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October to December 2020

October:
“God the Son”

by
Rev Dan Ebert III
(1931-2012)

November:
“Miracles of Christ our Lord”

by
J. C. Ryle
(1816-1900)

December:
“Morning and Evening”

by
C. H. Spurgeon
(1834-1892)

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1

JOHN 1:29-34

MICAH 5:2-5

“Yesterday, today, forever...”

THE ETERNAL CHRIST

(This month’s meditations are on “God the Son” by Dan Ebert III).

Throughout the Scripture there are many clear statements concerning the fact that Christ existed before His birth as a man. The Bible further states that Christ’s existence from eternity past is one of the proofs that He is God.

In the Old Testament the clearest statement relating to the eternal existence of Christ is found in the prophecy of Micah (Mic 5:2). In this portion we not only have the prophecy that Christ will be born in Bethlehem of Judah, but also a definite statement that Christ existed from eternity past. The Scripture says His goings forth, that is, His active existence, was from eternity. Since there was a point in time when we came into being, we generally think of eternity only in terms of the future. But to God, eternity stretches in both directions because, having always existed, He has no beginning.

Today we have caught but a glimpse of the eternal Christ. Yet we begin to see His great love for the world in that He left His eternal home in the glories of heaven to provide salvation for a sin-cursed world (1 Pet 2:24). Our finite minds cannot really understand such love, just as we cannot really understand eternity past or future. But just a glimpse of these things should place in our hearts a greater appreciation of how much God has done for us.

We must constantly remind ourselves that this great message of love and salvation will never be known to the lost if we, as His children, do not live in obedience to the Word of God and bear witness to the Gospel. The Scripture challenges us to be doers of the word and not hearers only. If we really want to know the blessings of the Lord, we must live in obedience to His Holy Word (James 1:22-25).

THOUGHT: What does Christ’s eternal existence prove

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee that we are the objects of Thy great love.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 2

JOHN 6:32-38

HEBREWS 1:1-4

“...Jesus is the same.”

THE ETERNAL CHRIST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Today we continue with our meditation on the eternal existence of Christ. The New Testament often unfolds doctrines with greater detail and clarity than the Old Testament. This is true concerning the teaching of Christ's existence from eternity past. There is great emphasis placed upon this truth because it is a fact which strongly supports His Deity.

John the Baptist was sent by God to prepare the way for the coming of Christ. He stated that although Christ had appeared on earth after him, He existed before him. John was referring to the Lord's existence from eternity past (John 1:30).

Jesus Himself referred to His eternal existence. After feeding the five thousand, He taught this truth to the crowd that had followed Him to Capernaum. This may well have been the largest crowd that the Lord taught during His earthly ministry. During His teaching on “The Bread of Life,” Jesus made clear His claim to have been God from eternity past. During this short discourse, Jesus said at four different times that He had come from heaven. This caused the Jews to grumble among themselves because they rejected the idea that He was God incarnate. They recognised Him only as the son of Joseph, the carpenter. Jesus said three times during that address that He had been sent by God the Father. He emphasized that while no human being had ever seen the Father, He had been with Him from eternity past (John 6:32-38, 41-50). In this it is clear that Jesus Christ was establishing His deity and His existence from eternity past.

In times of difficulty or faintheartedness, this truth should encourage us. No matter how great the trial, let us take heart remembering that we are the servants of the eternal God who empowers us to live in obedience to Him.

THOUGHT: What bearing does Christ's eternal existence have on our salvation?

PRAYER: Father, Thou art the eternally existent God who holds us in Thy hand.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3

JOHN 1:1-5

COLOSSIANS 1:15-20

“All may change...”

CHRIST’S POSITION IN ETERNITY PAST

We have been considering the subject of the Lord Jesus Christ’s existence in eternity past. This truth was also taught by the Apostle John. He opened His gospel with a statement concerning this important subject (John 1:1, 30). Again, in his first epistle, John makes reference to Christ’s eternal existence (1 John 1:1; 2:13a).

The Scripture not only teaches that Christ existed before His human birth, but also gives us some understanding of His position and work in eternity past. The Apostle Paul taught the existence of Christ from eternity past. In his teaching, he clearly places Christ above all creatures, and states that all things were created *“by him, and for him”* and that *“by him all things consist”* (Col 1:15-17).

The relationship of Jesus Christ to God the Father is presented in the first chapter of John’s Gospel. The *“Word”* mentioned here is Christ as we can see from the verses following. The Word is called the Light and is said to have become flesh and dwelt among men (John 1:1, 4, 14). Then John said of Jesus, *“This was he of whom I spake”* (John 1:15). As the Word then, Christ existed in the beginning. Not only was the Son the Creator of all things but His power holds creation together and keeps it functioning (Col 1:17, cf. Heb 1:2-3).

Since the eternal existence and deity of Christ are the most attacked points of the faith, it is important that we remind ourselves what the Scripture teaches about these things. Our faith will be strong only when we are clear concerning the Scripture’s teaching.

THOUGHT: Why should I be clear about the doctrines of the Scripture?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee that Thy power which upholds the universe upholds men of faith.

LORD'S DAY, OCTOBER 4

EXODUS 3:1-6

PHILIPPIANS 2:6-11

“...but Jesus never!”

THE THEOPHANIES

In this devotional series, we are endeavouring to bring to mind once again truths from the Scripture concerning our Lord so that we can have a closer walk with Him.

We have been considering the important truth that Christ existed from the beginning because He is the eternal God. The truth is intimated in the Old Testament theophanies. The theological term “theophany” means a manifestation of God. A Christophany then would be a manifestation of Christ. There are many reasons to believe that the appearances of the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament were actually Christophanies. One of the reasons for believing this is that the Angel of the Lord was God. Hagar recognised this truth (Gen 16:10-13). When Abraham offered Isaac, he recognised that the Angel of the Lord who appeared to him was indeed God (Gen 22:11-12). This is evident also in the miracle of the burning bush when the Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses (Exod 3:2-4).

This truth that the Angel of the Lord was God, coupled with the two following facts must lead us to conclude that the Angel of the Lord was actually an appearance of Christ. The Angel of the Lord was a visible manifestation of God. The Lord Jesus is not only the visible manifestation of God in the New Testament, but also proclaimed that no man had seen God other than through His manifestation of Him (John 1:18). Since Christ has come in the flesh to manifest God to the world, we see no further appearance of the Angel of the Lord.

Christ's appearances as the Angel of the Lord give further proof of His existence as God from the beginning. Just as the Angel of the Lord appeared to God's people of old in their time of need, even so today the Saviour meets our every need as we walk in obedience to Him. May we be encouraged by this truth.

THOUGHT: What do these facts about the Angel of the Lord teach?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for meeting the needs of Thy children.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 5

1 PETER 1:3-12

ACTS 3:24-26

“He is altogether lovely.”

THE PROPHETS SPOKE OF CHRIST

In the beginning of our meditation on God the Son, we considered His eternal existence. Being God and thus existing from eternity past, the Son was in heaven with the Father. We continue with our meditations on this tremendous subject by considering the Old Testament prophecies as they speak of the coming of God the Son to earth to redeem mankind. The amazing accuracy of these prophecies clearly points to the divine authorship of the Holy Scripture.

The prophets did not fully understand many of the words that the Holy Spirit gave them concerning the coming of the Messiah. Often, facts about the first and second coming of Christ were given together. Of course as we now look back at these Old Testament prophecies, we can clearly understand them. Despite their difficulty in completely understanding the words which the Holy Spirit gave them, the prophets fully believed that the Saviour would come. And they searched the Scripture in a desire to learn more about this great event (1 Pet 1:10-11).

During His earthly ministry, Jesus Christ claimed that He was fulfilling all that was spoken by the prophets concerning the Messiah. He specifically named various portions of the Old Testament, indicating they spoke of Him (Luke 24:44).

On two occasions, the Apostle Peter stated that all the prophets spoke of Christ and His coming to take away the sins of the world. It is clear that a major subject of Old Testament prophecy was the coming of Christ (Acts 3:24-26; 10:43).

The fulfilment of Bible prophecy by the Lord serves as an encouragement to us as His people. It should remind us of the importance of taking time to study the details of Scripture. It was written to instruct us concerning our God and our faith.

THOUGHT: What do I learn from the accuracy of Bible prophecy?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for making me a part of Thy eternal plan.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 6

ACTS 13:26-33

GENESIS 12:1-4

“He is my Beloved.”

A MIRACULOUS BIRTH

A major prophetic topic of the Old Testament is the coming of the Saviour. It would take an entire book to cover in detail all the amazingly accurate prophecies concerning Christ. In our short study we will consider just a few of these prophecies.

The promise concerning the Saviour was given to Abraham. He was told that the Saviour would come from among his descendants and all the earth would be blessed because of him (Gen 12:3). From that time on the Hebrew people looked for this Saviour. Through the years God gave further revelation concerning the Saviour. The New Testament confirms that Christ was sent to fulfil the promise given to Abraham (Acts 13:23).

The Old Testament prophets recognised that the Saviour would not be an ordinary man. Isaiah prophesied that Christ would be born of a virgin (Isa 7:14). The fulfilment of this prophecy is recorded in the Gospels (Matt 1:20-23). The prophets realised the Saviour would be God because His Father would be God. David recorded this prophecy in the Psalms and Paul proclaimed its fulfilment in Christ (Ps 2:7; Acts 13:33).

Another amazing prophecy concerning Christ was made hundreds of years before His birth. This concerned the fact that He would be born in Bethlehem (Mic 5:2; Luke 2:4).

Looking at these prophecies we must be impressed with the danger of following man's ideas rather than carefully studying and obeying the Scripture. For centuries before the coming of the Saviour, the Holy Scripture spoke of the event. Yet when the Saviour came, few were aware of it. Having chosen to follow the teachings of men rather than Scripture, they missed God's blessings. May we who call ourselves Christians and lovers of God's Word be careful that the same does not befall us.

THOUGHT: What great lesson can I learn from Jesus' birth?

PRAYER: Father, in Thy love please provide for Thy obedient children.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7

ISAIAH 53:1-6

ACTS 26:19-25

“He is the rose of Sharon...”

THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

The prophets of the Old Testament told of both the first and second advent of Christ. They saw Him coming both as a victorious King and a rejected suffering Saviour. They spoke of Him as a great leader of God's people bringing them victory over their enemies and as a spiritual leader who would save them from their sins.

Most Hebrews, like people down through the ages, took from God's Word parts that appealed to them and ignored the rest. The majority of the Israelites looked for a human Saviour whom God would provide to give them victories on the battle front and set up a great earthly kingdom. They ignored the teaching of the prophets that the Saviour would have to die for their sins. Yet the Scripture makes this truth very clear. The prophets spoke of the Saviour's rejection, crucifixion, and ultimate death for the sins of the world (Isa 53:3-6; Acts 26:22-23).

Like many people today, sin had closed the eyes of the Hebrews to the truth. Although they searched the Scripture they looked only for what they wished to find there. And so, they did not recognise the Saviour of whom these very Scriptures spoke (John 5:39-40). In John 5:39, the Lord Jesus was not telling the Jewish leaders to search the Scripture, but was accusing them of searching it in order to see that which would please them, rather than to find the message God had for them. What a terrible condemnation the Lord's words brought against those who claimed to love His Word. Let us learn from this tragedy and be careful in our handling of the Holy Scripture.

THOUGHT: Why did the Jews not recognise Jesus as the Saviour?

PRAYER: Father, Thy Word brings light to those who truly seek it.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8

PSALM 41:5-9

MATTHEW 27:1-10

“...the Lily of the valley.”

THE KING IS COMING

We are told that the time around the advent of Christ was one of great expectation for Israel. Many priests and teachers believed that the coming of the Messiah was near. But the Israelites were looking for a Messiah of their own making, not one as described in the Holy Scripture.

Long before the coming of the Saviour, Zechariah predicted that the Saviour would enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey (Zech 9:9). Once again the details of the prophecy are striking because they obviously could not have been clearly understood by the prophet. He spoke of the people rejoicing because their King was coming. And yet the King would not be on a great war horse nor riding in a chariot, nor would He hold a powerful position in this world. Instead the King would come in great humility on a donkey, a lowly beast of burden. Although Zechariah could not have fully understood the words of the prophecy, he faithfully recorded the message which the Holy Spirit gave him. His words were fulfilled when Christ entered Jerusalem as the Scripture said (Matt 21:5-7).

A great King demands complete loyalty and yet the Scripture prophesied that from among His twelve disciples one would betray Him (Ps 41:9). This was of course Judas Iscariot. Jesus used the very words of Scripture in referring to His coming betrayal (John 13:18). Even the exact price of the betrayal was foretold (Zech 11:12-13; Matt 27:9).

The Almighty God incarnate was betrayed by a close associate. He knew it would happen, yet He bore this indignity and went on to die for the sins of an uncaring world. His love was so great that no price was too high to pay for our sin. Even today, the Scripture still pleads for the sinner to repent and accept the Lord, for in Christ alone can eternal salvation be found (John 14:6).

THOUGHT: Why did Christ allow Judas to betray Him?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for Jesus who died to pay for my sins.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 9

ISAIAH 53:7-12

MATTHEW 27:32-44

*“He is despised and
rejected of men...”*

PROPHECIES CONCERNING THE CRUCIFIXION

In great detail the prophets of the Old Testament spoke of the events of the Crucifixion. Although over fifty prophecies were fulfilled on that crucifixion day we will consider only a few here.

The prophets foretold the dividing of the garments of the Lord. His cloak, however, would not be divided but given to the winner of a gambling game popular with the Roman soldiers (Ps 22:18; John 19:24).

As Christ hanged on the cross, the soldiers offered Him a pain-killing drink of vinegar mixed with gall. But the Lord refused it (Matt 27:34). A short time later, He fulfilled the words of the prophet (Ps 69:21) by calling out *“I thirst”* (John 19:28) and was given a drink of plain vinegar on a reed (Matt 27:48).

The Scripture prophesied that the Saviour would die among thieves but be buried with the rich. He was indeed crucified between two thieves. But after His death, He was buried in the tomb of a rich man (Isa 53:9; Matt 27:38, 57-60).

The words which the Lord spoke on the cross were also part of Old Testament prophecy. The Lord’s cry to God the Father was foretold (Ps 22:1; Matt 27:46). When the redemptive act was over, when the suffering and shame of Calvary was finished, the Lord cried out, *“...into thy hands I commend my spirit”* (Luke 23:46), thus fulfilling the final prophecy of the Old Testament. This was prophesied by the Psalmist (Ps 31:5).

Jesus Christ the Saviour is indeed God Himself. We have seen this as we studied about Him in eternity past, as well as through the accuracy of Bible prophecy. As the world scoffs at Scripture and questions its truth, we must live in obedience to its instructions as a demonstration of our love for the Saviour and as a testimony to the truth of the Scripture.

THOUGHT: What is the importance of Bible prophecy about Christ?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for Thy undying love for me.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 10

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

MATTHEW 1:18-23

“...a man of sorrows.”

THE INCARNATION

In our previous devotions we have considered biblical facts about God the Son before He came to earth. He was truly God, being with the Father from eternity past. He was spoken of by the Old Testament prophets as the Saviour that was to come. As we continue our meditations on God the Son we will consider how the eternal, almighty God became man and lived on earth.

The English word “incarnation” comes from the Latin word which means “enfleshment” or “to take on flesh.” In modern English we would simply say “to become human.” The eternal, immeasurable God loved the world so much that He was willing to subject Himself to the limits of a human body. This would be unbelievable except for the very clear teaching of Scripture.

The Gospel of John opens with the startling statement that the eternal God, the Word, became flesh and lived among mankind (John 1:14).

The Philippian letter affirms that while Christ was truly God, He left His heavenly position and became a human being. He who was over all became a servant, willing to follow the plan of the Father in order to redeem sinful mankind (Phil 2:6-7).

The doctrine of the incarnation is known to every Christian. Perhaps because of its familiarity we tend to lose sight of the great cost of our salvation and the incomprehensible love that made it possible. Our salvation is a gift given by God. It becomes ours by faith, without any personal merit or work on our part. But after salvation, the Scripture clearly teaches that we are no longer our own. We belong to God and must live in a manner that will reflect His love and righteousness. The little children learn to say, “*We love him because he first loved us*” (1 John 4:19). Let us show this love by following the example Jesus set for us.

THOUGHT: What does the word “incarnation” mean?

PRAYER: Father, help me to love others as Christ loves me.

LORD'S DAY, OCTOBER 11

LUKE 2:21-32

ISAIAH 42:1-9

"He hath borne our griefs..."

THE HUMAN ANCESTRY OF THE MESSIAH

Matthew and Luke's Gospels both trace the human ancestry of Jesus Christ. Matthew's genealogy traces Christ's human parentage back through King David to Abraham. This proves that Jesus was a king and also a descendant of Abraham. Thus, He was qualified to be the Messiah and fulfil the promise of blessing through Abraham (Matt 1:1-17). The gospel of Luke traces the human lineage of Christ back to Adam, showing Him to be indeed a member of Adam's race, truly a human being (Luke 3:23-38).

The Scripture teaches that He was born of a woman, just like any other human. However, the birth of Jesus was different from others in that although He was born of a human mother, He did not have a human father. Christ was human from His mother, but divine from His eternal origin, being conceived by the Holy Spirit. The human mother of Jesus, unlike any other mother throughout history was a virgin (Matt 1:18-20). We should note that the Scripture presents Mary as the mother only of Christ's humanity. To call Mary "the mother of God" is both unscriptural and blasphemous. Christ, as the eternal God, has no beginning, therefore has no mother. Mary was a wonderful person who lived a holy life and was highly favoured by God, but she was only a human, being in need of a Saviour herself just like us. She was not divine and she was never the "mother of God."

For most, if not all of us, the information we have just considered is not new. We have studied these things from the Scripture many times. Yet, perhaps because of our familiarity, the impact of this truth has been lost. God's love was so great for sinful man that He gave His own sinless self to redeem us from the penalty of sin. Being reminded of this amazing love should call us to a new dedication to our Creator and Saviour.

THOUGHT: List some of the amazing aspects of the incarnation.

PRAYER: Father, may I respond with obedience to Thy love for me.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 12

LUKE 2:39-52

ISAIAH 42:10-16

"...and carried our sorrows."

THE EARLY LIFE OF JESUS

The Lord Jesus Christ was born as an infant like any other child. His mother Mary wrapped Him in the clothing of an infant and laid Him in the manger they used for His bed (Luke 2:7). We see pictures of the manger scene with a halo around the head of the infant Jesus and a light shining mysteriously from His body. But such a picture is not in accordance with Scripture. Christ, in His great love for us had left behind His heavenly glory and in appearance was as any other child.

In a normal span of time, Jesus grew to be a man. We do not know to what extent His deity affected His childhood; but we do know that He grew in a normal manner (Luke 2:40). At the age of twelve, evidently looking like any other twelve-year-old, He was taken to the Temple by His parents (Luke 2:41-42). It appears from Scripture that Christ may not have evidenced anything of His divine power until after His baptism. Since this power was to be used to glorify the Father and save man, it is inconceivable that the Christ-child would have used His power in any childish way as some uninspired writings would have us believe.

Although the Christ-child had the body of a normal human being, His divine wisdom quickly became apparent. When the Lord was only twelve, He was already about the Father's business and amazed the learned men of the Temple by His understanding of Scripture and things pertaining to God (Luke 2:43-49).

