

# The Life of Christ, for Family Devotions - March

by F. L. Mortimer

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*Jesus' ministry is characterized by his compassion, love, and power, as he heals the sick, chooses his apostles, and teaches us about the importance of prayer and faith.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:14

**Topics:** "Faith And Works", "Spiritual Enlightenment"

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## Description

F. L. Mortimer preaches about the importance of genuine faith and sincerity in religious practices, highlighting the need to seek God's approval rather than human praise. He emphasizes the significance of forgiveness, both in seeking God's forgiveness and in forgiving others, as a reflection of a transformed heart. F. L. Mortimer also addresses the dangers of pride, covetousness, and double-mindedness, urging believers to prioritize heavenly treasures through good works and faith in Christ. The sermon underscores the necessity of spiritual enlightenment by the Holy Spirit to truly understand and live out God's will.

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## Transcript

A Devotional Commentary on the Gospels

Arranged for family devotions, for every day in the year.

By Favell Lee Mortimer (1802--1878)

MARCH 1

Matthew 12:9-13. Christ heals the man with the withered hand.

It was upon the way to the synagogue that the disciples had plucked the ears of corn; for our Savior did honor to the ordinances of public worship by attending them himself. He taught at the synagogue, he sat among the readers, and expounded. His enemies were present; for they observed the forms of religion, though they knew not its power.

Jesus noticed among the congregation a man with a withered hand. He would not be restrained by the malice of his enemies from displaying his mercy. The Pharisees observed what he was going to do, and asked him whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath-day. Jesus answered their question by another;

for, in Mark's gospel, we find that He replied, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath, or to do evil? To save life or to kill?" Thus he showed that he read the wicked hearts of his enemies, and perceived their design of killing him. It was impossible for them to resist this appeal to their consciences; they held their peace, as all the wicked shall do at the judgment-seat of Christ. "The mouths of those who speak lies shall be stopped;" (Ps. 63:11.) "The wicked shall be silent in darkness." (1 Sam. 2:9.) Jesus regarded this poor man as a sheep fallen into a pit of affliction. He had looked upon all mankind as such a sheep, and had come down to redeem their precious souls from death. With what compassion he viewed his poor sheep, "plunged in a gulf of dark despair," whence it never could extricate itself?

Mark describes our Savior's feelings towards his enemies on this occasion. "He looked round about him with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts." Well might it grieve him to behold sinners endeavoring to hinder the healing of a poor sufferer, only because the Savior's glory would shine forth the more brightly on that account. What a dreadful instance of hardness of heart! But are there not some in these days who commit similar sins, by opposing the preaching of the Gospel, which can alone restore a withered soul? Does not Jesus view such people now with anger and with grief?

The manner in which he healed the poor man is very remarkable. He could have cured him by a word; but he desired him to stretch forth his hand. Was not this a strange command? It was the man's disease, that he could not stretch forth his hand. The man might have replied, "I have often endeavored to stretch forth my hand, and have not been able. Why should I try again?" But he made no such unbelieving answer; he confided in the power of Jesus, and his attempt was successful.

The Lord in his Gospel commands us to do things that seem to be impossible. He says, "Repent and believe." We are sinners, and cannot repent and believe, except by a miracle of grace. Our hearts are hard--how can they repent and feel grieved because we have sinned against God? Our minds are blind, how can we believe and see the glorious salvation of Christ? Let us beware of saying, "We cannot repent and believe--we have often tried, and we have not been able." There is a dreadful history of one who reasoned thus. It was Dr. Priestly. In his youth he discovered that he was not born again--at first he was greatly distressed at finding he could not repent and believe; but instead of looking to the power of Christ to enable him, he listened to the devil, who suggested that there was no such thing as repentance, faith, or regeneration. He believed the lie; he preached it; and how did he die? Comforting himself with the thought that there was no eternal punishment--another lie suggested by Satan. He said to a friend, "Reach down that book--(he did not mean the Bible--he did not desire to hear its precious promises)--that book has greatly consoled me; it has convinced me that we shall all come to heaven at last, whatever sufferings we may endure first." Thus he died, expecting to be cast into hell for a time, and then to be translated to heaven. But who could bear the thoughts of passing one day in the lake of fire, or even one hour! Let us beware of the first unbelieving thought, lest it should increase to more ungodliness. Jesus commands, "Stretch forth your hand--Repent--believe." If we have not repented or believed, let us make the effort now, confiding in his strength who gave the command.

March 2

Matthew 12:14-21. Isaiah's description of the gentle and compassionate Savior.

Though Jesus had silenced his enemies in the synagogue, he had not overcome the enmity of their hearts. Though they could not answer him, they could hate him. So great was their hatred, that when they left the synagogue, "they held a council against him how they might kill him." Without the grace of God,

public worship cannot benefit the soul. From the church where the Savior has been present to bless many of the congregation, we may retire only "to do evil with both hands, earnestly."

Jesus retreated from his enemies to do good in another scene. He permits his followers to flee from persecution; but he enjoins them, wherever they go, still to seek to serve God.

Great multitudes followed Him into his retreat by the side of the lake, desiring to be healed of their diseases. Many people have wondered why he desired those whom he healed not to make him known. It appears that one reason was, that he did not wish, by the report of His miracles, to increase the rage of his enemies, and thus to provoke them to acts of violence before his work was done, and his hour was come. Another reason was, that he did not desire to add to the throng who followed him, and who pressed upon him to a painful degree. Already the concourse was so immense, that he was obliged to escape from the crowd into a ship. People flocked from the most distant parts of the land, and even from heathen cities. We find it recorded in Mark 3:8, that they came from Idumea, or Edom, and from Tyre and Sidon, the habitations of idolatrous nations. Jesus did not desire the praise of multitudes; it gave him no pleasure to hear their shouts as he passed; he delighted in the petitions of the poor trembling sinner, and in the love of those whose sins he had forgiven. Was not his gentle, retiring, compassionate character truly described by the prophet Isaiah in the passage beginning, "Behold my Servant, whom I have chosen!"

