bowed together by infirmity for eighteen years, excited his compassion ; and instantly, without any solicitation, he restored her to health and vigour. Such a miraculous display of power and benevolence should have drawn forth praises from every tongue. But the ruler of the synagogue objected to it with indignation, as if it had been a profanation of the sacred day. Jesus, however, con-

victed

victed him of the grossest hypocrisy in his pretended zeal for God, and defended his own conduct, in relieving this afflicted creature, from the attention which they all paid to their very cattle on the sabbath. Acts of mercy, we observe, as well as those of necessity, are not prohibited as an infringement of the holy rest. His enemies, therefore, were ashamed of their opposition; and the common people were the more attached to him for his wonderful operations. On that occasion he repeated the parable of the grain of mustard-seed, and that also of the leaven, in both which he represented the gradual and extensive enlargement of his spiritual kingdom, notwithstanding the resistance it should meet with. The hatred and violence of men shall not frustrate the counsel of God. His Gospel shall spread; and its blessed influence shall be felt and acknowledged through all the nations of the earth.

Our Lord proceeded from one city and village to another, directing his course to Jerusalem. In every place he scattered the good seed of divine truth, diligently improving the short time which now remained for him in the world. Upon the road, as it should seem, a question was put to him by one of the company, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" The inquiry was probably made through vain curiosity, which Jesus never gratified; and, therefore, instead of giving a direct answer, he thus addressed himself to the consciences of the people, exhorting them to be earnestly solicitous for their own salvation, rather than to indulge any subtle speculations about that of others:—

"The path to heaven lies through a strait gate, which is difficult of access, and your entrance may be resisted by numerous enemies. Be not, however, discouraged; but contend for admission in the most resolute manner, and break through every obstruction. Many, who are totally indifferent about eternal life, or refuse to go in the only appointed way, will shortly find that the door is finally and for ever barred



barred against them. It will then be too late to implore the divine mercy. Though they cry ever so importunately, "Lord, Lord, open unto us," the great Master of the household will reply, "I know you not." He will not admit the plea of their former high privileges or honourable situation in the church; but dissemblers, formalists, and all who die in impenitence, shall be covered with terrible confusion, while the Judge shall disown their boasted relation to Him, and shall pronounce with awful majesty, "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." In conceivable anguish, remorse, and despair, shall overwhelm many of those, who gloried in their near connexion with the most eminent saints of God, when they shall see themselves for ever separated from their society. The unbelieving Jews shall behold the despised Gentiles, from the remotest corners of the earth, enter into glory, while they shall be eternally thrust out. Great numbers of those, who may now be thought the furthest from God, shall attain a state of peculiar exaltation in my kingdom; and not a few, who are here distinguished above others by their religious advantages, shall then be marked out, for their contemptuous abuse of them, by the severest vengeance."

Does not the solemn admonition excite an alarm in us, who are placed in the Christian church, and favoured with an evangelical ministry? Let us not presume upon our external privileges, but consider how much is to be done. Let us be roused from our stupor; for "it is high time to awake out of sleep." If we be distressed by the fear of finding the door barred against us, let us now look unto Jesus, and cry, with all the strength and vigour of our souls, "Lord, Lord, open unto us," and our application will infallibly succeed.

On the same day on which our Lord had delivered the exhortations last mentioned, intelligence was brought that Herod, the governor of the country, was determined to destroy him. This was said with

an intention of intimidating him from prosecuting his labours in those parts. But Jesus could not be terrified; and therefore he replied, by a message to the crafty and persecuting prince, that, in spite of all his schemes, he would proceed with his work, performing the most miraculous and benevolent operations a little longer; that very shortly he should finish his course; and yet that he should lay down his life, not in Galilee, where he then was, but in Jerusalem, the grand seat of persecution. The example teaches us not to be dismayed, whoever may threaten or oppose us, in the proper execution of our office. Let us faithfully attend to our respective duties, and persevere in them, though surrounded by dangers. We shall walk but a few days more; and the God whom we serve will protect us till the end of our present appointment be answered. O that we may close our labours honourably, and then, like our Lord, "be perfected!"

After observing that he must perish in Jerusalem, he was led to reflect upon the heinous guilt, and approaching desolation, of that murderous city, and broke forth into the most tender and affecting lamentation over it. Jerusalem was the city where the blood of many prophets and holy men had been shed; the city which had scornfully rejected the gracious offers of the Saviour, repaid his services of love with cruelty, and even then meditated his destruction; yet, abandoned as it was, Jesus expressed the deepest sorrow for its miserable state. He declared that God, in righteous judgment, was about to lay waste the place with the most awful calamities, till the wretched inhabitants should learn to value and long for their promised Messiah, though they despised Him, who sustained that character.

What forbearance, kindness, and compassion, do we discover in the character of our Redeemer! Still he possesses the same bowels of mercy. Long time does he strive with sinners, using one expedient after another to promote their salvation. According to  
his



his own description, he still proposes to gather them as a hen gathers her helpless brood under her wings, to protect and nourish, and to afford them security and comfort in himself. But, alas! how many proudly spurn at the offer! And what can be expected to follow from their base conduct but final and remediless perdition? Yet, even then, he abandons them, as it should seem, with difficulty, charging their destruction upon themselves: "I would,—and ye would not\*." May we learn wisdom from the wretched infatuation of those who have perished in their unbelief! May we all therefore, with one heart and voice, welcome the Saviour, who brings with him pardon, peace, and eternal life! Let us take up our words now with unfeigned faith, and we shall speak them with confidence and joy at the last day, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!" Amen.

\* See also Hos. xi. 8.

## JESUS CHRIST.

## SECT. 26.

*Jesus dined with a Pharisee on the sabbath—healed a dropsy—inculcated humility and a regard to the poor—delivered the parable of the great supper—warned his followers to prepare for suffering—vindicated his attention to sinners by the parables of the lost sheep—the piece of silver—and the prodigal son.*

If our review of the life of Jesus affect us as it ought, it will not only produce in us an admiration of his excellency, who is “fairer than the children of men,” but regulate our conduct and sanctify our dispositions. While we “behold the glory of the Lord,” we shall be “changed into the same image\*.” Let us pray continually that we may feel this influence from his example; so shall we be followers of the Lord, “not in word, neither in tongue, but in deed, and in truth.”

Jesus was travelling through Galilee towards Jerusalem; and, probably in that journey, a principal Pharisee, a man of rank, invited him to dinner †. It might seem an act of condescension in a person of eminence to ask or admit such a guest into his house as appeared to be greatly his inferior. But a favour was conferred on the Pharisee rather than on Jesus. The most exalted monarch might have said with reason, “Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof.” It was an instance of “the meekness and gentleness of Christ,” that he vouch-

\* 2 Cor. iii. 18.

† Luke xiv. 1, &amp;c.



safed to converse freely with sinful creatures, and discovered no distance in his behaviour. He readily gave his compaay to those who desired it; not indeed for his own pleasure, or the convenience of eating with them, but for their benefit. He "sought not his own profit, but the profit of many, that they might be saved."

As this occurred on the sabbath, we infer that religion does not require us to refuse all intercourse with others throughout that day. There may be proper occasions for friendly visits in some parts of it; but we should be careful to maintain a spirit and conversation suitable to its grand design. The example of Jesus cannot be adduced in vindication of that vanity and dissipation by which it is so generally perverted and profaned.

It should seem that many persons were assembled at the Pharisee's house, and such as were not well affected to Jesus; for "they watched him." Perhaps the invitation was given, not from kindness, but malevolence, on purpose to pass the most invidious censures upon him. How odious the disposition of those who are eagle-eyed in scrutinizing the conduct of others, and who rejoice to find any real objections against them! And yet you, who are the faithful disciples of Jesus, are frequently placed in the midst of such malignant observers. Their attention is fixed upon you, with a view, not to commend what is laudable, but to discover and expose your faults, that so they may reproach that holy name by which you are called. You, therefore, should be vigilant as well as they, that their wishes may be defeated, and themselves ashamed, when they shall see the wisdom and consistency of your deportment.

A person who was present, afflicted with the dropsy, excited the compassionate regard of Jesus. He, however, knowing that the lawyers and Pharisees before him were seeking for an accusation against him, appealed to them whether it would be any violation of the sabbath to perform a cure on that day.

day. They were unable to reply, while he, unmindful of their censures, instantly restored the diseased man to perfect health, observing, that, however they might object to this act of mercy, they would none of them scruple to relieve their very cattle in distress. They felt the force of his words, and were confounded. Thus, likewise, it frequently happens that the enemies of religion are suddenly restrained and abashed by a serious remark or a solemn address to their consciences. Let us not, therefore, be deterred by their insidious designs, but persevere in the path of duty.

Jesus not only justified himself, but reproved them for their pride and love of precedency. He took notice that they were all ambitious of the highest seats at the table, and argued that such a contention for places of honour was extremely disgusting, and that it would be much more becoming to give way to others. He showed that an arrogant spirit is odious, and, while it claims respect, incurs contempt; and, on the contrary, that a modest and humble deportment, which seems to shun observation, invariably conciliates esteem. This is the case in the common intercourse of men; and it holds true, if we apply it to our temper and conduct towards God. "He resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble \*." Who will not allow that it is incumbent upon us, in his presence, "to take the lowest room?" Yet how little are the apostolic injunctions regarded or understood, "In lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves:" "in honour preferring one another †!"

Jesus continued to deliver the most serious instructions and admonitions to the company before him. With a reference, no doubt, to their general spirit and practice, while he addressed himself to the person who had invited him, he condemned the custom of providing sumptuous and costly entertainments merely for their relations and opulent neighbours, and recommended an attention to the relief

\* 1 Pet. v. 5.

† Phil. ii. 3. Rom. xii. 10.



and comfort of the afflicted, in all their various distresses. How much extravagance prevails in supporting magnificent tables for the reception of those who want nothing! The large sums which are thus expended serve only to feed our own pride and sensuality. But what a sordid parsimony is shown in contributing to the support of the truly necessitous, who can make no returns! Those, however, are blessed, who, from faith and love unfeigned, "deal their bread to the hungry, and bring the poor, that are cast out, to their houses \*." The Lord of heaven will consider himself as their debtor, and will render them an abundant recompense in the great day of retribution.

The solemn discourse of Jesus, probably, left a good impression on the audience. One of the company, at least, expressed his approbation and desire of continuing the subject, by remarking the exceeding felicity of those who shall be admitted to the sacred feast which God has provided in his kingdom. Possibly he might not understand or really wish for the happiness of which he spake; however, in order to excite both him and all present to a serious examination of their state, Jesus showed that the most gracious offers of it are made to mankind, and rejected with contempt by the greater part.

He represented, in a most interesting and affecting parable, a large and rich supper prepared for the accommodation of many guests. The Lord God, by the Gospel of his Son, has furnished the grand entertainment here referred to, in which every thing is set before us that can give delight or vigour to the soul. How valuable and exquisite are the blessings of which it consists! They are such as these: pardon, peace, holiness, and fellowship with God, even upon earth; divine light, strength, and consolation, communicated to the soul; an infallible promise of an admission into heaven, and a present foretaste of its

\* Isa. lviii. 7.

joys. Who does not ardently desire to partake of the sumptuous banquet? It is a royal feast; and no want of provisions need be apprehended, for there is a bountiful and inexhaustible supply.

Many guests are invited, and an urgent message is sent, pressing their immediate attendance, since the necessary preparations for their reception are now completed. Thus the call of mercy is given, by the publication of the Gospel, to an innumerable company, who are earnestly exhorted not to neglect the gracious offer. It was first, and in a particular manner, addressed to the Jews; but the language is the same to all who hear it, from one age to another, "Come, for all things are now ready." Every thing is done, on God's part, which is proper and requisite for the securing of eternal salvation to our guilty race. But their consent is indispensable; and is it possible that this can be refused?

Those, who are bidden, are unwilling, on various pretences, to accept the kind invitation. Different excuses for their absence are framed; all weak and ridiculous. It is alleged that they have other engagements; and yet these are such, as, though not wrong in themselves, are trifling, or may be deferred, and need not prevent their attendance. Their very pleas, therefore, show a marked contempt of the entertainment. Thus, alas! the proposals of the Gospel are rejected with scorn. Men pretend, indeed, to apologize for their conduct. Secular cares and occupations, or domestic comforts, so totally engross them, that it is supposed impossible and unnecessary for them to pay any regard to their spiritual concerns. Such reasons, surely, cannot be admitted in their vindication; nay, rather, they will condemn them, as proving their hearts to be alienated from God. Their employments may not be sinful, but highly proper, if pursued on right principles, and in due subordination to the care of their souls. Yet, probably, more persons perish eternally through an immoderate



moderate and unseasonable attention to things which are right in themselves, than by gross and avowed iniquity.

After the refusal of those who were first bidden, the invitation is enlarged. The servant is charged to bring in the poor and disabled; and, as sufficient room still remains for the accommodation of many more guests, he is despatched in search of those who are dispersed abroad in the most forlorn and wretched condition. Even these, the refuse of men, are imported, by the most cogent arguments, to enter, and satisfy their wants; that so the sumptuous preparations may not be lost. The Jewish nation despised their own mercies; but "through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles \*." To us, who are "the ends of the earth," is the gracious call addressed. Though we are, in a spiritual sense, "poor, and maimed, and halt, and blind," we are allowed to partake of the rich banquet. Nay, though we be sinners of the most abandoned character, fitly represented by those who lie in "the highways and hedges," we are permitted, and even pressed in the most forcible manner, to come. Many have already complied with the invitation; but "yet there is room" for thousands more; and it is the Lord's determination that his house shall be filled.

The Master is incensed when his kindness is rejected, and he resolves, in displeasure, that those, who have shown such contempt of him, shall be excluded from his entertainment. This is an awful admonition indeed. The Lord of heaven and earth considers himself as insulted when his Gospel is made light of. Do we not dread his indignation? Why, then, do we trifle with his messages of mercy? Possibly they may never be renewed. He may instantly bar the door against us, and declare "Those men shall not taste of my supper." Since he has done this against the Jews, let us fear for ourselves, "lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief †."

\* Rom. xi. 11.

† Heb. iv. 11.

Great multitudes still attended Jesus in his progress; and yet probably but few of them were attached to his cause from right principles. It is to be expected, that, amongst the numerous professors of the Gospel, there will be many of a suspicious character. All, therefore, should be exhorted to examine of what sort their religion is, from what motives it was first taken up, and whether they so value it as to be willing to suffer for its sake. To this purpose our Lord addressed the vast concourse of people who followed him:—

“ If any man would enter into my service, he must renounce all worldly views and expectations. Whosoever consents not, on every necessary occasion, to go in opposition to his nearest friends and relatives, so as to appear even to hate them; whosoever is averse to give up the most beloved enjoyments, and lay down life itself, in my cause, cannot be acknowledged as my disciple. Severe as the trial may seem, if he refuse to combat difficulties, to endure extreme hardships, and to persist in the path which my example or command may point out, he possesses not the temper of mind indispensably requisite for my servants.”

“ You, therefore, who profess an attachment to me, should deliberate well what you do; for you are undertaking an arduous and important business. Like one who is about to raise an edifice, you should make the proper calculations, that you may know whether you can finish the work which you are planning. The inconsiderate builder, whose labours are disappointed and suspended, is deservedly exposed to the derision of others. Or, as a prince, who meditates an hostile expedition against a neighbouring power, you should inquire if you are sufficiently prepared to meet your enemy. Is your force such as to give you a reasonable hope of success? It were better not to provoke an attack than hastily to rush into the battle, and there to betray your weakness and cowardice. Rather than fall in the conflict, or basely desert your  
standard,



standard, remain in your present state, bad as it may be, and prefer a dishonourable peace to a destructive war."

"Thus you should examine whether you possess what my service demands; for, if you be unwilling to renounce the dearest objects in life for my sake, you cannot be ranked amongst my people, or receive any advantage at my hands. With an unsound profession of religion, you would resemble the "salt which has lost its savour," and then, instead of answering any valuable purpose, as those who are "the salt of the earth," you would be useless, or a nuisance in your place, fit only to be cast out with contempt. Let every one who desires instruction attend to the solemn admonition."

Such was our Lord's address to his followers: and, in its main argument, it is perfectly applicable to ourselves. The same bold and disinterested regard to him, which he then required, we also must possess. With the same holy jealousy and circumspection we should search and try our hearts. Are we his disciples indeed? What motives or expectations induced us to assume that character? Or, what is our present plan? Are we determined to give up every thing which stands in competition with Christ, that he may be our "all in all?" If otherwise, let us not act as dissemblers with God, lest we be rejected with abhorrence, as far more detestable than those who never made pretensions to sanctity.

The foregoing exhortation may seem harsh and severe to persons of a tender spirit; and those who are oppressed with guilt may be ready to infer that Jesus forbids, rather than encourages, their application. But the following representation will obviate such a conclusion.

Many publicans and sinners came about him, showing great eagerness in listening to his instructions\*. Nor did he disdain their company, or drive them from him by denunciations of vengeance, as if their case

\* Luke xv. 1, &c.

were

were desperate. His condescending attentions and compassionate addresses were calculated to inspire them with humble hope towards God. These, however, displeased the Scribes and Pharisees; and they insinuated that he countenanced the profane and licentious. A similar objection is often urged against his ministers, when those who have been dissolute and abandoned are drawn to hear them. It is thought a reproach to the Gospel that it gives the most gracious invitations, and proposes a full and free forgiveness, to men of this description. But this is, in fact, its brightest glory, though too dazzling for carnal eyes to behold; and, accordingly, they turn away from it with disgust. Those especially, who expect and claim a preference for their own supposed goodness, quarrel with the greatness of the mercy, and generally pretend a vast concern for the interests of morality, which, they rashly conclude, are likely to sustain an injury. In opposition to them, we believe it to be for the honour of Christ that "he receiveth sinners," even those who are marked out as peculiarly infamous for their numerous and aggravated offences. He welcomes, pardons, sanctifies, comforts, protects, and saves them. This is extensive, rich, and distinguishing grace indeed, and it should induce us more than ever to love, and praise, and trust him. He acts in a way worthy of himself: and those, who know his character, admire that very part of it which enrages the Pharisees.