As we view these scenes, we are reminded once again of God's great love for mankind. He who knows no limit to His power, whose greatness no space can contain, who upholds the universe by His Word, became a child to rescue us from our sin. Surely such love should challenge us to greater service and dedication to the Lord.

THOUGHT: How did the Christ-child differ from other children?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for Thy great love for me. May I always show my gratitude by obeying Thee.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13

JOHN 1:10-17

DEUTERONOMY 26:15-19

“He made himself of no reputation.”

THE LORD’S HUMANITY

John 1:14 says, *“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us...”* This aspect of the Lord’s great sacrifice for us is sometimes overlooked. It is clear from Scripture that our Lord, the unlimited God, subjected Himself to the limitations of a human body in order to purchase our salvation.

The Lord’s human body not only looked like that of any human, it experienced the limitations and difficulties of humans. That One who fed the whole group of God’s children during their exodus in the wilderness, and the five thousand on the hillside, that One who declared that He was the “Bread of Life,” had so limited Himself that He experienced hunger just as you and I (Matt 21:18). The Lord’s body also became tired and needed rest (John 4:6). The One who offered wells of living water to all who believe, became thirsty in His humanity (John 4:7-9). And finally, being in human form, the Lord suffered pain and death for your sins and mine (1 Cor 15:3).

Because Christ had subjected Himself to the limitations of a human body, He was not only subject to physical difficulties but also to moral difficulties. God cannot be tempted to do evil (James 1:13). However, Jesus, having put on human form, allowed Himself to be subjected to the same temptations as mankind. We must remember that there is a difference between temptation and sin. Temptation is the invitation to do evil. Sin is the accepting of that invitation and thus the doing of evil. Christ was tempted by Satan (Matt 4:1). But He did not give in to that temptation. The Lord was subject to every temptation of man but He did not sin (Heb 4:15). He was able then not only to be offered as a perfect sacrifice but also to understand the problems of His children as they endeavour to live for Him.

THOUGHT: Consider the difference between temptation and sin in your own life.

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for understanding my daily trials.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14

1 JOHN 3:1-8

1 PETER 2:13-21

*“And took upon him
the form of a servant.”*

THE PURPOSE OF THE INCARNATION

In a certain sense, there are many reasons why Christ came to earth. But as we meditate on a few of these reasons, it becomes clear that the ultimate reason for His incarnation was to do the Father's will in working out salvation for sinful man. That the Lord came to sacrifice Himself for the sins of the world is made very clear in Scripture. He came to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). It was by the sacrifice of Himself that the sins of the world would be taken away (Heb 9:26; 1 John 3:5). This was the reason for the Lord's coming. All His acts as a man on earth were to fulfil Scripture, and to be, and prove He was, the perfect sacrifice for sin.

The Lord's desire was to do the will of God the Father and to finish all the work the Father sent Him to do (John 4:34). We see this objective expressed by the Lord in His prayer (Matt 26:39).

No man hath seen God at any time, but Christ came to the world to make Him known. The Lord told Philip that those who had seen Him had seen the Father (John 14:9).

The Lord came to give Christians an example to follow. Some have mistakenly thought that Christ came to be an example to the world. However, Scripture teaches that Christ came to save the lost by paying the penalty for their sins in His death. His life was meant as an example only to those who through faith have become the children of God. We are saved by faith in Him. But after salvation we are to follow His example (1 Pet 2:21).

Although the Son is God, He did not feel that position was more important than the salvation of mankind. He willingly gave up His heavenly position and became a man in order that He might die for our sins. This was the greatest act of love and humility that the world was ever to see (Phil 2:5-8).

THOUGHT: Am I following Christ in my daily life?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for Christ's sacrifice of Himself which offers me salvation and eternal life.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15

2 CORINTHIANS 5:11-21

COLOSSIANS 1:15-20

“God sent forth his Son...”

THE VIRGIN BIRTH

We have considered Christ’s human birth. God became man in order to save us from sin through His life and death. Christ was man in every sense, although without sin. We turn now to a consideration of the deity of Jesus Christ. Although Christ left heaven and became man, He was still divine. For this reason, we speak of God Incarnate, that is the God-Man, Christ Jesus.

No doubt, more false doctrines have arisen around the person of Jesus Christ than any other point of Scripture. The reason for this is obvious. If Christ were not both completely man and completely God, His substitutionary death would not have purchased our salvation. The most prevalent of these doctrines claims that Jesus Christ was a special human being, but not God. However, Scripture clearly teaches that Jesus Christ is truly God as well as truly man.

One of the proofs of the deity of Christ was His birth. He received His human body, thus His humanity, from His mother Mary. He was born of the seed of a woman as prophesied (Gen 3:15). Although Christ had a human nature, He was also God. Having been conceived by the Holy Spirit, He did not inherit Adam’s sinful nature, thus He was without sin (Isa 7:14; Luke 1:35; 2 Cor 5:21). Therefore He was a worthy sacrifice for the sins of mankind.

What an amazing act of love! The Almighty God left the glory of His heavenly home and became man in order to die for our sins. As we come to better understand this great love, it should cause us to love God more deeply in return. A true love for God will cause us to walk in obedience to His commands as we learn them from Scripture. As children of God, purchased with His precious blood, we must always live to bring honour to His name. Scripture clearly teaches that we cannot love God and walk in disobedience (1 John 1:6).

THOUGHT: Why must Christ be both man and God?

PRAYER: Father, help me to desire to love Jesus more in practical ways in my daily life.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16

JOHN 17:1-10

PSALM 123

“...made of a woman.”

ABSOLUTE DEITY

The Scripture clearly teaches that the fullness of divine nature lived in the humanity of Jesus Christ. That is, everything that is God was in Christ. He was not just part God, nor did He have just a spark of divine nature, but He was in every sense and in every aspect God (Col 2:9). Christ was the exact image of God's essence. In other words, Jesus Christ is what God is because He is God (Heb 1:3).

As we read the Scripture, we find that Jesus Christ possessed all the divine attributes. By the attributes of God, we mean the qualities that are associated with God. Let us consider just a few of these.

The Scripture teaches that Christ is eternal. He has neither beginning nor end. John the Baptist, on introducing Christ, said that although Christ came after him on earth, He had existed before him (John 1:15). When the Jewish religious leaders questioned how Jesus could have seen Abraham because He was not even fifty years old, Jesus told them that He existed before Abraham (John 8:58). In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus mentions the glory He had with the Father before the world began (John 17:5, 24).

While on earth, Christ exhibited the power of the Almighty God. He had power over nature (Matt 8:23-27). This is not surprising since He was the One who created the powers of nature.

When Jesus raised Lazarus and the daughter of Jairus from the dead, He exhibited His power over death (Matt 9:18, 23-26; John 11:43-44). By showing this great power, He not only proved that He was God, but also gave His followers hope for eternity. This is the same hope by which we live today looking forward to the final resurrection.

THOUGHT: In what way did Christ's ministry prove He was God?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for eternal life because Jesus is my Saviour.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17

MATTHEW 8:1-13

PSALM 90:1-6

He is the express image of God.

JESUS' POWER DISPLAYED

We continue to meditate upon the earthly ministry of Christ which showed in so many ways that He was indeed God. Down through the Church Age, Bible scholars have agreed that Satan was more openly active during the earthly ministry of Christ than at any other time in recorded Bible history. When Jesus came to an area known as Gadarenes, a man possessed by evil spirits came to Him. Jesus not only had complete power over these evil beings, they also recognised Him as the Son of God and feared Him (Mark 5:9-13). In Matthew's more complete account of this incident, we find that the demons were aware that their final judgment before God would be conducted by the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt 8:29). At the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus was again met by a demon-possessed man. This evil being also recognised that Jesus, the Holy One of God, had complete power over the evil spirits and could destroy them (Luke 4:33-34).

The instances where Jesus' power was shown over diseases are numerous. The woman, who had suffered for twelve years with an incurable illness, was healed by just touching the Lord's clothing (Mark 5:25-34). Leprosy was the most dreaded disease of Bible times. Those afflicted with this disease not only suffered a slow lingering death, they were also separated from family and friends. Lepers could be offered no hope by medical men of their day, but Jesus healed them (Matt 8:1-4).

There are two things that are important for us to notice about the healing ministry of Christ. First, He healed by His own power. He was God and needed no outside agency to help Him in His healing ministry. Second, He healed all who came into His presence according to His will (Matt 12:15). The healing did not depend on the strength of their faith but on the power of the Almighty God into whose presence they had come.

THOUGHT: What did the Lord's healing ministry prove?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for Thy love for sinners shown throughout Jesus' ministry.

MORE SIGNS OF CHRIST'S DEITY

As we continue to meditate upon the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, we notice that the Scripture attributes the works of God to Him. The creation is an act of God. And it was God the Son who performed this amazing work (Heb 1:10). God not only created all things, He maintains them in their existence. The functions of nature, the movement of the heavenly bodies, all continue because of God's sustaining power. This work of God is attributed to the person of Jesus Christ, the Son (Heb 1:3; Col 1:17).

We know that in the end all men will stand before God as their judge. This judgment will be conducted by Christ (John 5:22). There are many instances in Scripture where Jesus Christ was worshipped as God. He accepted that worship as His just due because He is God. In the account of Jesus healing the leper, we see that the afflicted man came to the Lord and worshipped Him. The Lord accepted His worship and healed him (Matt 8:1-3).

The Gospel of John records an account of a man who was born blind. Even in this day of modern surgery, no man born blind has ever had his sight restored. When Jesus healed the man, in fury the Jewish religious leaders dismissed him from the synagogue. Jesus later came to this man who then worshipped Him, having come to recognise that He was indeed God (John 9:32-38).

On many occasions, the Lord's followers and disciples worshipped Him. Two of the most memorable times were when Jesus calmed the storm, and when the women recognised Him after He had risen from the dead (Matt 14:33; 28:9).

The important point to notice in all these cases is that Christ accepted this worship. By accepting worship that belongs only to God, Christ revealed that He was God (Matt 4:10).

THOUGHT: What is the importance of Christ receiving worship?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for Jesus who gave up the glories of heaven to save my soul.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 19

LUKE 2:8-20

ISAIAH 9:6-7

“Behold, a virgin shall conceive.”

THE SHEPHERDS

Jesus Christ the Eternal Son of God was born of the seed of a woman. He was completely human yet completely divine. This is a miracle of God's grace. We now move on to meditate on the life of Christ while He was on earth. We will follow Him step by step as He fulfilled the plan of the ages for the salvation of mankind. We will first consider the period of the Lord's life before His active ministry began.

As we look at the life of our Lord, we will see many amazing prophecies fulfilled. The Scripture prophesied that the Saviour would be born in Bethlehem of Judah. And indeed that was the place of His birth (Mic 5:2; Matt 2:1).

An angel appeared to a group of shepherds and announced His birth. After the announcement, a whole army of heavenly beings joined the angel and sang praises to God (Luke 2:8-14).

The shepherds, thrilled at this glorious heavenly announcement, decided to go and see for themselves the tremendous thing that had happened. They arrived in Bethlehem and found the Christ-child with Mary and Joseph and they worshipped Him. Afterwards they returned to their sheep, praising God for fulfilling His promise in sending the Messiah. Along the way, they told everyone what had happened (Luke 2:15-20).

Our brief meditation upon this familiar scene should bring a ringing challenge to the heart of every Christian. A group of simple shepherds believed the message of the heavenly host. After they had seen the Christ-child, the Scripture tells us they told everyone about the great event. They had no training and little education, but this great message of salvation was too important to keep to themselves. We too should be excited about the Gospel and concerned about the souls of men.

THOUGHT: Were the shepherds qualified to spread the Good News?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, that I have met Christ and my life is forever changed.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20

LUKE 2:22-38

GENESIS 17:9-14

"His name shall be called Jesus."

THE CHRIST-CHILD AT THE TEMPLE

When Jesus was eight days old, He was circumcised according to the covenant that God made with Abraham (Gen 17:9-12). It was at that time that He was officially given the name Jesus (Luke 2:21).

Thirty-three days after the circumcision of the Christ-child, Mary and Joseph took Him to the Temple. There He was dedicated to the Lord as commanded by the Law (Exod 13:2). At that time, a sacrifice was made by Mary as required by the Law of new mothers. We notice her sacrifice was that of a poor person. The law allowed the poor to sacrifice a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons since they could not afford a lamb (Lev 12:8). So, we see Jesus Christ, the God of glory, in a family that was very poor. We are reminded of the words of Scripture: *"...though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor..."* (2 Cor 8:9).

While at the Temple, Jesus was brought into the presence of a man named Simeon. He had placed his faith in the coming Messiah and lived a holy life before God. The Holy Spirit had assured him that he would not die until he saw the promised Saviour. When he saw the child Jesus, he took Him in his arms and proclaimed Him to be the Messiah. Using the words of Isaiah, he prophesied that Christ would bring salvation to the Gentiles. He further prophesied the pain of Mary as she saw Jesus crucified (Isa 42:6; Luke 2:34-35). Another numbered among the faithful was a widow named Anna. When she saw Jesus she gave thanks to God. She then spent the rest of her life announcing to those who came to the Temple that Jesus was the Christ (Luke 2:36-38).

The world rushed on and few heard the announcement of the birth of the Christ. But there were a faithful few who passed on the message. Are we numbered among the faithful few who are living for God and actively looking for His return?

THOUGHT: Why did Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the Temple?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for the joy of walking with Jesus.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21

MATTHEW 2:1-12

DANIEL 1:1-5

“He shall be great...”

WISE MEN FROM THE EAST

Some time after Jesus was born, Scripture tells us that wise men from the east came to worship Him. We know very little about these men. What we can surmise from Scripture is that they were probably Gentiles who practised the art of astronomy and had knowledge of medicine and other sciences. (It was to a group of wise men such as this that Daniel was given for training during his captivity in Babylon.) We do know they followed the star to the Lord's birthplace, supporting the view that they were knowledgeable in astronomy, and had heard and believed the message of the coming King. They continued to be tender to the voice of the Lord as He warned them in a dream to go home a different way so as to avoid Herod (Matt 2:12).

We know little about these wise men. Yet they fit into the picture of faithfulness and love toward God that was so clearly shown by a few when the Saviour came. We think of Simeon and Anna waiting faithfully at the Temple while others went noisily about their business. Now these wise men were surely from among the few in their nation who believed. And could it be that this lesson in faithfulness goes back hundreds of years to a young man who had lost all he held dear? For so it was with Daniel. Although he lost family, fortune and home, he resolved not to defile himself with the things of the world (Dan 1:8). Perhaps the Lord rewarded Daniel's faithfulness by keeping the message of truth alive so some of the descendants of his spiritual sons could see the Christ-child face to face.

Today, Christians often feel alone in a world where there is little interest in the things of God. Yet we could hardly be more alone than these we have just considered. May God find us as faithful as these men and women of old.

THOUGHT: What did the presence of the wise men show?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may I be numbered among the faithful few.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22

MATTHEW 2:13-18

PSALM 48:1-10

“...the Son of the Highest.”

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

We have surely been encouraged by the faithful few who were looking for the Saviour and recognised the Christ-child at His birth. But the enemy knew that the coming of the Messiah and fulfilling of His ministry would spell his eternal doom. In an attempt by Satan to thwart God's plan, Herod tried to learn from the wise men the location of the baby Jesus (Matt 2:12).

Like many rulers, Herod was extremely suspicious of any threat to his power. Satan used this fear to incite Herod's wrath in an attempt to kill the baby Jesus. Being tricked by the wise men who returned to their country by a different route, Herod ordered all male children in Israel under the age of two to be killed (Matt 2:16). An angel had already warned Mary and Joseph to flee to Egypt so that the child would be spared (Matt 2:13-14). When Herod gave the order to kill the baby boys, he was fulfilling an old prophecy about the slaughter of Jewish babies (Matt 2:17-18; Jer 31:15). Mary and Joseph fled with the child to Egypt and stayed there until Herod's death. This also fulfilled a prophecy concerning the Christ (Matt 2:15; Hosea 11:1). So from the very beginning of His earthly life, we see prophecies concerning the Messiah being fulfilled.

A short time after the horrible slaughtering of the infants, Herod died. An angel of the Lord then informed Joseph that they could safely return to Israel. They started back but on hearing that one of Herod's sons was king they were directed by God to go into Galilee where they settled in Nazareth. This fulfilled another prophecy concerning the Christ (Matt 2:19-23).

We are reminded again of the faithfulness of God's promises. It is on the promises of the eternal Word of God that we base our faith and salvation.

THOUGHT: Why did Satan want to destroy the Christ-child?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, that all Thy promises are sure for all eternity.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 23

LUKE 2:41-52

EXODUS 23:14-17

“His name shall be called Wonderful...”

JESUS AT THE TEMPLE

From the time of the flight to Egypt until Jesus was twelve years old, we know very little of the Saviour’s activity. The Scripture tells us that He grew up strong and was filled with wisdom and grace (Luke 2:40). Other than this, we know nothing.

It was the custom of Mary and Joseph to go to the Temple every year during the Feast of the Passover. It was required of men to go to the Temple, but not necessarily of women. Despite the long, hard, costly journey from their home to Jerusalem, Mary and Joseph, although poor, always went (Luke 2:41).

The account is well known. Thinking Jesus was with them, Mary and Joseph started for home in a group of other relatives and friends. After having travelled for a day, they suddenly discovered that Jesus was not among the group travelling with them. So, they went back to look for Him (Luke 2:42-45).

After searching for three days, they found Him in the Temple entering into the theological debates of the wisest teachers of the Law in all Judaism. Everyone was amazed at the knowledge of this One who, humanly speaking, was just a boy (Luke 2:46-47).

When questioned by His mother, He reminded her that He had to fulfil those things ordained by God the Father (Luke 2:48-49). Mary and Joseph did not understand the reply of the Lord. But He returned with them and was an obedient son, having approval both of God the Father and those who knew Him on earth (Luke 2:51-52).

Here is a strong admonition for children to obey their parents. Jesus subjected Himself to Mary and Joseph despite the fact that Joseph was not His father and neither Mary nor Joseph could really understand Him. Children should be obedient to their parents. This was the example set by Christ.

THOUGHT: What lesson have I learnt from today’s Scripture?

PRAYER: Father, help me to follow Jesus’ example.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 24

LUKE 1:5-17

MALACHI 4:5-6

“...Counsellor...”

FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OF SILENCE BROKEN

It had been over 400 years since the last of the prophets had spoken God's words to Israel. The people of God had continued to grow as wicked as the world around them. The Jews had finally been cured of idolatry and were very religious. But it was a religion of hypocrisy, especially among the Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes. The Pharisees were filled with pride because they strictly kept the Law. The Sadducees were apostate in that they denied the Scripture's teaching concerning life after death. The Scribes claimed to love the Scripture but spent their time studying men's writings, not God's revelation. They added so much to the Law that it became an intolerable burden to the people.

Despite the wickedness everywhere, there were some who were faithful to God. These men and women loved the Old Testament Scripture and were looking for the promised Messiah. Such were the priest Zacharias and his wife Elisabeth. Zacharias had prayed for years for a son. That prayer had not been answered and, now old, Zacharias had given up hope. But he continued faithfully serving God in the Temple (Luke 1:5-10).

While serving in the Temple, an angel appeared to Zacharias and announced that God had answered his prayers and his wife would have a son. He was told that this child should be named John. He would be filled with the Holy Ghost from birth and would turn many back to God (Luke 1:11-17).

