

The Life of Christ, for Family Devotions - May

by F. L. Mortimer

Jesus teaches about the importance of faith, the danger of self-confidence, and the gift of eternal life through his teachings and miracles.

Scripture: Matthew 16:16, Matthew 16:18, Acts 4:11

Topics: "Jesus Christ", "Faith Foundation"

Description

Favell Lee Mortimer preaches about the importance of recognizing Jesus as the Son of God, emphasizing the blessing of faith given by God. The disciples, including Peter, are reminded that true belief in Jesus as the Christ is the foundation of the church, and that the powers of darkness will never prevail against it. Peter's confession of faith in Jesus as the Son of God is commended, and he is acknowledged as a rock on which Christ will build his church.

Transcript

A Devotional Commentary on the Gospels

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

By Favell Lee Mortimer (1802--1878)

MAY 1

Mark 6:30-44. Christ feeds five thousand with five loaves and two fish.

Behold another instance of the compassion of our Lord. See how ready he was to sacrifice his own ease and comfort that he might promote ours.

It appears that he longed to rest awhile with his disciples, and to hear them relate the things that had befallen them during their travels; and that for this purpose he crossed the lake, intending to land at some desert place; but the multitude, who saw him embark, ran round the lake, and were waiting to receive him at the place where he landed. Was he provoked by this interruption? No! he was moved with compassion for the destitute state of their souls. He regarded them as sheep without a shepherd, because their public teachers were ignorant of God. There is no outward deprivation which he pities so much as the want of a faithful ministry, and there is none which we should lament so much. A famine of the word of the Lord, is far worse than a famine of bread.

When evening came, the apostles wished to send the people away; but the people were willing to remain without food rather than to leave Jesus. They were rewarded for their anxiety to be with him by obtaining nourishment both for their bodies and souls.

Before Jesus broke the bread, he looked up to heaven. He knew whence every good gift came. Have we not often eaten our food without thinking of the Giver, and without considering his kindness in supplying our daily need?

Christ did not distribute the food himself, but employed the apostles in that service. This bread was an emblem of his own flesh, which he gave for the life of the world. The apostles were appointed to proclaim the crucified Savior to perishing sinners. It was necessary that they should believe that He could save by his death the souls of all believers. They now saw with their own eyes that He could make a little bread sustain a vast multitude. They would remember this in future days, when preaching his name to assembled thousands. This simple truth, that Jesus gave his flesh for the life of the world, has fed innumerable souls, and will feed innumerable more until the multitude without number are gathered around the throne; and then the Lamb himself will feed them through eternity with food which we know not of.

After the simple meal was ended, Jesus bade the apostles gather up the remains. By doing this, it was made evident that the hunger of the multitude had been fully satisfied, and the greatness of the miracle was thus proved. But Jesus gave another reason for the command; he said, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." (John 6:12.) By this command He showed us how precious he esteemed even the least of the works of God, that we might not dare to waste the food that our heavenly Father has provided.

But if earthly bread is too precious to be wantonly trampled under foot, how inestimably precious must heavenly bread be! Every word that comes out of the mouth of God is bread for the soul. Yet how much is permitted to fall to the ground! How carelessly we sometimes read the Scriptures! How many heart-stirring sermons have we heard, and then immediately forgotten! It is not that our memories are too weak to retain them, (for we can recollect the news of the town, or the village,) but it is that our hearts are too indifferent. It would be a blessed custom, after reading or hearing, to gather up the fragments; that is, to recall to our minds what we have heard, and to apply them to our consciences, "that nothing be lost."

It appears that the twelve baskets contained more bread than there was at first, and that the store had been increased by distribution. In the same way, by feeding the hungry we shall often enrich ourselves; for God will bless our earthly substance, as He did in the case of the widow who fed Elijah. But how much more will he bless those who feed souls with the word of God! Those teachers who in a humble spirit search the Scriptures, that they may scatter the crumbs among poor little ignorant children, find rich nourishment for their own souls.

May 2

Matthew 14:22 to end. He walks upon the sea.

This history contains a beautiful instance of the care of our Savior over his people. On another occasion the disciples were alarmed, because Jesus was asleep when a storm arose. How much more alarm they probably felt now that he was absent! Yet it ought to have comforted them to remember that he himself had constrained them to enter into the ship. They were evidently in the path of duty. How then should any

evil befall them! It is a great comfort to us when we can feel sure that we are doing the will of God; for whatever trouble may threaten us, we can trust Jesus to bring relief in the storm. On the contrary, when we are acting wilfully, we have reason to be alarmed at every difficulty that occurs, and to be apprehensive that God will punish us for our waywardness.

Yet the faith of the disciples was so weak, that, though they knew they were in the path of duty, they were alarmed by the storm; and when they beheld Jesus walking on the sea, they were still more terrified, thinking that he was a spirit. They knew not that while he was praying on the mountain, he had seen them, "toiling in rowing," and was come in the most wonderful manner to their rescue.

Peter, who possessed a warm, eager disposition, said, "Lord, if it be you, bid me come to you on the water."

Why did Peter make this request? Love suggested it! Did he not affectionately desire to be with his Lord? Faith enabled him to comply with the command, "Come." Yet this love, and this faith, were mixed with self-ignorance and self-confidence. He knew not the weakness of his own heart; he fondly imagined that he loved the Lord more than his brethren loved him, and that his faith was stronger than theirs. Upon the waves he learned a humiliating lesson. His mind was not resting solely upon Christ; he partly gloried in himself, and soon the tumult of the winds and waves shook his faith, and he began to sink. But his faith, weak as it was, did not fail, for he called on the Lord to save him.

If Peter had taken a lesson from this event, he might have been spared the sharp sorrow, as well as dreadful sin, of denying his Lord. Had he learned upon the waves, to distrust his own heart, he had not in the hall experienced its deceitfulness. If we reflect upon the events of Providence, we shall find that God often causes those events to occur in miniature, which happen afterwards upon a larger scale. An act of willfulness in youth is permitted to produce evil results; but the same willfulness at a later period is again displayed, and is followed by worse consequences. The deceit that David practiced at the court of Achish entangled him in many difficulties; but the Lord extricated him from them all. He was guilty of a deeper and fouler deceit in the matter of Uriah, and was entangled in a net from which he was never extricated in this life. It is very profitable to review our past conduct, that we may learn the lessons the Lord would teach us, and avoid the evils we have already experienced.