He vindicated his own conduct, showing its propriety, and the extreme unreasonableness of the objections urged. This he did in three parables, all tending to illustrate the abundance and the freeness of his mercy, and each an emblem of the favourable reception which penitent sinners, though they have been accounted most hopeless, shall meet with from him. Let the transgressor, then, who is ready to sink into despair, be encouraged to lift up his eyes to this dear Lord and Saviour, who will not disdain to help him.

A striking



A striking appeal is made to our own feelings, and the general practice of mankind. Where is the person, who, losing only one out of a numerous flock of sheep, will not be at pains to search after it, and express a peculiar pleasure in its recovery, especially if it had appeared unlikely to be found? Our own miserable state is here exhibited. We have wandered far from the fold of God, and, though exposed to want, and the assaults of furious and malicious enemies, are unwilling of ourselves to return. But our attention is directed to the compassionate care of Jesus, under the character of "the good Shepherd," who, with much labour to himself, seeks and rescues the lost sheep, and takes it under his immediate protection. Nor should this be considered as a trifling incident, a matter of indifference. Every instance of the conversion of a sinner is an important event, and will communicate the highest delight to those who understand the worth of an immortal soul. Jesus himself exults, and all the blessed inhabitants of heaven express a rapturous joy, as if their own happiness were increased, when any, however profligate, is "turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." They triumph in such a restoration, as being a peculiar acquisition, more than in the continued felicity of established believers, whom they looked upon as already secure. This is a grand display of pure and disinterested benevolence in the celestial world. Who shall object, or be tortured at the sight, but the malignant prince of darkness, and they who bear his image?

Another representation, to the same purpose, is given us in the case of a poor woman, who, after much anxiety and diligent search, finds the piece of money, which she had lost out of her little treasure. This appears a prize peculiarly valuable, and yields her more satisfaction than all her other stock, which she considered as a safe possession. Such is the generous concern which Jesus feels for the perishing souls of sinners. In whatever instances his grace proves

proves effectual, so that they, "who sometimes were far off, are made nigh" to God, he rejoices that he has done and suffered so much for their salvation; and the holy angels, who are called to witness the momentous change, are filled with wonder, love, and praise. And shall we presume to censure him for this exalted kindness? Rather, shall we not take occasion from it to admire the Shepherd, who came in search of us, and adore the ever-blessed Lord of all, who spared no pains for our recovery?

The subject is still further illustrated in another parable. A story is related, containing circumstances to which no hearer can refuse to listen; and the simplicity of the narrative is such, as not only engages the attention, but interests and affects the heart.—The younger of two sons, after receiving his proportion of fortune, is represented as departing from his father's house, the restraints of which were irksome to him, and going to a distant country. There the thoughtless youth squandered away his substance by intemperance. He was soon reduced to the most infamous servitude, and to such a degree of wretchedness, that he was on the point of perishing by hunger. A lively emblem of our sinful conduct, and its miserable consequences! A particular reference to the Gentile world, and to the case of profligate characters, might be designed. But we have all resembled this foolish man, in disliking the strictness of true religion, casting off the fear of God, and departing from him, with a full determination to gratify the desires of our hearts. And have we found the happiness which we expected in our own ways? Alas! far otherwise. The effects of our apostacy have been distressing and ruinous in the extreme. Like the poor prodigal, we are become destitute, enslaved, and contemptible. In such a state we can procure nothing to satisfy the soul, and we stand on the brink of destruction. How pitiable the case! And it is the more pitiable, as few are sensible of their degradation and wretchedness.

A change,



A change, however, took place in the unhappy youth. "He came to himself," as if he had been till that time intoxicated or insane; and then reflecting on the comfortable situation he had left in his father's family, and the misery, disgrace, and danger, which he had brought upon himself, he formed the resolution of returning to his insulted parent. He remembered his former pride, rebellion, and wickedness; and his purpose was to confess his aggravated guilt, and earnestly to request the shelter of his father's roof, though it should be in the lowest capacity of a menial servant. He proceeded, without delay, to execute his plan. In this stage of the history we perceive the pleasing character of a true penitent. Then only does a man "come to himself," or enjoy the proper exercise of his reason, when he feels convictions of his folly and baseness, and discovers strong desires of restoration to the divine favour. And what other expedient can the awakened sinner adopt, but to flee to his offended God, to pour out his soul with unfeigned contrition, and to lift up his voice to Heaven with incessant cries for mercy? Though he dare not be confident of acceptance, it will be proper, surely, to try the effect of an humble application; and, if he cannot ask for the privileges of a child, let him earnestly solicit an admission into the family on any terms. But his former practices, principles, and connexions, must be renounced, and a return not only resolved on, but instantly attempted.

The kind and forgiving father beheld the son at a distance; and, as if he had forgotten his past ingratitude and perverseness, without waiting for his nearer approach, he ran with open arms to embrace him. The penitent youth began his intended confession; but the indulgent parent, as if impatient to relieve his distress, interrupted him, prevented his request, assured him of his love by the strongest tokens, and immediately commanded all his household to give the most expressive demonstrations of their joy,  
inasmuch

inasmuch as his dear child, who had been considered as irretrievably lost, was restored to life and happiness. What does all this teach us, but that God can pardon more freely and extensively than we could have conceived? He views with delight the very beginnings of repentance, the first efforts of a sinner towards a return. He listens with satisfaction to his broken cries for mercy, and, instead of upbraiding him with any part of his accumulated guilt, he hastens to confer every mark of affectionate regard. The angels of heaven also, as well as believers upon earth, are required to exult in that event, from which the most glorious effects are produced. Such is the loving-kindness of our God! Who then shall despair of acceptance, or hesitate to apply unto him? "He will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy: he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing\*."

But one of the family refuses to participate in the general happiness. The elder son is disgusted at the attention shown to his brother, who had been so licentious and abandoned, and, while he boasts of his own dutiful subjection to his father, complains that he meets not with such a preference as he might have expected. The father condescends to argue with him on the unreasonableness of his objections, even allowing the justice of his claims, and still maintains that it was every way proper and expedient to express the highest delight in the recovery of a child, who had been given up as lost. This part of the parable contains a striking reproof of those proud and captious adversaries, the Scribes and Pharisees, who reproached the Saviour for receiving sinners. Here their own perverseness is exhibited; for while they were incensed that any notice should be taken of the most dissolute characters, or at least that they should be admitted to favour upon the same terms with themselves, and while the Jewish nation in general could not bear "that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body," they most ex-

\* Zeph. iii. 17.



actly resembled the elder brother. And do not many, in modern times, betray a similar aversion to the rich grace of the Gospel, which is extended to the most heinous offenders? There are those who value themselves on the uninterrupted regularity of their conduct, and are extremely disgusted that no peculiar compliment is paid to their excellence, and that others are put upon a level with them. But are they not wrong, even on their own principles? For, granting all that they can possibly urge in their behalf, no injury will be done to them by the kind and affectionate manner in which every penitent is received. Let them make good their claim, and they will be treated with suitable respect. But let them not refuse to rejoice, when those, whose cases appeared most hopeless, are taken into the number of the children of God, and heirs of everlasting life. The Lord God will vindicate his own glory in dispensing his mercy freely. Let us not petulantly object to any part of his plan of redemption, but drop all our angry prejudices against it. Let us implore forgiveness for ourselves, as those who deserve to perish; and under such a conviction we shall wonder, not that others are saved, but that we, who "were enemies, are reconciled to God by the death of his Son."

## JESUS CHRIST.

## SECT. 27.

*Jesus delivered the parable of the unjust steward—showed the use of money—reproved the Pharisees—described the case of the rich man and Lazarus—exhorted to avoid giving offence, to forgive injuries, and maintain faith—cured ten lepers—foretold the destruction of Jerusalem—described the nature of acceptable prayer by the parable of the importunate widow, and that of the Pharisee and publican.*

JESUS directed his steps towards Jerusalem, with a full view of all his sufferings before him, and even with an earnest desire to enter upon them. He was yet in Galilee; and during his progress through that country he continued to exercise his ministry, labouring to diffuse the knowledge of the truth, and to give unequivocal proofs of his divine character. While we contemplate him persisting in his work with diligence and cheerfulness to the very last, may we learn to persevere in the most vigorous exertions for the glory of his name, till we finish our course! What though the cross lies before us? Let us imitate the holy example of the Saviour, and we shall follow him to his kingdom.

Publicans and sinners, we have seen, attended on his preaching, and many Scribes and Pharisees also were present at the same time. In the audience of them all, and with a view to their instruction, he addressed his disciples, pointing out in what manner worldly possessions are to be improved\*. He spake, as usual, in parabolical language, and represented a

\* Luke xvi. 1, &c.



rich man calling his steward to account, that he might dismiss him for unfaithfulness in his trust. The guilty servant attempted not his own vindication, but showed extreme solicitude about his future support. He contrived to make friends to himself by falsifying his books in favour of the various debtors of his lord, that so they might be disposed to entertain and assist him when discarded from his office. The expedient was dishonourable and base, but it was ingenious; and, therefore, his master, who could not but condemn the injustice, admired the prudence of the man, who had so artfully provided for his own subsistence. We are here taught to consider ourselves as the stewards of God, who is the great Lord and Proprietor of all. At no distant period we must give up our accounts, and be removed from our present post. What, then, shall we do? Have we not been negligent and treacherous in the discharge of our trust? Have we not wasted our Master's goods, devoting that to the purposes of pride and sensuality, which God claims for his own? How shall we answer to the accusation? Have we no fears about our future condition? Or, what schemes have we formed for our own security in the day of calamity?

Jesus observed, at the close of the parable, that they whose hearts are fixed upon this world are much more attentive to their secular interests, than those are to their spiritual and eternal concerns, whom God hath taught to know their duty and happiness. Surely there is abundant cause to reprove the remissness of Christians among ourselves; for we perceive in them but little of that contrivance and assiduity for the welfare of their souls, which men in general discover for the attainment of the low and trifling objects of the present life.

Jesus, also, improved and applied the parable to the following effect:—"Riches, which commonly deceive the expectations of their possessors, and often are subservient to the purposes of sin, may yet be

be employed to great advantage. By a proper use of them, you may conciliate the esteem of those whose friendship is most valuable. Many, whom you have instructed, relieved, visited, and cheered, and to whom your bounty has endeared you, may go before you to heaven, and, upon your removal from the place you now fill up, may stand ready to welcome you to the same blissful habitations, where they will confess their obligations to you. A very small share, indeed, of wealth, may be committed to your care; but your religious principles will be evinced by your behaviour in the lowest station, so that we may safely infer from it what would be your conduct in a higher. If you act as unfaithful stewards in the disposal of your temporal substance, worthless as it is, how can you expect to be intrusted with those blessings which are of real value? And if you treacherously misapply what is not strictly your own property, but only put into your hands for the benefit of others, you have no reason to believe that God will confer upon you a certain and everlasting possession. How necessary is it, then, that you make a deliberate choice whom you will serve. You will be supremely attached either to God or the world; and, in proportion as you esteem the one, the other will be disregarded. It is impossible that you can live in subjection to two masters, whose demands are so directly opposite."

The Pharisees heard the solemn admonition; but they treated it with scorn, because the love of money had the ascendancy in their hearts, and the doctrine of Jesus struck at the root of that vile principle. The ministers of God, like their great Exemplar, must expect to be derided by those whose practices and tempers they condemn: yet they should not, on this account, keep silence. Jesus reprov'd the hypocrisy of the Pharisees in the most awful terms, declaring, that, while it was their object to preserve appearances before men, God perceived their inward dispositions, and that He looks with abhorrence on those



those things which short-sighted mortals may admire. Would to God that every proud and covetous pretender to piety, whose reputation stands high in the church, would seriously consider the tremendous truth!

The Pharisees professed a high regard for the Mosaic institution. Our Lord, therefore, remarked to them, that this was designed to continue only till John the Baptist appeared; that in him God began to open the new dispensation, and to set up the kingdom of Messiah; and that of the benefits and blessings of that government, which he its harbinger proclaimed, men of all characters were now anxious and eager to partake. Still, he observed, the ancient law did not fail, as if it had not answered the end; for it received its completion in the Gospel, which fulfilled the types and prophecies, and enforced the moral commands. In some points, particularly with respect to the sacred and inviolable bond of marriage, they themselves explained away or perverted its meaning, and he reproved them as guilty of adultery in divorcing their wives for every trifling cause of disgust.

Let us beware of the spirit of the Pharisees, and not be satisfied, as they were, with certain external observances in religion. It is possible, we see, that those, who pretend to be very zealous for duties, may be lamentably defective, and allow themselves in gross violations of the divine precepts. Let us inquire, then, how far our principles and practices agree. The highest veneration for the law should dispose us, not to reject, but embrace, the Gospel. They both come from the same God, and harmonize in the same glorious plan. The Christian revelation is, indeed, the perfection of every preceding economy, and by this especially God establishes the kingdom of his Son. Do we wish to secure its blessings? Then we are required to exert all the faculties of our souls; for "every man presseth into it." The faint desire, the unoperative resolution, will leave us short  
of

of heaven; the possession of it is not to be gained without a holy violence.

Before the same audience, and in order to enforce the foregoing admonitions, Jesus proceeded to deliver an affecting parable. He described the future miseries which will follow a life of carnal indulgence though pleasant for a season, and the everlasting blessedness to which the servant of God shall be admitted, however afflicted upon earth. A rich man is represented, expending his fortune merely for the support of an elegant appearance and a luxurious table. His plan was, to allow himself every gratification which his income would afford; but, while he consulted only his own wishes, he considered not the necessities of others. A poor beggar, named Lazarus, incapacitated for any labour by a diseased body, was placed before his door, imploring relief. This distressed object was neglected, except by the dogs, who licked his sores, as if they were more compassionate than their master: but even this circumstance showed his calamitous situation, since he was covered with ulcers, which were exposed to the open air, and at the same time he could hardly obtain the smallest crumbs for his subsistence. Death, however, soon put an end to the sufferings of the one, and the enjoyments of the other; and then how different their condition! Lazarus, who was dear to God, notwithstanding his extreme indigence, was conducted by a company of heavenly spirits to a distinguished abode in the kingdom of bliss and glory. The rich epicure might have the parade of a pompous funeral, but his grandeur followed him no farther. He was cast into hell, and there consigned to the torment of everlasting fire; while the view of Lazarus's happiness and exaltation increased his own misery. He petitioned that the once-despised beggar might be sent to alleviate the excruciating agonies which he endured from the fierceness of the flames; but this could not be granted. Deliverance from his pain, and even the smallest abatement of it, was denied:



denied : an impassable gulf separated him from the society of the blessed ; and he, who had before enjoyed every delicacy, could not then obtain a drop of water to cool his parched tongue.

Five brethren still survived him, and all trod in the very same steps. He begged therefore that a special messenger might be sent from the world of spirits to warn them of those extreme sufferings which awaited them. Perhaps he had been instrumental to their profligacy ; and the desire of preventing their destruction might arise from a fear of its aggravating his torment. The request, however, was refused, on this ground, that the testimony of the inspired writers was sufficient for their conviction, and that those who rejected such an evidence would give no credit even to a witness rising from the dead.

The whole representation is tremendous, and yet most instructive. Who now will plead for a life devoted to pleasure and sensual purposes ? Who will presume to say there can be no harm in expending our fortune upon ourselves ; or that no bad consequences will result from the gratification of our wishes, provided our income will support it ? Our Lord has shown that by such a conduct the trust reposed in us is betrayed, the poor neglected, God forgotten and provoked, the soul debased and ruined, and a fire kindled against us, which will " burn to the lowest hell," and which never can be quenched. Will not " the sinners in Zion be afraid, and fearfulness surprise the hypocrites ?" Ah ! " who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire ? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings \* ?"

We congratulate the faithful servants of God, though destitute as Lazarus. You possess a happiness beyond the reach of the world, of which no afflictions can deprive you. Though you can hardly procure the meanest fare or the coarsest apparel ; and though, while your diseased bodies can scarcely

\* Isa. xxxiii. 14.

endure the hardships of hunger, nakedness, cold, you are the scorn of your opulent neighbours yet we will call you blessed. Death, which strikes a terror into others, may inspire you with confidence and joy. For then you shall obtain perfect deliverance and be "carried by angels into Abraham's bosom."

Is it supposed that stronger evidence is wanted to convince men of the dangerous tendency of sin? The sacred Scriptures declare it, with all the strength and clearness of which language is capable. The testimonies of departed spirits, who have entered upon the invisible world, are withheld from us, and we have no right to ask for them, or to conclude that they would be at all regarded by unbelievers. Let the word of God then be fairly consulted, and its decisions implicitly received, or else we shall soon feel those torments which we are unwilling to credit.

After this interesting parable, Jesus addressed himself again to his disciples, suggesting certain cautions and directions for their conduct\*. Some of these things had been said before, but their importance rendered the repetition expedient and needful. He warned them against giving any cause of offence to others, observing, that though, in such a world as this, among creatures so constituted as we now are, cases of that kind may be expected, yet they are attended with awful consequences. It is abundantly better to suffer any calamity, and even to be cut off by a violent death, than to bring a reproach on the good ways of God, or to occasion the meanest of his people to depart from them. In an especial manner, he exhorted them to beware of an angry and implacable disposition, since this would be peculiarly disgraceful to the Gospel, and declared that their forgiveness of injuries should be unlimited. How necessary for ourselves is this solemn counsel! "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil†:" for inconceivable mischief may result from any wrong practices or tempers observed in your deportment. Many may

\* Luke xvii. 1, &c.

† Psal. xcvi. 10.



be prejudiced against the truth, and some so staggered as entirely to renounce it, when they perceive that it produces so little influence upon you. A contentious and quarrelsome spirit is particularly unsuitable to your character; for, though frequent occasions of complaint may occur, you are to "suffer long and be kind," and thus to prove that the Gospel which you receive is a system of peace and love.

The Apostles, it should seem, being affected by a sense of their great difficulties, and their inability to surmount them through the weakness of their religious principles, earnestly prayed unto the Lord that he would increase their faith. For, such is the efficacy of this grace, that it will bear up the soul against the severest trials, strengthen for the most arduous services, preserve in temptation, and sanctify our inward dispositions. But how frequently is it obstructed in its operations! If the near attendants and most honoured servants of Jesus lamented their deficiency in this respect, surely the most eminent believers now may with peculiar propriety exclaim, "Lord, increase our faith!"