The appearance of the angel to Zacharias broke the long years of silence between the Old and the New Testaments. No doubt Zacharias, his wife and the few faithful with them often felt alone among the hypocrites and the godlessness around them. But God is faithful, and those who follow Him are always blessed. May we be faithful in these days of apostasy which are much like those of old.

THOUGHT: What have I learned from Zacharias?

PRAYER: Father, may I remain faithful although others forsake Thee.

THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

It was a joyous occasion when John was born. No one dreamed that this elderly couple would ever have a child (Luke 1:57-58). It was the custom of the Jews to name a child when he was circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. At that time, relatives and neighbours gathered and wanted to name the child Zacharias, after his father. But Elisabeth replied that her child would be called John. Since Zacharias could not speak, having been struck dumb by the angel for his initial doubt of God's promise, we must assume he had written for Elisabeth the account of what happened in the Temple. But their friends and relatives disagreed saying the child could not be named John as this was not one of the family names. Zacharias then called for a writing tablet and wrote that the child's name should be John (Luke 1:59-63).

Immediately after this, Zacharias was able to speak and he praised God for all those things that were taking place. Everyone was amazed at the events and the news spread rapidly. All who heard recognised that the hand of God must be upon this newborn child (Luke 1:64-66).

Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to prophesy. He announced that the Day of Salvation was at hand and the Redeemer would come as prophesied by the prophets (Luke 1:67-70). Nothing further is known about the childhood of John except that he grew in a normal manner and developed spiritually. He later went out into the desert to live until it was time to begin his ministry (Luke 1:80).

There is an important lesson for us here. Zacharias was a man of faith. Yet his momentary doubting of the Lord's promise caused him to lose his speech, thus his ability to serve God for some nine months. How important it is that we be firm in our trust in the Lord and in our obedience to Him.

THOUGHT: What is the important lesson for me today?

PRAYER: Father, Thou art always faithful, may I be faithful in return.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 26

LUKE 3:1-14

ISAIAH 40:1-5

“...the Prince of Peace...”

THE MESSAGE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

John was living in the desert, unknown and perhaps alone when God spoke to him. He did not make up his own message nor pick his own time to preach, but his message and the time for preaching it came from God (Luke 3:2).

His message in its simplest form was “repent and be baptised.” This was an act of public confession of sin and a recognition of the need for the Saviour who was to come (Luke 3:3).

John is described in a prophecy of Isaiah. He is spoken of as the voice of one calling out in the wilderness for people to prepare their hearts for the coming of the Messiah (Luke 3:4-6; Isa 40:3-5).

John demanded that people honestly repent in order to have their sins forgiven. He called upon the vast crowds that came out seeking his baptism to live righteous lives and to show the fruit such repentance brings (Luke 3:8a). As more and more people heard about John, it became popular to go out to hear him and seek baptism. He evidently refused to baptise many who were just going along with the crowd. He called a large group of such people a “*generation of vipers*” (Luke 3:7), warning them that in order to escape the coming judgment their lives must show forth true repentance.

John pointed out sin to all who came. He reminded them that being related to Abraham could not save them. He called on the rich, the tax collectors and the soldiers to return their ill-gotten gains and to be honest. He rebuked the king, naming his sin and calling him a hypocrite (Luke 3:8b-20).

We see a vast difference between John’s message and much popular preaching in our day. Only an honest facing of sin and a life showing true repentance can be claimed as fruit of God’s Gospel. Such a message is never popular!

THOUGHT: Did John’s Gospel offend people? Why?

PRAYER: Father, help me to do Thy work in Thy way.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27

LUKE 3:15-20

PSALM 105:1-4

“I am the way...”

THE POSITION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

As John's popularity grew, people began to wonder if he could be the promised Messiah. But he always answered very clearly that he was not that promised One (Luke 3:15-16).

John the Baptist's ministry was to announce the coming of the Messiah. When Jesus met him, John made a clear declaration that Jesus was the Christ, the Saviour of the world and the promised sacrifice for sin (John 1:29, 35-36).

John's baptism was a sign of repentance. And so we are surprised to find that the sinless Christ asked John to baptise Him. Nowhere in the Scripture is there a direct statement to explain this (Matt 3:13-17). John himself did not feel that he should baptise the Lord. But Jesus said His baptism was to fulfil all righteousness (Matt 3:15). So in this Jesus was obedient to the plan of salvation, possibly by being identified with sinners (Isa 53:12). At this time the Spirit descended on Christ, and God the Father announced that this was His Son, the promised Messiah and Saviour (Matt 3:16-17). With His baptism Christ's ministry began and John the Baptist's ended.

Sometime after the beginning of Jesus' ministry, John's faithful preaching cost him his life. The account is told only in retrospect, but the details are clear. Herod had John beheaded against his will, being tricked by the wicked Herodias. She was his brother Philip's wife and John had rebuked the king for his immoral relationship with her.

John's life ended as he had lived it: faithfully preaching against sin and for righteousness. Many of us may not be bold preachers like John, but by our lives we can live the truth he died preaching. May God give us grace to be faithful.

THOUGHT: What was John's ministry?

PRAYER: Father, may I be found faithful to Thy assigned tasks.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 28

MATTHEW 4:1-11

DEUTERONOMY 8:1-5

“...the truth and the life.”

JESUS IN THE WILDERNESS

The four hundred silent years between the Old and the New Testaments had ended when the angel spoke to Zacharias to announce the coming birth of John the Baptist. With the baptism of Christ, John's ministry drew to a close and the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ began.

Just prior to the Lord's active ministry, a very important event took place. The Lord underwent a special period of tempting by Satan. We need not suppose that He had not been tempted before. Since Satan's aim was to stop God's plan of salvation, we must assume that he was active during the silent years of Christ's physical growth. But of this we know nothing.

Now the ministry of Christ has begun and proof of His sinless divine person would be shown. To reveal the certainty of the doom of Satan, he would be allowed to tempt the Son of God by every means at his command. It was for this reason that the Holy Spirit led Christ into the wilderness (Matt 4:1; Luke 4:1).

The period of forty days and nights reminds us of the forty years of Israel's wandering in the wilderness. According to Moses the purpose of this wandering was to test them in order to show what was in their hearts whether or not they would obey the commands of the Lord (Deut 8:2). Jesus proved Himself to be of honest and sinless heart, depending on the Word of God for His defence against the arrows of the wicked one (Matt 4:4). This time of testing would also show that our High Priest is One who can understand and help us, having subjected Himself to the limits of a human body and subject to every temptation and yet without sin (Heb 2:17-18).

The Lord's ministry began to be under attack by the evil one. It was to end in great victory. It is this same victory over sin that God offers His people who will obey His Word. May we be found faithful.

THOUGHT: Why was Jesus allowed to be tempted in the wilderness?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, that victory can be mine through Jesus Christ my Lord.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 29

LUKE 4:1-4

PSALM 24

"I am in the Father..."

THE FIRST TEMPTATION OF JESUS

The Lord fasted in the wilderness for forty days and was continuously tempted. After those forty days, when Jesus was tired and hungry, Satan came with his cleverest temptations (Luke 4:2). We might note here a lesson for us to remember. When we are tired from a heavy schedule or physical illness, Satan often takes advantage and endeavours to attack us when we are at our weakest. At such times we must seek strength from God through prayer and the reading of His Word.

The Lord was extremely hungry and Satan attacked Him at that point. Satan's first temptation was in the area of normal physical needs and desires. Satan tried to take advantage of the Lord's hunger by asking Him to prove His divine Sonship by changing the stones into food (Luke 4:3). God the Father had already announced that Jesus was His Son and that He was well pleased with Him (Matt 3:17). So there was no need to prove that point. There was need, however, for Jesus to follow the Father's will. To have met His hunger by using His power would have glorified Himself rather than the Father. Also, it would have moved Christ out of the area of human testing since no human could turn stones into food. The Scripture records that He was tempted in every human point, yet without sin (Heb 4:15).

The Lord faced the temptation the same as we should. He used the power of the Word of God, reminding Satan that our physical needs are not the most important thing in life (Deut 8:3). Satan often tricks God's people into allowing physical comforts to become the very centre of their existence.

So Christ stopped Satan's attack by quoting Scripture which shows that God will, in His time and in His way, provide for the physical needs of His obedient people.

THOUGHT: How does Satan take advantage of our physical weakness?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for meeting my needs through Thy Word.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 30

MATTHEW 4:5-7

PSALM 91:1-12

“...and the Father in me.”

SCRIPTURE MISUSED

Satan had been defeated in his first attempt to tempt the Lord to sin. He then returned with another temptation. This time he took the Lord to a high portion of the Temple. Many Bible scholars think it may have been the southern portico which overlooked the Kidron Valley. It was about 150 metres from the top of that part of the Temple to the valley floor. In any case, Satan asked Christ to commit a very foolish act which once again would have glorified Himself and tested the Father. Satan based his challenge on a misuse of Scripture, partially quoting Psalm 91:11-12. We saw long ago in the Garden of Eden how the misuse of God’s Word helped bring sin into the human race. The misuse of Scripture remains one of Satan’s cleverest methods of deceiving people.

Today, many false religions are based on the Word of God, usually removed from its context. Sad to say, many true believers are deceived in this same way. There is great danger in removing verses from their context to support what we believe rather than searching out the Word to see what it really says.

Psalm 91 which Satan used says that those promises belong to those who dwell in the “*secret place of the most High*” (Ps 91:1). In the physical sense, these verses are prophetic concerning Israel in the last days. However, in the spiritual sense, these promises are to all of God’s people. To be in His “*secret place*” is to walk in obedience to Him. Satan asked Christ to do something that was not in line with the Father’s will, and yet he cited God’s promises that are based on obedience (Matt 4:5-6). Jesus refused, quoting Scripture: “*It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*” (Matt 4:7; Deut 6:16).

We here see the importance of knowing the Scripture so we might be protected from those who would misuse it and lead the uninformed astray. Let us be diligent students of God’s Word.

THOUGHT: Do I diligently study God’s Word?

PRAYER: Father, help me to put Thee first so that my path will be directed aright.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31

MATTHEW 4:8-11

PSALM 93

*“He that hath seen me
hath seen the Father.”*

VICTORY IN THE WILDERNESS

Satan had been defeated more than once as he challenged the Lord. But he returned one more time. This should serve to remind us that we must always be on our guard against that one who would lead us into sin and rob us of the joy and peace that only comes from obedience (1 Pet 5:8).

The final temptation in the wilderness was an offer to give Jesus the kingdoms of the earth immediately. God the Father had already told of the kingdom that would be established in Christ, and Satan would have no part in it. The devil showed the Lord the organised empires of mankind, all that the earth has to offer. Over all of this, Satan holds sway because of sin. But he knew his doom was sure if Christ fulfilled the Father's plan. All the tempting was an effort by Satan to save himself and his evil order. He asked Jesus to worship him in return for an earthly kingdom (Matt 4:8-9). Again the Lord answered with Scripture. All the temptations of the evil one can be met by God's people through the Scripture even as Christ has given us this example to follow (Matt 4:10). The answer of the Lord was further proof that He Himself was God. As we saw in our earlier study, He allowed people to worship Him. Here, He refused to worship Satan on the basis that God alone is worthy of worship.

Satan's evil purpose to destroy the sinless sacrifice had failed. After this last attempt, Satan left the Lord (Matt 4:11). All his tempting of the Saviour was unsuccessful. The sinless life of Christ is attested to over and over again in the New Testament account by those who knew Him. Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church, *“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin...”* (2 Cor 5:21). Surely such love should cause us to want to live holy lives that bring honour to His name.

THOUGHT: How did the Lord defeat Satan's attack?

PRAYER: Father, may I treasure Thy Word and use it to guide me to live a holy life.

THE WATER WAS MADE WINE

(Today we begin a month of readings on "Miracles of Christ our Lord" by J.C. Ryle.)

We learn from today's reading the almighty power of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are told of a miracle which He wrought at the marriage feast when the wine failed. By a mere act of will, Jesus changed water into wine and so supplied the need of all the guests.

The manner in which the miracle was worked deserves especial notice. We are not told of any outward visible action which preceded or accompanied it. It is not said that Jesus touched the waterpots containing the water that was made wine. It is not said that He commanded the water to change its qualities, or that Jesus prayed to His Father in heaven. Jesus simply willed the change and it took place. We read of no prophet or apostle in the Bible who ever worked a miracle after this fashion. He who could do such a mighty work, in such a manner, was nothing less than very God.

It is a comfortable thought that the same almighty power of will which our Lord here displayed is still exercised on behalf of His believing people. They have no need of His bodily presence to maintain their cause. They have no reason to be cast down because they cannot see Him with their eyes interceding for them; or touch Him with their hands, that they may cling to Him for safety. If He "wills" their salvation and the daily supply of all their spiritual need, they are as safe and well provided for as if they saw Him standing by them. Christ's will is as mighty and effectual as Christ's deed. The will of Him who could say to the Father, "*I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am*" (John 17:24) is a will that has all power in heaven and earth and must prevail. Happy are those who believe on Him by whom this miracle was wrought!

THOUGHT: Whatever has been determined by God must happen (re: Dan 4:35).

PRAYER: Father, forgive me for the times when I have rejected Thy will for my life.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 2

JOHN 4:43-54

HEBREWS 12:4-13

“...who healeth all thy diseases.”

HEALING OF THE NOBLEMAN'S SON

What benefits affliction can confer on the soul! We read that anxiety about a son led the nobleman to Christ, in order to obtain help in time of need. Once brought into Christ's company, he learned a lesson of priceless value. In the end, he “*believed, and his whole house*” (John 4:53). All this, be it remembered, hinged upon the son's sickness. If the nobleman's son had never been ill, his father might have lived and died in his sins.

Affliction is one of God's medicines. By it He often teaches lessons, which would be learned in no other way. By it He often draws souls away from sin and the world, which would otherwise have perished everlastingly.

Let us beware of murmuring in the time of trouble. Let us settle it firmly in our minds that there is a meaning, a needs-be and a message from God in every sorrow that falls upon us. There are no lessons so useful as those learned in the school of affliction.

Christ's word is as good as His presence. Jesus did not come down to Capernaum to see the sick young man, but only spoke the word: “*Thy son liveth*” (John 4:51). Almighty power went with that little sentence. That very hour the patient was healed. Christ only spoke and the cure was done. Christ only commanded and the deadly disease stood fast.

The fact before us is singularly full of comfort. It gives enormous value to every promise of mercy, grace and peace which ever fell from Christ's lips. He that by faith has laid hold on some word of Christ has got his feet upon a rock. What Christ has said, He is able to do, and what He has undertaken, He will never fail to make good. The sinner who has really reposed his soul on the word of the Lord Jesus is safe to all eternity. He could not be safer, if he saw the book of life and his own name written in it.

THOUGHT: It is better to be sick and have Christ than to be well and on a road to hell.

PRAYER: Father, may I learn Thy lessons through my infirmities.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 3

LUKE 5:1-11

MATTHEW 8:18-22

Even the fishes obey Him.

THE MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT OF FISHES

Our Lord had an unwearied readiness for every good work. Our Lord preached to a crowd, not in any consecrated building or place set apart for public worship, but in the open air; not in a pulpit constructed for the preacher's use, but in a fisherman's boat (Luke 5:1-3). Souls were waiting to be fed. Personal inconvenience was not allowed a place in His consideration. God's work must not stand still.

Servants of Christ should learn a lesson from the Master. We are not to wait until every little obstacle or difficulty is removed before we put our hand to the plough or go forth to sow the seed of the Word. Let us work with the tools that we have. While we are lingering and delaying, souls are perishing. It is the slothful heart that is always looking at the hedge of thorns and the lion in the way (Prov 15:19; 22:13). Where we are, and as we are, in season or out of season, by one means or another, by tongue or pen, by speaking or writing, let us strive to be ever working for God. Let us never stand still.

What encouragement our Lord gives to unquestioning obedience. Our Lord's command to Simon (Luke 5:4) received a reply which exhibited in a striking manner the mind of a good servant (Luke 5:5). Luke 5:6 tells us the reward of this ready compliance with the Lord's command.

A practical lesson for us is contained under these simple circumstances. Let us learn the lesson of ready, unhesitating obedience to every command of Christ. The path of duty may sometimes be hard and disagreeable. The wisdom of the course we follow may not be apparent to the world. But none of these things must move us. We are to go straight forward when Jesus says, "Go." And do a thing decidedly, boldly and unflinchingly, when Jesus says, "Do it." We are to walk by faith and not by sight, and believe that what we see not now to be reasonable and right, we shall see hereafter. So acting we shall never find that we are losers. Sooner or later we shall reap a great reward.

THOUGHT: Disobedience can always make reasons out of excuses but God knows the motive of the heart (1 Cor 4:5).

PRAYER: Father, help me not to make excuses for disobeying Thee.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 4

MARK 1:21-28; LUKE 4:33-37

MATTHEW 19:16-22

Our Lord is all powerful!

THE DEMONIAK IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF CAPERNAUM

We are especially told that the unclean spirits knew our Lord (Mark 1:24). They knew Christ when scribes and Pharisees were ignorant of Him and would not acknowledge Him. And yet their knowledge was not unto salvation. This knowledge was a knowledge unaccompanied by faith, hope or charity. Those who possessed it were miserable fallen beings, full of bitter hatred against both God and man. The mere belief of the facts and doctrines of Christianity will never save our souls. Such belief is no better than the belief of devils. They all believe and know that Jesus is the Christ. They believe that He will one day judge the world and cast them down into endless torment. It is a solemn and sorrowful thought that on these points some professing Christians have even less faith than the devil. There are some who doubt the reality of hell and the eternity of punishment. Such doubts as these find no place except in the hearts of self-willed men and women. There is no infidelity among devils (James 2:19).

Let us beware of an unsanctified knowledge of Christianity. It is a dangerous possession, but a fearfully common one in these latter days. We may know the Bible intellectually and have no doubt about the truth of its contents. We may have our memories well stored with its leading texts, and be able to talk glibly about its leading doctrines. And all this time the Bible may have no influence over our hearts, wills and consciences. We may, in reality, be nothing better than devils.

Let us take heed that our faith is a faith of the heart, as well as the head. We may live saying, "I know that and I know that" and sink at last into hell with the words upon our lips. Let us see that our knowledge bears fruit in our lives. It is one thing to say, "Christ is a Saviour." It is quite another to say, "Christ is my Saviour and my Lord." The devil can say the first. The true Christian alone can say the second.

THOUGHT: Without faith we are worse than devils; with a mere head faith we are equal to devils; with life-changing faith we are unlike devils.

PRAYER: Father, may I allow my faith to truly change my life.

HEALING OF SIMON'S WIFE'S MOTHER

In time of trouble we should resort first to Jesus, as the friends of Simon's wife's mother did (Mark 1:30). There is no remedy like this. Means are to be used diligently without question in time of need. Doctors are to be sent for in sickness. Lawyers are to be consulted when property or character needs defence. The help of friends is to be sought. But still, the first thing to be done is to cry to the Lord Jesus for help. No one is so compassionate and so willing to relieve. Scripture gives many examples of this (Gen 32:11; 2 Kings 19:19; John 11:3; Ps 55:22; 1 Pet 5:7; Phil 4:6).

Jesus' almighty power was seen in that sicknesses and devils alike yielded to His command. He rebuked unclean spirits and they came forth from the unhappy people whom they possessed (Mark 1:25, 26, 34). He rebuked a fever, laid His hands on sick people and at once their diseases departed and the sick were healed (Mark 1:31, 34).