Are we, like Peter, disposed presumptuously to venture into scenes of temptation, and to desire trials of our faith? Does not past experience show us how weak and foolish we are? It is those who dread temptation, who are supported when exposed to it. It is those who feel their unfitness to occupy important stations, who are strengthened when exalted to them. Let us not rashly ask Jesus to bid us come unto him on the water; but ask him rather to come unto us in the ship. Yet the Lord does not forsake his servants, even when their own temerity and lack of faith have brought them into difficulty. No! even then he hears them when they call. He who stretched out his hand to sinking Peter, will extend his mercy to each of us in every trouble. The cry, "Save me or I perish," touches the Savior's heart, even as the infant's cry awakens the mother's tenderness. Never then let us be discouraged from looking to Christ for help. No past folly of ours can harden his heart against us, when by faith we come to him in our distress.

May 3

John 6:22-29. The multitude seek Jesus from interested motives.

It must be remembered that when Jesus walked on the sea to his disciples, he left a great multitude on the other side of the lake. These people had been fed by him in the evening; but afterwards many of them had remained near the mountain, to which he had retired to pray. They had seen with pleasure the disciples embark without their Master, in the only ship then upon the sea; and had felt certain of finding him near them in the morning. But what was their consternation, when morning came, at not being able to find him! They were at a loss to imagine how he could have departed.

While they were in this state of perplexity, some boats arrived. In these they joyfully embarked, and crossing the lake, soon reached the city of Capernaum. They sought there for Jesus, and found him teaching in the synagogue, (v. 59.) They expressed their surprise at the meeting, saying, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Jesus, however, did not satisfy their curiosity, by answering their inquiry, but proceeded to unveil their hearts, and to expose the selfish, earthly motives that led them to seek him so earnestly. Could we have supposed that a meal of bread and fish was more valued by them than the precious words of the Savior! Yet this was the case. Though Jesus was the Son of God, and had the most valuable gifts to bestow, the earthly refreshment he had afforded was more prized by the groveling multitude than heaven and all its blessings.

The Savior reproved their earthly-mindedness by saying, "Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that which endures unto everlasting life." Did he mean to forbid honest labor for our living? By no means. It is commanded that if any will not work, neither should he eat. The expression signifies, "Labor not so much for the meat which perishes, as for that which endures unto everlasting life. Labor not at all for it in COMPARISON with the earnestness with which you labor for heavenly blessings." Do we obey this direction? Are we indeed much more eager and anxious about eternal things than about earthly pleasures, or comforts? What we are most anxious about will be uppermost in our thoughts. What is uppermost in our thoughts? Perhaps we are not as poor as these people were, and are not therefore as anxious as they were about one meal. But if it be wrong to be so much engrossed about necessary food, surely it is much more wrong to be engrossed by unnecessary earthly things--such as pleasures, even harmless pleasures--the favor of men--the increase of our property--or the success of our studies! There is one thing needful--the meat which endures unto everlasting life.

Yet we, helpless, sinful creatures, never could obtain this by our most earnest strivings, were it not entrusted to the Son of God to bestow upon us. God the Father has given eternal life to the Son for us, and sealed the Son. A king places his own seal upon his written commands, that men may know they are his; so God the Father sealed his Son, by enabling him to do miracles, and thus showed men that He had sent him. Our duty is to believe upon this Son, who can give us eternal life.

The people asked, in a self-righteous spirit, "What shall we do that we might work the works of God?" They seemed to think that they could do something to entitle themselves to eternal life. This was impossible. Guilty, polluted creatures can do nothing really good. But there is a Savior to whom they may apply for pardon and grace. Jesus directed them to Himself when he said, "This is the work of God, that you believe on him whom he has sent." He calls believing a work. Yet it is not a work of merit; for it is the beggar coming to the king for alms; it is the criminal suing to the judge for mercy. This is the first work that each of us must perform. There is one who is able to save and to destroy--He is the Son of God. All power is committed unto him. Do we earnestly apply to him for salvation? How foolish only to ask Him for fading flowers, when he could bestow a crown of life! How foolish only to fear the pricking of the thorns and thistles, when the sword of eternal wrath is in his hand! Let us not insult this Savior by seeking his lesser gifts, while we neglect to implore that gift which he bought for us with his blood!

May 4

John 6:30-34. They ask him to give them bread.

Our Lord frequently took occasion from circumstances to explain spiritual truths. Once, when sitting by a well, he instructed a woman who came to draw water, and exhorted her to seek for living water. Now Jesus was speaking to people who had shown a great anxiety for bread, and he took the opportunity to direct their attention to the bread that came down from heaven.

There was much unbelief and ignorance displayed by the Jews in this conversation. They pretended that they had not received sufficient proof of his authority, and said, "What sign show you then, that we may see and believe you?" He had already given them a most wonderful sign in the miracle of the loaves, yet they required more evidence; but this was not granted to them. They even ventured to dictate to the Savior what he ought to do, and referred in an insolent way to the miracle of the manna, as if they wished Him to understand that Moses, in giving bread from heaven, had wrought a greater miracle than himself. Jesus took no notice of the bad spirit they displayed, but showed them they were mistaken when they said that Moses had given them bread from heaven. The manna had not come from the heaven of heavens, where God's glory is manifested, but from the lower regions of the skies; besides, Moses did not give that bread; he did not create it--nor was it living bread; it would not give life to the dead, or even preserve the life of the living. But there was a bread that could both give life to the dead, and preserve life for evermore--this bread was the Son of God.