Jesus reminded them that the least degree of it, though small as a grain of mustard-seed, will produce wonderful effects, and enable the Christian to perform duties, which would otherwise be as impossible as the transplanting of a tree into the midst of the ocean. Yet he taught them, after all their exertions, to assume no merit to themselves, but to acknowledge that their obedience to God in every point was no more than he had a right to demand, and that, as it added nothing to him, it gave them no claim upon him. According to this description, we all are the servants of Jehovah, the great and sovereign Lord, and should attend to our proper work till it be finished, not looking for our complete rest and enjoyment before we have done the business assigned us; and even then we shall deserve nothing. Surely a slight knowledge of ourselves will dispose us to confess that "we are unprofitable servants;" nay,

remembering what we are, we shall not be unwilling to own that we are miserable offenders.

Jesus continued to prosecute his journey to Jerusalem through Samaria and Galilee, and scattered blessings as he went. Near to a certain village, in which he was about to enter, ten unhappy persons afflicted with leprosy, presented themselves before him. They stood, indeed, at a distance, as was required of them, lest others should be defiled by their loathsome disorder. It was not, however, too far for the voice of the supplicant. Having heard of the power and grace of Jesus, they implored his merciful regard. He looked on them with compassion, and instantly directed them to show themselves to the priests, who alone were authorized to decide when the malady was removed. They obeyed his word in the believing expectation of a cure, and, as they were going, were healed. The influence of our great Restorer of life and health extended to the remotest places, as well as to the objects immediately within his view. The same miracle was wrought upon them all; but only one of them, it should seem, and he a Samaritan, was properly affected with it. He returned to proclaim the kindness of his Benefactor, and his own obligations to him. With admiring and grateful adoration he bowed at his feet, and with a loud voice gave glory to God. This instance of faith and love in a Samaritan, a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel, was a striking reproof to the rest. He, therefore, obtained the peculiar approbation of the Saviour, and was dismissed in peace.

Have we been the subjects of Christ's healing power? Has not the leprosy of sin spread its poisonous infection over our souls? And shall we not cry to him, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us?" Those, surely, who are restored by his grace, cannot but be thankful: yet, alas! none of them feel so lively a sense of his goodness as they ought. Is there one out of ten, who gives glory to God with proper energy and zeal?



zeal? And is not ingratitude, on such an occasion, most detestable? You, who have experienced deliverance by the power of Jesus, return to praise him; and commend him to the notice and esteem of others, while, with astonishment and love, you declare what he has done for you.

Perhaps he was arrived at the great city, or, at least, was in the neighbourhood, when the Pharisees inquired of him at what time God would establish the kingdom, of which he had spoken so much. He replied, that they were deceived about the nature of this kingdom; that it would not be attended with such external pomp and grandeur as to excite general observation; but that, being inward and spiritual, it existed in the hearts of his people. He suggested also to his disciples, that they would soon be longing for his appearance, in vindication of their despised cause, but warned them not to be misled by impostors, who should arise in great numbers. He declared, indeed, that after his passion, then approaching, he would manifest himself in a most awful manner, to take vengeance on his enemies; and that, coming suddenly and terribly as the lightning, he would confound and destroy them. He foretold that many would be cut off in the midst of their business, their gaiety, and sensuality, as in the days of Noah and of Lot, when thousands perished, in the former case by the flood, and in the latter by fire and brimstone from heaven. And, as this tremendous desolation should be accomplished so quickly, he directed his disciples to flee for their lives, at the very first commencement of the troubles, without attempting to secure any of their possessions. He warned them to remember Lot's wife, lest they also, through an attachment to worldly things, should be involved in the general ruin. He predicted that in this public devastation the most painful separations would be made, the nearest friends divided, the most intimate connexions broken; so that, where two persons should be united in the closest bonds, the one

one should be rescued by a peculiar act of grace, and the other left to perish.

It was inquired where the terrible destruction would take place; and our Lord replied by a proverbial expression, that the eagles would be gathered to the carcass. This seemed a plain intimation that the Romans, whose ensigns bore the image of the eagle, should be the instruments of that calamity, and that they would fly as those ravenous birds to their prey. It might also be intended to imply, that, wherever obstinate sinners are marked for ruin, the judgments of God will find them out, and hasten with an unerring aim to accomplish their perdition.

The awful subject will be afterwards resumed. For the present, we observe, that the prophecies of Jesus, which clearly referred to one signal event, were all in due time exactly accomplished. Jerusalem was given up to entire desolation, the unbelieving Jews perished miserably, and the Christians, obeying our Lord's directions, obtained a memorable deliverance. Are we not, then, here instructed, that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God \*?" And should we not be solicitous to provide a refuge for ourselves, against that day of more terrible calamity, when "the vials of the wrath of God shall be poured out" upon all impenitent sinners, and there shall be no escape? Jerusalem was destroyed for its contempt and rejection of the Gospel; and, if God be still jealous for the honour of his Son, what has Great Britain to expect? O may we know the time of our visitation, and embrace the offers of mercy which are held out to us in the Saviour!

We inquire, then, with serious concern, of all to whom the word of truth is preached, Are you members of the kingdom of God? Is it set up "within you?" It is declared to be "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost †." Have you understood what these blessings mean, so as to feel the efficacy in your own hearts? If not, you are as much strangers,

\* Heb. x. 31.

† Rom. xiv. 17.



in reality, to the character of Jesus, and as certainly obnoxious to the divine vengeance, as the unbelieving Jews. O, flee from the tremendous storm, while yet there is a possibility of escape! Be willing to make use of the appointed refuge, that, when the destroying Angel unsheaths the sword, you may be protected from the stroke of justice.

Probably with a view to encourage his disciples under the prospect of their approaching difficulties, Jesus exhorted them to pray, and to urge their requests with unceasing ardour\*. Let us attend to his counsel: "Men ought ALWAYS to pray," at all times, and in all the various circumstances of life. Though many difficulties attend the practice of the duty, and our petitions seem to be rejected, we are "not to faint." Our fears may suggest that "God hath forgotten to be gracious," and that it were vain to hope for his mercy; yet we are here taught to renew our applications with fresh vigour, and "give him no rest" till he vouchsafe to grant us deliverance and comfort.

The efficacy of such continued fervour in our addresses to God is exhibited in a short parable. A poor distressed widow, under great oppression, earnestly solicited the interference of a magistrate in her behalf, that she might obtain justice. He, being destitute of every good principle both toward God and man, refused for some time to undertake her cause; but at length he consented, merely that he might be freed from the trouble of her importunity. Jesus has directed us to draw the proper conclusion from this little history. The Lord God may seem regardless of the incessant cries of his afflicted people for a considerable season; but still they should persevere in their ardent supplications, and expect his gracious interposition. Like holy Jacob, they should wrestle with him, and say, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Then will he rescue them from the oppression of their spiritual enemies, and satisfy the

\* Luke xviii. 1—14.

desires of their souls. Yet, great as this encouragement is, how few are animated by it! Do not some appear so disheartened, and so "faint in the minds," as to grow remiss, and almost abandon their hope? Thus Jesus lamented, that, upon his coming, he should find but little faith on the earth. And, should this be the day of his visitation among ourselves, we fear that the number of firm and lively believers would be proved to be small indeed. Ah! why do we distrust his promise? Or, if we maintain our dependence upon it, why do we give way to so many distressing apprehensions? Why are we so backward to the duty of prayer; so cold and languid in the performance? Surely we treat the Lord as if we thought that he would not be true to his word.

Another parable, addressed to those who boasted of their own goodness, and looked down with contempt upon others, instructs us with what temper of mind we should make our approaches to God. We may draw near with confidence, in reliance on the Saviour; but not with presumption, as if we had a claim upon him, on the ground of our own merit. We are taught to bow before him with the deepest humiliation and abhorrence of ourselves, confessing our iniquity, and imploring forgiveness through his free and abundant mercy, as revealed in the Gospel. This is represented in the case of two men, a Pharisee and a publican, who went to worship at the temple. Their principles and dispositions were widely different; and very different also was the effect of their prayers.

The Pharisee stood by himself, with much self-sufficiency, as if he should be polluted by coming near the publican. His devotions, if such they may be called, contained not one petition; and, though he pretended to thank God, his object was to compliment himself, while he described his own excellency, and recounted the various services he had performed. He alleged that he was far better than the generality of mankind; that he had avoided the gross sins in  
which



which many others lived, and which might be charged upon the notorious character then present; and that he had also been exact in all ceremonial observances. Such was the detail of his goodness, such the only foundation of his hope towards God. And was not this "sacrifice an abomination unto the Lord?" Yes, a proud spirit is peculiarly odious to him; and he hath determined "that no flesh shall glory in his presence." But are not many, under a Christian profession, worshipping with the temper of the Jewish Pharisee? Let his prayer be translated into modern language, and it would describe precisely the sentiments of numbers among us. We have many who compare themselves with others, who boast of their virtue, their freedom from scandalous crimes, and their strict performance of certain customary rites. But what shall we say? Shall we not remark, as before, that, so long as they exalt themselves, their most specious offerings, whether of charity or devotion, are offensive to God?

Another character, however, is here exhibited, and that of an acceptable worshipper. The publican, or Roman tax-gatherer, whose former life, it is probable, had been stained with many enormities, was compelled under the terror of an awakened conscience to humble himself in the presence of God, and to deprecate his vengeance. He stood at a distance from the sanctuary, and with eyes cast down upon the ground; thus expressing his unworthiness to draw near or look up to God. Nor was such demeanour the only evidence of his feelings. Smiting upon his breast, through extreme anguish for his accumulated guilt, and confessing himself a sinner obnoxious to justice, without offering any plea in his own favour, he prayed, that, if it were possible, God would extend his mercy to him. To such a contrite penitent as this, however flagitious his conduct may have been, the promises of the Gospel are addressed. "Let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

pardon \*." This the publican found; he went down to his house in peace, having obtained acceptance with God. How instructive, how animating, is the example! It is recorded for our encouragement; and the declaration is added, to revive the heart of all those who are ready to despond, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." For this abundant grace, indeed, we are indebted to Him, who "died for the ungodly," and whose "blood cleanseth from all sin." Our application to God must be made in his name, and in dependence on his merits. But even the interposition of Christ will not avail us, unless we feel that "godly sorrow which worketh repentance," and that deep humiliation which the publican expressed. We may have been preserved from gross offences; but, if we be truly sensible of our guilt, we shall not be unwilling to be considered on a level with the worst of characters, in the point of our acceptance with God, nor will any other prayer suit us so well as that which is here provided, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

\* Isa. lv. 7.



## JESUS CHRIST.

### SECT. 28.

*Jesus, attending at the feast of dedication, gave sight to a man born blind—revealed himself to him, when excommunicated—described himself as the Door, and the good Shepherd—declared his union with the Father, and miraculously escaped from being stoned.*

JESUS had now taken his leave of Galilee, and arrived at Jerusalem. There he attended at the celebration of a certain festival, which is supposed to have been kept in remembrance of the purification of the temple by Judas Maccabeus\*. This was an institution only of human authority; but he did not on that account neglect it, and he has taught us by his example to pay a serious respect to those observances which tend to the advancement of religion, even though they be not established by the divine command.

In such a world as this, objects of wretchedness present themselves on every side: but we may learn from Jesus not to look on the distressed without feeling the tenderest emotions of compassion. As he passed through the streets of Jerusalem, he beheld with merciful regard a poor beggar, who had been blind from his birth†. The disciples, taking notice of the unhappy case, proposed a question of curious speculation. They asked whether the calamity was not to be considered as a peculiar judgment from God, for some heinous transgression committed either by the man or his parents. Possibly they entertained the idea of a pre-existent state, and supposed that the sufferings of this life are punishments for former

\* John x. 22. 1 Mac. iv. 59. Joseph. Antiqu. B. xii. ch. 11.

† John x. 1, &c.

sins. The Jews, at least, are said to have imbibed that absurd notion from the doctrines of certain Heathen philosophers.

Jesus, however, without entering into a subtle disquisition upon the case, declared that the affliction was appointed, not as a judicial visitation for any remarkable offence, but that the mighty power of God should be displayed by its miraculous removal. He further observed, that his time of service in this world, which he knew to be very short, must be diligently improved, in order to promote the great end of his mission; and that he should continue, during his abode here, to give light to them that were in darkness. Let us make the application to ourselves. We, who are sinners, should always consider that we deserve to bear distinguishing marks of the divine indignation. Wheresoever we perceive a poor sufferer, oppressed by heavy calamities, let us not curiously inquire into his crimes, but attend to our own, which merit a like, if not a severer, visitation. It may reconcile our minds to the most painful afflictions to remember what our Lord intimates, that they may be designed to promote the praise and glory of God. Let us not forget how soon our day of labour and of usefulness will be closed, that we may exert ourselves with vigour for the benefit of others. If the Saviour shone as "the light of the world," what are our obligations? Are we not bound to fulfil the purposes of the life which is given us? Shall we depart to the awful reckoning before these are answered? If we would imitate our great Exemplar, we must not trifle away the few remaining moments in sensuality or supineness, or omit any one opportunity of rendering assistance to our fellow-creatures.

Jesus not only attended to the cries of the distressed, but in some cases granted relief where it was not solicited, as in the instance before us. We observe, too, that, though all his miracles were illustrious, they were performed in different ways. In some a word or a touch sufficed; in others certain means were made



made use of, but such as magnified his mighty power. He anointed the man's eyes with clay: but this, it must be allowed, seemed more likely to take away than communicate sight. He then commanded him to wash in the pool of Siloam; and instantly, upon this being done, the cure was accomplished. The efficacy, however, should not be ascribed to any peculiar virtue in those waters, but to Him, whom by their significant name they typified, "the Sent" of God. He alone, who ordered this singular expedient, could render it successful. The same, we may remark, is evident with respect to his other appointments. The ordinances of his church are, indisputably, weak in themselves, and unable to impart any blessing to the soul. But he is pleased to confer grace upon those who frequent them in obedience to his directions, and in dependence on his promise. Let us therefore conform to his institutions with the simplicity of unfeigned faith, and his power will be therein displayed for the relief of all our spiritual necessities.

The miracle was manifest, and it could not but engage the public notice, as the man whose sight was restored was generally known. All were astonished, but some were enraged; in consequence of which, pains were taken to disprove the fact, or by some means to cast an odium upon Jesus. This malignant opposition, however, tended to confirm the evidence, and publish it the more extensively. In like manner, modern infidels, by their hatred of the Gospel, and assiduous attempts to invalidate its testimony, do really advance the cause which they mean to injure; and the more they resist God, the more his truth is established, and they themselves are confounded.

The man was summoned before the sanhedrim, and closely examined concerning the change he had experienced, which he described with the most artless simplicity, and from which he declared that he considered the author of it as a Prophet. This occasioned a division in the council; some, with hypocritical sanctity, pretending that Jesus had profaned the

the sabbath, because he had performed the miracle on that holy day, and therefore that he could not be of God; while others were constrained to acknowledge, from the evidence before them, that he could not possibly be an impostor. Some unfairness or collusion being suspected, endeavours were used to discover the trick. The man's parents, therefore, were called, and strictly questioned. The fact, indeed, they openly asserted, and yet, through the fear of excommunication (which all were threatened with who should confess Jesus to be the Messiah), they dared not avow their own convictions, but referred their examiners to the testimony of their son.

He was again interrogated by the rulers; and, while they with vehemence and bitterness reviled the Saviour as a worthless and profane wretch, the poor beggar ventured to plead his cause with confidence. He maintained before them all that the miracle was undeniable, and the conclusion from it reasonable, that Jesus must have received his commission from Heaven. This provoked them the more; and instantly, without any other charge of guilt, they passed the very severe sentence of excommunication upon him.

Whether, now, shall we most pity, the condemned person, or his judges? Ah! how odious their conduct, how miserable their case, who, with incontestable evidence before them, still hardened their hearts, and determined not to be convinced! He, though destitute of the advantages of education, and in a great measure ignorant of the real character of Christ, dared to act agreeably to his conscience, and refused to depart from his testimony, whatever he might suffer. We ask, then, Where are those, who have courage enough, in the face of opposition, to vindicate the character of Jesus? Can you speak of any benefit which you have received from him? Though unable to maintain an argument against subtle disputants, can you declare that he has communicated light to your mind, and say, as the poor beggar,



beggar, if you can add no more, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see?" By such a simple evidence as this, many an unlettered peasant has pleaded the cause of Christ with great success, and sometimes to the confusion of the most learned adversaries. But it may expose you to reproach and bitter persecution. Be it so. What have you to fear, while you stand up for the honour of the Saviour? It is a service of which you should not be ashamed, and in which you need not dread any consequences. Do not, therefore, shrink from it, or, as the man's parents, put it off to another; but come forth, and avow yourselves the disciples of Jesus, whoever may, on that account, exclude you from their society. He, whose interest you espouse, will manifest his favourable regard to you in due season.

The poor outcast, it should seem, understood but little of Jesus; yet, being faithful to his convictions, he obtained further information. The Saviour sought after him, that he might reveal himself to him. Upon being asked, therefore, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" he confessed his ignorance, but showed, at the same time, that he was a serious inquirer after the truth, and eagerly desirous of instruction. Accordingly, no sooner had Jesus explicitly declared himself to be that exalted Character, than he cried out, with a holy rapture, "Lord, I believe;" and, to testify his unfeigned submission and dependence, he bowed down in devout adoration of him. Thus he received a double cure, and exhibited, by the change wrought both in his body and soul, unquestionable proofs of the power and grace of the Redeemer. How seasonable was this manifestation to the excommunicated man, while he suffered under the severe and injurious sentence! The Lord will administer the necessary support and consolation to those who seek him in sincerity; and he will select the most suitable time and method for that purpose. Fear not, therefore, you who are faithfully devoted to him, whatever  
may

may come upon you in his service. We need not say, when the profane world turn away from you with scorn, but even when your dearest friends cast you off, for the truth's sake, he will prevent you from sinking under the trouble, and perhaps he may then favour you with peculiar discoveries of his salvation. In this confidence the royal Psalmist triumphed, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up\*."