Now in this prophecy there are several deeply interesting points. A glimpse is here afforded of the everlasting covenant, that covenant which the Father made with the Son respecting our salvation. It was made before the world began; for God foresaw our ruin, and knew that none but his only-begotten Son could save us; therefore he appointed his Son to do this mighty work. The Son consented, and replied, "Lo, I come--I delight to do your will, O God; yes, your law is within my heart," (Ps. 40.) And lo, he came. Thus Christ became the servant of God his Father. He finished the work that his Father had given him to do, and then ascended to sit at his right hand as our Intercessor. He now pleads the merits of his service, and asks for his reward, the salvation of sinners. His Father has promised that he shall prevail. That is the meaning of the words, (v. 20,) "He shall send forth judgment unto victory." Yes--all the ends of the world shall remember themselves, and turn unto the Lord, (Ps. 22.) That glorious day has not yet arrived. Meanwhile, let us trust in him.

See what a gentle Savior he is. "He will not break the bruised reed," or the broken heart. "He will not quench the smoking flax." The first desires of a soul after Christ may be compared to the smoke of flax, after it has received a spark, and before it is kindled into a flame. Will he quench these feeble desires? No--he will fan them into a flame. How can we refuse to trust in so compassionate a Savior! Ought we not to come to him with confidence, knowing that what he was on earth, he is now in heaven!

March 3

Luke 6:12-16. Christ chooses his twelve apostles.

We must remember, that though Jesus was God, yet that he was clothed in a body like our own, and was subject to all our feelings of fatigue. What ardor of love must have filled his bosom to have driven sleep from his eyelids, and to have sustained him in prayer for a whole night! How long do we pass in prayer? Half an hour? perhaps not five minutes morning and evening; perhaps the greater part even of that time our thoughts are wandering to the ends of the earth. Or do we never pray in spirit, with hearty desires after God? Do we feel our prayers a burdensome task; and do we never pour out our souls, as a child pours out his feelings into his father's bosom? If this be the case, how dreadful is our condition!

But even if we do know what it is to pray to God, yet we must feel that we do not pray as much, or as earnestly as we ought.

What blessings we should receive if we prayed to God more fervently, and entreated him and implored him to fulfill his promises! Why are we so apt to make excuses, and to think that we are too busy, or too much fatigued to pray! Is it because we do not believe that God hears us? or is it because we think that He will give us blessings without our asking for them? Let us beware lest we provoke God, by our negligence, to withdraw the blessings he has already bestowed.

We may conclude what was the subject of our Savior's prayer that night, when we observe what was his employment the next morning. Then he chose twelve from among his disciples to be apostles. Was he not praying in the night for them, and for the success of their ministry? What blessings have been poured down upon thousands in answer to those midnight prayers!

But even we, unworthy as we are, might assist our Redeemer's cause by joining in his petitions; for he once said, "The harvest is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest."

Yes, even we may entreat God to choose holy men, and to make them his ministers. Human creatures may build churches, but they cannot place in them holy ministers, unless God prepare men for the ministry. And what is a church without a man of God in it! False teachers ruin men's souls; they are not the ministers of Christ. Let us pray that God may send us pastors after his own heart to feed us with good knowledge, and understanding, and that he may send his shepherds forth to the ends of the earth to bring in his lost sheep into his fold.

These twelve apostles were not to become ministers immediately. If you refer to Mark 3:14, you will find that Jesus ordained them that they should first be with him, and then go forth and preach. All who teach others must be with Jesus to be taught by him.

Who were the men whom Jesus chose to be his apostles or messengers? (for apostle means "person sent forth.")

Some were fishermen; Matthew was a tax-collector; and probably none were great in this world.

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were called Boanerges, or sons of thunder; and it is supposed that they afterwards preached with great power, for though John is famous for writing about love, he wrote terrible warnings to sinners, and no doubt uttered them also, even as Jesus his gentle master did.

The last mentioned is Judas Iscariot, or the man of Carioth, the traitor! And why did Jesus choose such a man, when from the beginning he knew he would betray him, and once said, "Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" Why then did he choose him? No doubt one reason was to fulfill the prophecy in Ps. 41--"My own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me." Might he not also have intended to teach us a solemn lesson by the example of Judas? It is possible to be with Jesus, to hear him night and day; it is possible to appear religious and to preach holy doctrines, and yet to perish everlastingly. There are too many instances of people who have appeared to have been born of God, who have died in sin.

Baxter relates that in his youthful days he had a friend who seemed more earnest than himself, who prayed with him and exhorted him, and who finally fell away, and made shipwreck of his faith. Can we

hear of such instances without lifting up our hearts to God to keep us from falling?

March 4

Luke 6:17-19. A multitude of people healed by touching Christ.

We have just read how Jesus spent a whole night in prayer, and in the morning chose his twelve apostles. After choosing them he came down from the mountain, and found a vast multitude collected together in a plain beneath.

What a scene of suffering must have been witnessed upon this occasion, and what a scene of joy must have succeeded when the tongue of the mute sang, and the lame man leaped as the deer, when mothers again beheld their drooping infants restored to all the freshness of health, when fathers rejoiced over children once tormented with devils, suddenly become gentle, reasonable, and happy? Yet these changes are but faint emblems of the glorious works which are now wrought where the gospel is preached in power--for virtue (that is, a divine power) still goes out of Jesus, and where his name is proclaimed, tongues which were mute in his praise are loosed; feet that could not walk in his ways are strengthened; parents behold their wandering children returning to their forsaken God; and even angels in heaven survey the scene and look forward with joy to the time when redeemed sinners shall be their companions in heaven. O blessed gospel, which can effect such wonders! May it be preached all over the world, and rescue every sinner from the power of Satan!

There were probably some spiritual cures wrought by Jesus on that plain; for the multitude came not only to be healed, but also to hear him. This seemed a favorable opportunity for preaching a public discourse. This sermon is recorded by Luke. It is doubtful whether that recorded by Matthew is the same as this, or whether it was delivered on a different occasion. But the two sermons are so much alike, that it will be best to select one only, and as Matthew gives the fullest account, we will consider the sermon recorded in his gospel.

Never could a congregation have had such motives to listen to a preacher as the audience that surrounded our Lord at this time. With what feelings of grateful love the newly-restored sufferers must have regarded their compassionate Savior! And with what emotions of reverence and awe those who had witnessed the miracles must have gazed upon the Almighty Lord!

But much as we must admire the power displayed in his miracles, we must be chiefly touched by that love which induced him to welcome and relieve the suffering throng. The selfish heart of a fallen man would soon be wearied and disgusted with such a crowd of miserable objects. But the Son of God shrunk not from the leper's touch, nor the maniac's shriek.