The people understood not what Jesus meant, when he spoke of the "Bread of God;" but ignorantly cried, "Lord, evermore give us this bread." How many have made prayers as ignorant as this, and have received answers that they little expected! The woman of Samaria knew not what she asked when she said, "Give me of this water, that I thirst not, neither come here to draw." But her petition, so blindly offered, was graciously granted, for she soon received the water of the Holy Spirit into her heart. We may also believe that those who ignorantly asked for heavenly bread, were satisfied beyond their expectations. If God did not deal thus graciously with sinners, who could be saved! For we are all found by Him in a state of ignorance and enmity--our first prayers resemble the cry of this people--"Lord, evermore give us this bread." Some of us perhaps can remember our feelings just before we turned to God. We felt the misery of our state, we longed to find something better than we had found; but we knew not what we needed. We had heard that there was help in God; we cried to him, but in such a manner that any Being less gracious than Himself would have disregarded us. But his ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts. He pitied us in our low estate, and led us by ways that we knew not, to a knowledge of his Son.

May 5

John 6:35-40. Christ declares himself to be the bread of life.

Among the crowd who surrounded the Lord while he taught in the synagogue, there were some who believed not, (ver. 64.) But there were some who would come to him, and be his crown forever. This he knew--this was his consolation among all the taunts and jeers of the multitude while in the synagogue, and even afterwards when he was on the Cross.

It was to those people, who did, or would believe on him, that Jesus referred when he said, "All that the Father gives me shall come unto me." They had not all yet come unto him, but he knew they would come unto him, for his Father had given them to him. O what a gift it was! Polluted, guilty, helpless sinners were

the gift the Father bestowed upon the Son as the reward of all his sufferings. It was the compassion of his heart that made the Savior value such a gift.

A family of poor children was once bequeathed by a dying parent to a rich man. The legacy was accepted. Many were astonished at the kindness and condescension of the rich man. What trouble, and care, and expense such a gift involved! The children must be fed, and clothed, and educated, and provided for--the rich man was willing to do it all; and he did it all. And what will not the Savior do for those whom the Father has given to him! He will receive them, even as he said, "Him that comes unto me, I will in no wise cast out." When they come to him, however helpless and diseased and destitute they may be, he will graciously welcome them into his house of mercy, and place them at his children's table.

Nor is this all; he will raise them up at the last day. It is appointed unto all men once to die, (whether they believe in Jesus, or not;) but it is also appointed that some shall rise to everlasting life. Jesus promises to be with his children as they pass through the valley of the shadow of death, to receive their souls into paradise, to watch over their sleeping dust, and then at the sound of the last trumpet to raise them from their graves, to clothe them with glorious bodies like his own, and to welcome them into mansions of everlasting bliss. All this will Jesus do for everyone that comes to him.

And why will he do all this? He himself tells us why. Because it is the will of the Father that sent him. "This is the will of him that sent me, that everyone that sees the Son and believes on him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." The Son delights in doing his Father's will, even more than he does in showing mercy to sinners. It was the Father who appointed him to be the Savior of the world; and the Father knew how much the Son delighted in the work. When a person we love exceedingly gives us a command, we are ready to obey that command, however painful it may be; but when the work he appoints is that in which our soul delights, there is a double joy in obedience.

Ought we not to be astonished to think that the Father and the Son, who fill heaven and earth, should have interested themselves in our wretched race--should have cared for you and me! How guilty we must be, if we reject such wonderful mercy! We can have no excuse for not coming to Jesus, when we are so fully assured of a gracious reception. We shall not be repulsed, we shall not be upbraided, we shall not even be coldly received. Why then need we fear to come?

May 6

John 6:41-58. He promises to give his flesh and blood for the world.

To what unbelieving earthly hearts Christ addressed this heavenly discourse! The Jews murmured, because they could not understand the truths he declared. They said that Jesus did not come from heaven, and the reason they alleged for thinking so was, that Joseph was his father. Had they inquired into his history, or meditated upon the prophecies, they could not have urged this objection.

They said also that Jesus could not give them his flesh to eat. The Lord did not attempt to answer their objections, because he knew they were not in a fit state of mind to receive his words. He replied to his enemies in a very different manner from that which might have been expected. (See ver. 44.) "No man can come unto me, except the Father which has sent me draw him." He quoted also this verse from the prophet Isaiah--"And they shall be all taught of God." Who shall be taught of God? His children. Whom does a father teach? His own children. God also teaches His children. What does he teach them? He teaches them their need of a Savior. None will come to Christ until they have been taught that they cannot

do without him. It may appear strange that men do not find out this by themselves. But they do not. Starving people know that they are starving; but starving souls do not know that they are perishing, until God teaches them. They feel uneasy; but they do not know the cause of the aching void in their own hearts; and even when the bread of life is presented to them, they refuse it. But when God by his Holy Spirit has convinced them that they are in a perishing state, and that none but Christ can save them, then they thankfully accept the living bread. Has God taught any of us to feel our need of the Savior? Then may we say in the words of the poet--

Why was I made to hear your voice,

And enter while there's room;

When thousands make a wretched choice,

And rather starve than come?

But Jesus spoke not only of bread, he spoke also of flesh and blood. He said, "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you," (ver. 53.) The Jews were forbidden to taste blood, because it was the life of the animal. What did Jesus mean by eating his flesh and drinking his blood? He spoke of his own death. By his death sinners have life. Man has long been accustomed to kill beasts to preserve his own life. It seems fit that such creatures should die, in order that we may live. But how wonderful it is that the Son of God should die, that worms of the earth, such as we are, should live eternally. It would not be right that a man should die in order that beasts should live. Yet the Son of God laid down his life for us.

But his death will not save us, unless we believe in him. Believing in him is compared to eating and drinking. His flesh has been broken on the cross; his blood has been shed on Calvary; but has each of us believed in him? Have I believed in him? Have you believed in him? Eating bread and drinking wine at the Lord's supper will not save us. The sacraments are only signs of something greater than themselves. It was not until long after Jesus had spoken these words, that he ordained the holy communion of bread and wine, saying, "Do this in remembrance of me." He did not speak of that communion, when he said, "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you." No! he spoke of faith in his death. There is a supper to which he invites you--it is not administered in a church; it is not bestowed by human hands; it is not received into the mouth. This supper is spoken of in this passage of the Revelation--"Behold I stand at the door and knock--if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with me." (Rev. 3:20.)