But should the question be proposed to us individually, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" what answer could we return? Are not many, who assume the Christian profession, as far from the faith of Christ as if they had never heard his name? If, however, with a teachable disposition, we ask, how we are to conceive of him, or what regard is due to him, he himself will instruct us.

In addressing the man to whom he had given sight, he conveyed both information and encouragement, while he observed, that one grand design of his appearance was, to communicate the light of life to all who feel and lament that they are destitute of it. But he added, that he came also for judgment, as well as mercy, to expose their folly, who boasted of their own understanding, and to seal them up in ignorance, who were too wise to be taught. Certain of the Pharisees, it should seem, were present at the latter part of this declaration: and, considering themselves as charged, by an oblique reference, with spiritual blindness, they were disgusted. It must needs be offensive to the pride of those, who have acquired a reputation for learning and discernment, to be treated as intellectually dark, and having the same need of divine illumination as the most illiterate. Jesus, therefore, warned them, that they could not plead in excuse for themselves the want of information, and that a conceit of their own knowledge chiefly kept them in unbelief, and greatly aggravated their guilt and condemnation. This, surely, may

\* Psal. xxvii. 10.



furnish a forcible exhortation to us, that we "lean not unto our own understanding," and that we pray earnestly not to be given over to a judicial blindness, but, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, to discover "the truth as it is in Jesus."

Our Lord continued his address, with a particular view to those false teachers, who rejected him \*. Speaking in parabolical language, he declared, by a solemn asseveration, that whosoever enters into the fold any other way than by the appointed door, is to be considered as an injurious and destructive intruder. He described the real shepherd, as approaching by the regular access, which alone can be allowed, and gaining immediate admission. To such an one the care of the sheep is intrusted: he watches over them with a tender regard to their different cases and necessities; and they acknowledge him as their guide, supporter, and defender. But they will not pay the same respect to him who is not thus connected with them, and yields not a due attention to their concerns. This was indeed an awful reproof of the Pharisees, who pretended to instruct the people, and yet understood not the only instituted method of salvation; and it was an intimation, that, whatever character they assumed, the true members of the church would not submit to them, but turn away from them with disgust. Yet they saw not the drift of the parable; and therefore Jesus spake in plainer language to the following effect:—

"I myself am that Door to which I referred: and it is necessary that every one, who would be a teacher of others, should be properly acquainted with my mediatorial office, and cordially devoted to my service. There have been those who have urged the same claims before, and many have presumed to mark out for their disciples a different course from that which I prescribe; but they were deceivers and usurpers, whose object was their own gain, and not the good of the flock. The faithful people of God,

\* John x. 1, &c.

however,

however, have always discovered the ruinous delusion and refused to be led by their influence. I am the only way of admission into the church; and he, who approaches to God in a real dependence upon me, shall be protected from all assaults of enemies, and shall find abundant support and comfort for his soul in the rich provisions of the Gospel. The arrogant intruder into the sacred function of the ministry is a destroyer and murderer of immortal souls. But the purpose for which I am come is to bestow salvation in a larger measure than has ever yet been known upon the earth."

"I, therefore, perform the office of "the good Shepherd," and am the very Person described by the ancient prophets under that title \*: my people shall enjoy security and happiness, through my affectionate care for them; and I will render them every attention and service which the most vigilant and compassionate shepherd can yield to his flock. Circumstances of peculiar danger may occur, which will try the strength of his regard for the sheep. In such situations, the man who has no property or concern in them will not expose himself for their defence, but leave them to be dispersed and devoured by every beast of prey; while the real owner, who feels an attachment to them, will stand by them in all extremities, and hazard his safety that he may ward off the assaults of the destroyer."

"This is the character which I sustain for the benefit of my redeemed ones: and as a mutual love subsists between me and them, similar to that which the Father and I bear to each other, so, in the sincerity and fervour of my affection, I cheerfully give up my own life, to rescue them from perdition. My flock also extends beyond the limits of your nation: there are those among the Gentiles, however hopeless they may appear, who shall obey the call, and be incorporated into my church, that all believers may constitute one society, under the care and pro-

\* Isa. xl. 11. Ezek. xxxiv. 23, xxxvii. 24. Mic. v. 4.



tection of the same exalted Head. The Father himself is pleased with my attention to the welfare of my people, and with my voluntary undertaking for them. It is, therefore, our settled plan, and a part of the commission which I have received from him, that I should die, and rise again. Of my own accord I lay down that life, which I could easily retain against all the violence of men and devils; and by the same sovereign power I can resume it, since it is not possible that I should be imprisoned in the grave, contrary to my own will."

How interesting is the whole of this address! Who among us can be unconcerned about an admission into the fold of God, or the only possible mode of procuring that admission? Have we, then, diligently inquired for this appointed way; and do we consent to make use of it? It is more especially incumbent upon the teachers of religion to examine their principles. As they would dread the condemnation of the ancient Pharisees, and the odious appellation of "thieves and robbers," they should seriously consider with what motives they assumed the sacred character. Have they been actuated by an unfeigned regard to Christ? Is he the sole ground of their dependence? And is it the grand object of their ministry to display his grace, and exalt his glory? Very mischievous indeed are the effects which result from such persons undertaking to instruct others as are themselves ignorant of the salvation of God. Many, many precious souls, are deluded to their eternal ruin. Let us pray, therefore, that "the church, being alway preserved from false apostles, may be ordered and guided by faithful and true pastors, through Jesus Christ our Lord \*."

"The good Shepherd" can never be unmindful of his flock. Let us contemplate this description of him till we feel an increasing strength and liveliness of faith and hope, of love and joy. How amazing is that compassion, which induced him to take notice

\* Collect for St. Matthias's Day.

of our wretched case! How should that depth of humiliation and suffering, to which he submitted for our recovery, endear him to us! How should that tenderness of regard, with which he provides for all the various cases of his people, encourage our trust, and inspire us with confidence! But are we indeed "the sheep of his pasture?" Have we heard his voice, recalling us from our wanderings; and are we now content to abide in his fold? In dependence on him, do we go in and out, and feed upon the rich pastures of his grace? "All we, like sheep, have gone astray;" let us "now return unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls\*," and pray that others also, though far off, may be brought nigh, and made one with us in him.

Our Lord's declarations produced different sentiments in his hearers. Some turned away from him with disgust, and in a contemptuous manner derided him as a demoniac and a madman, unworthy of any serious attention. But there were those who judged more favourably of him, both from the doctrines he advanced, and the miracles he wrought. Thus, also, the faithful preaching of the Gospel generally creates a division. It is no uncommon thing for men to speak evil of what they understand not, and to vent their enmity against the zealous advocate for Christ, by scornful reproaches similar to those which were cast upon Him. And yet, such is the force of the truth, that, even in the midst of much opposition, some will be so impressed with it, as to exert their influence in its support. Let us "take heed how we hear," and examine for ourselves, without being biassed by the objections of others.

Jesus was walking in the portico which surrounded the temple, probably soon after his preceding discourse, when many of the Jews came about him, though with no friendly disposition. They desired a still plainer declaration from himself, whether or no he was the Messiah; and it is likely that they

\* Isa. liii. 6. 1 Pet. ii. 25.



wished for it, as a ground of accusation against him. Jesus, therefore, reproved them for their unbelief, in disregarding his former claims, and referred them to his works, for a full demonstration of his divine character. He showed their baseness in continuing to reject him, notwithstanding such accumulated evidence. It was a conduct which clearly proved that they belonged not to that favoured company, the sheep of his flock, all of whom acknowledge him as their Leader and Commander, receiving his doctrines, and obeying his directions. These, however reproached by men, he affirmed to be the objects of his peculiar notice, and secure, under the protection of his almighty arm, from the assaults of their most powerful enemies. He has redeemed them to himself, and engaged to rescue them from every danger, and conduct them to the possession of eternal life. He added, that the omnipotence of the Father is pledged for their defence, since he and the Father "are ONE," not in design only, but in nature and perfection, the same infinite and uncontrollable Being. As Jehovah, therefore, cannot be overcome, his people are invincible.

How clear and express the declaration! Mysterious we allow it to be; for we pretend not to comprehend the divine essence, or to explain in what manner this union can subsist. But we maintain the real and proper deity of the Saviour, on the authority of this infallible word; nor dare we make any difference or inequality, where the Scriptures have forbidden it. We confess our obligation to "honour the Son, even as we honour the Father," and derive the strongest hope and consolation from the important doctrine.

This high claim gave great offence; and so it has ever done; but the furious opposition of men ought not to deter us from the cordial reception of the truth of God. The Jews took up stones to stone him, as they had done on a former occasion\*. What a tremendous sight was this! Sinners rising up with

\* John viii. 59.—Sect. 23.

murderous rage against the Saviour, and arming themselves for the destruction of "the Holy One of God!" Why did he not crush them in a moment, and consume them in their iniquity? Or why does he bear with our perverseness? Only because he is "the Lord, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy\*." With astonishing composure and mildness, he stood to expostulate with them on their unreasonable conduct in recompensing all his benevolent actions with such barbarity. They pretended, indeed, a religious zeal; for they considered him, by what he had said, as "making himself equal with God." Now, had they mistaken his meaning, is it not in the highest degree improbable that he should suffer them to continue in such an error, without contradicting it? Yet in his reply he did not renounce, but confirmed and vindicated, his claim.

He argued, that kings and rulers were in their Scriptures called "gods†," as representatives of Jehovah; but that he was infinitely superior to them, and came, in a character peculiar to himself, immediately from the highest heavens; and therefore that he ought not to be treated as a blasphemer for asserting his proper title and dignity. In support of it, he solemnly appealed again to his works, which he called the works of his Father, being such as none but Jehovah could perform, and maintained from them what he had before affirmed, that he and the Father are one. This, surely, was clear and decisive; nor can there need a comment to deduce the Godhead of Christ from these repeated declarations. The Jews under-

\* Psal. ciii. 8.

† Psal lxxxii. 6 It is supposed by some that magistrates obtained this high appellation only as types of the Redeemer, and as an intimation that He would really be very God in himself, whereas they were styled so merely with a reference to him. Accordingly, our Lord's argument has been expounded with a view to this sense; and the interpretation certainly deserves serious consideration.



stood him as advancing this very doctrine, though they determined, through their pride and ignorance, to reject it; and therefore they renewed their attempts to destroy him. By a miracle, however, as on other similar occasions\*, he escaped from their violence, since he had yet a few months longer to continue his labours on the earth.

A proper opportunity is here offered us to warn those of their danger who oppose the divinity of the Son of God. Beware, lest, sinning as the Jews did, you "fall after the same example of unbelief." If their spirit and conduct were so odious, can yours be acceptable, to him? Your error, if persevered in, will be destructive; for you cannot possess right affections towards the Saviour, nor yield him that reverence and submission which he demands, unless you acknowledge that he "is over all, God blessed for ever†." For the present he bears with your petulance and folly in resisting his claims; but at length he will arise to vindicate his right, to the everlasting confusion of all his enemies.

We have only to add, that when Jesus withdrew from this persecution at Jerusalem, he retired to a distant part, even beyond Jordan, where John had formerly exercised his ministry. There many resorted to him, having been prepared, as it should seem, by the testimony of the Baptist, to receive him. These therefore, without hesitation, believed on him, while the great and learned at Jerusalem rejected him with scorn. Thus the sin of some persons may eventually become the salvation of others. "The kingdom of God," when taken from those who oppose, is given to such as will thankfully submit to it. Happy the people beyond Jordan, who were favoured with the presence of the Saviour, because they knew the time of their visitation! Let us fear for ourselves and our country, lest our perverseness should provoke him to depart from us; and therefore let us yield all serious attention to the word of truth, which we hear. O

\* Luke iv. 30. John viii. 59.

† Rom. x. 5.

Lord,

Lord, withdraw not the Gospel of thy grace, nor the influence of thy Spirit, from us! Here fix thine abode, and make us willing and obedient in the day of thy power. May we be added as faithful members to thy church on earth, and conducted to thy heavenly kingdom, there to behold thy glory, and praise thee as one with the Father, world without end! Amen.



## JESUS CHRIST.

### SECT. 29.

*Jesus answered inquiries about divorces—showed a tender regard to little children—replied to a young ruler—warned his disciples of the danger of riches—delivered the parable of the labourers in the vineyard—hastened to Jerusalem to suffer—cured two blind men near Jericho.*

THE enemies of Christ, even while they seem to prevail, are subservient to his purposes: by their opposition to the truth, they are eventually the cause of its more extensive promulgation. Thus, we have seen, when Jesus was driven away from Jerusalem, the people beyond Jordan received the benefit of his ministry. To them he imparted his blessings with a liberal hand; for he was followed by great multitudes, whom he instructed in the mysteries of his kingdom, and healed of their various bodily diseases\*.

Hither also the malice of the Pharisees pursued him. They came with an intention of drawing him into some difficulty, or of prejudicing the people against him. They pretended to consult him on the subject of divorces, and asked whether it were allowable for a man to dismiss his wife for every trifling reason. He knew their malevolent designs, and yet condescended to answer their inquiries. He referred them to the original institution of marriage, as delivered in their own Scriptures, with which, he argued, the separations so prevalent among them were totally inconsistent. To this it was objected,

\* Matt. xix. 1—12. Mark x. 1—12.

that

that Moses had countenanced those divorces by an express law for the purpose \*. Jesus replied, that a permission of that kind had indeed been granted to their nation, "on account of the hardness of their hearts," which might have produced worse mischiefs, but that such a toleration was repugnant to the first appointment of the sacred union.

The disciples resumed the subject in private, when he solemnly declared, that, if either of the parties so bound together put away the other (excepting only for the cause of unfaithfulness), and entered into a fresh connexion, it was adultery in the sight of God. The representation appeared so severe, that they judged it advisable to decline an engagement which could not be annulled. But this was a wrong conclusion: for our Lord observed, that, though various reasons might lead men to celibacy, it should not be imposed upon any, and that those, who preferred it with a view of devoting themselves more entirely to God, should possess peculiar grace, suited to the circumstances of that state.

This may seem an uninteresting topic to some readers: but the licentiousness of the present age renders it in an especial manner necessary. "Marriage is honourable in all †:" yet few, we apprehend, proceed to it under the influence of right motives, in the fear of God, or with a real regard to their spiritual welfare. A sudden and capricious attachment, the gratification of libidinous desires, worldly expectations or convenience, are the grounds on which most persons connect themselves together; and in such cases, as there is no firmness of virtuous principle, the bond of union is more liable to be broken. Disappointments ensue, disgust arises, a freedom of intercourse becomes irksome, a separation is eagerly wished for, and consequences, most destructive to religion and society, take place. How frequent are such instances among us, particularly in what is called fashionable life! So numerous are the appli-

\* Deut. xxiv. 1.

† Heb. xiii. 4.



cations for divorces to one branch of our legislature, as to constitute no small part of the deliberations of that august body. The many examples of contention and impurity, which are thus brought to light, stain the records of Parliament, disgrace our profession of the Gospel, and expose our nation to the judgments of an incensed God.

How much care and circumspection, then, are necessary in the choice of a partner, with whom we are to spend our days! If we would attain real and abiding happiness in such a connexion, it is indispensably requisite that our inclinations be regulated according to the will of God, that we seek his direction and blessing, and aim at his glory. Those, also, who are bound together by the marriage covenant, should maintain a constant vigilance over themselves, lest, by any part of their spirit and conduct, they should excite disgust in each other, and render their union painful. Let them learn to "bear one another's burdens," and, by the exercise of patience, forbearance, and love, promote their mutual comfort and advancement in the road to heaven.

The dread of inconveniences and trials should not, however, deter men from that which is God's own institution, and for which our very nature is formed. Few, we fear, continue single on real principles of religion: few possess the grace which is necessary for that state. The celibacy of many, it is evident, leads to licentiousness; and therefore it is their sin and reproach. While they boast of their liberty, and rove at large for the indulgence of their passions, they are hastening their own perdition, and with much assiduity laying snares for the unwary, whose bodies and souls are sacrificed for a vile and momentary gratification. What aggravated guilt is here!

During our Lord's continuance in the same neighbourhood, the inhabitants regarded him with such veneration, that many presented to him their tender offspring, who were not capable of profiting by his instructions,

instructions, requesting his solemn benediction and devout intercessions for them\*. The disciples would have prevented it, and put them from him, unwilling that their Master's time should be occupied with infants, as he had other more important business to employ him. Jesus, however, showed much displeasure at their officious interposition, and commanded that even the youngest children should be allowed a free access to him, inasmuch as the kingdom of God should consist of such members. He declared, also, as he had done before, that no person can belong to that holy community, who is not brought to a simplicity of disposition resembling that of a little child. With the greatest complacency, therefore, and most amiable condescension, he took them up in his arms, and pronounced his blessing on them.

This occurrence may seem trifling, but it is replete with instruction. It should endear the Saviour to us, when we observe such decisive proofs of the meekness and compassion of his character. And, since Jesus allows and invites those of tenderest age to come unto him, affirming them to be capable of being received into his kingdom, shall we forbid their admission into his church, and exclude those whom he has not excluded? The argument drawn from this passage in favour of infant baptism, though not direct, appears conclusive; for why did he show such a regard to infants, but because they were the proper objects of his care and love, and might partake of his grace? Parents, therefore, may be encouraged to present their offspring to Christ, and entreat his kind attention to them. They may solemnly devote them to him in his covenant by the initiating ordinance of baptism. That rite is to the father of a Christian family what circumcision was to the father of a Jewish. We believe that our whole house will be an acceptable offering to him, and re-

\* Matt. xix. 13—15. Mark x. 13—16. Luke xviii. 15—17.



joice that "the promise is unto us and to our children \*."

The representation here given seems particularly suited to engage the notice of our youngest readers, and to such we would apply it. Inconsiderable as you may be thought in the world, you are not beneath the Saviour's regard. Let nothing, then, keep you from his arms, which stand open to receive you. While you hear him say, "Suffer them to come unto me, and forbid them not," be encouraged to have recourse to him, whoever would prevent your approach. Cast yourselves before him, and implore his blessing. Surrender up your hearts, in willing subjection, that he may attach them to himself, and accomplish in you the purposes of his mercy. Though your years have been few, you stand in need of redemption through his blood, and the sanctification of his Spirit; nor will his grace be denied you, while you wait in humble faith and fervent prayer before him.