Such miracles occurred so frequently in the Gospels that we are apt to read them with a thoughtless eye, and forget the mighty lesson that each one is meant to convey. They are all intended to fasten our minds on the great truth that Christ is the appointed Healer of every evil that sin has brought into this world. Christ is the true antidote and remedy for all the soul-ruining mischief which Satan has wrought on mankind.

The Lord Jesus made a complete and perfect cure when He healed. Not only did the fever leave Simon's mother-in-law, but she served them (Mark 1:31). That weakness and prostration of strength that as a general rule fever leaves behind was entirely removed in her case. The fevered woman was not only made well in a moment, but in the same moment made strong and able to work. What an emblem of Christ's dealings with sin-sick souls! The sin-sick soul is not merely cured and then left to itself. It is also supplied with a new heart and a right spirit; and enabled to live so as to please God.

THOUGHT: (Read 1 Peter 5:7.)

PRAYER: I praise Thee, Father, for Thy power to heal physically and spiritually.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 6

MARK 1:40-45; MATTHEW 8:2-4; LUKE 5:12-15
NUMBERS 5:1-4

*Only one said,
"Thank you, Lord."*

ISRAEL THE CHOSEN

Leprosy is a complaint of which we know little. In Bible lands it is far more common. It is a radical disease of the whole man, attacking not merely the skin but the blood, the flesh, the bones until the unhappy patient begins to rot. Amongst the Jews, the leper was reckoned unclean and was cut off from the congregation of Israel and the ordinances of religion. He was obliged to dwell in a separate house. None might touch him or minister to him. What remarkable wretchedness belonged to the leprous person!

There is something like leprosy in us. There is a foul sin disease which is ingrained into our very natures and cleaves to our bones and marrows with deadly force. That disease is the plague of sin. Like leprosy it is a deep-seated disease, infecting every part of our natures: our heart, will, conscience, understanding, memory and affections. Like leprosy it makes us loathsome and abominable, unfit for the company of God and the glory of heaven. But far worse than leprosy, it is a disease from which no mortal is exempt (Isa 64:6).

Our Lord is able and willing to heal those in need (Mark 1:41-42). Our Lord responded to the leper's request (Mark 1:40-41) and made him well. At once the cure was effected (Mark 1:41-42). That very instant the deadly plague departed from the poor sufferer and he was healed. It was but a word, and a touch, and there stood before the Lord not a leper, but a sound and healthy man.

Who can conceive the greatness of the change in the feelings of this leper when he found himself healed? The morning sun rose upon him, a miserable being more dead than alive, a mass of sores and corruption. The evening sun saw him full of hope and joy, free from pain and fit for society. So with spiritual leprosy. No heart disease is so deep-seated, but He is able to cure it. No plague of soul is so virulent, but our Great Physician can heal it.

THOUGHT: Christ is willing to save. Sinners are not willing to go to Him for salvation (Matt 23:37; John 5:40).

PRAYER: Father, cleanse me of my spiritual leprosy by Jesus' blood.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7

MARK 2:1-12; MATTHEW 9:2-8; LUKE 5:17-26

PSALM 139:1-6

*By His word
the healing was
instantaneous.*

A MAN WITH PALSYP HEALED

What great blessing affliction may prove to a man's soul! The man with palsy, having been carried from his house weak, dependent and bowed down in body and soul, returned to his own house rejoicing in body and soul. Who can doubt that he to the end of his days would thank God for his palsy? It was the beginning of eternal life to his soul.

Let us beware of murmuring under affliction. Every cross is meant to call us nearer to God. Bereavements have proved mercies. Losses have proved real gains. Sickesses have led many to the great Physician of souls, sent them to the Bible, shut out the world, shown them their foolishness and taught them to pray. Thousands echo Psalm 119:71.

Our Lord Jesus has perfect knowledge of men's thoughts (Mark 2:8). It should be a daily and habitual reflection with us that we can keep nothing secret from Christ. To Him belong the solemn expressions of Psalm 139, which Christians should often study (Heb 4:13; Ps 139:4). How many searchings of the heart this mighty truth should awaken within us! Christ ever sees us! Christ always knows us! Christ daily reads and observes our acts, words and thoughts! The recollection of this should alarm the wicked and drive them from their sins. Their wickedness is not hid, and will one day be fearfully exposed if they do not repent. It should frighten hypocrites out of their hypocrisy. They can deceive men, but not Christ. It should comfort all sincere believers. They should remember that a loving Master is looking at them and fairly and justly measuring them in His eye (John 21:17).

The Lord Jesus possesses the priestly power to forgive sins (Mark 2:5, 10). No angel in heaven, no man upon earth, no church in council, no minister of any denomination can take away the sinner's conscience load of guilt and give him peace with God. They may declare with authority whose sins God is willing to forgive, but they cannot absolve by their own authority. This is the peculiar prerogative of God, which He has put into the hands of His Son, Jesus Christ.

THOUGHT: Jesus who knows us completely can forgive us entirely.

PRAYER: Father, look into my heart and forgive me entirely.

IMPOTENT MAN AT BETHESDA

How great are the mercy and compassion of Christ! He "saw" (John 5:6) the poor sufferer lying in the crowd. Neglected, overlooked and forgotten in the great multitude, he was observed by the all-seeing eye of Christ. He "knew" (John 5:6) full well, by His divine knowledge, how long he had been "in that case" and pitied him. He spoke to him unexpectedly, with words of gracious sympathy. He healed him at once and without tedious delay, and sent him home rejoicing.

This is just one among many examples of our Lord Jesus Christ's kindness and compassion. He is full of undeserved, unexpected, abounding love towards man. He "delighteth in mercy" (Mic 7:18). He is far more ready to save than man is to be saved, far more willing to do good than man is to receive it.

We are taught the lesson that recovery from sickness ought to impress upon us. That lesson is contained in the solemn words which our Saviour addressed to the man He had cured: "*sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee*" (John 5:14).

Every sickness and sorrow is the voice of God speaking to us. Each has its peculiar message. Happy are they who have an eye to see God's hand and an ear to hear His voice in all that happens to them. Nothing in this world happens by chance.

And as it is with sickness, so it is with recovery. Renewed health should send us back to our post in the world with a deeper hatred of sin, a more thorough watchfulness over our own ways and a more constant purpose of mind to live to God. Far too often the excitement and novelty of returning health tempt us to forget the vows and intentions of the sick-room. There are spiritual dangers attending a recovery! Well would it be for us all after illness to grave these words on our hearts: "Let me sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto me."

THOUGHT: Am I making the most of God's kindnesses towards me or am I building up His wrath? (Rom 2:5)

PRAYER: Father, may I hear Thy voice in every of my experiences.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 9

LUKE 6:1-11; MATTHEW 12:1-13; MARK 2:23-3:5 *“The Sabbath was made for man.”*
MATTHEW 23:15-24

THE LORD HEALING ON THE SABBATH

Our Lord freed the sabbath from incorrect interpretations and purified it from man-made traditions. He stripped off the miserable traditions with which the Pharisees had encrusted the day, and by which they had made it a burden rather than a blessing.

Our Lord allows all works of real necessity and mercy to be done on the sabbath day, a principle which is abundantly established in today's Bible passages. We find our Lord justifying His disciples for plucking ears of corns on a sabbath. It was an act permitted in Scripture (Deut 23:25). They were hungry and in need of food and therefore not to be blamed (Matt 12:1). We find Him maintaining the lawfulness of healing a sick man on the sabbath day. The man was suffering from disease and pain. In such a case, it was no breach of God's commandment to afford relief. We ought never to rest from doing good.

The arguments by which our Lord supports the lawfulness of any work of necessity and mercy on the Sabbath are striking and unanswerable. He reminds the Pharisees, who charged Him and His disciples with breaking the law, of the actions of David (Luke 6:3-4), of priests in the temple (Matt 12:5) and of their own care for animals (Matt 12:11). Above all, He lays down the great principle that no ordinance of God is to be pressed so far as to make us neglect the plain duties of charity (Luke 6:9; Matt 12:7). The first table of the law is not to be interpreted so as to make us break the second. The fourth commandment is not to be so explained as to make us unkind and unmerciful to our neighbour.

Our Lord again shows His perfect knowledge of men's thoughts (Luke 6:8). It belongs only to God to read hearts. He who could discern the secret intents and imaginations of others must have been more than man. No doubt He was man like ourselves, sin only excepted. But there are other texts in Scripture which prove our Lord was God as well as man. Our Lord's perfect knowledge should always exercise a humbling influence upon our souls. Jesus Christ reads our hearts.

THOUGHT: Zeal for truth must be matched with love for others.

PRAYER: Father, may I treasure Thy truth and love even my enemies.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10

LUKE 7:1-10

MATTHEW 8:5-13

No greater faith!

THE HEALING OF THE CENTURION'S SERVANT

Luke 7:1-10 describes the miraculous cure of a sick man. A centurion in the Roman army applies to our Lord on behalf of his servant and obtains what he requests. A greater miracle of healing than this is nowhere recorded in the Gospels. Without even seeing the sufferer, without touch of hand or look of eye, our Lord restores health to a dying man by a single word. He speaks and the sick man is cured. He commands and the disease departs. We read of no prophet or apostle who wrought miracles in this manner. We see here the finger of God.

The kindness of the centurion appears in three ways. He cares for his sick servant tenderly and takes pains to have him restored to health (Luke 7:3). He does not despise the Jewish people as many other Gentiles did. The elders of the Jews bear a strong testimony to this (Luke 7:5). He liberally supported the Jewish place of worship at Capernaum, not loving Israel in words and tongue only, but in deed.

Let us learn a lesson from this centurion's example. Let us, like him, show kindness to everyone with whom we have to do. Let us strive to have an eye ready to see, and a hand ready to help, and a heart ready to feel, and a will ready to do good to all. Let us be ready to weep with them that weep and rejoice with them that rejoice (Rom 12:15). This is the way to recommend our religion and make it beautiful before men. Kindness is a grace that all can understand. This is one way to be like our blessed Saviour. If there is one feature in His character more notable than another it is His unwearied kindness and love. There is one way to be happy in the world and see good days. Kindness always brings its own reward. The kind person will seldom be without friends.

THOUGHT: Kindness to all is a characteristic of God (Luke 6:32-36). Christians are exhorted to show similar kindnesses, doing good to those who are fellow believers in Christ especially, but also to men in general (Gal 6:10). Even our enemies are to be the recipients of our kindness (Luke 6:35) and such action in the face of evil has its effect in overcoming evil and turning hostility into friendship (Rom 12:20-21).

PRAYER: Forgive me, Father, for my lack of kindness. May I grow in my Saviour's kindness.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 11

LUKE 7:11-17

1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-58

“An only son was raised.”

THE RAISING OF THE WIDOW’S SON

What sorrow sin has brought into the world! Here we have the death of the only son of a widow. All this misery is the result of sin. God made all things very good (Gen 1:31) but sin entered the world and death through sin (Rom 5:12). This world is full of sickness, pain, infirmity, poverty, labour and trouble. Universally the history of families is full of lamentation, weeping, mourning and woe. It can all be traced to sin. How much we ought to hate sin! Instead of loving it, cleaving to it, dallying with it, excusing it, playing with it, we must hate it with a deadly hatred, waging a ceaseless warfare against it (Rom 12:9).

How deep is the compassion of our Lord’s heart! He did not wait to be applied to for help but addressed the weeping mother (Luke 7:13). A few seconds later, the meaning of His words became plain. The widow’s son was restored to her alive. Her darkness was turned into light and her sorrow into joy.

Our Lord has not changed (Heb 13:8). His heart is still as compassionate. His sympathy with sufferers is still as strong. There is no friend or comforter who can be compared to Christ. In all our days of darkness, which must needs be many, let us turn first to Christ for comfort. He will never fail us, never disappoint us, never refuse to take interest in our sorrows. He lives to heal the broken-hearted and to be a Friend that sticks closer than a brother.

What great power our Lord has to bring the corpse back to life! He speaks to a corpse and at once it becomes a living person. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the heart, the lungs, the brain, the senses again resume their works and discharge their duties (Luke 7:14-15).

This is a pledge of the solemn resurrection. This same Jesus that raised one man shall one day raise all (John 5:28-29). When the trumpet sounds and Christ commands, there can be no refusal or escape. All must appear before Him in their bodies to be judged.

THOUGHT: Am I ready to meet God?

PRAYER: Father, may I live in obedience to Thee daily.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12

MATTHEW 12:22-37

LUKE 11:14-23

*Our Lord who
created can heal.*

THE HEALING OF ONE DEAF AND DUMB

Neutrality in religion is impossible (Matt 12:30). There are many persons who endeavour to steer a middle course in religion. They are not as bad as many sinners, but they are not saints. They feel the truth of Christ's gospel when it is brought before them, but are afraid to confess what they feel. Because they have these feelings, they flatter themselves that they are not as bad as others. And yet they shrink from the standard of faith and practice which the Lord Jesus sets up. They are not boldly on Christ's side and yet they are not openly against Him. Our Lord warns all such that they are in a dangerous position. There are only two parties in religious matters, two camps, two sides. Are we with Christ and working in His cause? If not, we are against Him. Are we doing good in the world? If not, we are doing harm. There can be no peace until we are thoroughgoing and decided in our Christianity.

How exceedingly sinful are sins against knowledge! This is the practical conclusion that seems to flow naturally from our Lord's words about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Difficult as these words are, they seem fairly to prove that there are degrees in sin. The brighter the light, the greater the guilt of him who rejects it. The clearer a man's knowledge of the nature of the gospel, the greater his sin if he wilfully refuses to repent and believe. The doctrine taught here is in other Scriptures too (Heb 6:4-7; 10:26-27). The unconverted children of godly parents, the unconverted members of evangelical congregations are the hardest people on earth to impress. They seem past feeling. The same fire which melts the wax hardens the clay. In a Pharaoh, a Saul, an Ahab and a Judas Iscariot there was a combination of clear knowledge and deliberate rejection of Christ. There was light in the head and hatred of truth in the heart.

May God give us a will to use our knowledge, whether it be little or great! May we beware of neglecting our opportunities! Let us live up to the light we have and walk in the truth we know.

THOUGHT: Men ever seek to create a third group within humanity, but the Scripture only ever recognises two. In which am I?

PRAYER: Father, may I clearly stand on Thy side.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 13

MARK 4:35-41; MATTHEW 8:23-27; LUKE 8:22-25
HEBREWS 11:32-38

*He is the Lord
of Creation.*

THE STILLING OF THE TEMPEST

True saving faith is often mingled with much weakness and infirmity. It is a humbling lesson but a very wholesome one. The disciples' fears (Mark 4:38) are rooted in a lack of faith (Mark 4:40). What a vivid picture we have here of the hearts of thousands of believers! How many have faith and love enough to follow Christ and yet are full of fears in the hour of trial! How many have grace enough to cry, "*Lord, save us,*" and yet not grace enough to lie still and believe in the darkest hour that all is well!

Let the prayer, "Lord, increase our faith," always form part of our daily petitions. We never perhaps know the weakness of our faith until we are placed in the furnace of trial and anxiety. Blessed and happy is that person who finds by experience that his faith can stand the fire, and that he can say with Job, "*Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him*" (Job 13:15).

Our Lord, as God, has almighty power. He calms the raging storm with a few words (Mark 4:39). The elements knew the voice of their Master and, like obedient servants, were quiet at once. With the Lord Jesus, nothing is impossible. No stormy passions are too strong for Him to tame. No temper is so rough and violent that He cannot change. No conscience is so disquieted that He cannot speak peace to it and make it calm. No man ever need despair if he will only bow down his pride and come as a humbled sinner to Christ. Christ can do miracles in his heart. No man ever need despair of reaching his journey's end if he has once committed his soul to Christ's keeping. Christ will carry him through every danger. Christ will make him conqueror over every foe. What though our relations oppose us? What though our neighbours laugh us to scorn? What though our place be hard? What though our temptations be great? It is all nothing if Christ is on our side and we are in the ship with Him.

THOUGHT: Faith looks beyond the circumstances to the Hands which mould them for the good of the church (Rom 8:28).

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for Thy almighty Hand in my life.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14

MARK 5:1-13; MATTHEW 8:28-32; LUKE 8:26-33

1 JOHN 3:1-8

Demons fear

God's Son.

THE DEMONIAK IN THE COUNTRY OF THE GADARENES

How complete is the Lord's power and authority over the devil! We see this in the cry of an unclean spirit (Mark 5:7). We see it in the command given and the immediate obedience that follows (Mark 5:8). We see it in the blessed change that at once took place in him that was possessed: he was found sitting, clothed and in his right mind (Mark 5:15). We see it in the confession of all the devils (Mark 5:12) declaring their consciousness that they could do nothing without leave. All these things show that One mightier than Satan was there. Strong as the great enemy of man was, he was in the presence of One stronger than he. Numerous as his hosts were, he was confronted with One who could command more than twelve legions of angels. A King was present with power (Matt 26:53; Eccles 8:4).

The truth here taught is full of strong consolation for all true Christians. We live in a world full of difficulties and snares. We are ourselves weak and compassed with infirmity. The awful thought that we have a mighty spiritual enemy ever near us, subtle, powerful and malicious as Satan is, might well disquiet us and cast us down. But thanks be to God, we have in Jesus an almighty Friend who is able to save to the uttermost (Heb 7:25). He has already triumphed over Satan on the cross (Col 2:15). He will ever triumph over him in the hearts of believers and intercede for them that their faith fail not. And He will finally triumph over Satan completely when He shall come forth at the second advent.

Are we delivered from Satan's power? He still reigns and rules in the hearts of all who are children of disobedience (Eph 2:2-3). He is still a king over the ungodly. Have we by grace broken his bonds and escaped his hands? Have we really denounced him and all his works? Do we daily resist him and make him flee? Do we put on the whole armour of God and stand against him?

THOUGHT: Let us take to heart the teaching of John (1 John 4:4). God has not abdicated.

PRAYER: Help me, Father, to resist the devil.

THE HEALING OF A WOMAN WITH AN ISSUE OF BLOOD

What misery sin has brought into the world! A long-standing painful disease afflicted this woman (Mark 5:25). Medical skill had proved unable to cure it (Mark 5:26). After twelve long, weary years battling the disease, relief seemed no nearer than at first (Prov 13:12).

How amazing it is that we do not hate sin more! Sin is the cause of all the pain and disease in the world. God did not create man to be an ailing and suffering creature. It was sin, and nothing but sin, which brought in all the ills that flesh is heir to. It was sin to which we owe every racking pain, every loathsome infirmity and every humbling weakness to which our bodies are liable. Hate sin with a godly hatred.

People thronged Christ with different feelings. Only one in the crowd touched Him with faith and was healed (Mark 5:24, 27). Many followed Jesus from curiosity without deriving benefit from Him. Many now go to church, but few touch Christ by faith and go home in peace.

This one woman, weary of her disease and her physicians, describes many a sinner. Such men and women have felt their sins deeply and have been sore afflicted by the thought that they are not forgiven and not fit to die. They have desired relief and peace of conscience, but have not known where to find them. They have tried many false remedies but not been helped. They have gone the rounds of all the forms of religion and wearied themselves with every imaginable man-made device for obtaining spiritual health. But all have been in vain.

Let all such take comfort in the miracle which we are now considering. Let them know that there is something that can cure them, if only they will seek it. There is one door at which they have never knocked in all their efforts to find relief. There is one Physician to whom they have never applied who never fails to heal. Let them consider the conduct of this woman in her necessity. When all other means had failed, she went to Jesus for help. Let them go and do likewise.