The love of Jesus flowed out to meet the misery of man. It is thus even now. His love is still shown in listening to the cries of the most degraded outcasts. Those whom proud men would trample under foot, need only cry to the condescending Savior, and they shall be heard, received, and welcomed. The beggar in his hovel is visited, even the felon in his cell, when, in the hour of trouble, he calls upon the name of Jesus. Could we track the steps of the Savior through the world, we would find that while he passed by many a stately mansion and many a grand palace, he often cheered by his presence the hut of the African slave, and softened by his love the hard bed of the dying pauper. How blessed are they who tread in the steps of the Savior, and who delight more in relieving the sufferer than in shining in elegant society, and partaking of splendid entertainments!

Everyone has heard of Howard, the prisoner's friend; and of Wilberforce, the negro's friend; and of Ashley, the friend of the factory child--but there are many whose names the world has never heard, who have imitated Christ as nearly as they in labors of love. An aged outcast one night wandered to the door of a poor Christian. The wanderer was a beggar, and almost an idiot, but for Christ's sake she was received. Her new-found friend never grew weary of her care, but year after year sustained her by the labor of her hands, dressing her wounds with a sister's tenderness, and praying with many tears for the salvation of her soul. When asked why she did so much for a stranger, she replied, "The love of Christ constrains me. Has He not said, Bring the poor that are cast out to your house?" (Is. 58:7.)

March 5

Matthew 5:1-10. Christ begins his sermon on the Mount by pronouncing the beatitudes.

The blessed Savior had been just engaged in healing the bodies of men, when he ascended the mountain to preach words that might save their souls. He opened his mouth to speak with a loud voice to the vast multitude. What heavenly words proceeded from those gracious lips! He began with pronouncing blessings; for he came to bless and to save. These eight blessings are called the beatitudes. They are very instructive, because they teach us whom Christ counts happy or blessed.

We all naturally desire happiness, but we fall into this great mistake--we think that we must have earthly good in order to be happy. Do not the people of this world show by their conduct, that if they were to speak the language of their hearts, they would say, "Blessed are those who have houses and lands--Blessed are those who enjoy health and long life--Blessed are those who are held in honor and reputation among men?" But God speaks very differently. He assures us that happiness is only to be found in his presence, and in likeness to himself. The Psalmist declares, "In your presence is fullness of joy;" and again, "I shall behold your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in your likeness." In order to become happy we must become holy like Him.

God will bestow upon us, in answer to our prayers, all the graces mentioned in these beatitudes--humility, penitence, meekness, spiritual desires, mercy, purity, love of peace-making, and joy in persecution. None but real Christians possess these dispositions. Unconverted people may sometimes appear to be meek. It is no doubt true that there are some people more meek by nature than others. But how different is natural meekness from that of the true Christian! He is meek, not because he does not feel an insult, not because he is afraid of showing resentment, not because he sees it is most to his interest to endure in silence; but--because he traces the hand of God in every injury man is permitted to inflict, because he knows that he deserves worse treatment than he receives, and because his Savior suffered far more for his sake. These are some of the motives which lie at the root of the Christian's meekness. When David was cursed by Shimei, he meekly replied, "Let him curse," because the Lord has said unto him, "Curse David." He felt that the Lord had appointed the chastisement, and he did not desire to resist it. This was the meekness, not of nature, but of grace.

Some people are more merciful or kind-hearted by nature than others; but none exercise true mercy except those who have themselves received it from God. These are the only people who show mercy to the souls of men.

There are some also who naturally delight more than others in making peace; but the right motive must ever be lacking, where true religion is absent. How beautiful is the character of a Christian peacemaker! We might all do something in preventing quarrels, and in healing them. The children of Satan delight in

seeing people divided, and often by their malicious tales create differences between friends--but the children of God delight in seeing hearts fondly attached to each other; and often by their kind efforts reunite the cord of love when it has been broken. Two celebrated ministers, Robert Hall and Charles Simeon, had quarreled; they refused to speak to each other; when John Owen, another eminent minister, adopted the following plan to reconcile them, after several others had been tried in vain. He wrote and left at the house of each these lines--

How rare that task a prosperous issue finds,

Which seeks to reconcile discordant minds!

How many scruples rise at passion's touch!

This yields too little, and that asks too much;

Each wishes each with others' eyes to see--

And many sinners can't make two agree.

What mediation then, the Savior showed,

Who singly reconciled us all to God!

It is said that upon receiving the lines, each minister left his residence to seek the other, and that they met in the street, where a perfect reconciliation took place.

This is an instance of the manner in which the true Christian makes peace between his brethren, and of the success with which God blesses his efforts.

Let us now turn to another of the beatitudes. "Blessed are the pure in heart--for they shall see God." All who know anything of their own hearts, must acknowledge that they are not by nature pure. We learn from the scriptures that the heart is purified by faith. (Acts 15:9.) When a man believes in Christ, his heart no longer delights in sin, but desires to be holy like God. Lest, however, any penitent sinner should be cast down by reading this verse, let me mention a little circumstance for his comfort.

When the Esquimaux, in North America, first obtained the Gospel of Matthew in their own language, they perused the sacred treasure with the greatest attention. One day the missionary found a poor lad weeping bitterly. He inquired the cause of his grief. The youth replied by pointing to the passage in the eighth verse of this chapter. "Look there," said he, "it is only the pure in heart who shall see God; and I am not pure, so I can never see him." "But stop," said the missionary, (placing his finger on the fourth verse,) "read again, Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

March 6

Matthew 5:11-16. Christ prepares his disciples for persecution.

The sermon which the Lord Jesus preached on the Mount astonished those that heard it. Who would have thought that the persecuted could rejoice? Yet Jesus said, "Blessed are you when men shall revile you." There are a great many different kinds of persecution; but only one of them is mentioned in this place. It is a kind that some might not think very difficult to bear--the persecution of the tongue. "Blessed are you

when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake." But those who have endured this kind of persecution, know that it is very painful to the natural feelings. Yet all who follow Jesus must suffer it; for "if they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" (Matthew 10:25.)