As he was departing from the place in which the last occurrence happened, a certain person came running to him, evidently with much eagerness, and with profound veneration, acknowledging him as a divine teacher. He kneeled down at his feet, and desired information from him on a subject of all others the most important †. "Good Master," said he, "what good thing shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?" Here, then, was a candidate for heaven, of a most promising appearance. He was young, yet not addicted to sensual pleasures, for he attended with great exactness to the duties of morality, and discovered a serious concern about his future state. He was a ruler, a magistrate of some consequence, and possessed of considerable wealth. Yet, unlike the generality of those in high life, he applied to Jesus, not with a disposition to cavil, but, as it should seem, with a desire of being instructed in the way of salvation.

\* Acts ii. 39.

† Matt. xix. 16, &c. Mark x. 17-31. Luke xviii. 19-30.

The case was hopeful; and, from such a view, we might have been ready to conclude that the man was a real convert. But a little experience will teach us not to be precipitate in our judgment, nor to rest with implicit confidence in any favourable appearances. Jesus, who knew perfectly the bent of his mind, dealt with him in such a way as to show his true character. He inquired, therefore, why he had given him the title of "good," since it properly belonged only to God. He did not thereby disclaim it, or in the least imply that he possessed not the attributes of deity, but examined on what ground the amiable youth had so addressed him, and whether he had done it on a full conviction of his dignity. The ruler, probably, was elated with a conceit of his own goodness, and his ability to do every thing required; on which account, to detect his erroneous notions, and evince his deficiencies, Jesus referred him to the law, assuring him that he must keep the commandments, in order to attain eternal life. We cannot so interpret this declaration as to set aside the necessity of believing in the Son of God for salvation, or ascribe to man a power in himself of yielding a complete obedience to his Maker. But there is a peculiar propriety in putting those, who boast of their own righteousness and strength, upon considering the extent of their duty. We exhort them to bring forth their best performances, that they may compare them with the appointed rule, and to try what their most vigorous exertions can effect. "Keep the commandments;" but let one precept as well as another be regarded, and that in the utmost extent, so as to regulate your inward affections no less than your outward practice. Such an unfeigned and perfect compliance is required from you at all times and in all circumstances, without weariness or interruption, even to your latest hour. Upon the least failure, you are rendered incapable of being justified by the works of the law, and, though decent and orderly in your conduct, can obtain forgiveness no otherwise than



than by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, through the blood of his cross.

This young person, not knowing himself and the defects of his obedience, presumptuously boasted that he had, from his earliest years, performed every duty enjoined in the second table, to which he was referred; and, in the vain confidence of his own sufficiency, he then asked whether any thing further could be demanded of him. Ah! how gross the darkness, how fatal the delusion, by which men are so exalted in themselves as to say, "I am innocent," or, "What lack I yet?" Jesus, however, looked with compassionate regard on the ruler, whose manners and disposition, in some respects, might be peculiarly engaging. But, as he resisted conviction in one way, he proved him in another, requiring a special testimony of the entire submission of his heart to the divine will. "One thing," said he, "thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor; and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me." The strict injunction was more than the youth could bear, but not more than Jesus had a right to ordain: nor would those refuse to comply with it, who are truly sensible of their own demerit, and the worth of the Saviour. The merchant, who finds the "one pearl of great price," will sell all that he has, and buy it\*: for he will say, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord †." Not so he, whom rank and fortune had ennobled. He was disappointed, grieved, confounded; and instantly betrayed what Jesus meant to detect by the trial here proposed, the secret insincerity of his heart. He gave up all further inquiries about the religion of the Gospel; "he went away sorrowful," mortified with the severity of the injunction, regretting his inability to comply, and, if unwilling to part with his pretensions and his hopes, yet still more reluctant

\* Matt. xiii. 46.

† Phil. iii. 8.

to resign his present attachments. He withdrew, preferring the enjoyment of his large possessions to the grace and salvation of Jesus.

Ah! who can refrain from tears, on account of the promising youth thus departing from Christ, and at length, as we fear, perishing in sin? Yet similar cases frequently occur. We would ask all those, who seem desirous to learn the way to heaven, do you unfeignedly consent to the terms which Jesus requires? He does not, indeed, say to you, "Sell whatsoever thou hast;" but he will certainly call you to make some painful sacrifices, as an evidence of your regard to him. You must, at least, be ready to relinquish the dearest objects in life, if he shall so appoint; nor are any of his disciples exempted from the obligation of taking up the cross, and following him through shame, contempt, and suffering. If you comply not with his demands, whatever they may be, you lack the one thing, an integrity of heart, an unreserved submission to him, for which no compensation can be allowed. Would you, then, depart from him? O, think again what the consequences must be! Those who know your danger tremble and weep for you, though you feel no pity for yourselves.

Jesus, being much affected, directed the attention of all the people, and especially of his disciples, to this occurrence, while he taught them the proper improvement. He declared, such are the snares of riches, such the obstructions which they cause to the spiritual life, that few persons in affluence will be disposed to receive the Gospel, or to pursue that course which alone will conduct them to heaven. Much is to be given up, and many severe struggles to be endured, in all situations; but those whose hearts are attached to their worldly possessions, labour under peculiar difficulties, and it must be a miracle of grace indeed which will enable them to make the necessary sacrifices in the service of God, and for the attainment of his kingdom. The disciples were almost



almost confounded at this intimation, and cried out, with inexpressible astonishment, "Who, then, can be saved?" Jesus replied, that, though the strength of man be insufficient, the power of God will be effectual to accomplish the arduous work. To him, therefore, should our fervent prayers be directed, that by his almighty grace we may resist and overcome the temptations peculiar to our respective circumstances in life.

But, how few are aware of the danger of riches! Instead of fearing, do not almost all eagerly covet, an exalted rank? The affluent, in general, desire no better portion than their temporal possessions, and consider not that these may be the means of excluding them from the happiness of heaven. On the very same principle, also, the poor repine at the appointment of God, when they ought to be thankful that he has placed them in a situation the most favourable to religion. Surely we should be more anxious for spiritual advantages than those which are merely secular, and pray to be preserved from the love of money, through which so many have forsaken Christ, and perished eternally.

Upon Peter's remarking that he and his brethren the Apostles had renounced all their worldly occupations, in their attachment to their Master, Jesus assured them, that at the final consummation, when he himself shall appear upon the throne of his glory, they shall obtain a distinguished honour, and sit with him in judgment on the twelve tribes of Israel. He added also, for the encouragement of others, that those, who incur any losses or sufferings for his sake, shall gain an abundant recompense, inasmuch as they shall receive even here what will be a hundred-fold better to them in real substantial happiness, and everlasting life hereafter. Yet, in order to excite a holy jealousy in all his followers, he declared that many, who may now seem the foremost in profession and privileges, shall in the end be found the furthest from God; and that some of those, who are thought the most unlikely to be

be admitted into heaven, shall shine the brightest in it. O, what "great searchings of heart" should this produce in us! Are we acting agreeably to our high character, and the peculiar advantages we enjoy? Are we not afraid, lest they, upon whom we look down with contempt for their supposed inferiority, should excel us in every good attainment? May not our very opportunities for improvement increase our future condemnation?

To illustrate and confirm the solemn admonition, Jesus delivered a parable\*. He compared the dispensation of the Gospel to the conduct of a certain householder, who hired labourers for a stipulated sum to gather in his vintage. The engagement was made with some of the servants in the morning, but with others at different hours, as at the third, the sixth, the ninth, and even at the eleventh hour. Yet at the final reckoning there was no discrimination between them, the last being as acceptable, and receiving the same wages, as the first. This gave great offence; for it was thought unjust that those who had been employed the whole day should obtain no superior distinction above such as had wrought only a small part of it. The master, however, vindicated his own proceeding on this ground, that he had done no injury to any of them, and that, as he had an absolute right to bestow his favours where he pleased, none ought to object to that particular kindness with which some were treated.

We cannot be at a loss for the proper application. The Lord God by his word calls us to a laborious service; and, till we obey that call, we are idle as to the great business of life. He has sent out his messages of mercy to different nations at different periods of the world. The Jews were first admitted into the church; and the Gentiles, though they resembled the workmen who were hired at the last hour, obtained equal privileges. In like manner, also, persons are brought under the influence of divine grace at various

\* Matt. xx. 1—16.



ages; some being sanctified from their very infancy, while others, after a long course of profligacy, almost in a dying state, are recovered and saved. Many objections are raised against such a dispensation; and the arrogance of men presumes to call the God of heaven to account. The Jews could not bear that the Heathens should be fellow-heirs with them. The Pharisees, likewise, quarrelled with the Saviour, because publicans and sinners met with a favourable acceptance from him: and to this day there are those who think it dishonourable to his character to take such into his family as have grown old in the service of iniquity.

Is not this conduct, then, to be vindicated? We perceive the sovereignty and freeness of his grace; and ought it not to excite our admiration, love, and praise? Surely he has a right to call what persons, and by whatsoever methods, he shall please. If we be the distinguished objects of this mercy, we should feel the strongest emotions of gratitude; nor shall we have any cause to complain, though others, in a condition seemingly more desperate, be saved upon the same terms with ourselves, or even be preferred before us. Shall we dictate to him how to dispense those favours which none can claim? And would it not argue an odious malevolence in us to murmur at his extensive kindness towards those who have been most abandoned? If that be our temper, it is probable that some whom we may despise for their ignorance and profaneness may enter into heaven, and we ourselves, with our presumptuous expectations, be forever cast out. Let us not depend upon an external profession: among the thousands, to whom the Gospel invitation is published, but few comparatively are chosen to final salvation.

At length our Lord departed from the country, to which he had fled, and set out on his last journey to Jerusalem\*. He knew that the appointed time of his sufferings approached; and yet, with a full view

\* Matt. xx. 17—28. Mark x. 32—46. Luke xviii. 31—34.

of all that was coming upon him, he hastened to finish his work. So great was his ardour in advancing towards the murderous city, where he was to lay down his life, that his disciples, being aware of danger, were filled with amazement, and terrified at the prospect before them, as they followed him in the way. To prepare them for the awful scene, he reminded them of the calamities which awaited him; and predicted, in a clear and circumstantial manner, that he should be betrayed, condemned, delivered to the Roman power, mocked, scourged, spit upon, and taken off by the ignominious and excruciating death of the cross; yet he added, that he should be finally victorious by rising again on the third day. This was a remarkable prophecy, express, and frequently repeated; but even the twelve could not comprehend its meaning, which was rendered obscure by its repugnance to their prejudices and expectations. Let us contemplate the love of the Redeemer, till our hearts burn within us. How great was his eagerness to accomplish our salvation, since his alacrity and vigour increased as he saw his agonies approaching! Let us not shrink from his service, though we may meet with severe and complicated trials, but go forth with cheerfulness and zeal to the work assigned us, content to "suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together\*."

But what do we hear, after this solemn declaration? A most unseasonable petition was presented to Jesus from two of the Apostles. James and John solicited, through their mother, that they might possess the chief posts in his kingdom. Probably they still retained the expectation of his erecting a temporal dominion, and wished to secure the highest preferment. Considering the persons from whom the request came, and the occasion on which it was offered, we cannot but be astonished. Yet the ignorance, pride, and perverseness, which remain in the best characters, will sufficiently account for the inconsistency.

\* Rom. viii. 17.



Jesus very sharply reproved them for their unsuitable and ill-timed application, and warned them that they should soon be called to partake with him of extreme sufferings, which with a vain self-confidence they professed their readiness to do; but he declared that the chief honours of his kingdom were already disposed of in the counsels of his Father. The ten other Apostles were also displeased with them for the desire they had expressed; but even in this, it should seem, they too discovered a temper of mind equally blamable, as being actuated by envy and resentment. O Lord, subdue in us all carnal affections! For, while we behold such a strength of corruption in thy favoured companions, we tremble for ourselves.

There was a suitable occasion, and Jesus embraced it, for inculcating those dispositions and principles which discriminate and adorn his people. He showed, that, instead of that thirst for power and worldly distinctions which prevailed among the Heathens, they should possess a peculiar humility and meekness, a willingness to give up their own ease and consequence, and a readiness to submit to the meanest and most arduous services, for the real interest and happiness of others. He himself had set them an example of this generous condescension, in relinquishing a state of glory, appearing in the very lowest condition upon earth, and consenting to ransom the captive souls of men at the price of his own blood. If we, then, profess to follow the Saviour, we see what tempers become us. And are we willing to forego our own accommodations, that we may render ourselves useful in the world? Is the pride of our hearts subdued? Do we indulge no ambitious desires or expectations? Is "nothing done through strife or vain glory?" And do we "mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate\*?" These inquiries will show that few resemble the meek and suffering Saviour, and that there is very little of genuine practical Christianity among us.

\* Phil. ii. 3. Rom. xii. 16.

Jesus passed through Jericho towards Jerusalem, and as he went out of that city, attended as usual by a large company, an opportunity was offered for the display of his power and compassion. Two distressed objects\*, totally deprived of sight, sat by the road, imploring relief; and, learning that Jesus of Nazareth was at hand (of whose character and miraculous operations they had been previously informed), they exclaimed aloud, professing their faith in him as the promised Messiah, and earnestly soliciting his merciful interposition in their favour. They were reprov'd by the multitude, and charged to desist from their clamour. Feeling, however, the urgency of their own case, they renewed their petition with the greater importunity, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David!" A cry like this he never disregarded, and therefore, with the most gracious condescension, when he had called them to him, he granted their request. Immediately, by his touch, he restored their sight, and gave a public approbation of their dependence upon him. Nor was this all: his love won their hearts, and constrained them to follow him, while with gratitude and joy they glorified God for their great deliverance.

Are not we, also, under the strongest obligations to adore, and praise, and serve this merciful Redeemer? We cannot too frequently remark that we all stand in need of his help, if not for the cure of an afflicted body, yet for the removal of our spiritual maladies. And here we have an emblem of one great blessing which he bestows, and of his kind attention to every distressed suppliant. He renews our disordered faculties, and refits them for their proper use: He "openeth the eyes of the blind."

You, therefore, who hear that Jesus passeth by, implore the effectual interposition of his power and

\* Matt. xx. 29, &c. Mark x. 46, &c. Luke xviii. 35, &c.—St. Mark and St. Luke mention but one of these cases, and St. Mark introduces the very name of this beggar, Bartimeus, the son of Timeus, probably because he was the most noted person, and the chief speaker upon the occasion.



compassion in your behalf. O, cry to him, and never cease your importunate requests till he vouchsafe a gracious answer. There are those, perhaps, who will rebuke you, and charge you to desist. But, instead of being thereby deterred, be excited to pray the more fervently, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on us." He will listen to your voice, and permit you to spread your wants before him. Is it not your desire that he would communicate spiritual light to your minds? He will readily grant it, if only you can depend upon him. Then, having obtained the object of your petition, endeavour to show your gratitude to your heavenly Benefactor. Follow him in the way wherein he leads, praise him for his mercy, and testify his goodness to others, that they also may be induced to give glory to his name. The Son of David is worthy to receive all honour, and love, and worship, and obedience, throughout all generations. Amen.

## JESUS CHRIST.

## SECT. 30.

*Jesus visited Zaccheus the publican, who became a true convert; and, as he approached to Jerusalem, he delivered the parable of the ten pounds.*

THE city of Jericho had been formerly rendered famous by the remarkable triumph which Joshua there obtained. In this same spot the Lord Jesus triumphed by his grace, and erected a trophy in proof of his victory over Satan. He had already manifested his high character, in the confines of the town, by giving sight to the blind: but a more illustrious instance of his power and mercy is now to be exhibited, in the conversion of a notorious sinner. Let us "praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men." How many witnesses declare that He is "mighty to save!" Every fresh example encourages our application to him and dependence upon him. May his Spirit work effectually in us, that, while we contemplate his free and extensive kindness to others, we also may partake of his great salvation!

As Jesus passed through Jericho, he was attended by an immense concourse of people. Perhaps, also, the miracle which he wrought there added to his train. One of this numerous company is selected for our peculiar notice; and his case is considered by the sacred historian as so interesting, that it is introduced with a mark of admiration\*. "Behold, there was a man named Zaccheus, which was the chief

\* Luke xix. 1—10.



among the publicans, and he was rich." By his rank in life, as principal of the tax-gatherers, having many collectors under him, he possessed no small influence, and had raised an ample fortune. A situation this, most unfavourable to religion! Power and wealth are great hinderances in the way of salvation: those who are most exalted in the world seem the furthest removed from the very means of conversion. They are, as it were, fenced round with strong barriers, which prevent an access to their hearts. When such persons, therefore, become "obedient to the faith," the hand of the Lord is illustriously displayed in the change. His grace is effectual to surmount all difficulties; when he is pleased to work, none shall let it\*: "even the rich among the people shall entreat in his favour†."

But Zaccheus had, also, been a man of base character and iniquitous conduct, covetous, unjust, and oppressive. And some may be ready to ask, Can such an one obtain mercy? Or is it probable that Jesus should ever look with a favourable regard upon him? Yes: the very man before us is singled out as a monument of his mercy, in order to show that he can pardon, sanctify, and save, the chief of sinners.

Zaccheus, it should seem, sought not for any acquaintance with Jesus, but, probably, was induced by mere curiosity to mix with the multitude, that he might gain a sight of the remarkable Person of whom he had heard so much. But not being able to gratify his wishes, on account of the crowd and his own diminutive size, he mounted up into a tree by the side of the road, that he might have a distinct view. Jesus observed him, and called to him by name, desiring him to come down, and expressing an intention of being his guest. Thus our Lord was the first to propose the visit; and, by this unsolicited favour, he "prevented him with the blessings of goodness."

\* Isa. xliii. 12.

† Psal. xlv. 12.