THOUGHT: Without Christ, without hope (Eph 2:12).

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for my Saviour Jesus Christ.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 16

MATTHEW 9:27-34

PSALM 103:1-14

*“Once I was blind,
but now I can see”*

HEALING OF THE TWO BLIND MEN

Strong faith in Christ may sometimes be found where it might have been least expected. Who would have thought that two blind men would have called our Lord “*Son of David*” (Matt 9:27)? They could not have seen the miracle He did. They could only know Him by common report. But the eyes of their understanding were enlightened though their bodily eyes were dark. They saw the truth that the scribes and Pharisees did not see. They saw that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. They believed that He was able to heal them.

We must never despair of anyone’s salvation merely because he lives in a position unfavourable to his soul. Grace is stronger than circumstances. The life of religion does not depend merely upon outward advantages. The Holy Spirit can give faith and keep faith in active exercise without book-learning, without money and with scanty means of grace. Without the Holy Spirit a man may know all mysteries and be lost. The poor and uneducated believe while the university man is full of hardened unbelief.

Our Lord has had a great experience of disease and sickness (Matt 9:27, 32, 35). He was an eyewitness to all the ills to which the flesh is heir. He saw ailments of every kind, sort and description. He was brought into contact with every form of bodily suffering. None were too loathsome for Him to attend to. None were too frightful for Him to cure.

We are all living in a poor frail body. We never know what quantity of suffering we may have to watch as we sit by the bedside of dear relations and friends. We never know what racking complaint we ourselves may have to submit to before we lie down and die. But let us arm ourselves with the precious thought that Jesus is especially fitted to be the sick man’s friend. The great High Priest is eminently suited to sympathise with an aching body and to look with pity on the diseased.

THOUGHT: Our Lord assumes that His people will engage in the visiting of the sick (Matt 25:39). Do I?

PRAYER: Father, use me to share hope with those in need.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17

MARK 6:35-46; MATTHEW 14:13-21; LUKE 9:10-17
EXODUS 16:1-15

*Labour not
for meat
which perishes.*

FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND

We have here a striking example of our Lord's divine power. He feeds an assembly of five thousand men with five loaves and two fishes. He makes a scanty supply of food, scarcely sufficient for the daily wants of Him and His disciples, satisfy the hunger of a company as large as a Roman legion. There could be no mistake about the reality and greatness of this miracle. It was done publicly and before many witnesses. The same power which at the beginning made the world out of nothing caused food to exist which before had not existed. The circumstances of the whole event made deception impossible. Five thousand hungry men would not have agreed that they were all filled if they had not received real food. Twelve baskets would not have been taken up if real material loaves and fishes had not been miraculously multiplied. Nothing, in short, can explain the whole transaction save the finger of God (Exod 8:19). The same Hand which sent manna from heaven in the wilderness to feed Israel was the Hand which made five loaves and two fishes supply the needs of five thousand men.

The miracle before us is one of many proofs that with Christ nothing is impossible. The Saviour of sinners is almighty. He calls the non-existent into being (Rom 4:17). When He wills a thing, it shall be done. When He commands a thing, it shall come to pass. He can create light out of darkness, order out of disorder, strength out of weakness, joy out of sorrow and food out of nothing at all! Forever let us bless God that it is so! We might well despair when we see the corruption of human nature and the desperate hardness and unbelief of man's heart, if we did not know the power of Christ. Can any man or woman be saved? Can any child or friend ever become a true Christian? Can we ourselves win our way through to heaven? Questions like these could never be answered apart from the almighty power of Jesus. Jesus has all power in heaven and on earth. He lives in heaven for us, able to save to the uttermost, and therefore we may hope.

THOUGHT: Does my life reflect faith's confidence in Christ's power?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for Jesus is the all-powerful Son of God.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18

JOHN 6:16-21

JOB 23:1-10

He is the Lord of creation.

OUR LORD WALKING ON WATER

We should notice in these verses the trials through which Christ's disciples had to pass. We are told that they were sent over the lake by themselves while their Master tarried behind. And then we see them alone in a dark night, tossed about by a great wind on stormy waters and, worst of all, Christ not with them. It was a strange transition. From witnessing a mighty miracle and helping it instrumentally, amidst an admiring crowd, to solitude, darkness, winds, waves, storm, anxiety and danger, the change was very great! But Christ knew it and Christ appointed it, and it was working for their good.

Trial, we must distinctly understand, is part of the diet which all true Christians must expect. It is one of the means by which their grace is proved and by which they find out what there is in themselves. Winter as well as summer, cold as well as heat, clouds as well as sunshine are all necessary to bring the fruit of the Spirit to ripeness and maturity. We do not naturally like this. We would rather cross the lake with calm weather and favourable winds, with Christ always by our side and the sun shining down on our faces. But it may not be. It is not in this way that God's children are made "*partakers of his holiness*" (Heb 12:10).

The Lord Jesus came to His disciples as they were rowing on the stormy lake, "*walking on*" (John 6:19) the waters. He walked on them as easily as we walk on dry land. They bore Him as firmly as the pavement of the temple, or the hills around Nazareth. That which is contrary to all natural reason was perfectly possible to Christ.

It was just as easy for Him to walk on the sea as to form the sea at the beginning, just as easy to suspend the common laws of nature, as they are called, as to impose those laws at the first.

THOUGHT: He who created and sustains this world can keep His people secure through their trials and snares.

PRAYER: Father, I praise Thee for Thou art the all-powerful God.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19

MATTHEW 15:21-28; MARK 7:24-30

LUKE 18:1-8

In prayer – persevere.

HEALING OF THE DAUGHTER OF THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN

Let us persevere in praying for others! The woman whose history we are now reading appeared at first to obtain nothing by her application to the Lord. On the contrary, our Lord's reply was discouraging (Matt 15:24). But she did not give up in despair. She prayed on and did not faint. She pressed her case with ingenious claims. She would take no refusal. She pleaded for a few crumbs of mercy rather than none at all. And through this holy insistence she succeeded. At last she heard joyful words (Matt 15:28).

Perseverance in prayer is of great importance. Our hearts are apt to become cool and indifferent and to think that it is no use to draw near to God. Our hands soon hang down and our knees become faint. Satan is ever labouring to draw us off from prayers and filling our minds with reasons why we may give them up. These things are true with respect to all prayers, but they are especially true with intercessory prayers on behalf of others. It is always far more meager than it ought to be. It is often attempted for a little while and then left off. We see no immediate answer to our prayers. We see the persons for whose souls we pray going on still in sin. We draw the conclusion that it is useless to pray for them and allow our intercession to come to an end. But this woman prayed and did not give up in face of great discouragement. At last she went home rejoicing. Let us resolve by God's grace to follow her example.

Do we pray for ourselves? Let us pray for others also. Let us beware of selfish prayers – prayers which are wholly taken up with our own affairs and in which there is no place for other souls besides our own. Let us name all we love before God continually. Let us pray for all – the worst, the hardest and the most unbelieving. Let us continue praying for them year after year in spite of their confirmed unbelief. While we live, let us pray for others.

THOUGHT: How many (relatives, neighbours, friends) do you name before God in heartfelt intercession?

PRAYER: Father, forgive me for not praying for those around me.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20

MARK 8:1-10; MATTHEW 15:32-39

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-20

Filled, to hunger again!

THE MIRACULOUS FEEDING OF FOUR THOUSAND

How great is the kindness and compassion of our Lord! He saw around Him many who had nothing to eat. He knew that the majority were following Him from no other motive than idle curiosity and had no claim whatever to be regarded as His disciples. Yet when He saw them hungry and destitute, He pitied them (Mark 8:1-3). His feeling heart is seen in these words. He has compassion on those who are not His people: the faithless, the graceless, the followers of this world. He feels tenderly for them, though they know it not. He would receive them graciously and pardon them freely if they would only repent and believe on Him. Let us ever beware of measuring the love of Christ by any human measure. He has, beyond doubt, a special love for His own believing people. But He has a general love of compassion even for the unthankful and the evil. His love passes knowledge (Eph 3:19).

Let us strive to make Jesus our pattern. Let us be kind, courteous, compassionate and full of pity to all men. Let us be ready to do good to all man, and not only to the household of faith (Matt 5:44; Rom 12:20). With Christ, nothing is impossible. The disciples might well ask their question (Mark 8:4). Without the hand of Him who made the world out of nothing, the thing could not be. But, in the almighty hands of Jesus, seven loaves and a few fishes were made sufficient to satisfy four thousand men. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. We must never allow ourselves to doubt Christ's power to supply the spiritual needs of His people. He has enough and to spare for all who trust in Him. Weak, infirm, corrupt, empty as believers feel themselves, let them never despair while Jesus lives. In Him there is a boundless store of mercy and grace for the use of all His believing people and ready to be bestowed on all who ask in prayer (Col 1:19).

THOUGHT: So often when we ask, "How?" we should be asking, "To whom shall I go but to Him?" As His authority is universal (Matt 28:18), He does not have too many problems with our "impossibles"!

PRAYER: Father, increase my faith and trust in Thee.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21

MARK 8:22-26

JOHN 9:13-38

*Permanent healing –
when Jesus returns.*

OPENING OF THE EYES OF ONE BLIND AT BETHSAIDA

We do not know the reason of the peculiar means employed by our Lord in working this miracle. We see a blind man miraculously healed. We know that a word from our Lord's mouth or a touch of His hand would have been sufficient to effect a cure. But we see Jesus taking this man by the hand, leading him out of the town, spitting on his eyes, putting His hands upon him and, not till then, restoring his sight. And the meaning of all these actions is left entirely unexplained.

It is well to remember that the Lord is not tied to any one means. In the conversion of souls, there are diversities of operation, but it is the same Spirit that converts. So in physical healings God employs a variety of agencies, but the same divine power effected the cure. In all His works, God is sovereign. This man was not delivered from his blindness at once. The Lord might have done it in a moment but He chose to do it step by step. First the man saw partially (Mark 8:24), then completely (Mark 8:25). In this respect this miracle stands alone.

This gradual cure is a striking illustration of the manner in which the Spirit frequently works in the conversion of souls. We are all blind and ignorant in things that concern our souls. Conversion is an illumination, a change from darkness to light, from blindness to seeing. Yet few converted people see things distinctly at first. The nature and proportion of doctrines, practices and ordinances are dimly seen and imperfectly understood. Their vision is unaccustomed to the new world into which they have been introduced. It is not till the work of the Spirit has become deeper and their experience has somewhat matured that they see all things clearly. Happy is he who has learned this lesson well and is humble, and distrustful of his own judgment.

This gradual cure is also a picture of the present position of Christ's believing people in the world compared with that which is to come. We see now indistinctly. Then clearly.

THOUGHT: It does not matter whether a conversion is gradual or instantaneous as long as it is real!

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for opening my spiritual eyes.

LORD'S DAY, NOVEMBER 22

MARK 9:14-29; MATTHEW 17:14-20; LUKE 9:37-43

JOHN 15:1-5

Never trifle with demons!

THE DEMONIAK BOY CURED

How dependent Christ's disciples are on the company of their Master and on His help! Coming down from the mount, He finds His little flock in confusion. His nine Apostles were besieged by malicious scribes and baffled in an attempt to heal one possessed by a devil. The very disciples who a short time before had done many miracles and cast out many devils now met with a case too hard for them. They were learning that without Christ they could do nothing (John 15:5). It was a useful lesson, no doubt, and overruled to their spiritual good, but it was a bitter lesson at that time. How much we learn from such lessons! We do not love to learn that we can do nothing without Christ.

We need not look far to see many illustrations of this truth in the history of God's people in every age. The very men who at one time have done great exploits in the cause of the gospel at another time have failed entirely and proved weak and unstable as water. Some great Reformers temporarily recanted under pressure. The holiest and best of Christians have nothing to glory of. Their strength is not their own. They have nothing that they have not received. They have only to provoke the Lord to leave them for a season and they will soon discover that their power is gone. Like Samson when his hair was shorn, they become weak like other men.

Let us learn a lesson of humility from the failure of the disciples. Let us strive every day to realise our need of the grace and the presence of Christ. With Him we may do all things (Phil 4:13). With Him we may overcome the greatest temptations. Without Him the least may overcome us. Every morning we need to pray that He will not leave us to ourselves but that His presence might go with us, for we do not know what will happen in any day.

THOUGHT: Every action in the Christian life is either in the flesh or in the Spirit, with God's aid or without it. To face Satan in the flesh is to face him disarmed and vulnerable. To face him in the Spirit is to have Christ on our side.

PRAYER: Forgive me, Father, for my pride and self-reliance. Help me to humbly admit that I can do nothing without Jesus.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 23

JOHN 9:1-12

MATTHEW 28:18-20

He is the Great Physician.

HEALING OF THE MAN BORN BLIND

What different means Christ used in working miracles on different occasions! In healing the blind man He might, if He had thought fit, have merely touched him, or given a command. But He did not. We are told that *“he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay”* (John 9:6).

The Lord of heaven and earth will not be tied down to the use of any one means or instrumentality. In conferring blessings on man, He will work in His own way and will allow no one to prescribe to Him. We should observe in this passage the almighty power that Christ holds in His hands. We see Him doing that which in itself was impossible. Without medicines He cures an incurable case. He actually gives eyesight to one who was born blind.

Such a miracle as this is meant to teach an old truth, which we can never know too well. It shows us that Jesus, the Saviour of sinners, has all power in heaven and in earth (Matt 28:18). Such mighty works could never have been done by one who was merely man. In the cure of this blind man we see nothing less than the finger of God.

Such a miracle, above all, is meant to make us hopeful about our own souls and the souls of others. Why should we despair of salvation while we have such a Saviour? Where is the spiritual disease that He cannot take away? He can open the eyes of the most sinful and ignorant and make them see things they never saw before. He can send light into the darkest heart and cause blindness and prejudice to pass away.

Surely, if we are not saved, the fault will be all our own. There lives at God's right hand One who can heal us if we apply to Him. Let us take heed lest these solemn words are found true of us: *“...light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil”* (John 3:19). *“And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life”* (John 5:40).

THOUGHT: Christ has all power. He is Lord of all.

PRAYER: Father, I stand in awe for Thou art the All-powerful God!

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 24

LUKE 13:10-17

PSALM 122

Every sickness can be healed

- if He wills.

RESTORING OF THE WOMAN WITH A SPIRIT OF INFIRMITY

Sickness was no excuse with this woman for tarrying from God's house. In spite of suffering and infirmity, she found her way to the place where the day and the Word were honoured and where the people of God met. And truly she was blessed! She found a rich reward in all her pains. She came sorrowing and went home rejoicing! The conduct of this suffering Jewess may well put to shame many a strong and healthy professing Christian. How many in the full enjoyment of bodily vigour allow the most frivolous excuses to keep them away from the house of God! How many think it a great matter if they attend the public worship of God once on Sunday and regard a second attendance as a needless excess of zeal akin to fanaticism! How few know anything of David's spirit (Ps 122:1)! Yet if we cannot enjoy a few hours in God's service once a week in this world, it is plain that we could not enjoy an eternity in His service in the world to come. Too many have no heart for God's service.

What almighty power our Lord has! With Christ nothing is impossible. This healing can provide comfort to sin-sick souls. Christ can soften hearts which seem as hard as the millstone. He can bend stubborn wills which have long been set on self-pleasing, sin and the world. He can create, transform, renew, break down, build and quicken with irresistible power. There are no, incurable cases with Christ. Let us never despair about the salvation of others for as long as we live. Let us name them before the Lord day and night and cry to Him on their behalf. Let us have Job's belief (Job 42:2).

Our Lord defended the right observance of the sabbath day by sharply rebuking the criticism of the synagogue ruler (Luke 13:14-15). If it was allowable to tend to the wants of beasts on the sabbath, how much more to human creatures! Works of necessity and mercy were not prohibited on the sabbath. The sabbath was made for man's benefit, not his hurt.

THOUGHT: Do I hate those times when I was prevented from being with God's people in the worship of God? If not, why not?

PRAYER: Father, may I long to be found in Thy house.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 25

LUKE 14:1-6

DANIEL 6:1-5

Our Lord heals spiritual dropsy too!

HEALING MAN WITH DROPSY

Our Lord accepted the hospitality of those who were not His disciples (Luke 14:1). How did the Lord conduct Himself at the Pharisee's table? He first defended the true observance of the sabbath day (Luke 14:1-6), He then expounded the nature of true humility (Luke 14:7-11), then explained the character of true hospitality (Luke 14:12-14) and finally delivered a striking parable to them (Luke 14:15-24). All this was done in a most wise, calm and dignified manner. His speech was edifying and appropriate (Col 4:6). The perfection of our Lord's conduct appears on this as on all other occasions. He always said the right thing, at the right time and in the right way. He never forgot for a moment who He was and where He was.

What an example is set for Christians here! Do we go among non-Christians watchfully and, prayerfully, with a firm resolution to carry our Master and our Master's business with us? The house from which Christ is deliberately excluded is not the house for us, but where we can carry on conversation with the unconverted we should go. We need to ask ourselves two questions: "Do I spend all my time in light and worldly conversation?" and "Do I try to follow the example of Christ?" So long as we can take Christ with us, we shall come to no harm.

Our Lord's enemies watched for some word or deed on which they could build an accusation against Him (Luke 14:1), but they found none. He was ever harmless, holy, undefiled and separate from evil. Perfect indeed must that life have been in which they, His bitterest enemies, could find no flaw, or blemish, or spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing!

Servants of Christ will also be watched. If they make a slip here in word or deed or act inconsistently, it will not be forgotten. Let us live holy lives before God and men. By God's grace, it can be done and we can receive the testimony given to Daniel (Dan 6:5).

THOUGHT: We are so to live that our opponents must make up slander against us if they are to accuse us, because no real accusations can be made to stick (1 Pet 2:15).

PRAYER: Father, may I be watchful that my life be a holy one.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 26

LUKE 17:11-19

PSALM 130

*How does your
gratitude compare?*

THE HEALING OF THE TEN LEPERS

How earnestly men can cry for help when they feel their need of it (Luke 17:13)! It is difficult to conceive of any condition more thoroughly miserable than that of men afflicted with leprosy. They were cast out from society. They were cut off from all communion with their fellows. The lepers in this passage were aware of their wretchedness. They stood afar off, but they did not stand idly by doing nothing. They felt acutely the deplorable state of their bodies. They found words to express their feelings. They cried earnestly for relief when a chance of relief appeared in sight. Their conduct throws much light on prayer.

How is it that many never pray at all? Or are content to repeat a form of words but never pray with their hearts? How is it that dying men, with souls to be lost or saved, can know so little of real, hearty, business-like prayer? The answer to these questions is short and simple. The bulk of mankind has no sense of sin. They do not feel their spiritual disease, are not conscious that they are lost and guilty and hanging over the brink of hell. When a man finds out his soul's ailment he soon learns to pray. Like the lepers, he finds words to express his needs.

How is it that many true believers often pray so coldly? What is the reason that their prayers are so feeble, wandering and lukewarm? The answer once more is very plain. Their sense of need is not as deep as it ought to be. They are not truly alive to their own weakness and helplessness and so they do not cry fervently for mercy and grace. Let us remember these things.