May 7

John 6:59-65. He explains the spiritual meaning of this declaration.

We find that many of the disciples of Jesus were offended by his discourse concerning his own flesh and blood. We must remember that all the followers of Christ were called disciples, whereas only twelve were called "apostles." The twelve apostles are not meant by the word disciple in this passage. Why did these disciples murmur? Because they could not understand how Jesus could give them his flesh to eat. They thought he meant that his flesh must literally be eaten; whereas he spoke of a spiritual thing; of obtaining life through faith in his death.

He told them that they would be still more astonished when he ascended up where he was before, even into heaven; for then it would be clearly seen that he did not speak of his real flesh and blood, as they would be changed, and return to heaven. "What and if you shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before!" What would you say then? Jesus proceeded to explain his words, as far as they could be explained.

He said, "The Spirit quickens, or gives life." Bread and wine cannot give life. No, the Spirit alone gives life. "The flesh profits nothing." By "flesh" forms and ceremonies are meant. They cannot profit the soul by any power in them. It is right to keep the ordinances of Christ, and to partake of the Supper he has ordained in remembrance of his death. Believers account it an unspeakable privilege to approach their Lord's table; but no ordinances, not even those of divine appointment, can impart spiritual life. Jesus directs us to his Father as the only source of life.

When he saw men did not believe, he told them, "No man can come unto me, except it be given unto him of my Father." Why did he declare this doctrine? Has it not often furnished unbelievers with an excuse for not coming to him? His reason for declaring it was that he might convince man of his danger and helplessness. Many have been alarmed from hearing it, and have been led to call out, "What shall we do to be saved?" A reasonable creature is often led to think, "Am I indeed in a state of death! And can I not raise myself from it? What will become of me, if the Father do not lead me to believe in Christ!" These are profitable thoughts, and often induce the sinner to call with earnestness upon God. A few years ago, the son of pious parents entered into a church. He had lately lost a praying mother, and his heart was softened by the event--but he had not turned to his mother's God. The preacher set before his audience the declaration of the Lord Jesus, "No man can come unto me, except the Father which has sent me, draw him." The youth was alarmed, "What, is my mother dead," thought he; "is her voice silent, and am I still unconverted? And what if God should never bestow upon me his converting grace?" He offered up earnest prayers. The Lord heard him, blessed him, and chose him to be one of his faithful ministers.

What ought to be the feelings of believers when they reflect that they never could have come to Christ, if it had not been given unto them of the Father. Have we believed? Then what thanks can we render for our escape from perdition, and for our hope of glory! We would ever be "Giving thanks unto the Father, who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."

May 8

John 6:66 to end. He asks the apostles whether they will go away.

No minister ought to be surprised when people are offended by his sermons, seeing that some were so much displeased with this discourse of the blessed Jesus, as to walk no more with him. What was the doctrine that gave offence? It was this, "No man can come unto me except it be given him of my Father." This truth wounds the pride of man. It shows him that he cannot repent when he chooses, or turn to God at his own time. Proud sinners do not like to find that they are so utterly dependent upon God's mercy. Yet are we not dependent upon God for everything? For life, for food, for clothing, for health, for earthly happiness? Surely, then, upon God we must be dependent for eternal life and heavenly bliss. Happy dependence! for has not God promised to give these blessings to all who ask him?

Great was the folly of the disciples who forsook the instructions of infinite wisdom! Could the compassionate Jesus behold their conduct without feeling grief on their account! He looked at the little

flock that still remained faithful, and addressed to them this tender appeal--"Will you also go away?" We may well conceive that it was in a tone of fatherly affection these words were uttered. They went to the heart of the frank and generous Peter, and drew from him (on behalf of the rest as well as himself) this earnest declaration--"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we believe and are sure that you are that Christ, the Son of the living God." Peter's warm expressions of love and fidelity were acceptable to his Divine Master. Though the world may deride professions of attachment to Christ, they were never reproved by the Lord himself.

There was no insincerity in Peter's assurances, but there was more weakness in his heart than he was aware of. No temptation had yet occurred to induce him to forsake his Savior; but Jesus well knew that the day would come when all that little band would leave him in the hands of his enemies. The doctrines that He had declared had not offended them, but the sufferings that he must undergo--these would prove their stumbling-block. Peter, who was loudest in his professions of attachment, would not only forsake, but also deny his Master. Could he at that moment have foreseen his base conduct in the judgment-hall, he would have added petitions to his professions. In the Epistles he wrote many years afterwards, he speaks of the saints as "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." He found to his cost that he could not stand by his own power. In the same epistle he warns believers against the enemy who had nearly destroyed him, and says, "Be sober, be vigilant; for your adversary the devil walks about, as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

Do our hearts at this moment glow with grateful affection to our Savior? Are we ready to exclaim, "To whom shall we go, if we forsake him? No other teacher can show us the way of life; no other friend can comfort us in the hour of sorrow; no other advocate can plead for us in the day of judgment!" Yet let us remember that this love, we think so strong, will be tried. In what manner it will be tried, we cannot foresee. The devices of Satan are innumerable. He knows our characters, and understands how to assail us to the greatest advantage. He has succeeded in causing eminent saints to forsake their God for a while. Jerome of Prague, and our Cranmer, as well as the apostle Peter, were tempted to deny the Master they loved; yet at last all three laid down their lives in his cause; for the children of God are brought back by their loving Shepherd's rod into the fold whence they have wandered.

Jesus knew that all his beloved apostles would be restored, excepting one, who was "a devil." Judas was distinguished from his brethren by this dark token, "indifference to his Lord." It was he who so strongly objected to Mary's memorable act of love, the pouring the precious ointment on her Savior's head. Yet he so far succeeded in deceiving his fellow apostles, as to be intrusted with the bag containing their little all. The love and esteem of professed Christians for each other, are often very much misplaced. We ought not to solace ourselves with the thought that the best of men approve us, if our hearts are conscious that we do not love the Savior. Jesus is loved by all the saints in earth, even by the weakest--he is still more loved by the saints in heaven; he has been ever loved by the innumerable hosts of glorious angels. By whom then is he not beloved? By devils in hell; and by some ungrateful men, who, though they know he died for them, yet refuse to love him.