We rejoice when the careless and profane are brought by any motive to attend where Jesus vouchsafes his presence. Very frequently they obtain those benefits which they never coveted or sought. Various inducements may lead them to the place, where the divine ordinances are administered, and the truth of the Gospel is faithfully declared; such as general custom, habits of education, the solicitations of others, some strange reports about the preacher or the doctrine, and an inquisitive desire to know what can attract so large a concourse of people. Now, however weak or wrong these reasons may be, we would still encourage them to come and show themselves, where the Saviour passeth by. Perhaps he may unexpectedly look upon them, and reveal himself to them, as he did to Zaccheus. Thus, in many cases, repentance, faith, and love, have been suddenly produced under those means which were first resorted to through an idle curiosity. They who meant to be mere spectators, or captious critics, have found themselves deeply interested: their hearts have been instantly impressed and changed, so that they have departed with sentiments and dispositions very different from those which they brought with them. Jesus beholds them with compassion, and, even before they offer up a prayer to him, speaks effectually to their consciences, and attaches them inseparably to himself. In the conversion of every sinner the unmerited grace of God is gloriously displayed: but in these instances more especially it appears at once that "boasting is excluded;" and that their love to the Saviour is properly the fruit of his love to them; that "they have not chosen him, but he hath chosen them \*."

The call was no sooner given to Zaccheus than it was cheerfully obeyed: and it is of importance to remark the astonishing alteration which he immediately discovered. The effect, however, must be ascribed, not only to the word of Christ, but to the divine

\* John xv. 16.



Spirit, which rendered that word so powerful. With eager haste the rich publican came down from the tree, where he had taken his place, and received his illustrious Guest with impressions of lively joy. He could not but be surprised to hear a perfect stranger to him, as he might conceive, addressing him by name, and proposing to abide at his house : but it is evident that he instantly felt a conviction of the high dignity of the Personage before him, and considered the offer as an act of gracious condescension. His heart, therefore, being first opened, he was glad to admit the divine Visitant within his doors, and thought himself honoured by his presence.

Is this the reception which the Saviour meets with among ourselves? How few yield a ready obedience to his word! "He hath called, but we refused: He hath stretched out his hand, and no man regarded \*." Is there, even with you who profess an attention to his Gospel, any thing like that affectionate attachment to him which Zaccheus showed? Would you consent that he should abide with you; and would you rejoice to furnish an entertainment for him? He is, indeed, removed from the earth; but you have many of his representatives around you, and you are required to evince your love for him by your kindness to them. Do you, then, search out his poor members, that you may minister to their necessities? Do you embrace every opportunity of relieving them? And are you thankful for the exalted privilege? This fruit of divine grace we observe in Zaccheus. While he made a public confession of his former wickedness before Jesus and all the company, he wished to testify the sincerity of his repentance. He, whose grand object had been to amass worldly treasures, was no sooner acquainted with the Saviour, than he expressed a willingness to give up a large share of his wealth for the support of the indigent. He declared his determination to consecrate his substance to the Lord, by devoting even the half of it to charitable purposes.

\* Prov. i. 24.

The same extensive distribution, according to that exact division of our property, is not binding upon us. But we are strangers to the love of Christ, if we shut up our bowels of compassion from the afflicted, nay, if we do not "open our hand wide unto them," as God hath prospered us. Ah! how many warm advocates for the Gospel betray their insincerity by "having a heart exercised with covetous practices"†.

But you are required to be just as well as liberal; for God says, "I hate robbery for burnt-offering‡." If there be any dishonest gain in your possession, if you have enriched yourselves by fraud or extortion, it is surely known unto God, and an explicit confession should be made. Thus the publican acknowledged his baseness in oppressing the people by a violent and injurious execution of his office. But you must do more than merely declare your sorrow for the past. Nor is it enough for "him that stole to steal no more;" you must not retain in your hands what you have wrongfully taken from another. Suppose not that by giving a pittance of it to the poor your guilt will be expiated: for such charity is continued theft. It is not yours to bestow: it is another's property, and, if you can find the owner, you must restore it.

This strong and necessary evidence of sincere contrition appeared in Zaccheus. "I am ready," said he, "not only to relinquish the full amount of what I have gained from any person by false charges, but to return him four times as much‡." In many cases it may be difficult to settle what particular compensation is proper: and we fear that few are troubled with any scruples upon the subject. But let every reader make a faithful appeal to his conscience, and attend to its report. Have all your past transactions been conducted according to the rules of truth and equity? Have you no painful remembrance of any fraud or extortion which you have practised? And are you not concerned to make all possible repara-

2 Pet. ii. 14.

† Isa. lxi. 9.

‡ See Lev. vi. 1-5.



tion for whatever injuries you have done? If you refuse this as a degree of preciseness which is needless or absurd, talk not of your Christianity; your hypocrisy is most glaring. "Go your way; first be reconciled to your brother," by offering restitution and satisfaction, according to your ability, before you pretend to devotion.

Jesus himself, who knew "what was in man," bore an unquestionable testimony in favour of Zaccheus, declaring that he had that day obtained salvation, and proved himself a real child of Abraham. This could not be on account of his descent merely, but because he had the faith of Abraham, and experienced the renovation of the Holy Ghost. Probably he arose in the morning ignorant, careless, and profane; but before night how great a change took place! he received a new heart, the forgiveness of his sins, and the assurance of divine favour. How extensive, and how powerful, is the grace of God! Has it produced such effects as these in us? It is of little consequence whether the transformation be sudden; but is it certain? Has the Saviour visited us with the blessings of redemption? To "as many as receive him he gives power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name \*." "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise †."

Who shall object to this? The very mercy of God, which should draw forth praises from every tongue, frequently excites disgust. Some appear unwilling that atrocious offenders should be saved at all, or, at least, that pardon and eternal life should be offered to them on the same terms as to themselves. There were those who cavilled at the conduct of Jesus for the kind notice which he took of Zaccheus, whose character was generally accounted infamous. But he vindicated himself on this ground, that the very end for which he came into the world was "to seek and to save that which was lost;" and therefore he

\* John i. 12.

† Gal. iii. 29.

was acting agreeably to his grand design, in using means to rescue them from destruction, whose case seemed of all others the most desperate. Justly may we rejoice in this representation. We have no right to despise any persons, as if we might claim a preference; for the whole human race, having departed from God, are equally involved in ruin, and unable to extricate themselves. But Jesus appears for our help, and accomplishes deliverance for us: nor is any sinner sunk so low as to be beyond the reach of his mercy. He proposes salvation to us, and earnestly solicits our acceptance. Various methods he adopts for the recovery of our souls: let us not resist him, but yield ourselves in cheerful subjection to him, that his grace may reign in us unto eternal life.

After the conversion of Zaccheus, Jesus pursued his journey towards Jerusalem. Upon his nearer approach to the city, his followers expected that he would immediately assume the pomp and power of an earthly monarch, and establish an universal government\*. To correct these mistaken notions, he delivered a parable, in which he represented the nature of his dominion, and the opposition made to it, and admonished them that the proper business of his people is not to be solicitous for secular honours, but to employ themselves diligently in their appointed work till he shall come again, when he will receive his faithful servants to himself, and destroy his enemies.

A nobleman, or prince, departed to a distant country, to be invested with full powers for the possession of a kingdom, to which he was heir; and then he proposed to return in all the glory of majesty. But, in the mean time, many of those who, from their peculiar relation to him, were more especially bound to submit to his authority, with great malignity declared their firm determination to resist and reject him in his regal character. This is exactly the case with the Lord Jesus Christ. H

\* Luke xix. 11—28.



is One of illustrious origin, of high descent, as "the Only-begotten of the Father," and "Heir of all things," concerning whom Jehovah himself hath sworn "That unto him every knee shall bow, every tongue confess \*." But his universal sovereignty was not to be established during his abode on earth, which was intended to be a state of profound humiliation. "He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." In order to enter upon his government, it was necessary for him to quit this world, and ascend to his Father: and then the sceptre was delivered into his hands. At the appointed season he will return with all the ensigns of royalty, and with irresistible power. He will come in his glory; and that shall be the day of his triumph.

For the present his dominion is not generally acknowledged. The Jews especially, who were his own people more than others, and ought to have submitted to him with joy, have shown a most malignant opposition to him, and solemnly renounced him as their ruler. But, without further notice of them, the question for ourselves is, Do we reverence the Saviour as we ought in his regal office? The kingdom is His: Do we rejoice in it? Do we cordially consent that "this Man shall reign over us?" Are we looking for his future advent? What reception may we expect from him when he appears? Or, what should be our deportment till he return?

The prince here described left his ten servants behind him, with the care of a certain portion of money. Ten pounds were committed to their management, of which they were charged to make a diligent use during his absence. Under these circumstances the disciples of Jesus are placed. They profess subjection to him, and they should act at his command. Their very name, as they are "servants," implies their obligations to work, agreeably to his directions. They are intrusted with various advantages, one in one way, and another in another; and these they are

\* Isa. xlv. 23. Phil. ii. 10, 11.

required to improve, as men in trade, that they may turn them to the most profitable account. It is intended, indeed, that they, who are faithful to their Master, shall be sharers with him in the future glory of his kingdom: yet for the present they are appointed, not to any high honours or distinctions in the world, as some persons then vainly dreamed, but to a post of labour and difficulty; and their most vigorous efforts are necessary in the business assigned them.

The prince returned in full possession of the sovereignty which he had expected, and strictly examined his servants what benefit had accrued from their use of the money committed to them. Two of the number, by their fidelity and diligence in commerce, had made considerable improvement of their stock, though one of them was far inferior to the other. Both came and acknowledged their obligations to their lord, as if they had said, "We are indebted to thee for the advantages bestowed upon us; and the increase we have gained must be ascribed to thy favour, which enabled us to maintain our occupation, rather than to our own wisdom and good management." The conduct of both was approved, and publicly commended; and they were then appointed to a state of exaltation and dignity, proportioned to their respective exertions and usefulness in the service of their master.

The day of reckoning is at hand, and it will soon appear what good we have done in our place, what profitable purposes have been promoted by our various opportunities. The disciples of Jesus, under the influence of his grace, are all active; and, by a faithful attention to their Lord's concerns, they render themselves a blessing in their generation, though in different ways, and in different degrees. "When he shall appear, they shall have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming." The most eminent of them will not then presume to boast of their own works, or their progress in holiness; but they



they will all praise him for the efficacy of his Spirit in them, and for the advancement of his own glory, by their weak and unworthy efforts. They will say, therefore, "All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee \*." But their labours shall receive a distinguished recompense: Jesus will profess himself well pleased in them, and admit them to a participation of his own honour and felicity, according to the various measures of their zeal and fidelity in his cause. O, be animated, you that serve him, while you "have respect unto the recompense of the reward!" Be roused from your sloth; for are not your languid exertions very unsuitable to such high expectations? Are you trading with your pound to any beneficial purpose? What is the increase which you have gained? O, "be not wearied nor faint in your minds;" but "hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ †!"

A third character, very different from the two preceding, is here also exhibited. He had made no use at all of the advantages intrusted to him; for he had not traded with his pound. He had not, indeed, squandered it away in dissipation, but, neglecting to improve it, "laid it up in a napkin." He is represented as pleading in his own excuse, with great insolence, that his lord was a severe and rigid master, who exacted such services as he had no right to, and for which he would not grant sufficient strength and ability.

This is the case with many who are admired in the world. They are satisfied with doing no harm, and see not their obligations to be active and useful in their Christian calling. They live, therefore, a quiet indolent life, and can scarcely be said to have a place in existence. If we inquire of them why they decline the work of the Lord, they are always ready to complain of insurmountable difficulties, and express hard thoughts of God, as requiring more than is reasonable,

\* 1 Chron. xxix. 14.

† Heb. xii. 3. 1 Pet. i. 13.

and more than they can possibly perform. But, without examining the truth or justice of these pleas, we observe that their very excuses will turn to their own confusion.

The master convicted this indolent man of the most palpable inconsistency, and argued, that, even on his own principles, he ought to have made some use of his money. He declared, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant." Thus it will appear at the last that sinners are not influenced by their own foolish pretences, that their negligence is unpardonable in every view, and that what they urge in their defence will furnish sufficient ground for their condemnation, as evincing their rooted enmity against God.

The pound was taken from him, who was too slothful to improve it, and given as an additional recompense to the person who had been most assiduous. And this, we are assured, is agreeable to the general dispensations of God. He will put the most honourable distinction on them who discover the greatest fidelity and diligence; but those, who through disaffection refuse to exert themselves for him, will be deprived of all their advantages, and never allowed another trial. May we adore his justice, and tremble for ourselves!

The prince, who was heir to the kingdom, was rejected, as we have seen, by his own citizens, who were under peculiar obligations to receive and welcome him. But, when he had assumed his full power, he proceeded to punish their insolence; and, while he vindicated his authority, he destroyed with terrible vengeance those enemies of his government. Thus Jesus predicted, that, though his own nation would openly avow a determined opposition to him, he should come again to assert his supreme dominion, and give them up to the most severe calamities, and to everlasting perdition, for their rebellion against him. This has been in part fulfilled already. The Jews, in their national capacity, renounced the Saviour with



with the utmost malignity, and resisted every effort to establish his kingdom amongst them. But they have felt the weight of his arm. To avenge the insults put upon him, their holy city was ransacked, their temple demolished, their land desolated, their ecclesiastical and civil polity entirely subverted, and a tremendous slaughter, unparalleled in history, nearly completed the ruin of the people.

This alone is enough to strike us with horror; but it is not all. Another and a far more terrible display of his justice, in the punishment of his enemies, remains for his future advent. And in that, not the unbelieving Jews alone, but all in every age and nation who reject the Saviour, will be deeply concerned. Whoever shall be found opposers of his grace, unwilling to bow to his sceptre, shall be brought forth for public execution, a spectacle to the whole universe, and shall feel the fierceness of his anger, in torment inexpressible, for ever and ever. Let every soul, then, yield an immediate and unreserved subjection to this "King of Zion." Constrained by his mercies, as well as awed by his terrors, let us surrender up ourselves to him, that he may reign over us, and prepare us to reign with him. in his glory. Amen.

## JESUS CHRIST.

## SECT. 31.

*Jesus raised Lazarus from the grave—was anointed with costly perfume—rode in triumph to Jerusalem—wept over it—purged the temple.*

A MORE particular account is given us of the circumstances attending and immediately preceding the death of Jesus than of any part of his life. We are approaching to that important period; and, as we accompany him through the awful scene, we shall observe by what steps the surprising event was accomplished. The subject is calculated, not to gratify a vain curiosity, but to impress our minds with seriousness and solemnity.

We have already contemplated our Lord setting out on his last journey to Jerusalem; previous to which, however, an interesting occurrence had called him into the neighbourhood of that city, though he was soon driven back again by the malicious rage of his enemies, and obliged to seek a distant retreat till his appointed hour arrived. That occurrence we shall introduce in this place, as it is so closely connected with the sequel\*.

At Bethany, as we have seen, about two miles from Jerusalem, dwelt a pious and beloved family, who were frequently favoured with his company. Lazarus, the head of the family, was seized with a violent disorder, of which his two affectionate sisters, Mary and Martha, sent information to Jesus, while he remained beyond Jordan. Upon receiving this account, Jesus observed that the sickness would not terminate in Lazarus's final departure from life, but

\* John xi. 1, &c.



was intended to display the character, and exalt the glory, of the Son of God. He meant, therefore, to grant relief; and yet he judged it expedient to try the faith and patience of those, for whom he had the strongest regard, by deferring his aid, and suffering their distress to increase. After two days, and not sooner, he proposed to return into Judea; but the disciples, aware of the malicious designs of his enemies, objected to the plan. He declared, however, that, as the day is the proper time for travellers to prosecute their journey, so he should spend the short residue of his life in a diligent attention to the great business for which he came into the world.

He then intimated to them the situation of Lazarus, and his own intentions respecting him. But his words were not understood till he affirmed more explicitly that Lazarus was dead, and that he considered it as a happy circumstance that he himself was not with him to prevent the change, because their faith would receive an additional confirmation from the miracle of which they were going to be witnesses. Still they thought it extremely dangerous to venture so near to Jerusalem; but Thomas advised that they should cheerfully accompany their dear Master, though the consequence might be fatal to them all.

The affecting narrative will teach even you, whom Jesus loves, not to be surprised if sickness or sore distress come upon you. In your deepest afflictions, you ought not to conclude that he has acted unkindly, or that he will not deliver you. Perhaps you are unwilling to wait for his interposition; and for that very reason it may be delayed till your case may seem desperate. But in the end you shall perceive stronger proofs of his power and grace, and find his mercy the more precious. You shall learn, also, from your Saviour, to improve the hours of the day, and "to walk," while you "see the light of this world;" remembering that all your opportunities of usefulness will be closed when the night of death arrives. You should be roused to diligence and vigour;  
nor

nor should the prospect of dangers intimidate you. Desert not your standard; but determine, like Thomas, to adhere steadfastly to Jesus, and to "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth," even to the severest tortures, or to martyrdom itself.

When they came to Bethany, Lazarus had been four days in his grave; and many friends from Jerusalem were assembled at the house, endeavouring to comfort the mourning sisters for the loss of their brother. Upon an intimation of the approach of Jesus, Martha, with all that eagerness which marked her natural temper, ran to meet him; and, though she seemed to upbraid him for not preventing their distress, she expressed a hope that at his prayer some deliverance might yet be obtained. Her language evinced her faith; but at the same time it betrayed much weakness. Jesus in reply, without reproving her for what was wrong or defective in her principles, declared that Lazarus should rise again; but a resurrection from the dead, merely at the final consummation, was not the relief she wished. He then directed her attention to himself, "as the resurrection and the life," that she might have clearer conceptions of his exalted character, and be so strengthened in her dependence upon him as to expect the miraculous operation, which he meant to perform. His words were most sublime, and replete with instruction of peculiar importance. He assured her, that as the Author, Restorer, and Preserver of life, he has all power in himself to quicken whom he will, and that every believer, by virtue of an union with him, is brought into a state of glorious existence, which death cannot destroy or impair. Upon his inquiring whether she yielded a cordial assent to this interesting truth, she perfectly acquiesced, professing her firm persuasion that he was indeed the promised Saviour, the Son of God.