Help meets men in the path of obedience (Luke 17:14). Our Lord neither touched them nor prescribed means. Yet healing power accompanied the words He spoke. Relief met the afflicted company as soon as they obeyed His command. Surely this teaches us the wisdom of simple, childlike obedience to every word which comes from the mouth of Christ. It does not become us to stand still, reason and doubt when our Master's commands are plain and unmistakable (John 7:17).

THOUGHT: "I need Thee every hour." (Hawks)

PRAYER: Father, help me to truly see my need for Thee.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 27

MATTHEW 20:29-34; MARK 10:46-52; LUKE 18:35-43

GENESIS 32:22-32

Spiritual blindness is worse.

HEALING THE BLIND MEN NEAR JERICHO

What wisdom there is in using every opportunity for getting good for our souls! These blind men sat by the wayside. Had they not done so they would never have been healed. Jesus never returned to Jericho again. Let us see in this simple fact the importance of diligence in the use of the means of grace. Let us never neglect the house of God, the Word of God, prayer, assembling with God's people. These things will not save us without the grace of the Holy Spirit. But it is just in the use of these things that souls are converted and saved. They are the ways in which Jesus walked. We do not wait in idleness but go where He is.

There is a value in pains and perseverance in seeking Christ. These blind men were rebuked by the multitude that accompanied our Lord (Matt 20:31). But they were not to be silenced in any way. They felt their need of help. They cared nothing for the opposition they received. They cried all the more (Matt 20:31). Nor are we to be deterred by opposition, or discouraged by difficulties, when we begin to seek the salvation of our souls (Luke 18:1). We must press our petitions at the throne of grace (Gen 32:26). Friends, relatives and neighbours may say unkind things and reprove our earnestness. We may meet with coldness and a lack of sympathy. But let none of these things move us. If we desire to have our sins forgiven, let us press on.

How gracious the Lord Jesus is to those who seek Him! (Matt 20:32) He stood still, called the blind men, kindly asked them their petition, heard it and did as they requested (Matt 20:32-34). We see here the mercifulness of Christ's heart towards man. The Lord Jesus is not only a mighty Saviour, but merciful, kind and gracious to a degree our minds cannot conceive. His love passes knowledge (Eph 3:19). Like Paul, let us pray that we might know more of that love. We need it when we first begin our Christian course as babes in grace. We need it as we travel along the narrow way, often erring, often stumbling and cast down. We shall need it when we go into the valley of the shadow of death. Let us grasp the love of Christ firmly and keep it daily before our minds.

THOUGHT: Has Christ yet rejected any who come to Him?

PRAYER: Father, may I always remember the love of my Saviour.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 28

JOHN 11:38-44

1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-58

*Jesus is the resurrection
and the life.*

RAISING OF LAZARUS

We should mark the words which our Lord addressed to Lazarus when He raised him from the grave. We read that He *“cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth”* (John 11:43). At the sound of that voice, the king of terrors at once yielded up his lawful captive and the insatiable grave gave up its prey. At once *“...he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes...”* (John 11:44).

The greatness of this miracle cannot possibly be exaggerated. The mind of man can scarcely take in the vastness of the work that was done. Here, in open day and before many hostile witnesses, a man four days dead was restored to life in a moment. Here was public proof that our Lord had absolute power over the material world! A corpse, already corrupt, was made alive! Here was public proof that our Lord had absolute power over the world of spirits! A soul that had left its earthly tenement was called back from Paradise and joined once more to its owner's body. Well may the church of Christ maintain that He who could work such works was *“over all, God blessed for ever”* (Rom 9:5).

Let us turn from the whole passage with thoughts of comfort and consolation. Comfortable is the thought that the loving Saviour of sinners, on whose mercy our souls entirely depend, is one who has all power in heaven and earth and is mighty to save. Comfortable is the thought that there is no sinner too far gone in sin for Christ to raise and convert. He that stood by the grave of Lazarus can say to the vilest of men, *“...come forth... Loose him, and let him go”* (John 11:43-44). Comfortable, not least, is the thought that when we ourselves lie down in the grave, we may lie down in the full assurance that we shall rise again. The voice that called Lazarus forth will one day pierce our tombs and bid our soul and body come together. The *“...trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed”* (1 Cor 15:52).

THOUGHT: The funerals of our loved ones only have the appearance of finality. There is a God who raises the dead.

PRAYER: Father, may I live with the assurance that I have a better life to come.

LORD'S DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 29

MARK 11:12-14, 20-26; MATTHEW 21:18-22

HEBREWS 11:1-6

Miracles are God's doings.

THE CURSING OF THE BARREN FIG TREE

This whole transaction was an emblem of spiritual things. The withered fig tree spoke to the Jewish church. Rich in the leaves of formal religion, but barren of all fruits of the Spirit, that church was in fearful danger at the very time this withering took place. Well would it have been for the Jewish church if it had eyes to see its peril!

The withered fig tree speaks to all the branches of Christ's visible church in every age and in every part of the world. There is a warning against an empty profession of Christianity unaccompanied by sound doctrine and holy living which some of those branches would have done well to lay to heart.

Above all, the withered fig tree speaks to all carnal, hypocritical, false-hearted Christians. Well would it be for all who have a name that lives, while in reality they are dead, if they would only see their own faces in the glass of this passage. Baptism, the Lord's Supper, church membership and all the outward means of Christianity will not save our souls. They are leaves, nothing but leaves. Without fruit they add to our condemnation. Like the fig leaves of Adam and Eve, they will not hide the nakedness of our souls from the eye of an all-seeing God. We must bear fruit or be lost for ever.

The Lord teaches the immense importance of faith by His sayings (Mark 11:22-24). His promise (Mark 11:24) must of course be taken with a reasonable qualification: that the believer will ask things which are not sinful and which are in accordance with the will of God.

Confidence in God's power and will to help every believer in Christ and in the truth of every word that God has spoken is the grand secret of success and prosperity in our religion. It is the very root of saving Christianity. Do we wish to grow in grace and make progress in religion? Let us pray daily for more faith.

THOUGHT: However beautiful things outward maybe, it is always the heart that matters most.

PRAYER: Father, may my heart be pleasing to Thee.

HEALING THE EAR OF MALCHUS

Peter's impetuous temperament comes out in the action before us. Impulsive, earnest, zealous and inconsiderate of consequences, he acted hastily and his zeal soon cooled down and was changed into fear. It is not those who are for a time most demonstrative and fervent whose religion is deepest. John never smote with the sword, but John never denied his Lord and was at the foot of the cross when Christ died.

Whether the ear was cut off entirely, or only so cut as to hang down by the skin, may be left to conjecture. In any case we know that it gave occasion for the last miracle of bodily cure which our Lord ever wrought. Luke tells us that He "*touched*" (Luke 22:51) the ear and it was instantaneously healed. To the very end of His ministry, our Lord did good to His enemies and gave proof of His divine power. But His hardened enemies gave no heed. Miracles alone convert no one. As with Pharaoh, they only make some men harder and more wicked.

We cannot doubt that Peter meant to kill Malchus with this blow, which was probably aimed at his head. His own agitation probably and the special interposition of God alone prevented him taking away the life of another and endangering his own life and that of his fellow disciples. It was clearly an impulsive act of Peter, done without reflection. Zeal not according to knowledge often drives a man into foolish actions and makes work for repentance.

The gospel is not to be propagated or maintained by carnal weapons, or by violence. Matthew adds the solemn words of Jesus: "*...all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword*" (Matt 26:52). How needful the rebuke and how true the comment have often been proved by the history of the church of Christ. The appeal to the sword can rarely be justified and has often recoiled on the head of its promoters.

THOUGHT: (Read Matthew 26:52.)

PRAYER: Father, help me to use Thy methods only, and always.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30

JOHN 21:1-14

1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-49

*By faith we know the Lord
rose from the grave.*

JESUS' RESURRECTION AND APPEARANCES

Here, as in other places, we find an unanswerable proof that our Lord rose again with a real material body and a proof seen by seven grown-up men with their own eyes at one and the same time. We see Him sitting, talking, eating, drinking on the shore of the lake of Galilee and to all appearance for a considerable time. The morning sun of spring shines down on the little party. They are alone by the well-known Galilean lake, far away from the crowd and noise of Jerusalem. In the midst sits the Master, with the nail-prints in His hands, the very Master whom they had all followed for three years and one of them, at least, had seen hanging on the cross. They could not be deceived. Will anyone pretend to say that stronger proof could be given that Jesus rose from the dead? Can anyone imagine better evidence of a fact? That Peter was convinced and satisfied we know. He says himself to Cornelius, "(We) *did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead*" (Acts 10:41). Those who in modern times say they are not convinced may as well say that they are determined not to believe any evidence at all.

Let us all thank God that we have such a cloud of witnesses to prove that our Lord rose again. The resurrection of Christ is the grand proof of Christ's divine mission. He told the Jews they need not believe He was the Messiah, if He did not rise again the third day. The resurrection of Christ is the top-stone of the work of redemption. It proved that He finished the work He came to do and, as our Substitute, had overcome the grave. The resurrection of Christ is a miracle that no infidel can explain away. Men may carp and cavil at Balaam's ass and Jonah in the whale's belly, if they please, but till they can prove that Christ did not rise again we need not be moved. Above all, the resurrection of Christ is the pledge of our own. As the grave could not detain the Head, so it shall not detain the members.

THOUGHT: What does Luke 16:31 teach about the nature of unbelief?

PRAYER: Father, may my heart be a believing heart, always.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1

JOSHUA 5:1-12

HEBREWS 3:12-19

Jesus says

“Come...and I will give you rest.”

THE REST AWAITING WEARY WANDERERS

(Today, we begin a month of readings adapted from Charles Spurgeon’s “Morning and Evening.”)

Israel’s weary wanderings were over: no more moving tents, fiery serpents, howling wilderness and enemies along the way. After forty long years, they had entered the Land of milk and honey, the promised rest. Perhaps this year some beloved reader will be admitted into His rest. This is every believer’s joyful prospect, by faith in our almighty Saviour. To be with the Lord in the rest reserved for God’s people is surely our lively and blessed hope.

But between us and the Land of Bliss lies the Jordan, the final hurdle to be cleared. Does that worry you? Why, has not our Lord helped us conquer more ills than death? Let us banish every faithless thought and rejoice with exceeding great joy at the prospect that once across the Jordan, like the vale of shadow, we shall be for ever with the Lord. Then we may gladly say goodbye to the woes and weariness of earth.

For most readers, our lot is to tarry on earth to do service for the Lord. But even as we serve, we are given a foretaste of the heavenly rest. “For we which have believed do enter into rest...” (Heb 4:3). Here we have a “first instalment,” as it were, of our rest to come: the Holy Spirit Himself is the earnest of our inheritance. He gives us “glory begun below” (Watts). Even now we have a savour of Heaven’s blessings.

In Heaven, the departed saints are forever secure: so are we in Christ. There they enjoy eternal victory with Christ, on earth we have victory always in the Lord; there they commune in person with Him: here the Lord walks with us from day to day. He is ever true to His promise (Matt 28:20). “The fellowship of kindred minds, is like to that above” (Fawcett). In Heaven they are forever praising the Saviour. Should we on earth do less? It will make our wilderness wanderings less wearisome!

THOUGHT: Man did eat angels’ food of old, and why not now?

PRAYER: Father, grant me grace to feed daily on Jesus, the bread of life.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2

SONG OF SOLOMON 1:1-7

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9

*In His presence are
joys for ever more.*

REJOICING IN THE LORD

We will be glad and rejoice in Thee. Let all of God's people say "Amen!" Let us echo the Psalmist's happy song: "*O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation*" (Ps 95:1). We, the people of God, the faithful and chosen, we will not give place to our griefs, but will set up our banners of confidence in the name of our God. Others without hope lament over their troubles, but we will magnify the Lord, even the God of all comfort.

Eternal Spirit, our effectual Comforter, we are the temples in which Thou art pleased to dwell. We will never cease from adoring and blessing the name of our Saviour. Jesus our Lord must have the crown of our heart's delight. We will not dishonour Him by mourning in His presence. Did He not promise: "*Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*" (Matt 28:20)? We the redeemed of the Lord are commanded to "*rejoice evermore.*" The day of everlasting songs of praise will not be long to await. But let us rehearse now, before we sing in the New Jerusalem.

We "*will be glad and rejoice in thee...*" (Song of Sol 1:4). Need there be any limit to our rejoicing in the Lord while here on earth? Do you, a child of His grace, not find the Lord more precious, than camphire and spikenard, calamus and cinnamon (Song of Sol 4:13-14) even now, and ever worthy of your unceasing praise and rejoicing? In Jesus our Lord we find our all in all, all that is ever worth having and keeping. He is the source of all goodness, the fountain of every blessing. He is our portion forever and ever. Let us be glad and rejoice in Him.

THOUGHT: Why is it so difficult for me to rejoice in my Lord?

PRAYER: Father, favour me with a sense of Thy preciousness that I will never cease from rejoicing in Thee.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3

PSALM 55:1-17

COLOSSIANS 4:2

*“The spirit is willing...
the flesh is weak.”*

CONTINUE IN PRAYER

How large a portion of the Bible is on the subject of prayer - furnishing examples, enforcing precepts, or elaborating on God's promises. Open your Bible and you will read, *“Then began men to call upon the name of the LORD”* (Gen 4:26). Everywhere we encounter men of prayer: Jacob wrestling in prayer (Gen 32:24-30) at the ford Jabbok; Daniel praying three times a day with window open (Dan 6:10-11); David the sweet Psalmist of Israel who with all his heart called upon the Lord. Then see Elijah on mountain top, or Paul and Silas in lowly dungeon cell - all calling on the name of the Lord.

God has given us multitudes of commands and myriads of promises. What does this teach us, but the sacred importance and necessity of prayer? Be certain of this: whatever God has made prominent in His Word, He intended to be conspicuous in our lives. If He has said much about prayer, it is because we have much need of it. So great is our present need of Divine help, that we must not cease to pray until we arrive in Heaven. Have you nothing to pray for? Then, I fear you do not know your own poverty. Have you no mercy to ask of God? May God show you your misery.

A prayerless soul is a Christless soul! Prayer is the lisping of the believing infant, the shout of the Christian soldier, the cry of the dying saint falling asleep in Jesus. It is the breath, the watchword, the comfort, the strength, the honour of every true believer. If you are a child of God, you will seek the Father's face often in prayer. Pray that you may be holy, humble, zealous and patient as you commune with Him at the Throne of Grace.

THOUGHT: Pray without ceasing. He blesses without ceasing.

PRAYER: Father, grant me a heart that desires to pray without ceasing.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4

ISAIAH 40:26-41:4

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10

His grace is sufficient for me.

THE SECRET OF STRENGTH

All things on earth need to be renewed. No created thing continues by itself. Even trees which wear not themselves with care, nor shorten their lives with labour, need constantly to be renewed by the rain of heaven and to draw from the hidden nutrients of the soil. But long though trees may flourish, yet their lifespan must come some day to an end.

Man's life cannot be sustained without renewal from God. While the body one day will perish, the soul - that unseen inner man - can only be sustained by feeding upon the Word of God, by listening to the Word preached, and by constantly meditating therein. These are God-given means of grace. How impoverished must our souls be when these means are neglected! No wonder the church has so many spiritual dwarfs and weaklings, crawling around despite their years.

Awake, ye saints of God! You cannot be renewed and strong without the diligent use of the Word, and daily secret prayer. Your feeble fumbling spiritual life is not of divine workmanship. It is your own neglect and carelessness. Without constant renewal by the blessed Spirit, you cannot face the assaults of hell, the unsettling inner strifes, and at times the afflictions of the Heavenly Father.

Little tree, are your roots firmly stayed on the Rock, that you will be able to withstand the coming whirlwind? Little ship, is your anchor fastened to the Rock which alone can hold you, fast and secure, against the tempests of life? Our strength comes not of ourselves, or from any human source, but the Lord. He alone is our strength and our life. Only He can renew us from day to day.

THOUGHT: *"But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength..."* (Isa 40:31).

PRAYER: Father, forgive me for my stupidity to think that I can rely on myself. Truly, I confess that I can do nothing without Thee.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5

ISAIAH 49:5-12

EPHESIANS 1:15-23

*Without Christ –
a hopeless end.*

JESUS CHRIST OUR ALL IN ALL

Jesus Christ is God's best gift to us, given to every believer. Reader, can you estimate what you have gotten in Christ our Lord? "*For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*" (Col 2:9). Pause a while and ponder: there are inestimable, unspeakable blessings procured by Jesus for you and me who believe. All that Christ, our Emmanuel, has is yours. Out of pure unmerited favour, God has assigned to you, to be your possession for ever, all that belongs to Christ our Lord.

Let us enumerate what it all means. Think of His great power. "*All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth*" (Matt 28:18), says the Lord. That power is yours to strengthen and enable you to cope with difficulties, to overcome temptations, and to persevere in your walk with God, till you arrive Home. Think of His love. Out of His inexhaustible ocean of love He fills our prepared hearts and you may say: "It is mine." Then His love will flow from you to others around you.

Think of His justice. Can such a high and noble attribute be yours? It may seem impossible, but even this is yours, by His grace, for He will by His justice ensure that all the covenant promises shall most certainly be secured to you. All that Jesus has as the Perfect Man is yours. As your representative, He stood accepted by the Father.

Dear reader, when God accepts Christ, He accepts you! The love which the Father set on His beloved Son, He sets on you now! All that Christ did, He did for you, and me. His perfect righteousness is yours, imputed to you "*by grace...through faith*" (Eph 2:8). He is our ALL in ALL.

THOUGHT: "My God, I am thine - what a comfort divine! What a blessing to know that the Saviour is mine!" (Wesley)

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for Thy great and bountiful love, care and provision for me.

PREPARE YE THE WAY OF THE LORD

The voice of John the Baptist in the wilderness called for a way to be prepared for the Lord. What way should be prepared today in the wilderness of men's hearts? Let me consider the dry desert nature of my own heart. What must be done to make a way for the Saviour?

1. Every valley must be exalted. Low and unworthy thoughts of God must perish; doubting and despair must be removed; selfish and carnal delights must be forsaken. Across these deep and dark valleys a gracious pathway needs be raised, a way prepared for the Lord.
2. Every mountain and hill be laid low. Proud self-sufficiency, and boastful self-righteousness must be taken down, levelled, to make a highway for the King. The great King will not regard the haughty and highminded. The Lord has respect unto the meek and lowly. He will condescend to the contrite in heart, but the lofty ones are an abomination to Him.
3. The crooked shall be made straight. The wavering devious heart needs to come clear and straight for God. Let holiness be its hallmark. Double-minded men are strangers to the God of truth. My soul, beware, take heed: in all things be honest and true, as in the searchlight of the all-seeing God.
4. The rough places shall be made smooth. Stumbling blocks of sin must be removed, and thorns and thistles of rebellion must be uprooted. The Lord comes to honour us with His company. May He find in your heart a highway made ready by His redeeming grace. May He enter in triumph and glory, to the eternal blessing of your soul.

THOUGHT: Is my heart already prepared? The King is coming!

PRAYER: Father, Thou art the King of glory! May I always stand at attention to welcome Thee into my heart and my life.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 7

PSALM 42

2 PETER 3:10-18

Not to grow up is to go down!

GROW IN GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE

“*Grow in grace*” (2 Pet 3:18) - not in one grace only, but in all grace. Grow in that most important of graces, faith. Believe God’s promises more firmly than you have ever done. Let faith increase in steadfastness, in constancy, in simplicity.