May 9

Matthew 15:1-20. Jesus eats with unwashed hands.

It has often been observed, that in the character of Jesus, opposite qualities were united. We seldom (or perhaps never) see a man remarkable at once for meekness, and for boldness. Yet our Lord was

remarkable for both. The incident we have just read, affords an instance of his boldness in dealing faithfully with his powerful and malicious enemies.

He would not countenance the custom of washing the hands before taking food. Yet was not this a harmless custom? Why did he not comply with it? Because, though harmless in itself, it was enforced on the people as a religious duty. The Jewish teachers taught the people that food defiled them unless eaten with washed hands. Now this was not a doctrine of God's word. These elders (or teachers) ought to have taught the truths contained in God's holy word. It was their office to explain the Scriptures to the people; but instead of doing this, they added commandments of their own. Jesus expressed his disapprobation of their conduct by not observing these human commandments. The custom of washing the hands before eating was innocent in itself; but there were other commandments taught by the elders that were very pernicious. Jesus gave an instance of one of these. God had commanded children to honor their parents. A child who honors his parents will provide for them in old age. But the Jewish teachers taught the people, that if they gave some money to the priests for the service of the temple, that then they might be excused from supporting their aged parents. They instructed children to say to their decrepit parents, "It is a gift; what I should have given you has been bestowed upon the temple; so that I can do nothing for you." Such conduct was exceedingly wicked; yet the Jewish teachers said it was right.

We see from this instance that it is very dangerous to follow the opinions of men concerning what is wrong, or what is right. What God commands is good--what he forbids is evil; and the word of God is the only rule of good and evil.

Of course the Pharisees were extremely enraged against Christ for exposing their false instructions. But Jesus had so much compassion for the poor ignorant people, that he chose to undeceive them; though by this line of conduct he increased the hatred of his enemies. Had we more compassion for the ignorant, we should have less fear of man. A father would not stand by and see his child poisoned, whomever he might offend by his opposition.

Jesus explained clearly to the people in the presence of their teachers, in what respect they were deceived. He called them, and said, "Not that which goes into the mouth defiles a man; but that which comes out of the mouth, that defiles a man." Yet even the disciples could not understand this simple truth, and Peter called it a "parable," and asked Jesus to explain it. It is very hard to get rid of prejudices which have long darkened the mind. The heathen, even when converted, are apt to retain many superstitious ideas imbibed in their infancy. We are all naturally disposed to think that ceremonies can profit our soul; whereas none can sanctify us but the Spirit of God, and nothing can defile us but sin. Neither is it the sinful action only that pollutes--the sinful thought (which gives rise to the action) pollutes far more. It is not the act of stealing only, but the desire to possess our neighbor's property, that defiles; it is not the words of the lie merely, but the WISH to deceive, that stains the man; it is not so much the blasphemous expressions, as the irreverent feeling towards God, that constitutes the essence of profaneness. We perceive, therefore, that even if we have not committed gross and open transgressions, we are, notwithstanding, deeply polluted. Such defilement, no ceremonies can remove. Water cannot wash the heart. The blood of Christ alone can cleanse the inner man. It is a spiritual washing that we need; Jesus himself must wash us or we perish. He is gracious, and will pardon the vilest sinner that implores his mercy; he will not only pardon him but sanctify him, and give him a new heart full of holy desires.

May 10

Matthew 15:21-28. The woman of Tyre.

It is very interesting to observe the various ways in which Jesus behaved to afflicted people. Some, he offered to relieve; saying to one at the pool of Bethesda, "Will you be made whole?" and to another with a withered hand at the synagogue, "Stretch forth your hand." Others he restored on their FIRST application to him--while he permitted the woman of Canaan to plead long and earnestly before he showed her mercy. Yet even this delay was the cause of her obtaining greater favor in the end; for it gave her the opportunity of proving the strength of her faith. Before he exposed her to this test, he knew that she could endure it. The compassionate Savior proportions our trials to our strength, and will bring upon us no temptation greater than we are able to bear. A sharp trial is often a sign that he confides in our fidelity. Had a weak saint been tried as Job was, he would have been overwhelmed; but God knew that his servant would prove faithful.

When we consider who this woman was, we have reason to be astonished at the attainments she had made. She was a Canaanite, a daughter of the cursed race. She was not descended from Abraham, the friend of God--she was not one of the nation of Israel. No! she was descended from ignorant heathen. She resided in the wicked city of Tyre; and she had been brought up in the Greek or heathen religion; yet it appears evident that she had obtained some knowledge of the true God, and that she possessed a hearty faith in his name. How could she have called Jesus the Son of David, had she not heard of the prophecy made unto David concerning One who should sit upon his throne? She was evidently a child of God, born again of the Holy Spirit, and bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit--faith, patience, and humility. She had such faith, that she believed that Jesus would have mercy on her, in spite of his apparent unkindness; she had such patience that she continued, notwithstanding repeated denials, to press her suit; and she had such humility, that she could bear to be called a dog. Let us now observe Christ's conduct towards this woman. The disciples in a spirit of selfishness, and not of compassion, entreated their Master to send away the poor suppliant. Jesus is never weary of the cry of distress; above all, the voice of faith, though choked with tears and sighs, ever sounds sweet in his ears. The mother is glad to hear those cries which prove that her babe lives; and the Savior rejoices to hear those petitions which are the tokens of spiritual life.

Have we ever prayed as this woman did? Have not we as great requests to make as she had? She implored a temporal blessing, and received an answer. Had she never prayed for spiritual blessings? Her faith, her patience, her humility, prove that she must have prayed for them--whether beneath some fig-tree, as Nathanael did, or in some chamber of her heathen home--we know not. She was a true believer, and therefore must have been a secret worshiper. She had learned to trust in her God from his dealings with her in times past, and therefore she was not dismayed by her Savior's seeming sternness. We also must have secret transactions with our God. When we have experienced his pardoning mercy, we shall be able to trust him with all our concerns. It is indeed a comfort to a mother, when a child is sick, to have a God in whom to confide. Sometimes he may see good to take her child away; but He will in the end reward believing prayer by imparting unspeakable consolation.