Slander is a part of the martyr's portion. No man was ever yet put to death as a good man. His enemies take away his good name before they venture to murder him. Thus they did to Jesus. They said that he was a rebel and a blasphemer, before they crucified him. The most dreadful calumnies were spread abroad respecting the early Christians. The first persecution was set on foot by the emperor Nero, on the ground that the Christians had set fire to the city of Rome, though it is supposed he himself had committed the crime. When warriors expire on the field of battle, they know that their names will be honored by their countrymen; but martyrs often die amid the curses and insults of the multitude.

Many Christians have tried to escape persecution by concealing their religion. But the Lord Jesus does not approve such conduct. He has compared his people to two things, salt and light. Why has he compared them to salt? Because if salt has lost its savor, it is utterly useless. Thus, a Christian who hides his religion, or who disgraces it by his conduct, is useless. Light also is a great blessing; but if it is concealed, it is no blessing at all. There have been Christians, in countries where persecution was violent, who have concealed their sentiments even from their own children. In Bohemia, some fathers, when going to die, acknowledged that all their lives they had been Protestants in heart, but had not had courage to avow it. While they lived, they often retired into a shed to read the Bible, which they hid in the ground. But did these men give light unto all that were in the house? Were their children brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?

The prophet Daniel acted in a very different manner, when, in spite of the king's decree, his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime. There are two things which Christians must do if they would glorify God; they must lead holy lives, and openly acknowledge the Savior, in whom they believe. If they do not openly acknowledge him, how can they do him honor by their lives? And if they do not lead holy lives, they disgrace the cause by making an open profession of his name.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." We must expect that they will now speak evil of us; but afterwards, when they are in affliction, they may be led to turn to our God; according to the words of the apostle Peter, "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation." (1 Peter 2:12.)

March 7

Matthew 5:17-32. Christ explains the spiritual nature of the law.

It is a very common idea, that Christ came to set aside the law; but it is a mistaken one. He said himself, "I came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill." He knew that man had broken it; and he came to fulfill it in his stead, and to bear the punishment due to man for breaking it. But he came to do still more; he came to take out of man's heart, his hatred of God's law. Forever since the fall, men have hated that law. As it is written, "The carnal mind is enmity against God--for it is not subject to the law of God--neither indeed can be." (Rom. 8:7.) The Pharisees professed to keep the law--but in their hearts they hated it.

No doubt it astonished the people exceedingly to hear Jesus declare, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall never enter the kingdom of heaven." But what sort of righteousness can those men have had, who in their hearts hated righteousness! But this was the case with the Pharisees, and it is the case with every unconverted man. The law is too holy to please such sinful creatures as we are by nature.

It may appear, at first sight, an easy thing to keep the sixth commandment, "You shall not kill." But if we think it easy to keep it, it is because we do not understand its spiritual meaning. It forbids not only the act of murder, but the thought. Hatred is the beginning of murder. This may be proved. When we hate a person, we do not like the presence of that person; we feel uncomfortable when he is near, and wish he were at a distance. This must have been Cain's first feeling against Abel. It was fostered in his bosom, until it led to murder. Before he murdered Abel with his hand, he murdered him in thought. And what is the beginning of hatred? It is anger.

There is a righteous anger. God is angry with the wicked; but if they would turn from their wickedness, his anger would cease; for he says, "Let the wicked man forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him." But sinful anger is very different from the anger of God; it is anger without a cause, or without a sufficient cause. Perhaps someone has slighted us and wounded our self-love; or, perhaps, he has gained some advantage that we should like to possess, and has excited our envy. Perhaps he has faithfully reproved us, or set us an example which makes us feel ashamed of our own conduct. This was the reason that Cain was angry with Abel, and it was the reason that the Pharisees were angry with Jesus. Worldly people are still angry with real Christians on the same account. How sinful is such anger! It is usually vented in abusive words. Raca and fool were terms of reproach used by the Jews. Raca signified "vain worthless fellow," and fool, "wicked and abandoned wretch."

And have none of us in our anger been led to use very improper expressions? Even little children sometimes utter very violent words in their fits of passion. And does not God notice these words? He does notice them, and though we may forget them, He will not. He is an adversary to the wicked, and will shut them up in a prison whence they can never escape. We are now going to pray to God. Do any of us cherish malice in our hearts? Malice is the worst kind of hatred. God will not accept the prayers or the praises of any person who hates his brother. It is a difficult thing to part with our sins. Many people would rather part with a foot, or an eye, than with their sins. But we must part with them, or we shall be cast into hell. Blessed be God, He will give new hearts to those who ask for them; He will make them righteous, and He will pardon all their sins for his dear Son's sake.

March 8

Matthew 5:33-37. Christ forbids irreverent swearing.

The Lord Jesus observes the expressions we use in our common conversation; he notices every reproachful word we utter to each other; he notices also every irreverent word we speak of God. He heard with displeasure the Jews of old calling their brethren raca and fool, and swearing by heaven, by the earth, by Jerusalem, and by their own heads. Let us never forget that he still listens to our words, and is displeased with every profane expression, such as, "God bless us," "The Lord knows," "Upon my soul." Ungodly people are so much in the habit of uttering these exclamations, that they scarcely know when they use them. But they could not have acquired the habit, if they had felt reverence for the majesty of the

Almighty God. But when men became sinners, they began to despise Him. If they were to hear his dreadful voice, they would be filled, as Adam was, with fear; but when they do not see him, they feel no dread, and care not how they insult his name. "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. The Lord will not let you go unpunished if you use His name in vain."

But with what solemn awe the Son of God speaks of his Father! Even the heavens and earth are not common things in his sight. When we look up at the blue vault above our heads, we are gazing upon the throne of its Creator; and when we look around upon this green and smiling earth, we are gazing upon the footstool of its glorious Monarch--even our own heads are His, and not ours; for He made them, while we cannot make one hair, white or black. If men were not sinners, they would be satisfied with saying "yes" and "no," without using oaths to confirm their words. For Jesus said, "Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one--or the evil heart."

There is one difficulty that may be urged respecting the rule Christ laid down. How is it that Paul in his epistles often appeals to God, saying, "God is my witness, I speak the truth in Christ; I lie not. I call God for a record upon my soul." Did Paul speak profanely? That is impossible, for he spoke by the Holy Spirit. It is therefore lawful to appeal to God on solemn important occasions; as in a court of justice, when our words may affect the life of a fellow-creature. It is even mentioned in Isaiah as a proof of piety in future days, that men instead of swearing by false gods, will swear by the true God. "He who swears in the earth, shall swear by the God of truth." (Is. 65:16.) In Deuteronomy also, God said, "You shall fear the Lord your God, and serve him, and swear by his name." (6:13.) It must therefore be lawful on some occasions to use solemn oaths.