Grow also in love. Pray the Lord that your love be extended, more intense, more practical, beautifying your every thought, word, and deed. Likewise, grow in humility. Seek the lowest place; recognise more of your own nothingness. As you grow downward in humility, seek also to grow upward, approaching nearer to God in prayer and communion.

Let not your spiritual growth stop there, but grow in knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He who grows not in the knowledge of his Saviour, loses out on great blessing. To know Him is “*life eternal*” (John 17:3), and to increase in the knowledge of Him is to increase in true happiness. He who does not long to know more of Christ impoverishes himself. The Apostle Paul counted “*all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus ...*” (Phil 3:8).

Dear reader, how do you love the Lord Jesus? If you truly love Him, you will be as the hart panting for the water brooks. And one sip of that “soul satisfying” knowledge makes you thirst for more. You will pant after deeper draughts of His love. True love always cries, “Nearer, nearer my Lord to Thee!” The more you drink of Him, the more you want to drink. The very knowledge of His presence is Heaven. Are you growing or going? Pray the Lord to keep you very near the cross and let the precious flow of love melt your heart. Then see how He helps you grow.

THOUGHT: Flying always to the cross of Jesus.

PRAYER: Father, may Thy Holy Spirit empower me to grow spiritually.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8

GENESIS 42:1-8

PSALM 129

*“Search me, O God,
and know my heart.”*

O LORD, THOU KNOWEST ME ALTOGETHER

While we strive to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, pause and consider that He knew us long before we had the slightest knowledge of Him. *“Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them”* (Ps 139:16). Before we ever had a place in this world, we had a place in His heart. When we were enemies to Him, He saw our misery, our madness, and our wickedness. Such was our hopeless, lost estate before He came to our aid.

In this we see the mystery of divine love: the Lord knew our need long before we thought to seek Him. He comes to us as our “Heavenly Joseph,” ever so gracious and forgiving, viewing us as His brethren well beloved, with tenderest affection towards us. Like the wicked sons of Jacob, we bore Joseph no love, only hatred and malice. Yet He sees us as objects of His infinite affection. *“...The Lord knoweth them that are his...”* (2 Tim 2:19) is true of prodigals in far off exile feeding swine as well as of the children seated at the table. Our Lord pitieth us like as a father pitieth his children (Ps 103:13).

God’s redemption is made more marvellous when we realise the great and grievous sins we have committed against Him times without number. In our rebellion, we shut Him out of our hearts and mistrusted His gracious words. We rebelled against Him and spurned His loving call. Yet He never gives us up, but comes to us ever so patiently and gently. God be praised, He saved us from our desperate, lost condition, and adopted us into His family. Now we begin to study Him, but He has known us all along. And God be praised again, and again, for had our Lord not known us, where would we be today! One day, at His appearing, He will confess our names. Thank God, our Lord knows all about us! And He never forgets!

THOUGHT: To those who refuse to know Him now, the Lord will say *“I never knew you”* (Matt 7:23) when He comes.

PRAYER: Father, I can never hide from Thee. May I always come to Thee in confession of my sins, and to receive Thy forgiveness.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9

GENESIS 1:1-5

2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-18

“Walk in the light.”

WHAT COMMUNION HATH LIGHT WITH DARKNESS?

Without light, life on earth as we know it ceases to exist. The wise king said, *“Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun”* (Eccles 11:7). But Gospel light is infinitely more precious. It alone reveals eternal things, and ministers to our souls’ need. When the Holy Spirit gives us spiritual light, we behold the glory of God in Jesus Christ His Son. We also see ourselves, marred and stained by sin, in our true condition - hopeless, lost and helpless. Then we see the Saviour, God’s appointed One, *“full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14), offering us “life for a look” (John 3:14-16). Thank God for the Gospel light drawing us to the Saviour, the Lord Jesus, the Light of the world.

With light comes also a division. Light and darkness can have no communion: God the Creator ruled from the beginning that they remain separate. Therefore, let us not confound them. Sons of light must have no fellowship with the children of darkness. Neither must we have anything to do with their deeds, doctrines, and deceptions. The children of the day must be sober, honest and vigilant. We must be faithful and courageous in the Lord’s work. No matter how unpopular it may be, we must have no dealings with the works of darkness.

A true Church of Jesus Christ should exercise the discipline of keeping clear and separate from all doctrinal darkness and error, and from those “Christians” and churches which preach or participate in them. In judgment, in action, in hearing, in teaching, in association, we must exercise spiritual discernment between truth and error, between light and darkness. At the beginning of the world, the Lord laid down the principle. Now at the end of the age, should not we His servants do likewise?

THOUGHT: True and loyal believers will never approve or be involved in the Ecumenical Movement and its darkness.

PRAYER: Father, keep me in Thy strait and narrow path.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10

GENESIS 1:1-5

EPHESIANS 5:1-14

Let the lower lights be burning.

GOD SEES YOUR LIGHT

The Lord has a special eye for light. At the creation, “...*God saw the light, that it was good...*” (Gen 1:4). At our conversion, He gives us His light. Thereafter He looks on that light with peculiar interest. Not only is it dear to Him as His own handiwork, but because it is like Himself, for “...*God is light...*” (1 John 1:5). It is blessed to know that God’s eye is tenderly watching over that work of grace which He has begun in you. He never loses sight of the treasure which He placed in our earthen vessels (2 Cor 4:7).

Sometimes we cannot see the light, but God always can, and that is much better than our seeing it. I am comforted to know that I am one of God’s people, but more important is the fact that the Lord knows, so I am safe. “...*The Lord knoweth them that are his...*” (2 Tim 2:19). Dear child of God, you may be sighing and groaning because of some inbred sin, and mourning over your darkness. Yet the Lord sees the light in your heart, for He has put it there, and all the cloudiness and gloom of your soul cannot conceal your light from His gracious eye. Rise above your feelings and take heart, looking only unto Jesus (Heb 12:2).

Perhaps you have sunk low in despondency, and even despair; but if your soul longs for the Lord, and if you are resting in His finished work, God sees the light. He not only sees it, but He also preserves it in you. This is a precious thought to those who, after anxious watching and guarding of themselves, feel their own powerlessness to do so. At such a time, look to the Saviour. The light preserved by His grace will one day develop into the splendour of noonday, and the fullness of glory. His light within you is the dawn of the eternal day. He who began the good work in you will perfect it on that day (Phil 1:6).

THOUGHT: Our Lord says, “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*” (Matt 5:16).

PRAYER: Father, may I shine for Thee, that Thou mayst be glorified by my life.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11

PSALM 27

1 PETER 5:6-11

*“In every thing by
prayer and supplication.”*

HE CARETH FOR ME!

It is a happy way of soothing sorrow when you can say, “He careth for me!” Christian! Do not dishonour your religion by always wearing a brow of care. Come, cast your burden upon your Lord. You are staggering beneath some crushing weight. To Him it is but as the small dust of the balance. Why struggle in your own little strength? Nothing is so sweet as to:

Lie passive in God’s hands,
And know no will but His.

O, child of suffering, be patient. God has not passed over you in His providence. He who feeds the sparrow will also supply your need. Do not give up in despair. In Him there is hope! Sail the sea of trouble in His ship of faith. “With Christ in the vessel you can smile at the storm.” Hear Him command the wind and wave, “*Peace, be still*” (Mark 4:39). Cast all your care upon Him, for He careth for you.

Remember, you are one of His family. He will bind up your wounds, and heal your broken heart. Never doubt His grace because of your tribulation. Believe that He loves you as much in trouble as in happiness: He changes not. Why then struggle with your load of care? Leave the providing to the God of providence; and see if He will not grant you a serene and quiet life.

God cares for you! Why then are you full of care? Can you trust Him for your soul, and not for your body? He never refuses to bear your burdens; He never faints under their weight. Come, dear reader, away with anxious cares! Leave all your worries and concerns in the hands of our gracious God.

THOUGHT: He who cares for the sparrow will surely care for me.

PRAYER: Forgive me, Father, for my lack of faith in Thee. To Thee will I run with my burdens and cares.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12

EZEKIEL 33:21-22

HEBREWS 12:5-11

“Behold, the LORD’S hand

is not shortened,

that it cannot save...”

THE HAND OF THE LORD

The hand of the Lord is good, be it the hand of chastening or strengthening, His is always the hand of blessing. At times He visits with the rod in the night season. Let me not be discouraged or rebellious, but let me cheerfully submit, and endeavour to be profited thereby, knowing that *“...afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness...”* (Heb 12:11).

The hand of the Lord often comes to strengthen the soul and lift up the spirit towards eternal things. May I feel His gracious hand dealing with me! His divine presence and indwelling Spirit bears the soul heavenwards as upon eagle wings, filling us with heavenly joy and erasing the sorrows of earth. In the Spirit, the invisible appears, and the visible loses its power over us. How good is the Shepherd’s hand to all His needy sheep.

O that our Quiet Time may always be a hallowed season of sweet communion with the Lord. Even at this moment I feel a deep sense of need: my graces languish, my corruptions rage, my faith is weak, my devotion is cold. I need His healing hand upon me. That glorious right hand which created the world can re-create my mind. The almighty hand which upholds the earth can sustain my flagging spirit. My Saviour’s hand will do this, and more!

Why should I not feel His loving hand leading me moment by moment? Come, my soul, look to Him alone and cease from all thy anxious fears. Behold Him, the Risen Lord. He is alive for evermore! Then put your hand in His nail-scarred hand. Hear Him say, *“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you...”* (John 14:27). And: *“I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand”* (John 10:28).

THOUGHT: Do I really believe that my times are in God’s hand?

PRAYER: Father, guide my eyes daily to look away from the corruptions around me, and to look heavenward to see Thy hand on me.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST

The believer did not always live to Christ. He began to do so only after God the Holy Spirit convinced him of sin, and brought him to trust in the Saviour's atoning blood, and to receive His new life. From that moment of the new birth, the man begins to live to Christ. This is the witness and experience of every true child of God. Is this your experience?

To the believer, Jesus is precious above all else: He is the Pearl of great price (Matt 13:46), the Chiefest among ten thousand (Song of Sol 5:10), the Lover of the soul, our Redeemer God. Our new life came from Him, belongs to Him, and must be lived to His glory: nothing else is worthy of His unspeakable love for us. The Apostle Paul was fully convinced of it and so should we: *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain"* (Phil 1:21).

Paul's words mean more than most men think. They imply that the aim and end of his life was Christ - nay, his very life was Jesus! He is the life, the true God, and eternal life (John 14:6; 1 John 5:20). In the words of an ancient saint, he did eat, and drink, and sleep eternal life! Jesus was his very breath, soul of his soul, heart of his heart, life of his life. This is the normal, fully converted Christian's life.

Dear reader, can you honestly say that for you to live is Christ? In your business or profession, are you doing it for Him? There are many who obey this principle in some measure. But God looks for those who would live wholly for Christ, like Paul. This alone is the full and true Christian life. Away with feeble, lukewarm, half-hearted "Christian living."

THOUGHT: For whom have I been living?

PRAYER: Father, here I give myself to Thee, promising to live only in Thee, and to Thee. Make me ready and willing to go for Thee, even to die for Thee. All glory be unto Thee. Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 14

ROMANS 8:37

GALATIANS 3:1-3

“Are ye so foolish?...”

MORE THAN CONQUERORS

We go to Christ for forgiveness, and then too often look to the law for power to fight our sins. Paul thus rebukes us in Galatians 3:1-3.

Take your sins to Christ’s cross, for the old man can only be crucified there: we are crucified with Him.

The only weapon to fight sin with is the spear which pierced the side of Jesus. To give an illustration: you want to overcome an angry temper; what do you do? It is very possible you have never tried the right way of going to Jesus with it.

How did I get salvation? I came to Jesus just as I was, and I trusted Him to save me. I must kill my angry temper in the same way. It is the only way in which I can ever kill it. I must go to the cross with it, and say to Jesus, “Lord, I trust Thee to deliver me from it.” This is the only way to give it a death-blow.

Are you covetous? Do you feel the world entangle you? You may struggle against this evil so long as you please, but if it be your besetting sin, you will never be delivered from it in any way but by the blood of Jesus.

Take it to Christ. Tell Him, “Lord, I have trusted Thee, and Thy name is Jesus, for Thou dost save Thy people from their sins. Lord, this is one of my sins; save me from it!”

Ordinances are nothing without Christ as a means of mortification.

You must be conquerors through Him who hath loved you.

THOUGHT: Why am I still fighting a losing battle against my sins?

PRAYER: Father, may I come to Thee continually with my every weakness, my every sin, big or small, that with Christ I may be more than conquerors over them, that I may grow in sanctification thereby magnifying the name of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15

EXODUS 28:36-38

JOHN 4:21-24

“Be ye holy, for I am holy.”

WORSHIP HIM IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

Today let us begin with a solemn prayer: Father, open Thou mine eyes to see the *“iniquity of the holy things.”* It is humbling and profitable for us to take a close look at this strange and sad sight. The iniquities of our public worship, its hypocrisy, its dead formality, lukewarmness, irreverence, wandering of heart and disrespect of God - these make a whole catalogue of the *“iniquity of the holy things”!*

But that is not all. Consider further our work for the Lord, its pretense, selfishness, carelessness, sloppiness, slackness, unbelief - what a mass of defilement it adds to our first account. Our private devotions, their half-heartedness, coldness, neglect, sleepiness, and vanity - these mount up into a nauseating heap of revolting refuse. For some church-goers, perhaps some congregations, perhaps myself (!), they add up to the total experience of *“holy things.”*

With some Christians, the heart of devotion very much resembles the garden of the sluggard. Look! It is a sorry sight to see noxious weeds creeping and overspreading my garden. (Yes, care not to look into your neighbour's. Like charity, let's begin at home.) With holy motives and God-given desires, let us, with Holy Spirit help, come before the Lord and plead for mercy. Every noxious weed of iniquity must go as we confess them to the Lord.

We are comforted with the fact that when the High Priest bore the iniquity of the holy things, he wore upon his brow the words, **“HOLINESS TO THE LORD.”** Even so, while our Lord Jesus bears our sins, He presents before His Father's face, not our unholiness, but His **HOLINESS.** O, for grace to view our great High Priest with the eye of faith!

THOUGHT: God is a Spirit. He cannot be deceived or mocked by man.

PRAYER: Father, forgive my unholy life. Make me to worship Thee and to live for Thee in a way that truly pleases and glorifies Thee.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 16

ISAIAH 63:1

ROMANS 1:16-32

Our Lord saves to the uttermost.

MIGHTY TO SAVE

By the words “*to save*” (Isa 63:1), we understand the whole of the great work of salvation, from the first holy desire to complete sanctification. Christ the Lord is not only “*mighty to save*” those who repent, but He is able to make men repent. He will carry those to Heaven who believe. But He is mighty to give men new hearts and to work faith in them; to make the man who hates holiness love it, and the despiser bend the knee before Him. Our Lord is mighty to save, to quicken and sanctify.

We see His power in the after-work. The life of a believer is a series of miracles wrought by the mighty God. He is mighty to make His people holy, and then to keep them holy, and He continues to preserve them until He consummates their eternal salvation in Heaven. Christ’s mighty power does not lie in making a believer and then leaving him to fend for himself. But He who “*hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*” (Phil 1:6). Our Saviour is mighty to save!

Consider this: He implants life in a dead soul, sustains its divine existence, continues to strengthen it against every debilitating sin, causes it to grow in grace and sanctification, until finally it is released from earth and perfected in glory. Our Lord has power to do all this, and more.

Are you praying for someone? Do not be discouraged because nothing seems to happen. Never give up! Our Lord is able and mighty to save. Lay hold on His mighty arm. Does your own problem trouble you? Fear not, for His grace is sufficient for you. Whether to begin, or to carry on, or to bring to final perfection, our Lord is “*mighty to save.*” The best proof of His power is the fact that He saved you! And He has power to save many more!

THOUGHT: Is anything too hard for the Lord?

PRAYER: Father, may my confidence in Thee never be questioned, for Thou art the almighty God!

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17

JEREMIAH 31:27-34

HEBREWS 8:10-13

Emmanuel: God with us.

“I WILL BE YOUR GOD!”

Christian! Here is something that satisfies, more than all that you can ever wish for. Ponder again what the Lord Almighty is saying: “...*I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people*” (Jer 31:33). This is God’s promise to His people, far exceeding wish or thought. The Psalmist David would say to such an offer, “...*my cup runneth over*” (Ps 23:5).

In Christ we possess all things. All our fondest wishes and highest desires will be met by the Lord. Our cup runneth over because the immeasurable wealth of God will more than fill and overflow it. And He says, “*I will be your God!*” Ask yourself: “Am I not complete when the Lord is mine? Do I want anything else, besides God? Is not His all-sufficiency enough to satisfy me, if all else should fail?”

Come, my friend, here is music fit for heaven in God’s promise, for He is the Maker of Heaven. No other music can compare with His promise. “*I will be your God!*” Call it what you will: a sea of bliss, a shoreless ocean of pure delight. You can never exhaust God’s blessings even after ten thousand years. In that eternal day, you will behold the beauty of the Lord, and through endless ages you will inquire in His temple (Ps 27:4).

Of God’s promises, “*I will be your God*” is the masterpiece. Its certain prospect brings Heaven to earth. Daily live and walk in the light of this promise. No more should we plan and plot our future on earth. Live as citizens of Heaven, children of the King, and rejoice with unspeakable joy. He will be our God and we shall be His people.

THOUGHT: God says, “*I will be your God.*” What does this mean to me?

PRAYER: Father, may that day Thou hast promised come soon!

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18

PSALM 100

1 CORINTHIANS 15:58

*The good Master looks
for good servants.*

SERVE THE LORD WITH GLADNESS

Delight in divine service is a token of divine acceptance. Those who serve God with a sad countenance are not serving Him really. They make a show of homage but the life is absent. Our God requires no slaves to grace His throne. He is the Lord of love, and would have all His servants appear before Him dressed in garments of joy. His angels serve Him with songs, not with groans.

How are you serving Him? That service which is not spontaneous and joyous is disservice. The Lord looks at the heart, and if we serve by compulsion or some other persuasion, and not out of love, He will reject our offering. Service with cheerfulness is heart-service, pleasing to the Lord. He knows those who are sincere and serve with joyful willingness.

The Lord has battles to be fought. If a man be driven to the battlefield, he is no patriot. But he who marches into the fray with keen eye and beaming face, singing the battle-song more than proves his patriotism. Cheerfulness doubles one's strength: *"...for the joy of the LORD is your strength"* (Neh 8:10). Cheerfulness is the remover of many difficulties. It is oil to the wheel, balm to the weary and worn. In *"...every thing by prayer and supplication..."* (Phil 4:6), with cheerfulness, our heavy tasks become light.

The man who is cheerful in his service of God proves his inner obedience. As he serves, he sings,

Make me to walk in Thy commands;
'Tis a delightful heavenly road.

Reader, how do you serve the Lord? Is it with sadness or with gladness? Remember, the joy of the Lord is your strength. We serve a good Master.

THOUGHT: The time to serve is NOW!

PRAYER: Father, may I serve Thee out of a heart of love and gratitude, not out of compulsion.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19

PSALM 23

2 TIMOTHY 4:1-8

“...my reward is with me...”

A CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Some believers live in doubt and needless fears. “I fear I shall never enter Heaven!” Is this what you are thinking? Fear not! All the people of God shall enter there. A dying saint said, “I have no fear of going Home, I have sent all before me. God’s finger is on the latch of my door, and I am ready to enter.” Praise God for such simple steadfast faith in His promises.