May 11

Mark 7:31 to end. The deaf and mute man.

We here find the Lord Jesus again visiting Decapolis on the borders of the lake. On a former occasion he had healed two poor demoniacs, who dwelt among the tombs. The treatment which he had received from

the owners of the swine, did not prevent him from again visiting their shores. There were many sufferers there whom he designed to relieve and to bless. It is probable that his way had been prepared by that poor man who had desired to accompany him, but who had remained behind that he might tell "what great things the Lord had done for him." With what warmth that man must have spoken to his countrymen of the compassion of his Lord! Those who have lately experienced the loving-kindness of the Savior cannot speak of him with coldness. The testimony of one such person often produces a great effect upon the minds of many.

We know not by what means the friends of the deaf and mute man were induced to apply to Jesus. Though deprived of two valuable faculties, the afflicted man possessed the blessing of affectionate friends, who besought the Lord to heal him. We read of a paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, who had no friend to help him in his weakness.

The Lord did not relieve the deaf and mute man immediately; he first took him to a retired place, where he might perform the miracle unseen by the multitude. He healed him in a remarkable manner. Before he uttered the words, "Be opened," he put his fingers in the man's ears, spit, touched his tongue, looked up to heaven, and sighed. These actions were, no doubt, designed to instruct the deaf and mute man. Though this man could not hear, he could feel the sacred touch, he could see the eyes uplifted, and perceive the deep-drawn sigh. The touch taught him that it was through the power of Jesus he was healed; the upward look that it was by the will of his Father in heaven, and the sigh, that the Savior felt compassion for his infirmities.

Had this man been cured by natural means, he would have had to learn the use of language gradually; but those whom Jesus healed were endowed with the power of using their restored faculties immediately. The mute man spoke plain. Thus the prophecy of Isaiah was in one instance fulfilled, "The ears of the deaf shall be unstopped, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly."

We have seen, in this miracle, that Jesus adapted the mode of cure to the circumstances of the afflicted man. By what various means he now cures the spiritual infirmities of men! He knows how to treat each case in the most suitable manner. There are many different states of mind to be found among the unconverted, and all seem to us cases very hard to cure. The wisdom of Jesus enables him to meet the difficulties of each case that he undertakes to relieve. He knows how to solemnize the light mind of one, and how to abase the proud spirit of another; how to tame the violent temper, and to enlarge the selfish heart. It is very interesting to consider the peculiar circumstances attending the conversion of each sinner to God.

"By what way has the Lord brought you to listen to his voice?" Have you indeed been brought to listen to it? Or are you still deaf to his gracious invitations?

May 12

Matthew 15:29-31. Christ heals the multitude on the mountain-top.

The miracle wrought upon the deaf and mute man brought a host of suppliants to the feet of Jesus. The mountain-top was his throne of mercy, and thence he rebuked the diseases of the imploring multitude. Could any occupation have more gratified his loving heart! Yes; there was one which would have been still more delightful to him. Had penitents implored his pardon as earnestly as these sufferers besought his healing mercy, he would have felt a deeper joy. The day shall come when all men shall apply to Him for

the forgiveness of their sins; with weeping and with supplication shall they come, each one mourning for his iniquity.

It is to be remarked, that the poor sufferers were brought by their friends, who cast them down at the feet of Jesus. The afflicted creatures were not able to come alone. How could the lame have climbed the hill? How could the blind have found the way, and how could the mute have sued for mercy? But by the kindness of their friends they reached the blessed spot, and made known their wretched state. It may be we ourselves owe to the kindness of our friends, under God, in times past, the salvation of our souls. Was there no affectionate relative who expostulated with us in the days of our folly, who persuaded us to accompany him to hear some faithful preacher, and who encouraged us to forsake the world, and to serve the Lord? In some instances it was a mother's prayers, long offered to God in secret, with many tears, that drew down upon the soul eternal blessings. How much do we owe to such friends for all their love to us, and all their exertions for our good! We ought to show the same kindness to others, that they once showed to us. Have we no unconverted relatives to cast at the feet of Jesus by secret supplications? Have we none to whom we might send a letter of entreaty, or a book adapted to their case? Are there none whom we might draw to the house of God, to hear the gospel preached with fervor and with power? These services of love bind the hearts of the children of God to each other.

You may conceive how much the sufferers who had been cast at the Savior's feet must afterwards have loved those who had laid them there. When restored, did they not go to seek for others, afflicted as they once had been? There was no room here for strife and contention; there was enough virtue in Jesus to heal all who came. When men bestow gifts, there must be a limit to their extent, and this circumstance gives rise to competition and jealousy; but Jesus is like the sun in the heavens, who has shed his beams for ages upon benighted worlds, and is still as full of glorious light as when he first began to shine. There is no rivalry among penitent sinners. There is a fountain in which all may wash, and be clean; there is a heaven to which all may go, and be happy. In that abode of bliss, benefits received from our fellow-creatures upon earth will not be forgotten. There will exist in those worlds stronger ties than the nearest known in this. The converts who form the joy and crown of the blessed apostle Paul, are nearer and dearer to him than children are to any father upon earth.

But if saints entertain a grateful love towards each other, what must they feel for the Savior who died for them! Surely the mute, the blind, the maimed, whom Jesus healed, must have loved their gracious benefactor. It is recorded of a poor blind boy, that such was his affection for the physician who had couched his eyes and restored his sight, that he never saw him without shedding tears of joy; and that when disappointed of an expected visit, he could not forbear weeping. The saints on earth begin to feel this love for their Savior; but now they love imperfectly. In heaven this love will be the spring of all their thoughts. It is written upon the tomb of one of God's servants,* this saying, which he had expressed in his lifetime--"To love is heaven; to love a little less imperfectly is the foretaste of heaven." * See the Life of Gonthier, the Swiss Pastor.