How condescending God has been to us in having used an oath to confirm his promise to us! Because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, and he said, "As I live." This he did to quiet the unbelieving fears of his own people. He says to each of those who have fled to Christ for pardon, "Surely blessing I will bless you." He adds his oath to his word, and says, "As I live." Thus by two immutable or unchangeable things, his word and his oath, he gives strong consolation to the poor penitent trembling at his footstool. He uses the same oath when He threatens to destroy His enemies. "I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, 'I live forever.' If I whet my glittering sword, and my hand take hold in judgment, I will render vengeance to my enemies, and will reward them that hate me." (Deut. 32:40, 41.) Well, then, may we fear this glorious and fearful name, "The Lord your God."

March 9

Matthew 5:38-42. Christ forbids revenge.

These directions have excited a great deal of surprise. It seems to proud man impossible that God should expect him to bear injuries without complaint, or desire of revenge. Let us inquire in what manner these directions are to be understood. The words, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," are the words of God, and Jesus did not contradict his Father's words, which were his own also, but he explained them. The Pharisees had misunderstood them, and represented them falsely to the people. Those words, "eye for eye," were a direction given to the civil authorities. See Ex. 21. It was to be their rule of punishment. If a man put out another man's eye, the civil authority might not take away his life on that account, but might assign a punishment equal to the injury he had inflicted. But this command was never intended to encourage revenge. The judge executes justice for the public good, and men may bring others to justice on the same account; but they may not practice private revenge from feelings of hatred and anger.

The Pharisees had explained this law very poorly, and had deceived the people. Jesus told them that far from revenge being allowable, we ought to suffer personal injuries without complaint, or resistance. He did not forbid us to remonstrate with our enemies, when we had the opportunity; for it is right to do all we can to deter others from committing sin. He himself expostulated with the man who dared to smite his cheek, as he stood before the high priest, saying, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you smite me?" (John 18:23.)

When our Christian brethren trespass against us, we are bound to rebuke them, (though with mildness,) for it is written, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall rebuke him, and not allow him to sin." (Lev. 19:17.)

Are we not then to turn the left cheek to him that has smitten us on the right? The command is to be obeyed in the spirit, rather than in the letter. And what is the spirit of the command? It is a willingness to yield up our rights. We owe duties to others, and others owe duties to us. Now by nature we are apt to think little of the duties which we owe to others, and much of the duties they owe to us; that is, we think little of our duties, and much of our rights. We are inclined to watch the conduct of others towards us, and to feel angry when they do not behave as we think they ought. This is a ruinous course of thought; it not only makes us unhappy in THIS world, by leading us to feel dissatisfied and revengeful, but it endangers our happiness in the next, by taking off our thoughts from Christ, our atonement, and our example.

It is useless to think of the duties of others to us; they ought not perhaps to expect so much from us, or to behave to us with such disrespect, or with such harshness; but by dwelling on these subjects, we do not improve their conduct, but lose our own peace. On the contrary, it is most useful to think of the duties we owe to others, because we shall have to account for all our conduct at the last day. Then to have been ill-treated will be nothing, but to have ill-treated others will be dreadful. If we are engaged upon this profitable subject, we shall often not observe when our fellow-creatures behave ill to us, and thus we shall miss many occasions of uneasiness, and also of sin. But if we do observe any ingratitude, or unkindness, there is one great use we may make of the trial; we may examine whether there is no person to whom we have behaved in a similar manner. It is almost certain that we shall remember having done something like the offence we have received, to some of our fellow-creatures; but at all events, we shall find that there is One to whom we have behaved far, far more ungratefully than any have behaved to us. All that our fellow-creatures can do to us is but a faint shadow of the manner in which we have insulted God. What has He not a right to expect from us! If a man had expended all his property in ransoming a poor prisoner, would he not expect some grateful return for his generosity? But God has given up his only Son for our sakes. O sacrifice surpassing human thought! And how have we behaved towards him? How coldly! How unfaithfully! What reluctant obedience have we rendered! More frequently still, what open disobedience!

This consideration should make us very meek when we receive injuries. If it really sinks into our hearts, we shall become less ready to complain of others, and more earnest in our endeavors to behave well to them.

March 10

Matthew 5:43 to end. Christ enjoins the forgiveness of enemies.

It is written in Lev. 19, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The Pharisees for many ages past had given a very imperfect explanation of this law. They had not explained the term "neighbor" aright. They had declared that it applied to those who loved us, and did not include those who hated us. But this was not true. Every human being is, in one sense, our neighbor. We are therefore commanded to love all. God

had never said, "You shall hate your enemy;" for, though he had desired the Jews to form no friendships with heathen nations, he had never commanded them to hate or injure them from feelings of revenge. It was man who had added, "You shall hate your enemy." How easy it was to obey such a law! By nature we love our friends, and hate our enemies. As Christ said, "Even the publicans love those who love them." The publicans were people of very bad character, who generally defrauded in collecting the taxes, and who were therefore much despised--yet even they behaved with kindness and respect to their particular friends. The Pharisees had no reason to be proud of such righteousness as this.

Well might our Savior say to his disciples, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." Yet this is the sort of righteousness which men are still inclined to think sufficient to entitle them to everlasting happiness. How often people say, "Have I not been a good mother to my children, a faithful friend, a kind brother--what harm have I done?" They claim a reward from God for such goodness as this! But our Savior expects far more from his disciples; he expects them to love those who hate them; to speak kindly to them, in spite of their abusive words, and to pray for them, notwithstanding repeated injuries. And yet even this conduct deserves no reward, because it is no more than our duty.

Do we say, how is it possible for us to do this? It is impossible, without a new heart. We are too sinful to do it. Those who have been renewed by grace are enabled to love their enemies. The missionaries who went to Greenland to dwell amid plains of snow and mountains of ice, were treated in the most unkind manner by the natives. Once the ship that was to have brought them provisions did not arrive at the expected time, and they were reduced to the brink of famine; for they could not procure food by hunting seals, as the natives did. The cruel Greenlanders mocked at their sufferings, and refused to help them. At length the ship containing provisions arrived. The missionaries might have gone back in it to their native country, but they remained in Greenland. Soon afterwards, many of the people were in need of food, as through their improvidence their summer stores were exhausted. Did the missionaries refuse to feed them? They shared their little supplies with them. The people were attacked with the smallpox; the missionaries nursed them with the greatest tenderness. This conduct had a great effect in softening the minds of the heathen towards their teachers, and in preparing them to receive their message. It is by such behavior we may show that we are the children of God.