“But,” said his friend, “are you not afraid lest you should miss your inheritance?” “Nay,” said the dying man. “Nay, there is a crown in Heaven which the angel Gabriel could not wear. It will fit no head but mine. There is one throne which the Apostle Paul could not fit. It was made for me, and I shall have it.”

O Christian, your inheritance is secure, reserved for you (1 Pet 1:4). What a joyous thought! “But might I forfeit it?” No, not at all! The child of God cannot lose it. We are “...kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet 1:5). God’s Word cannot fail. We can rely on it. Therefore “...rejoice, though now for a season...ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations” (1 Pet 1:6).

Dear reader, if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and none other, and have repented of your sins, you are a child of the Father. A place in Heaven is yours, reserved; a crown of righteousness is laid up for you. No one can take your inheritance away from you. Every blood-bought believer will have his portion. The Lord will see to it.

THOUGHT: There shall be no vacant thrones in Heaven when God’s elect are all gathered in.

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for the inheritance Thou hast prepared for me. May I live my earthly life as a citizen of heaven.

IN MY FLESH SHALL I SEE GOD

Job was given a foresight of the believers' resurrection. The Holy Spirit enabled him to utter prophetic words of comfort while his own faith in God was severely tested. With perfect assurance he said, "...yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:26). This is the sum and substance of Heaven, the joy and hope of all believers.

But now they see Him in the ordinances, by faith. They behold Him in communion and in prayer. But there in Heaven they shall see Him as He is, face to face. Then their joy will be complete, for they shall be made completely like their Redeemer. This is the promise: "*we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him ...*" (1 John 3:2).

We "*shall be like him.*" Can we wish for more? And we shall also see Him. What more can we desire? This is the believers' blessed hope, especially we believers living in these last days. On us may well befall the most stupendous and glorious experience - that of being changed and caught up without having to go through death (1 Thess 4:16-17).

With such a prospect, we can say with the Apostle Paul: "*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*" (Rom 8:18). By faith Job saw it. David also: "*As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness*" (Ps 17:15). For God's people there is glory ahead: we shall see God. Until then let us serve Him.

THOUGHT: "...in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:26). Do I believe as Job did?

PRAYER: Increase my faith in Thy wonderful promises, Heavenly Father.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 21

PSALM 1

LUKE 8:9-18

Be fruitful for God every day!

OF SEED AND SOIL

My soul, examine thyself this morning by the light of God's Word. Thou hast received the word with joy; thy feelings have been stirred and a lively impression has been made. But remember: to receive the word in the ear is one thing; to receive Jesus into thy very soul is quite another. Superficial feeling is often joined to inward hardness of heart, and a lively impression of the word is not always a lasting one.

The seed which falls on stony ground with scanty soil takes root but its downward growth is impossible. The plant itself pushes upward for a time, but without inward moisture to support the roots, it withers away. Is this my case? Am I making a fair show in the flesh without an inner life? Strong growth is both upwards and downwards. Outward piety must be rooted in inner fidelity and love to the Lord.

A "Christian exterior" must be the result of a heart softened by God's grace and made fertile for spiritual growth. A hard, stony, unbroken, unsanctified heart is not suitable for the seed of God's Word to flourish. An external "godliness" that grows rapidly must have a corresponding internal and deep work of the Holy Spirit.

The good seed of God's Word can only flourish, endure and eventually bear fruit, if it is energised by the Holy Spirit in the heart. Only God's blessed Spirit can make the "soil of the heart" receptive, moist and nourishing for growth. Only His continual watering and fertilising can sustain the plant so as to withstand the scorching heat of trial and temptation, or the storms of ridicule and persecution. Good seed needs the support of good soil!

THOUGHT: What goes on in my head and heart when I hear or read God's Word?

PRAYER: O heavenly Sower, plough me, then implant the truth into me, and let me yield Thee a bounteous harvest.

OUR GREAT INTERCESSOR

How encouraging is the thought of the Redeemer's never-ceasing intercession for us. When we pray, He pleads for us. When we are not praying, He does not forget us, but continues to advocate our cause. Our ultimate security is His continual concern, for *"he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them"* (Heb 7:25).

This is one aspect of our Lord's ministry which needs to be preached on more frequently for the help and comfort of some suffering or struggling saint who may feel isolated, neglected or greatly discouraged. Consider how Jesus addressed Peter: *"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat"* (Luke 22:31). Herein is a warning of some impending assault by the evil one. But Jesus continued: *"But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not ..."* (Luke 22:32).

Hallelujah! What a Saviour who, by His supplications, shields us from unseen dangers and assaults. Now seated at the right hand of the majesty on high, our Lord intercedes without ceasing to plead our cause and uphold us so that our faith fails not. How shall we thank Him because He never holds His peace, but day and night points to the nail prints He bears for our sakes, and pleads our cause before the Father's presence. From Peter's case, we see our Saviour preempting Satan: He checks the wily foe even in his very desire, to nip it in the bud. Did you not wonder how your faith has been preserved all these years? He is our Great Intercessor who ever liveth to make intercession for us.

THOUGHT: I have a Great Intercessor!

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, that the Lord Jesus is pleading our case against unseen enemies, frustrating their evil plans, and rendering their snares ineffective.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 23

PSALM 116

1 CORINTHIANS 3:16-23

We are not our own.

YE ARE CHRIST'S

Today we are reminded by the Apostle Paul: "...*ye are Christ's...*" (1 Cor 3:23). We are not our own. We belong to our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We are His by donation for the Father gave us to His Son. We are His by the purchase of blood paid on Calvary's cross for our redemption. We are His by dedication, for we have consecrated ourselves to Him. We are His by relation, for we bear His name and have been made His brethren and joint-heirs.

Dear reader, labour to show the world that you belong to Christ the Lord. When tempted to sin, reply, "I cannot do this great wickedness, for I am Christ's." When wealth is before you, and it can be won by sin, touch it not! Are you exposed to difficulties and dangers? Stand fast! You are Christ's! All around you may be idle, doing nothing. Say to yourself, "No, I must be about my Master's business, for I am Christ's!" Keep busy for Him.

When the siren songs of worldly pleasure are calling, reply; "Your pop and rock, your discos and karaokes, they cannot charm me. I belong to Christ." There is much to be done for the Lord. When the cause of Christ calls, give yourself without reserve. The Lord has prospered you; give to those in need, for you are Christ's. Be true to your Lord in speech, conduct, conversation, lifestyle. You belong to Him!

Let everything about you be so redolent of Heaven, that all who see you may know that you are no worldling, but are Christ's. May we by daily deeds of kindness and acts of selfless love, and bearing His countenance of holiness, be clearly seen by all that we are Christ's.

THOUGHT: Am I really in the world but not of the world?

PRAYER: Lord, keep me faithful to Thee always.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24

JOB 36:1-3

MATTHEW 5:13-18

Give your light to all.

A CITY SET ON A HILL

Christians ought not to court publicity for their own virtue or attract notice for their zeal. At the same time, it is a sin to hide what God has given us for the good of others. Be a *“city that is set on an hill”* (Matt 5:14). Be *“a candle...on a candlestick”* (Matt 5:15). Let our light be seen near and far.

There is a place for retirement and modest obscurity, but let not any believer use these excuses to hide Christ. Hiding the precious truths within us is a sin against others and an offence against God. Let not a nervous temperament or a retiring disposition dim your light and render you useless to the church.

Our Lord was not ashamed of you. Why then should your shyness seal your lips of witness? If you do not have a trumpet mouth, yet use the still small voice. You may not be cut for the pulpit, or to face a crowd, yet say with Peter and John, *“Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee”* (Acts 3:6).

If you cannot climb the mountain top or ascend some great pulpit to preach a sermon, go to the needy people like the woman of Samaria by Sychar’s well (John 4:4-14). Opportunities abound for you to speak a word for your Saviour, in your own place of abode, or your place of work. Has not the Lord given you to drink of the water of life? Give others to drink also!

Think of and pray for someone in need, whom you may help. Hide not your talent. Trade wisely, diligently, and bring in good interest to your Lord and Master. In speaking for God you refresh yourselves, cheer the saints, bless sinners, and honour the Saviour. Be a city of God that is set on a hill!

THOUGHT: Can I speak a word for the Lord today?

PRAYER: Father, loosen my tongue, for Thy glory.

THE LORD HATH BROKEN THY WORKS

Solomon's ships had returned in safety, but Jehoshaphat's never reached the land of gold. Providence favours one, and frustrates another, in the same business and at the same spot. Yet the Great Ruler remains ever good and wise: He is just and fair to all. May we therefore bless the Lord for broken ships as well as prosperous ones. It is not for us to envy others' success, or murmur at our own loss. Whatever our lot, let us be precious in the Lord's sight, even though our schemes have ended in disappointment.

Now you may wonder: why did Jehoshaphat fail? The answer to this question holds the secret to much of the suffering of God's people. Jehoshaphat had joined in alliance with a sinful family. The Lord sent a prophet to warn him, "...*Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the LORD hath broken thy works...*" (2 Chron 20:37). Jehoshaphat appears to have heeded the Lord's chastisement, for in 1 Kings 22:49 it tells us that Jehoshaphat refused to allow his servants to sail in the same vessels with the wicked king.

What lesson has the Lord for us today? Jehoshaphat's disobedience is a solemn warning to God's people, to avoid being unequally yoked together with unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14-18). A life of misery is usually the lot of those who join with unbelievers in marriage, business partnership, or in any other way of their own devising. May our love and loyalty for the Lord Jesus be such that we may follow Him wholly, and be holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. Do you think this a hard thing? To do otherwise is to go the way of Jehoshaphat: in the end, sadly, you will be told, "*the LORD hath broken thy works.*"

THOUGHT: It is less costly and painful to learn from others' mistakes.

PRAYER: Father, grant me humility and wisdom to learn from others!

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 26

2 KINGS 6:1-7

MATTHEW 17:24-27

Have faith in the Lord.

OUR WONDER-WORKING GOD

The axe-head seemed hopelessly lost, forever buried in the depths of the Jordan. And it was borrowed! The honour of Elisha's prophetic band was imperiled, the name of the Lord was at stake. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity" (Flavel). Our God is the Lord of all creation, the Master over the physical world. He, and He alone, could make the iron swim upwards against the law of gravity. Remember our Lord's words: "*With God all things are possible*" (Mark 10:27).

A Christian man was faced with a task far exceeding his strength: even the idea of attempting it seemed absurd. Yet he was called to it, and by faith in the Lord, he rose to the occasion. God honoured his faith, sent unlooked-for help, and "*the iron did swim*" (2 Kings 6:6). Another was in grievous financial straits. Friends let him down, but faith led him to the unfailing Helper, and the trouble was averted, his footsteps were enlarged, and "*the iron did swim*."

A third example: it was a sorrowful case of depravity. He had taught, reproved, warned, invited, and interceded, but in vain. Old Adam was too strong for young Melancthon. The stubborn spirit would not relent. It was only by earnest supplication and the agony of prayer that a blessed answer was sent from heaven. The hard heart was finally softened, "*the iron did swim*."

Dear reader, what heavy matter weighs you down? Bring it to the God of the prophets. Do not hold back. Our God wants to help His saints. Believe in the Lord of hosts! Call on the blessed name of Jesus, and you will see God manifest His wonder-working power. Come to Him in faith, see anew, "*the iron did swim*," to His great glory. Ours is a wonder-working God!

THOUGHT: "*For with God nothing shall be impossible*" (Luke 1:37).

PRAYER: Father, may I truly see Thee as the wonder-working God!

I CRIED UNTO THE LORD

Sinking times are praying times with the Lord's servants. Peter neglected prayer embarking upon his venturesome journey, but when he began to sink his danger made him cry out to the Lord. In times of bodily pain and mental anguish, we are naturally driven to prayer. The hunted fox for shelter flees to its hole, the bird to the wood; so the tried believer hastens to the mercy seat, even Heaven's great harbour of refuge. Every weather-beaten, storm-tossed vessel has a safe haven there.

Short prayers are long enough. Peter's prayer had only three words, but they were sufficient for his purpose. Not length but strength is the secret of effective prayer. An acute sense of need is a mighty teacher of brevity. Our prayers would be all the better with less of the tail feathers of pride and more wing. In prayer verbiage is chaff. Precious things lie in small compass. Many a long address called prayer could have been uttered in three words, like Peter's. Beware vain repetitions, as the heathens do: they will not be heard for their much speaking (Matt 6:7).

Our extremity is God's opportunity. As soon as the cry for help goes out, the ear of Jesus hears, and with Him ear and heart go together, and His hand does not linger. *"The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth ... he also will hear their cry, and will save them"* (Ps 145:18-19). Are you almost sinking into the waters of affliction? Are the storms of working life buffeting you? Take your eyes off the raging of wind and wave, fix your eyes on the Lord. He is only a look away. All is not lost when He is near. Cry unto Him and He will speedily answer. Salvation belongeth unto the Lord!

THOUGHT: Do I pray with all my heart?

PRAYER: Father, help me to be instant in prayer, in season and out of season.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 28

2 SAMUEL 7:18-29

2 CORINTHIANS 1:20-22

“...do as thou hast said.”

GOD’S PROMISES ARE YEA AND AMEN

God’s promises were never meant to be thrown aside as waste paper. He made them to be used for our blessing. Just as gold is minted to be used as currency, nothing pleases our Lord better than to see His promises put in circulation, appreciated and trusted. He loves to see His children say, *“...do as thou hast said”* (2 Sam 7:25). We glorify God when we plead His promises.

Do you think that God will be any the poorer for giving you the riches He has promised? Or any the less holy for imparting His holiness to you? Or any the less pure for washing you from your sins? Can any of these things be possible? He says to us, *“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool”* (Isa 1:18). Dear reader, take the Lord at His Word: He is faithful and true.

By faith lay hold of God’s promise of pardon. Do not delay, saying, “This is an incredible promise. I wonder if it is true?” Rather go straight to the throne of grace with it, and plead, “Lord, here is Thy promise. Do as Thou hast said.” And the Lord will be pleased. If we doubt or neglect God’s promise, we dishonour Him. But when we hasten to the throne of grace and cry, “Lord, I am unworthy of Thy promise, but Thou hast said it,” our desire shall be granted.

Our God is like a banker. He delights to cash His own notes. Present our petitions to Him as cheques to be cashed. Our heavenly Banker will gladly pay us in full. Think not that God will be troubled by our importunately reminding Him of His promises. On the contrary, He delights to hear our cries of need. He is more ready to answer than we are to ask. God is never tired of keeping His promises: in Christ, they are yea and amen.

THOUGHT: The sun is not weary of shining.

PRAYER: Father, help me to receive Thy promises with gladness and belief.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 29

PSALM 109:1-4, 21-31

MATTHEW 7:7-11

*How does one
pray without ceasing?*

I GIVE MYSELF UNTO PRAYER

Lying tongues were busy trying to destroy the reputation of David, but he did not defend himself. He committed the matter to the Lord. Prayer is the best reply to lying words of men's hatred. The Psalmist gave himself unto prayer (Ps 109:4), throwing his heart and soul, mind and strength, into the holy exercise. Like the returning Jacob, he wrestled in prayer. Thus, and thus only, should be our attitude before the throne of grace.

Here is an important lesson in prayer. Many of our prayers are quite ineffective. As a shadow has no power because it has no substance, even so our prayer from which our proper self is absent, is utterly ineffective. Let us examine our attitude in prayer. Is there a soul-deep agonising earnestness, a consuming desire, and a burning affectionate love toward the Lord in our prayer?

As an old divine said, "Fervent prayer, like a cannon fired at the gates of Heaven, makes them fly open." Too often we yield to distractions in prayer. Our thoughts go roving, and we make little impact in the desired direction. Like quicksilver our minds flow rapidly this way and that. There is no proper focus or concentration of power. Ineffectual prayer injures us and insults God.

To give myself unto prayer means to continue and persevere. David did not cry once and give up. His holy clamour continued till it brought down Heaven's blessing. Prayer must not be casual or occasional, but our daily urgent and serious business. Be immersed in the holy atmosphere of the throne, and pray without ceasing. Lord, teach us to pray!

THOUGHT: Inattention in prayer is like a petitioner before the King playing with a toy in his hand.

PRAYER: Father, teach me to persevere in prayer.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 30

ISAIAH 41:1-14

HEBREWS 13:1-8

*“If God be for us,
who can be against us?”*

THE LORD IS MY HELPER

Today, the Lord has gracious words of assurance for you and me. He says, *“I will help thee”* (Isa 41:10). Is anything too hard for the Lord? When we consider what He has done already, we have the answer from the Lord Himself: *“Why, I bought thee with my blood. I died for thee, and if I have done the greater, will I not do the lesser?”* The Apostle Paul’s words say the same: *“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”* (Rom 8:32). How shall He not readily come to our aid?

God’s help comes to us from His great loving heart. He chose us before the world began. He included us in His covenant. His own Son laid aside His glory and became a man for our sakes. At Calvary He gave His life for us. If He did all this, He will surely help us now. If we need a thousand times as much help, He will still not deny us. Our present need is little compared with what He is ready to give. Nothing is too hard for the Lord! Fear not, O ye of little faith! Whenever in doubt remember His loving words: *“I will help thee.”*

Consider who our Helper is. *“There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them”* (Deut 33:26-27). O my soul, is not this enough? Do you need more strength than the omnipotence of the eternal God, the One who rules supreme in the heavens? He is the Creator, who is from everlasting to everlasting, who *“fainteth not, neither is weary...there is no searching of his understanding”* (Isa 40:28). It is He who says, *“I will help thee.”* Respond, then, believing, *“The Lord is my helper”* (Heb 13:6).

THOUGHT: Is anything too hard for my Lord?

PRAYER: Father, may I always turn first to Thee, knowing that Thou art my Helper.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 31

DANIEL 9:25-27

ROMANS 5:8-12, 19-21

“Salvation is of the Lord.”

ONLY CHRIST DIED FOR US

Blessed be His name, the only *“name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12).

In Him was no sin: neither original nor actual sin had defiled Him. Therefore death had no claim on Him. No man could have taken His life from Him justly, and none could have slain Him by force. *“I lay it down of myself”* (John 10:18), said our Good Shepherd. *“Greater love hath no man than this ...”* (John 15:13).

Herein is the love of God revealed, the mystery of the atonement: God sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10). Man sins and his Maker suffers. Justice was offended by us, but found its satisfaction in Christ. Nothing that we could have done could have availed for the removal of sin: not rivers of tears, mountains of offerings, lifetimes of service - nothing but the blood of Jesus.

At Calvary He was cut off for us, and the cause of wrath was cut off at once, for sin was put away for ever. Herein is God's wisdom: by substitution - God dying for man - full atonement was made, once and for all. There is no place for penance, self-mortification, pilgrimages, or any other man-made ways of gaining merit with God. The Lamb of God has paid our debt in full. On the cross He cried, *“It is finished”* (John 19:30).

Dear reader, do you see the Saviour bleeding for you, in your stead? Look to Him, God's own Son, your representative, bearing away your sins, every one of them. Look only to Him, not to any other person, not to any priest or pastor, not to Mary or any beautiful image. Only Jesus! No one else died for you, only He, our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

THOUGHT: God calls: *“Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else”* (Isa 45:22).

PRAYER: Father, I believe in Jesus. He is my Saviour and Lord.