May 13

Matthew 15:32 to end. Christ feeds five thousand with seven loaves.

For three days seated upon a mountain, surrounded by the afflicted and the ignorant, our blessed Lord had manifested his compassion for our fallen race. At the end of that period, he displayed his beneficence by feeding the multitude. He had refused to feed them when they came because of the loaves; but now

that they had been gathered together from other motives, he provided for their wants. It is so now. The Lord does not promise to provide for the temporal wants of those who attempt to serve him from interested views, but only for those who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Is it not surprising that the disciples should say the second time, "Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?" How soon they had forgotten the five loaves and the five thousand! But can we remember no similar instance of forgetfulness in our own history? Has not the Lord on many occasions in times past gone beyond our highest expectations? And yet are we not prone in every fresh difficulty to doubt his power and his faithfulness? David remembered that God had delivered him out of the paw of the lion and the bear, and therefore he believed that He would deliver him out of the hand of the mighty giant. Whenever we find ourselves placed in difficulties, we should remember the "years of the right-hand of the Most High;" that is, we should remember the events of past years, and the deliverances we have received. How many fears have we entertained! Have they been realized? Has not the Lord been better to us than our fears? and better than our hopes too? The Lord, who fed the multitude, can supply the largest family with bread. The pious parent may trust Him to send provision for all his little ones. The affectionate daughter may feel assured that the Lord will help her to sustain her widowed mother. The weak in health, and declining in years, may confide in the Lord not to leave them to pine neglected and forlorn; for the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers.

The Lord is able to supply his perishing creatures with more enduring food than bread. The disciples ought to have known that the bread they distributed signified that flesh which Jesus would give for the life of the world; for they had lately heard their Master discourse upon this subject. The Lord has already raised up many faithful ministers who proclaim to his people the crucified Savior. This was his promise in days of old--"I will give you pastors according to my heart, which shall feed you with knowledge, and with understanding," (Jer. 3:15.) If all congregations had the same appetite for the bread of life that this multitude had for common bread, how joyfully would pastors exercise their ministry! But of what congregation can it be said, "They did all eat and were filled?" Too many people have no appetite for the heavenly feast; they sit as God's people sit, but they partake not of the sacred fare--they go away to feed again upon ashes, and at length die without having tasted of that bread, which if a man eat, he shall live forever. But there is a congregation above, in number far exceeding four thousand, or one hundred and forty-four thousand--a multitude that no man can number, who are fed by the Lord himself with heavenly manna. They hunger no more, because the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne feeds them.

May 14

Matthew 16:1-4. Christ refuses to grant a sign to the Pharisees and Sadducees.

It is not certain what the sign from heaven was that the Pharisees and Sadducees desired to see; probably it was some display of Christ's glory, such as he afterwards gave to his most favored disciples upon the mount. But whatever the sign required might be, the motive that led these men to ask for it was a very evil one--it was the desire not to believe. And why did they entertain this desire? Because they hated Jesus. It is our desires and our feelings that mark our characters in God's sight.

And what were the feelings of the Savior on this occasion? Mark records a circumstance which shows us what they were. In Mark 8:12, we read, "And he sighed deeply in his spirit." The hardness of men's hearts grieved the Savior more than all the sufferings of his life. It is a sign of grace in the heart when a man is

deeply grieved by hearing of sin committed against others; but it is a still better sign when he is grieved, rather than angry, at sins committed against himself. There are some to be found among the followers of Jesus, who have imbibed this feeling from their Master. The most cutting reproaches have excited no other emotion than this regret--"Alas, he who hates me is blind, and knows not what he does."

The Lord condescended patiently to argue with these unbelievers. He proved that their doubts respecting his being the Son of God did not arise from want of understanding; for they showed their understanding by knowing the signs of the weather. Their understandings were good enough to enable them to know that he was the Son of God, because all the signs the prophets had described, had come to pass. We cannot now consider what these signs were. The miracles Jesus performed were among them; for Isaiah had prophesied that the tongue of the mute should sing when the Savior came, that the ears of the deaf should be unstopped, and that the lame man should leap as an deer, (Is. 35.)

Jesus declared that one sign only should be given to these unbelievers--the sign that God once gave to the Ninevites.

Jonas was cast into the sea, and was swallowed by a whale. Thus Jesus would be cast into the grave, and lie hid in the tomb. As Jonas was delivered from the whale, so Jesus was raised from the tomb. As Jonas warned the people of Nineveh that their city would be destroyed in forty days, so Jesus warned the people of Jerusalem that their city would be destroyed in forty years; that is, before that generation would pass away. But whereas the Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonas, the Jews did not repent at the preaching of the Lord and his apostles.

The words which are recorded in the conclusion of this passage (verse 4) are dreadful--"Jesus left them and departed,"--left them in mingled sorrow and displeasure. To be left by Jesus is almost the greatest calamity that can befall a human creature! There is one calamity greater, which is this--to hear Jesus say, "Depart from me." If left by Jesus, we may implore his return; but when he says "Depart," we never can be admitted any more into His presence. Some, who have despised religious privileges while they possessed them, have learned their value after they have lost them; and sometimes God has graciously restored the blessings they had forfeited. But it too often happens that when Jesus leaves a people, he leaves them to their impenitence and hardness of heart, and that when they see Him again, it is to hear Him say, "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire."

May 15

Matthew 16:5-12. He warns his disciples against the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

We often find that people did not understand our Savior when he spoke of spiritual things under the image of earthly ones. Thus, when he spoke of living water to the woman of Samaria, the woman did not understand him. Neither did his disciples now understand him when he spoke of leaven. He did not reprove the woman of Samaria for not comprehending his meaning, because she had never enjoyed opportunities of instruction; but he expected better things from his own disciples, and he rebuked them, saying, "How is it that you do not understand that I spoke it not to you concerning bread?" And how was it that they did not understand? Had they not lived long enough with their Master to know his way of discourse?

It was unbelief which clouded their minds. Because they had taken no bread with them in the ship, they feared that they should suffer from hunger; though their Lord was in the ship, and though He had promised

to supply all their need.