Have we, likewise, so regarded Jesus, as he is here represented? Behold what honour is due to his name! Is he not to be revered and worshipped as  
"the



"the mighty God," since he vindicates to himself the prerogative of reviving those over whom death has prevailed, and of imparting and supporting a principle of endless life, according to his own sovereign pleasure? Shall we not, then, stand in awe, and confess and adore the Divinity in this exalted Personage? What answer shall we return to the question, "Believest thou this?" It is indispensably necessary for every one to credit his declaration, and rely upon him for the blessing which he proposes to bestow. The promise of salvation, including both spiritual and eternal life, is annexed to faith. If we possess an unreserved dependence upon him, how great is our felicity! We shall feel the quickening energy of his Spirit giving vigour to our souls, and maintaining that vigour against all opposition. Nor shall any thing be able to destroy our union with him. Our present mode of existence may cease, and our bodies be consigned to the grave; but we shall even then enjoy a state of happiness and glory with him; and at the last day "He will swallow up death in victory," "ransom us from the power of the grave," and give us our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in his own everlasting kingdom. What an unfailing source of consolation is here! "Sorrow not," then, believers, "as others which have no hope."

Mary, who seems to have been almost overwhelmed with grief, remained in the house for some time; but at length, being called by her sister, she also ran with eager haste to meet Jesus. The interview then became extremely affecting. The distress of these affectionate relations and their weeping associates excited the tenderest emotions in the Saviour; and thus, while he sympathized with the afflicted, he proved himself a partaker of human nature. Many considerations, probably, upon this mournful occasion, oppressed his mind, and constrained him, as he indulged his compassionate feelings, to burst into tears. He accompanied them to the sepulchre,  
and

and directed the stone to be removed. Martha objected that the body was become offensive, evidently implying that deliverance could not then be effected: but Jesus immediately reproved her for her unbelief. Standing by the tomb, with uplifted eyes to heaven, he gave thanks to his Father for granting his requests, and for the present opportunity of displaying his glory; and with a divine majesty, as the supreme Almighty Lord, "to whom belong the issues from death," he commanded the grave to release its prisoner. At this powerful word Lazarus came forth with life, and health, and vigour.

O, what surprise, and joy, and gratitude, must have overwhelmed the dear friends, upon the miraculous restoration of him whom they so tenderly loved, and had considered as irrecoverably removed from their society! Doubtless they looked up with admiration, love, and praise, to the great Deliverer. But how much more illustrious the triumph when ALL the saints of God shall be raised incorruptible, each of them clothed with a splendour resembling the sun in the firmament! Then also the eyes of the whole redeemed company shall be fixed on the Saviour with unutterable ecstasy, and the glory shall be ascribed to him, who is "the resurrection and the life."

Will not this be allowed as an unquestionable evidence of our Lord's divine character? Who can withstand the testimony of one that arose from the dead? Will not all be constrained to yield unfeigned reverence and submission to the Son of God? Many of those who were present felt a forcible conviction from the view of the miracle, and immediately believed on him. But, oh! the blindness and obduracy of the human heart! External proofs are not sufficient to produce the efficacious principle of faith; the mighty power of God is requisite to implant the proper disposition of mind. Some, who were witnesses of the wondrous fact, carried information of it to his avowed adversaries, and, as it should



should seem, with the malevolent intention of exciting opposition against him. At their report the grand council of the sanhedrim was assembled, to consult upon the steps necessary to be taken for obviating his increasing popularity. The result of their deliberation was, to endeavour by some method or other to destroy him; and in this they were directed by the advice of Caiaphas, the high-priest, who spake by a divine impulse what he did not understand, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. But vain were all their designs of violence till his hour came. He retired to Ephraim, a distant city, not far from the river Jordan, where he lay concealed till within a few days of his last pass-over, when he surrendered himself to their malice.

Let us meditate on the unbelief and obstinacy of the Jews, not that we may frame any bitter invectives against them, but that we may fear for ourselves. Their case furnishes the most solemn admonition. Let us beware of resisting the evidences which are set before us, lest we be given up to a similar obduracy. Let us pray that God would put forth his power, in subduing our natural depravity; for it requires the same almighty energy, which raised Lazarus from the grave, to bring us into a state of unfeigned subjection to the Saviour. Thus may we be constrained to trust, and love, and serve him, and to glory in him as "the Author of eternal salvation!"

Jesus, who withdrew from persecution, has taught us to be prudent in consulting our safety, when no express duty makes it proper to hazard it. But his example likewise instructs us to face the most formidable dangers with firmness and intrepidity, in obedience to the will of God. At the appointed season, he kept not back from the murderous city, where his enemies thirsted for his blood; though he had all his sufferings full in his view, he advanced to meet them with cheerfulness and courage.

Six days before the passover he returned to Bethany, whence he had been driven by the violence of the

the Jews \*. In that town an entertainment was provided for him in the house of Simon, who, from his surname, had probably once been a leper. Lazarus, also, whom he had raised from the grave, was one of the guests upon that occasion; and Martha discovered her attachment by waiting upon him. Mary, the other sister of Lazarus, that she might testify her affectionate regard and high veneration, procured a box of expensive ointment, composed of rich perfumes: part she poured upon his head, and with the remainder anointed his feet, wiping them at the same time with her flowing hair. The action was extraordinary, and so were the circumstances. We must ascribe it, doubtless, to the most excellent principles, which rendered it acceptable to Jesus. Such was her fervent love, that she spared no cost to give a striking proof of it; such her deep humility, that she wished to perform the meanest as well as the kindest office for him.

But her conduct disgusted some, even of the disciples, who probably condemned it as wild and extravagant. Judas, in particular, objected to her from the basest motives; while he pretended, what he never felt, a tender concern for the poor, and argued that the price of the ointment had better have been devoted to charitable uses; he meant to appropriate it to his own use. Jesus, however, who knew the purity of her intentions, and the strength of her regard for him, undertook her defence. He justified and commended the action, as being well suited to his dying situation, and, as it were, an embalming of his body, preparatory to his burial. He observed, that opportunities of relieving indigence continually occur, which should draw forth the benevolence of his people; but that, as he was soon to leave them, and few more occasions of ministering to him would be afforded, some extraordinary marks of respect might properly be paid him at that time. He declared also, to show his gracious acceptance of her

\* Matt. xxvi. 6—13. Mark xiv. 3—9. John xii. 1—11.



love, that, wherever the Gospel should be published, her affection for him should be celebrated.

This little narrative will furnish an instructive lesson. Let us not precipitately or warmly censure those zealous exertions in the service of Christ which may appear to us needless or extravagant. While we condemn, Jesus may highly approve. The ardour of some persons, in certain uncommon cases, may carry them such lengths as would be extremely improper in the ordinary course of things. We may not clearly understand the circumstances or the motives of their conduct; and therefore let us leave them to him, who knows their hearts, and who will not only make all favourable allowances for the sincere, but applaud and reward whatever they have done from the pure, disinterested regard to him.

Perhaps you, who are forward to reproach others for their intemperate heat, may be much more displeasing to Christ by your coldness and hesitation, and fear of going too far in his cause. How rare is such love as that of Mary to her Lord and Saviour! Many will profess a strong attachment to him, who refuse to be at any expense in his service. We ask, then, if you can part with your money for his sake? You cannot, indeed, yield an exact imitation of this pious woman, since the bodily presence of Jesus is removed from the earth. But his poor remain among us, and they are appointed his receivers: "whosoever ye will, ye may do them good." O, let us beware of a covetous parsimonious spirit, which would represent a liberal disposition as improper or wasteful. There are those, who will plead for charity, as Judas, till they are brought to the trial; and then it appears that they are more anxious to increase their own store than to relieve the indigent. Let us judge ourselves; why are we content with doing so little, or why do we rate that little so highly?

When it was known at Jerusalem that Jesus was in the neighbourhood, a large concourse of people resorted from that city to Bethany, not merely for his

his sake, but that they might have a sight of Lazarus, who was so wonderful a monument of his power and grace. The miracle which had been wrought had already attached the hearts of many to the Saviour and excited the curiosity of more; but the chief priests, who were enraged on this very account, seriously meditated not only his destruction, but that also of him who had been recalled from the grave. How foolish as well as wicked the design! He, who had been once raised from the dead, might, with the same ease, have been instantly restored again. But those who resist the Lord's Anointed are chargeable with the grossest absurdity. Their wisest contrivances are "a vain thing:" and "the Lord shall have them in derision \*."

We do not wonder, that they, whose cases have illustriously displayed the mercy of the Redeemer, ~~are persecuted, like Lazarus, with peculiar malignity.~~ The enemies of Jesus, who really aim at Him, direct their envenomed shafts against them who are witnesses for his name. Believers, however, may possess peace and confidence in the midst of opposition, since their Defender is invincible. He, who keepeth them, has numbered the very hairs of their head, and declares that "none shall pluck them out of his hand †."

We have accompanied Jesus to the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, and now we contemplate his remarkable entrance into the city. Hitherto we have seen that he sought not any worldly honours, having studiously declined even the semblance of pomp and ostentation. But toward the close of his life we perceive a different scene. We behold the humble Nazarene attended by a singular procession, in which, while he permitted the people to do him homage, he designed to exhibit a representation of his regal character.

Anno Dom. 31. On the day after his entertainment at Sunday before Bethany, he proceeded on his journey. the Passover.

When he came to the mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples to an adjacent village, that

\* Psal. ii. 1—4.

† John x. 28.



they might bring thence an ass and her unbroken foal \*. He directed them to the very place, and so minutely described the circumstances in which they should find the animals, as to show his exact knowledge of things distant, and seemingly accidental. The narrative also proves that he could influence the minds of men as he pleased; for the owners of the ass relinquished her without hesitation, upon being told that "the Lord had need of her." The young colt he condescended to make the bearer of his person, and rode in a sort of triumph to the city, with much meekness, and yet with an appearance of majesty †.

Many persons conducted him from Bethany; and many more, having heard of his raising Lazarus from the grave, came from Jerusalem to meet him. The whole multitude, as if by a miraculous impulse, appeared to vie with each other in ascribing all possible honours to him. They spread their garments in the way, and, cutting down branches of trees, part of them they strewed upon the road, and with part they marched before him; these being usual expressions of joy upon the arrival of a potent monarch or victorious general. Under a full conviction that Jesus was the Messiah, and the expectation of his assuming the government, they began to praise God with a loud voice, and to shout with exultation, though they understood not the import of their own words,

\* Matt. xxi. 1—16. Mark xi. 1—11. Luke xix. 29, &c. John xii. 12—19.

† There was nothing ridiculous or mean in Christ's riding on an ass; for, not to mention that this animal in eastern countries is of a larger size and more graceful appearance than among us, some of the most eminent persons, patriarchs, judges, and kings, made use of asses; and, probably, with a reference to that primitive simplicity, he chose this method of going in solemn and triumphant procession to Jerusalem. Gen. xxii. 3. Exod. iv. 20. Judg. v. 10. x. 4. 2 Sam. xvi. 2. xix. 26. He meant to assert his regal character, according to the ancient style and custom of their princes, and to declare his regard to the law, by discountenancing that use of horses, which had been introduced through a fondness for splendour, and which God had expressly forbidden, Deut. xvii. 16. See Bp. Chandler's Defence of Christianity, and Bp. Sherlock's Dissertation on Christ's entrance into Jerusalem.

“ Hosanna

“ Hosanna to the Son of David ; blessed is the King that cometh in the name of the Lord ; peace in heaven, and glory in the highest ! ”

Do we ask the reason of all this ? Among other causes to be assigned, it was the purpose of God to fulfil an ancient prophecy. Zechariah had expressly foretold \* that the Saviour, the King of Zion, would make such a public appearance as is here described. The most minute circumstances in this view, as completions of former and authentic predictions, are important ; they furnish incontestable evidence for the truth of the Gospel. How manifold is the wisdom of God, who raised up holy men, and instructed them to declare, some hundred years before, many of the things which the Redeemer should both do and say ! No event can take place which he did not foresee, and which, in this sense, did not form a part of his original plan.

Do we join in these acclamations, and welcome the King of Israel with our Hosannas ? Do we, with ardent and devout affections, exult in the blessings of his government, which brings peace to man and glory to God ? And do we most earnestly pray for an extensive enlargement of his dominion, even to the ends of the earth ? Such zeal as this may be termed madness and enthusiasm ; and accordingly there are few who dare to express any real fervour in the cause of Christ, lest they should expose themselves to scorn and derision. But the day of his complete triumph is coming, of which his procession to Jerusalem was a faint emblem. He shall soon be revealed in all the splendour of his divine majesty ; and the honours of his kingdom shall be universally acknowledged. Saints and Angels shall join, with inexpressible love and transport, in everlasting acclamations to the Son of David. Would you bear a part in the joyful exultations of that day, and celebrate the high praises of your Redeemer ? You must begin your song on earth, confess his glory,

\* Zech. ix. 9.



and pray that the purposes of his spiritual government may be fully effected within yourselves.

This profound veneration paid to Jesus, these rapturous shouts of applause, were offensive to the Pharisees. They cried out in a rage, "We prevail nothing; Behold, the world is gone after him." They called upon him to reprehend his disciples for their officious and intemperate zeal. But he defended their conduct, maintaining that the honour due to his exalted character must be proclaimed, even though a miracle should be requisite to accomplish that end, and that, if they were to be silenced, the very stones would rise up as witnesses for him. And does not the temper of the ancient Pharisees prevail in modern times? Are there not many, who would damp the fervour, and resist the vigorous efforts, of those lively Christians, who labour to advance the kingdom of Christ? He, however, will secure his own glory; for, though we and thousands more refuse to praise him, he will raise up others to do it, even such, perhaps, as may be vile and contemptible in our eyes. Let the followers of Jesus, then, indulge a holy transport, while they unite in their acclamations to him. "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King."

But the triumph was soon interrupted, and the Redeemer himself bathed in tears. How affecting the sight! When he approached the city, so as to take in a full view of its extent and magnificence, he felt the tenderest compassion for its unbelieving and obdurate inhabitants. Foreseeing the complicated miseries and entire desolation which awaited them, so far from exulting in their confusion and destruction, he mourned, he lamented, for them. He cried out, in the bitterness of his soul, "Oh, that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." He then added a clear and circumstantial prediction of the siege and total overthrow of that infatuated place, assigning as the reason  
of

of all its calamities the indifference and neglect with which his gracious offers had been treated.

The case of Jerusalem speaks aloud to us, and calls us to examine, whether we know, or seriously attend to, "the things which belong unto our peace." It warns us not to reject or make light of the Gospel, which is calculated to secure to us both present and everlasting happiness. Soon may "the glad tidings" be withdrawn; and He, who now addresses us in terms of mercy, may appear against us as our adversary, in the thunders of his wrath. This, then, is "the time of our visitation;" for the Saviour himself waits upon us in the ministry of his word. Are we aware of the important consequences of the present moment? If salvation be despised, it will be the ground of our heaviest condemnation; and we ourselves may perish with a more terrible destruction than even the sinners of Jerusalem.

The entrance of Jesus with so singular a procession threw the whole city into commotion, and excited a general inquiry about this extraordinary Personage. Very soon he displayed the glory of his character by different proofs. He went immediately to the temple, and began, as with divine authority, to correct the abuses and punish the profanations which prevailed there. Now again, as he had done before, he drove out the traders with indignation, and vindicated the honour of that holy place, which God had chosen to himself for "the house of prayer." By fresh miracles, also, in healing the blind and the lame, he gave the strongest evidence that he had a full right to that power which he exercised.

Were not all, then, at length convinced, and persuaded to receive him? The very children took up the song, while they cried, as if by a supernatural impulse, "Hosanna to the Son of David:" and thus their infant tongues, in celebrating the praises of the Redeemer, were witnesses against the rulers of the people. The chief priests, who ought to have been his most zealous advocates, expressed violent dis-  
pleasure



pleasure at these proceedings. But Jesus vindicated the acclamations of the children, and showed, from the Scriptures, that it was God's determination to get himself glory, as he did in that instance, "out of the mouth of babes and sucklings \*." How should this encourage those of youngest years to offer their adorations to Jesus! It cannot be too soon for them to learn Hosannas to his name. He will listen to them with peculiar delight, and consider himself honoured by their weak attempts. Perhaps, too, he may make use of them to confound the wisest and strongest of his enemies.

The common people, likewise, were much affected by the doctrines of Jesus. While he taught them daily in the temple, they crowded to hear him, and appeared to hang upon his words. In general, the lower orders have been found to yield a serious and eager attention to the Gospel; while the rich too frequently, possessing more pride and prejudice, turn away their ears in disdain. The Jewish rulers continued to seek the destruction of Jesus; but their malice was restrained a few days longer. As he had so many adherents among the poor, they were afraid of proceeding to any act of violence against him: nor could their efforts have at last succeeded, except he had surrendered himself into their hands. The mournful history exhibits the strongest proofs of the wickedness of man; but it affords us, also, a pleasing representation of the grace of the Saviour, waiting to show mercy to his most virulent opposers. May we be constrained, by a sense of his great love, to drop all our perverse objections to him, and yield ourselves unfeignedly to his disposal! Thus may we be redeemed to God, and established "unblamable in holiness" through Jesus Christ! Amen.

\* Psal. viii. 2.

## JESUS CHRIST.

### SECT. 32.

*Jesus instructed certain inquiring Greeks—warned the unbelieving Jews—cursed a barren fig-tree—confounded those who questioned his authority—admonished them by the parable of the two sons, and by that of the vineyard, let out to unfaithful husbandmen.*

A GENERAL commotion was excited in Jerusalem by our Lord's singular entrance into it, by the loud Hosannas sung before him, and by the miracles which he there publicly performed. Many persons of different dispositions came about him: some sincere inquirers sought his instruction; but a more numerous company opposed him with extreme malignity. He varied the manner of his address, according to the cases and characters of the people; and yet in every instance he preserved the same "meekness of wisdom." May his followers, and especially his ministers, learn from him to be "gentle unto all men," as well as to be ready always to declare "the hope that is in them!"