How does God behave towards ungrateful man? Our Savior reminded his disciples that God sent rain, and the light of day, to all, even to those who hated him. But he did not then speak of a still greater proof of love--the gift of his Son. For a righteous man some might even dare to die; but God commends his love towards us, in that while we were yet enemies, we were reconciled to him by the death of his Son. This shows us what kind of love we ought to feel for our enemies. The same kind that God feels for us. Not the love of approbation, (that we can only feel for the righteous,) but the love of compassion. It is this love that God felt for the world when he gave his Son to die for it. To love an enemy is to be perfect; for it is to have charity, the bond of perfectness. If we have this charity, this love to all, we are like God, though our love can never be so great as His.

If we earnestly desire the salvation of our enemies, then we may know that we are the children of God. Let us endeavor to melt their hearts by acts of kindness. Such efforts are often blessed to the conversion of sinners. A holy man was once, for the truth's sake, shut up in a prison, and obliged to share the cell with a murderer. The conduct of his wicked companion was so intolerable, that his fellow-prisoner complained of him to those who overlooked the prison. An order was issued that the murderer should be removed to another dungeon. When the unhappy man heard to what place he was to be committed, his dismay was

great, for he knew that the damp and closeness of that dungeon would cut short his life in a few days. He implored his fellow-prisoner, with many tears, to ask that the sentence might be reversed. The holy man felt that it was his duty to yield to these entreaties. He requested that the murderer might be permitted to remain with him. His petition was granted, but with this condition, that he should complain no more of the conduct of his companion. The murderer was melted by the generosity of the man he had once hated and annoyed. He fell at his feet, and with tears of gratitude implored his pardon. Henceforth he listened to his instructions, and through the grace of God, repented, and believed the Gospel.

March 11

Matthew 6:1-4. Christ forbids ostentation in GIVING.

The Lord Jesus now began to show the emptiness of the good works in which the Pharisees gloried. He had declared what false views they entertained of the law of God, and now he shows that their best actions were nothing worth, because they were done from wrong motives.

Let us remember that he said, in the early part of the sermon, that except our righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, we shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. Here is an instance of what their righteousness was. They sometimes bestowed large sums of money on the poor, or on the service of the temple; but their desire was to be seen of men. They did not care so much for God's favor, as for men's admiration. Therefore they took care to have their charities known. They did not literally sound a trumpet before them; but they endeavored as much to attract notice, as if they had sounded a trumpet. They did gain much praise from men, and this was their reward, and their only reward.

We all by nature care for the praise of men more than for the praise of God. The reason is, that we have no faith. We see men, we hear their praise; but we do not see God, nor hear his voice. But when a person has faith, he begins to value God's favor more than the praise of men. To hear every human tongue united in applauding him, would not give him as much delight as the hope of hearing God say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Now the point we should examine is this--Which are we most anxious to obtain, the praise of men or the favor of God?

It may sometimes be best that our charities should be known. David, for instance, gave the gold and silver he had saved for the temple in a public manner. But why? Not to gain praise, but to encourage others to give also. Should we even hide our charities, and at the same time desire that they should be discovered, God would not be pleased with us. He looks at the heart. He wants us to act to him alone. We ought not to think that our charities deserve to have a reward from God. If we do them with this idea they will not be acceptable.

What can we give to God? Nothing worthy of his acceptance. All we can bestow are but like the flowers that the cottager may gather from his garden, and present to the monarch as a slender token of his gratitude for the gift of his cottage, and for his garden, and for all that he possesses. A gracious sovereign would not refuse the gift, if humbly offered, though the flowers were common, and though his own garden contained the rarest and the finest; but if the cottager presented them to gain the praise of his neighbors, or thinking he conferred a great favor upon his king, both the offering and the offerer would deserve to be rejected. And shall those who give money for God's service in such a spirit, be accepted? Cornelius gave

alms from the overflowings of a grateful heart, therefore the angel said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up as a memorial before God," (Acts 10:4.) The poor widow gave her two mites with a single eye to God's glory. She gave her heart with them, or it would not have been said of her, "She gave more than they all." Mary poured the ointment on the head of Jesus, under a deep sense of her own unworthiness, and of the preciousness of her Savior; therefore Jesus accepted the service, and has caused it to be remembered through all ages. All we do from a feeling of grateful love to Him, who laid down his life for us, shall be remembered by God, when the costly gifts of ostentation shall be buried in eternal forgetfulness.

March 12

Matthew 6:5-8. Christ forbids ostentation in PRAYER.

Our Savior continued to expose the emptiness of the works in which the Pharisees prided themselves. One of these was giving. This has been already considered. Another was prayer. Let us now direct our attention to this subject. The customs of Judea were very different from ours. The synagogues were always open, and people resorted to them, as well as to the temple, in order to pray. There was no harm in the custom, and many people no doubt went to the synagogues to pray in sincerity, as we know one poor tax-collector went to the temple, and sincerely said, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

But others went only to be seen of men. There were also certain hours of the day at which the Pharisees said certain prayers; and if at these hours they found themselves in the streets, they stopped to repeat their task; and for this purpose preferred the corner of a street to a more private place. Jesus bade his disciples avoid such ostentatious conduct, and advised them to retire to their closets to pray, and to conceal from the world their communion with their heavenly Father.

If we really love God, we shall pray to him in secret. It is clear, that if we pray in church and in the family, but neglect secret prayer, we are only seeking human approbation.

It is a great proof, both of faith and love, to be frequent in secret prayer. If we were told that a departed friend was hovering near us, though unseen, and that he could hear us, though he could not answer us aloud, should we feel inclined to speak to him? This would depend upon two circumstances--first, upon our faith in the statement, that is, upon our really believing that the friend was near; and secondly, upon our love for this friend--If we both believed he was near, and loved him, we would find great delight in talking to him. "He who comes to God, must believe that he is." If we doubt whether God hears us, no wonder we find prayer a burdensome task. If, also, we do not love God, how can we find it pleasant to speak to him? But if we believe that he is very near us, and if we love him with fond attachment, O how delightful to shut our closet door, and to pour out our hearts before him! And will he give us a reward for doing so? What! A reward to his needy creatures, for calling upon him for help! The reward will be, He will answer our petitions as He has promised, and at the last acknowledge us as His children.