As the celebration of the passover approached, a large concourse of those, who professed to worship the God of Israel, was then assembled at Jerusalem from all parts of Judea. Among the rest were certain pious Greeks, probably of Gentile extraction, who desired to be introduced to Jesus\*. They applied to Philip for this purpose, and he, together with Andrew, whom he consulted on the occasion, informed Jesus of their wishes. They were immediately conducted into his presence, and the Saviour

\* John xii. 20, &c.



addressed them, with great solemnity, to the following effect:—

“The Son of man, whom you now behold in circumstances of meanness, is about to enter on a state of the highest exaltation. But be not staggered, while you observe that my glory is preceded by extreme sufferings: for these are necessary to accomplish the object which I have in view, the salvation of precious souls. As the wheat springs up from the grain, which at first seems to perish in the earth, and which, except it putrefy, will produce no increase; a so numerous company shall be redeemed to God in consequence of my death, and not one of the human race can be saved without it. He also, that professes an attachment to my cause, must be willing to make the most painful sacrifices. A solicitous regard to your temporal interests will endanger your eternal welfare; but, while you can cheerfully give up life itself for my sake, you adopt the most effectual method to secure your own happiness for ever. If, therefore, you would acknowledge me as your Lord and Master, you must be obedient to my command, and follow, without hesitation, wherever I shall lead, even to the severest calamities; and then you shall be with me, to behold my glory, and sit down with me in my kingdom. My Father himself will declare his approbation of your conduct, and confer distinguished honour upon you.”

It is pleasing to observe that there are any humble inquirers after Jesus. His faithful ministers will rejoice to direct you, and encourage your application to him. They will, as it were, take you by the hand, and conduct you to the knowledge of him, whose acquaintance you seek: nay he himself waits to receive you. But, while you come to him, attend to his solemn declarations. As he “hath suffered for us in the flesh,” you must “arm yourselves with the same mind\*,” and endure the cross. Let it suffice you, that “if

\* 1 Pet. iv. 1.

you suffer, you shall also reign with him \*." Is that what you object to? Do you determine to renounce the service of Christ, because it will subject you to difficulties; and resolve to gratify your own corrupt nature, because it promises you much present enjoyment? Ah! how unwise a choice, how unfair an estimate do you make! For Jesus holds out a crown of glory to his despised and oppressed followers; but your carnal pleasures are momentary, and, if continued, will be succeeded by endless torment and despair.

Our Lord, having adverted to his approaching sufferings, was deeply affected with the prospect; and as if the terrors of death had fallen upon him, he cried out, "Now is my soul troubled." He seemed, for a moment, confounded in the view, and ready to petition that he might be rescued from the cross. But whatever the weakness of human nature might suggest, he resolved not to shrink from that which was the grand object of his incarnation; and therefore he prayed only, "Father, glorify thy name." Immediately a voice from heaven declared that the divine glory had already been secured, and would yet be more signally displayed by his ministry. While the astonished multitude wondered at the sound, many of them not hearing the words distinctly, Jesus remarked that this testimony was given not for his sake, as he could want no further assurances of his Father's love, but for the confirmation of their faith.

He then exulted in the confident expectation of the blessed consequences which would result from his death. He affirmed the moment to be at hand when by his interposition the world should be delivered from the usurped dominion of the devil, and sinners every where, of all ranks and characters should be attracted by the view of his cross to make application to him, and enlist themselves as faithful soldiers under his banner.

This affords us an endearing representation of the Saviour. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted

\* 2 Tim. ii. 12.



yet he opened not his mouth" in peevish complaints to God, or bitter invectives against man. Though he felt unutterable anguish, he expressed not the least impatience: his only prayer was, that the honour of the divine name might be exalted, whatever he might endure. Here, then, is our pattern: we should resign ourselves to the disposal of God with like meekness and unreserved submission, and be more solicitous for his glory than our own personal ease and security. Alas! how little have we "learned Christ!" This is fully evinced by our fretfulness, discontent, and selfishness, by our eager desire that our trials may be removed, rather than the interest of religion promoted. Have we considered that it is one grand design of the death of Christ to deliver us from all carnal affections, and from the power of darkness? Is Satan indeed cast out from the possession of our hearts? Have we by faith beheld the Son of man "lifted up from the earth," and felt the constraining influence of his cross? Are we, then, "drawn unto him," so as to acknowledge our subjection, and vow unfeigned allegiance?

Our Lord's intimation of his approaching dissolution was cavilled at by some of the people, as inconsistent with the scriptural declarations of the perpetuity of Messiah's office. But he, knowing their captious disposition, exhorted them not to trifle away their present opportunities of instruction. He warned them that the light which then shone upon them, and which was sufficient to conduct them to eternal life, would soon be removed if they refused to follow its guidance, and they would be left in a state of deplorable ignorance and sin. How solemn the admonition, and how applicable to many in modern times! Are there not those, to whom the word of salvation is sent, who show a fondness for perverse disputation, rather than an humble desire of receiving spiritual advantage? We entreat them, therefore, to consider the day of their visitation. Much of it is already gone: and has the great business of life ever

yet been seriously attempted? Why need we answer this or the other question which you propose, if you are not earnestly solicitous to save your immortal souls? O, take heed, lest, while you trifle, "darkness come upon you!"

We are not informed with what effect Jesus delivered his instructions to the inquiring Greeks; but a tremendous account is given us of many of the Jews who were present on this occasion. When they began to cavil, he departed, and withdrew from them the light which they despised. They believed not of him, but obstinately resisted all that strength of evidence which he had set before them in a long train of unquestionable miracles. The Evangelist observes that the lamentation of Isaiah, complaining of the general rejection of the Saviour\*, might properly be used with peculiar reference to them; and that his prophecy of the fatal judicial blindness and obduracy of the Jewish nation was accomplished at that very time†. He concluded, therefore, that their case was desperate, and that all means employed for their conversion would be ineffectual.

O, let us fear, lest we also come under the same condemnation, by an abuse of our present privileges! When sinners obstinately persist in stopping their ears against the calls of God, he determines that they shall not hear. And is not this a righteous dispensation, though the consequences be most tremendous? Who shall object? We are aware that this matter is perversely misrepresented, as if men were constrained to sin by a positive evil influence from God himself; or as if "they could not believe," though they most eagerly desired and endeavoured to do it. This is far from the case. They are left to their own choice; and God's final desertion of them is only the just punishment of their obstinate opposition. But, when he withdraws, we know that the most confirmed unbelief will ensue. We pray, therefore, "O Lord, take not thy Holy Spirit from us ‡!"

\* Isa. liii. 1.

† vi. 9, 10.

‡ Liturgy.



Many of the Jewish rulers felt a strong conviction in their minds that Jesus was the Messiah; but they dared not avow that conviction, because a public confession of him would have brought upon them severe reproach and persecution, and they were more solicitous to preserve their reputation with men than obtain the favour of God. How wretched the case! And yet many may read in them what they themselves are. Such are those who have not courage to meet the scorn and displeasure of the world in defence of that system of doctrine and practice which they are persuaded is most agreeable to the sacred Scriptures. The approbation of God is made light of, and his anger provoked, by such a conduct. Surely we give too much consequence to our fellow-creatures, in courting their notice and dreading their anger, with the sacrifice of conscience. What will they be able to do for us in the hour of death, or in the day of judgment?

Jesus departed from them, but he took another opportunity of delivering a solemn admonition. He asserted his divine mission, and his union with the Father. He declared himself the grand Luminary of mankind, who will communicate light to all sincere inquirers, and guide their feet into the way of peace. Yet, though the intent of his appearance on the earth was to confer salvation rather than pronounce judgment, he observes that unbelievers shall not escape, but shall be condemned in the last day by that word which they now contemptuously reject. How righteous the sentence, since they despise and oppose the will of God, so clearly manifested to them by his Son!

And as Jesus acted, so must his ministers. They too must warn sinners of their danger. Will you, then, receive the record which he hath given? He demands your attention, not only as the messenger, but as the representative, and the very image, of the invisible God. Can you disprove the credentials which he has exhibited? Or why should you resist him

him, who comes to rescue our fallen race from perishing, and who brings light, life, and peace, to all that believe? Do you not fear the awful doom which awaits his enemies? The Lord God will vindicate the honour of his Gospel; and, at the final consummation, you must account to him for your present neglect and contempt of it. Ah! how many will wish that they had lived and died in Pagan darkness, since the word of salvation, which is sent unto them, will witness against them, and, as it aggravates their guilt, increase their misery for ever!

Monday in Passion week. It should seem that Jesus was obliged to hide himself from the malicious attempts of his opponents, and that each evening he retired from Jerusalem to Bethany for his own comfort as well as safety\*. Very early in the morning, probably on the second day of the week, he returned with ardent zeal to the city, from which he had fled the night before. Having set out without taking any food, he felt the call of hunger by the way, and thus proved that he really partook of our infirmities. A fig-tree being seen at a distance, he went to it, that he might refresh himself with the fruit, which might then be expected to be on the tree, as the time of gathering the figs was not arrived. But, upon his approach, finding it barren, though its leaves afforded a fair appearance, he pronounced a curse upon it, that it never should be able to produce any increase in succeeding seasons. The effect of the imprecation was immediate: "the fig-tree withered away." We are not to ascribe our Lord's conduct upon this occasion to weakness, or peevishness of spirit, such as we may betray under a painful disappointment: it was, evidently, a significant action, designed to convey some important instruction.

He exhibited therein an awful emblem of the Jewish nation, who, with all their profession and show of piety, were destitute of real goodness, and were therefore soon to be devoted to destruction. That

\* Matt. xxi. 17—19. Mark xi. 11—19.



guilty people were doomed by his curse, like the fig-tree, to be reduced from a flourishing to a desolate condition. The case of all vain pretenders to religion is exactly similar. They may appear beautiful to the eye, and raise an expectation in others of much fruit: but, though they stand in the church, they bring no glory to God, and remain unprofitable. He may bear long with them; but his vengeance will fall upon them at the last, and so entirely consume them as to "leave them neither root nor branch\*." Ah! what jealousy should this excite in us respecting our own state! When the Lord himself comes to search, will any increase of holiness be found upon us?

When Jesus arrived at Jerusalem, he visited the temple, and again endeavoured to correct the flagrant violations of that sacred place, asserting its proper use, as a house devoted to the service of God. His faithful admonitions, as before, enraged the Scribes and chief priests against him, so that they wished to destroy him instantly; they observed his influence among the people, and dreaded its consequences. In the evening he once more retired from the city; a retreat apparently necessary for his security.

Tuesday in Passion week. In the morning of the day following, as he passed by the same road, his disciples, who accompanied him, expressed their astonishment when they saw the fig-tree withered away †. They perceived in this instance an additional proof of the power of their divine Master; and he taught them from it to depend more firmly upon him. He encouraged them to believe that his almighty hand would be exerted in their behalf, and that, while they relied implicitly on the promise of God, they should be enabled to confirm their doctrine by miracles far superior to this. But, that they might perform such extraordinary operations, he exhorted them to offer up importunate prayer to God, with strong

\* Mal. iv. 1.

† Matt. xxi. 20, &c. Mark xi. 20, &c. xii. 1—12. Luke xx. 1—19.

faith,

faith, assuring them that their most confident expectations of the divine blessing would not be disappointed. He insisted, also, on a charitable forgiving disposition, as so absolutely requisite, that without it all their addresses to God would be ineffectual.

The supernatural powers with which they were invested are not now wanted, and it would be presumption in us to ask for them. But there are advantages and privileges more excellent and valuable which we may look for, and which we should "ask in faith, nothing wavering \*." We need not wonder that our petitions for the influences of the Spirit have failed of success, if we cannot credit God for the performance of his promise, or believe that he will hear us. To ensure a favourable acceptance, we should likewise lay aside our evil tempers when we approach to the God of peace and love. He will not vouchsafe his presence and assistance to those whose hearts burn with resentment one against another. We are to "lift up holy hands without wrath," as well as without "doubting †."

After passing by the barren fig-tree, our Lord came again to Jerusalem, and taught publicly in the temple. The chief priests, Scribes, and elders (which expressions may denote the members of the sanhedrim), being much enraged against him, demanded of him what authority he possessed which could justify his extraordinary conduct. Had the question been proposed with an humble desire of receiving information, we apprehend that Jesus would have given a different answer; for he never disappointed the serious inquirer. But, knowing the pride and obstinacy of their hearts, he intended, not so much to instruct, as to silence and confound them. He therefore interrogated them on what foundation the ministry of John the Baptist rested: for, since John had borne the most decisive testimony for him, as he himself had for John, they both stood on the same ground. This involved them

\* James i. 6.

† 1 Tim. ii. 8.



in a difficulty. They could not allow the prophetic character of John without allowing that of Jesus also; and they dared not deny it, through fear of the people, who held the name of the Baptist in the highest veneration. They were, therefore, obliged to confess their ignorance, and to relinquish their malevolent examination. How admirable was that wisdom, which could at once perplex the most subtle adversaries, and defeat all their purposes!

Do not many, also, among ourselves, like those ancient cavillers, demand by what proofs the authority of Jesus is ascertained? We are not afraid of bringing the matter to a fair trial before impartial judges; for the truth cannot suffer by a serious disquisition. But take heed with what temper and motive you weigh the evidences of the Gospel. They are strong enough to convince those who are not biassed by pride or prejudice. But, if you enter upon the subject with an unhumiliated captious disposition, probably difficulties will occur which will prevent your attaining any satisfaction; and it is a righteous thing with God to permit it. Many, who affect to call themselves free-thinkers, take up the Bible, with no desire to regulate their faith or practice by it, but with a previous determination to raise objections. Can such persons, who are evidently blinded by their passions, be competent to decide upon this subject? Or is it likely, that, while they resolve not to be persuaded, Jesus will vouchsafe to guide them by the light of his Spirit?

But, though our Lord seemed to evade the inquiries of his enemies, he still warned them, by a faithful and striking representation of the baseness of their character, and by intimations which they could not mistake, of the awful destruction they should soon feel.

1. He described the different conduct of two sons, who were both directed by their father to work in his vineyard. The first, with great insolence, refused to obey; but afterwards, ashamed of his perverseness,

perverseness, submitted, and fulfilled the injunction. The second, with fair professions of regard, and an express promise of compliance, continued to neglect the command. Jesus then appealed to his auditors upon the case he had proposed; and, while they were obliged to confess that he, who for a time avowed an opposition to his parent's will, had yet performed a more dutiful part than the other, they condemned themselves; for, with high pretences to piety, they were more averse to God's design of saving sinners than the most open and profligate offenders. Our Lord failed not to make this very pointed application; "Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." He referred them for a proof of his assertion to their rejection of John's ministry, to which persons of abandoned character had submitted.

Let all the professors of religion be excited to examine themselves. You say, "I go, Sir;" but are you not acting as dissemblers? With declarations of love and obedience upon your tongues, are you not in your lives and tempers most opposite to God? Have you cordially complied with the scheme of salvation in the Gospel? You may pride yourselves upon your morality or devotion, as the Pharisees did; yet, if you "have not submitted yourselves unto the righteousness of God," you possess more odious dispositions, and may be further from heaven, than those who are notoriously dissolute and profane. This is an offensive position: but here we discover the malignity and danger of self-dependence, which is more likely to prevent us from a sincere reception of the Saviour than any atrocious crimes; and we perceive, also, the freeness and sufficiency of that grace, which can rescue from destruction the most enormous sinners.

This representation, however, should not be thought favourable to your licentious practices, who have avowedly cast off the fear of God. Your iniquities



quities are detestable before him, and, if not renounced, will "bring upon you swift destruction." But we thank God for the revelation of mercy through his Son; and on this ground we can encourage you to "turn unto him, from whom you have deeply revolted." We are, also, sanguine in the expectation of succeeding with you; for, surely, the Gospel must at once appear suitable to your case, as it is addressed to them "who are ready to perish," and offers a full and gratuitous pardon to the most guilty.

2. He described the base conduct and certain condemnation of the Jews, in a parabolical representation of wicked husbandmen, who were intrusted with the care of a vineyard. The owner sent his servants to demand the produce: but the messengers were treated by them with extreme violence and cruelty; they were beaten, stoned, and killed. At last, as the grand expedient for recovering them to their duty, his only and beloved son was despatched on the same errand: but, though he had a peculiar claim to be received with veneration, they unanimously determined to put him to death.

Jesus then appealed to his captious hearers; and they allowed that these unfaithful husbandmen should be deprived of that trust which they had abused, and be destroyed for their iniquity. But, in doing this, being blindly inattentive to their own guilt, they passed sentence on themselves. Jesus also confirmed the sentence, declaring that the kingdom of God, or the dispensation of his mercy, should be withdrawn from them, and committed to another people. He further observed, that a remarkable prophecy was then fulfilled, since the very stone which the builders refused was appointed the head-stone of the corner, as the main support of the whole building\*. And he solemnly warned them, that, by taking offence at him or his doctrine, they exposed themselves to the heaviest calamities in this life, and

\* Psal. cxviii. 22.

that

that finally, when his whole vengeance should fall upon them, they would perish with tremendous and irreparable ruin.

The Jewish rulers perceived that the parable which he had delivered was directed against them; and yet the awful admonition did not duly affect them. They hardened their hearts the more, and again they sought for some means of destroying him, that they might no longer be troubled with his reproofs. At that time, however, they dared not to carry their wishes into effect: the multitude, who still revered him as a Prophet, would not suffer them to seize him. We observe that God can restrain the malicious attempts of his fiercest enemies; nor can they ever prevail, "except it be given them from above." A firm persuasion of this truth will inspire the believer with confidence and joy, though "ten thousands of people set themselves against him round about \*."

The judgments denounced against the Jews have been fulfilled; and thus God hath "avenged the quarrel of his covenant." Through their unbelief "the kingdom of God" is come unto us: and if we would not provoke him to take it from us, as he has done from them, we should beware of rejecting "the chief corner-stone," which God hath laid in Zion, and on which alone, as "the sure foundation," his church can stand. Let us build our hopes upon him, and we shall never be ashamed †. But inconceivable anguish, torment, and despair, shall be the portion of all those to whom he is "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even of them which stumble at the word, being disobedient ‡." May we so contemplate his character, that he may be more and more exalted in our estimation, till we be admitted to see his face in glory! Amen.

\* Psal. iii. 6.

† Rom. ix. 33.

‡ 1 Pet. ii. 8.

END OF THE THIRD VOLUME.

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