Jesus also tells us in what manner we should pray. It is not words alone that move God. The heathen think they shall be heard for much speaking, and say, Baal, hear us, Baal, hear us. The Roman Catholics repeat the Lord's prayer many hundreds of times, and count the numbers upon their string of beads. But of what use are such prayers; for what are words without desires! We should use words, because in using them our desires grow stronger; but words without desires are but unmeaning noise. A Christian poet beautifully describes the nature of prayer in the following lines--

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,  
Uttered, or unexpressed;  
The hidden motion of a fire  
That trembles in the bosom.  
Prayer is the burden of a sigh,  
The falling of a tear;  
The upward glancing of an eye,  
When none but God is near.

Sometimes the mouth cannot express what the heart feels. But sometimes the soul feels dead, and we cannot pray in spirit and in truth. An unconverted heart is always dead; but even the renewed heart has seasons of barrenness. How are desires to be stirred up? Take the Scriptures--consider the things revealed in them--Heaven, Hell, God, the Judge of all--the crucified Savior--a precious soul--a fleeting life. Is there nothing you desire to escape? Nothing you desire to possess? Have you nothing to say to Him who can do everything for you, and who has done so much already? What would many a lost soul give for such an opportunity as you now possess? God, who sees your efforts, will send his Holy Spirit to teach you how to pray. Let us remember that prayer is our safety; without prayer we must be lost. When a person can receive no nourishment, we give him up; we know he must die if he can take nothing. If we cannot pray, we must perish.

March 13

Matthew 6:9-13. The Lord's Prayer.

This prayer is so familiar to us, that we are in great danger of not considering its weighty meaning. A prayer taught by our blessed Savior himself ought to engage our deepest attention. Had we been told that such a prayer had been given, and had never heard the words, how we would have desired to hear them!

We ought not to suppose that we are bound to use this prayer every time we pray. Jesus said, "After this manner pray." We find in this prayer a pattern for our prayers.

We see in what way we should address God, and what kind of petitions we may present. The title we are allowed to give to Him is the tenderest that can be conceived--Our Father. He is our Father, because he made us in his own image; but by sin, we became children of the devil. How then are we restored to our Father? By Jesus Christ. He became our brother in the flesh, that we might become his brethren in the spirit. He makes us the children of God by faith in him. Thus he said to Mary Magdalene, after he rose from the dead, "Go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend to my Father, and to your Father, and to my God, and to your God."

Our Father is a king also; but a dethroned king. His subjects have risen up in rebellion against him. Therefore his children entreat him to return. His return is the darling wish of their hearts. It is a great sign of faithfulness in subjects, when they maintain allegiance to a sovereign who is in banishment. At such a time it is dangerous to be faithful; for if discovered in sending letters to their monarch, inviting him to take

possession of his throne, they would be regarded as enemies by their rebellious countrymen. Yet faithful subjects would be continually forming plans for the restoration of their lawful sovereign, and would run all risks rather than desert him. The children of God feel and act in this manner while they live in the world. Their desire is, that their Father's name should be hallowed, praised, and adored; that his kingdom should come, and that his will should be done on earth, as it is in heaven. In their prayers they express this desire first, and they endeavor to promote its fulfillment by persuading men to submit to their king. Nor shall their desires and efforts be disappointed, for God shall one day be king over all the earth. We see, therefore, that only converted people can offer this prayer in sincerity, for none who are not converted long for God to be acknowledged as king.

The next requests relate to such things as we desire for ourselves. In the first place we ask for bread; not for a great supply, but daily bread. Then we ask for the forgiveness of sins, declaring at the same time that we have forgiven others their sins against us. Thus we see that this prayer suits none whose hearts cherish hatred and revenge; for if we do not forgive those who offend us, every time we use this prayer we are pronouncing our own condemnation, and asking God not to forgive us.

We have before remarked, that this prayer is only fit for those who love God, because they ask that his kingdom may come and his will be done. We now see that it is only fit for those who love man also; and we know that those who do love God, love their fellow-creatures also. These are the two great commandments--Love God and love your neighbor. When people believe in Christ they have new hearts, and they begin to love God and man. Then this prayer suits them. They still have sins to be forgiven, and it is the sense of God's grace in forgiving them, that makes them so ready to forgive others. When God has forgiven them a debt of thousands of pounds, how can they exact a debt of a few pence from their fellows! They feel that no one has acted towards them as ungratefully as they have towards God, and so their mouths are stopped from uttering reproaches against their fellow-creatures.

A penitent sinner hates sin. He can say from the heart, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, (or the evil one.)" By nature we delight in temptation and in evil. All our pleasures are temptations; we are always running into it and longing for it. But the Christian dreads temptation; therefore he does not desire to be rich, nor to run with the crowds, nor to obtain high praise, because he knows he might be tempted to be proud, and foolish, and to forget God.

The prayer is ended as it was begun--with the praise of God. Yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. This is the consolation of the child of God; though none may acknowledge his Father, yet he knows his Father is glorious, and that some day his glory will be displayed before an assembled universe.

Christ would not have given his people such a prayer, if he had not determined to grant it. He knows what he will do, and he delights to hear us asking him to perform his gracious designs. Then let every devout soul say, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly, for yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory."

March 14

Matthew 6:14, 15. Christ declares whom God will forgive.

Jesus here gives some instructions concerning the frame of mind in which prayer must be made. In the Lord's prayer we are directed to say, "Forgive us our debts, or trespasses, as we forgive our debtors, or those who have sinned against us." This petition seems like asking God not to forgive us if we do not forgive others. Some people might have been induced to wish that some part of the sentence was omitted,

and that they were instructed simply to ask God to forgive them, whether they forgave others or not. But it would be of no use to make such a prayer; for God is determined not to forgive us unless we forgive others.

It is therefore necessary that we should inquire whether we really forgive them; for our hearts are so deceitful that we are apt to imagine we forgive, when we still harbor a grudge against an offending brother. What then are the signs of having really forgiven an offender? When we have heartily forgiven him, we cease to indulge the thought of his offence, and we take no pleasure in speaking of it. When we have heartily forgiven him, we neither wish evil to befall him, nor feel glad if it do befall him; but, on the contrary, wish all manner of good to happen to him. When we have heartily forgiven him, we neither speak bitterly of him ourselves, nor do we feel gratified if we hear others speak harshly of him. This last, perhaps, is the best test of our state of feeling; for some who would not dare to speak harshly of an enemy themselves, would be glad to hear others do so. These should be our feelings even towards one who has not asked our forgiveness; but if our offending brother ask us to forgive him, we ought to restore him to friendship and endearment, and our heart ought to be towards him as before--and thus we ought to continue to act, in spite of repeated offences.

Is it an easy thing thus to forgive? No! it is impossible to nature, and can only be done through the Holy Spirit working in our hearts a sense of our own unworthiness, filling us with love to God for his mercy towards us, and then with love to our fellow-creatures.

Though thousands offer this prayer of our Lord every day, it is only accepted from those whose hearts are renewed by grace. Before our prayers are accepted, we ourselves must be accepted. Cain's sacrifice was not accepted by God, because he himself was not accepted. Abel's sacrifice was accepted, because he himself was accepted. Would we, therefore, offer acceptable prayers, we must first give our own selves to the Lord; we must come in the name of Jesus, and on account of his sacrifice that he offered on the cross, God will accept us, renew our hearts by his grace, and answer our prayers. God will not be mocked. Man would gladly put God off with formal, heartless prayers; but He will not receive them. He spurns the offering, and says, "Who has required this at your hands--to tread my courts? When you spread forth your hands I will hide my eyes from you. Yes, when you make many prayers I will not hear." (Is. 50:12-15.)

But let no penitent sinner be discouraged by these declarations. We may come with our sins to Christ, if they are a grief and a burden to us, for it is He alone who can forgive them, and it is He alone who can subdue them. His Holy Spirit will make us hate our sins, help us to strive against them, and enable us to overcome them.

March 15

Matthew 5:16-18. Christ forbids ostentation in FASTING.

There was another duty upon the performance of which the Pharisees prided themselves--fasting. Some of them fasted twice a week. On those days they neglected the care of their persons, and went abroad that men might see they fasted, and admire them for their religiosity. In the day of a public fast for the sins of the nation, men should not conceal that they fast; but, like the king of Nineveh, who repented at the preaching of Jonah, they should set an example of penitence and self-denial. But when men fast for their own sins, then they ought to conceal the deed, and not seek to obtain human praise.

The scriptures teach us that fasting is a duty. It brings down the spirits, and sobers the mind; and, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, disposes the soul for prayer and meditation. But there are some people, whose health is so delicate, that it would be injured by long fasting. It surely cannot be a duty for them to fast, for they would thus be less fit to pray.

But all should beware of excess in food, which drowns the soul, and renders it sensual and stupid. It is written concerning one of the most wicked cities of old, "Pride, FULLNESS OF BREAD, and abundance of idleness was in her and her daughters," (or inhabitants.) This fullness made them haughty, and brought on their destruction. (Ez. 16:48, 50.) Let none think that they are too pious to stand in need of such a warning. Christ warns his own disciples against gluttony and drunkenness--"Take heed lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with excessiveness and drunkenness." (Luke 21:34.) Constant moderation in food and drink is as important to the soul as to the body.

But when we fast let us beware of PRIDE; for as dead flies spoil the most fragrant ointment, so pride mars the most self-denying actions. We should perform religious duties secretly, when we are among those who will think highly of us for observing them. This rule applies to fastings, prayer, reading the scripture, and doing good. But when we are among those who would ridicule us for religion, then is the time boldly to confess our Master, and to show that we are not ashamed of him. How easy it is to speak against vain amusements, to quote the scriptures, and to make pious remarks in the presence of religious people--but how difficult, when surrounded by scoffers, to be faithful to Christ! We need a lively sense of the presence of God, that we may always act as in his sight, neither courting the smiles of our fellow-creatures, nor fearing their frowns; neither seeking their applause, nor shrinking from their ridicule. Let us labor to be accepted of Him, to whom we must each give an account. In that solemn hour how worthless will the praises of our fellow-creatures appear, their censures how harmless!

March 16

Matthew 6:19-23. Christ forbids covetousness and double-mindedness.

Our Savior had exposed the apparently good actions of the Pharisees, as their prayers, fastings, almsgivings. He now reproves their wicked practices. The first thing he attacks is their covetousness,--their delight in laying up earthly treasures. In those days riches consisted partly in valuable clothes, and therefore He speaks of moth and rust corrupting.

The Lord shows, in the first place, the folly of covetousness. Riches make themselves wings, and fly away. How foolish, then, to set the heart upon them! But if we do not lose them, we must leave them. We brought nothing into this world, and we can carry nothing out; it is therefore evident to reason, that if there is another world in which we shall eternally dwell, we ought to be extremely anxious to lay up treasures there.

But how are we to lay up treasures in heaven? By good works. Paul, in his epistle to Timothy, says, "Charge those who are rich in this world that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute; willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." But some may inquire, "Can we gain heaven by good works?" O no. Jesus Christ has gained heaven by his righteousness, and he freely bestows this heaven on all who believe in him. We cannot lay up treasures there, until we have believed in Him. We lay up treasures there, when we do things that please God. Good works are the fruits of faith. It is written, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." It is added, "Their works do follow them." (Rev. 14:13.)

These blessed dead had believed in Christ; therefore their works were accepted. The Pharisees could not please God; they could not lay up treasures in heaven. And why not? Because the eyes of their minds were shut; and they saw not the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus.

How great is the darkness of the unawakened mind! God alone, by his Holy Spirit, can enlighten this darkness. Jesus came to give sight to the blind. Has he given it to us? Our actions show whether he has or not. When we see a blind person, we are not always aware at first that he is blind; but if we watch him closely we soon discover his condition. If a mad dog pass near him, he does not try to avoid it; and if the most splendid illuminations be displayed, he does not stop to admire. The actions of men show clearly whether they are blind or not. Unawakened souls evince no dread of hell, no desire after heaven, no contempt for earth, no love for Christ. God frowns, but they a

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