They did not express these unbelieving thoughts aloud; but their Master knew they cherished them in their hearts. Who ventures to go to God to express in words his secret unbelief? Who could say in prayers--"We cannot trust you in time to come? We think it likely that you will forsake us, that you will not care for our tears, or heed our cries." We dare not speak thus to our heavenly Father. Why then should we think what we dare not speak?

Jesus was displeased with his disciples on two accounts--for their want of faith, and for their want of spiritual understanding. How could they suppose that the earthly leaven of the Pharisees was worse than any other leaven? Leaven could not be the worse for belonging to wicked men. Jesus had lately shown his disciples that nothing but sin could pollute; yet their minds were so much darkened by early prejudices that they could not receive this simple truth.

And what was the leaven of which the Savior bids his disciples beware? It was the false doctrine, or teaching, of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Both these sects taught errors; but opposite errors. The Pharisees added to the word of God--the Sadducees took from it. The Pharisees added to it commandments of their own invention; the Sadducees took from it all but the five books of Moses, and even these they did not fully believe, for they would receive nothing that they did not understand. The Pharisees were superstitious--the Sadducees were skeptical. The world is now full of people, who, though bearing different names, preach doctrines like those of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Papists resemble the Pharisees, and infidels the Sadducees.

Were even the disciples in danger of being tainted by bad doctrine? Ought we not to fear its evil influence? Bad doctrine, like infected air, finds entrance through the smallest aperture, and unseen spreads a pestilence all around. As leaven will change the nature of a whole lump of flour, so bad doctrine will injure all the powers of the mind, and all the feelings of the heart. The venerable Howells used to say, "Error in principle is the parent of vice in practice." If it be so, how carefully we ought to shun bad doctrine! Though we may be well instructed in the truth, yet we are liable to be corrupted by false teachers. There are some melancholy instances of people who had instructed thousands by their pious writings, receiving in their advanced years false principles into their minds, and attempting to pervert those whom once they had edified. Our constant prayer ought to be, "Hold me up, that my footsteps slip not."

By what mark may we distinguish good doctrine from false? By this mark; the true doctrine exalts Christ, and humbles man; it is summed up in these words--"O Israel, you have destroyed yourself; but in me is your help," (Hosea 13:9.)

May 16

Mark 8:22-26. He cures a blind man by touching him twice.

There is one circumstance in this miracle which we do not meet with in any other--it is the gradual manner in which the cure was effected; the blind man was not suddenly restored to sight, but by degrees.

There are several other interesting circumstances connected with this miracle, though they are not peculiar to it. It is evident that this man did not belong to the town of Bethsaida, for after he was cured, Jesus desired him to return to his house, but not to enter the town. Bethsaida was one of those cities most highly favored, and most deeply guilty, for it repented not at the preaching of Jesus. On this account a woe

was pronounced against it. "Woe unto you, Bethsaida." The friends of the blind man heard that the Lord was arrived at Bethsaida, and they went there, and besought mercy for the afflicted creature.

It often happens when the gospel is preached in a town, that while it is despised by the inhabitants of the place, it is valued by those who live in distant villages. The Lord showed his displeasure against the people of Bethsaida, by leading the blind man out of the town before he cured him, and by forbidding him to return there afterwards. Those who hate the gospel often take great pains to avoid hearing it, and God sometimes meets their wicked desires by taking measures to prevent their being troubled by the unwelcome sound.

How touching is the account of the kind manner in which Jesus conducted the blind man out of the town! "He led him by the hand." Behold the Son of God leading the blind by a way that he knew not, to the retired spot in which he intended to restore him to sight. Perhaps this blind man was but little acquainted with his benefactor, and was not fully aware of his power to cure his blindness. Thus many are led by Jesus to the place where they are converted. They know not where the events of Providence are guiding them; they know not why they are removed from one place to another; why one path is blocked up, and another opened before them, until at length they find that all was arranged to bring about this blessed end, the opening of their blind eyes.

Jesus cured this blind man by the use of outward means, and not by his word alone; He spat on his eyes, and touched them. Perhaps he did so that he might more fully convince him that He alone was the author of his cure; there was a virtue in his touch, a power in the simplest means when applied by Him, that could remove blindness. Thus it is now. The most trifling circumstances are made by the power of Christ effectual to open the eyes of unbelievers.

A few years ago, an infidel saw a child reading the Bible, and said to him, in a scornful manner, "You cannot comprehend that book, why do you read it?" The child replied, "I delight in it, and therefore I try to understand it." This simple answer struck the infidel so powerfully, that he was led to reflect seriously on the cause of his unbelief, and to apply to God for his Holy Spirit.

This blind man, it appears, had not been born blind, for he knew the names of surrounding objects. His sight was so imperfectly restored at first, that it was only by their movements that he could distinguish men from trees; he knew that those were men that he beheld, because they walked. Jesus would not suffer him to remain in this state, but soon completely restored his sight. He laid his hand upon him the second time. Are not we reminded by this account of our own case? Has spiritual light been bestowed upon us? Is that sight perfect? Can we understand spiritual things distinctly and fully? We must reply, "No, we see through a glass darkly." Not through such a glass as in these days admits light into our rooms; but we see spiritual truths in the same confused manner that objects are seen reflected upon ancient mirrors, which were only made of polished brass. This is the state of the most enlightened Christian; he sees eternal things "darkly." How much more is it the state of new converts! They can just discern (though faintly) what it is most necessary to know; they see that sin is hateful, that God is holy, and that Christ is precious; but there are many important truths they cannot distinguish; and when they meditate on them they are perplexed and distressed.

What is the only remedy for the darkness of our minds? The touch of Jesus. Let him touch us by his Spirit the second time, and the third time. Let him continue to touch our eyes with his divine eye salve, until we can see him as he is, that we also may be like him. When the apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians, though

he knew they were converted, yet he told them that he constantly prayed that the eyes of their understanding might be enlightened, that they might know the hope of their calling, and the riches of their glorious inheritance. (Eph. 1:18.) These are the things that we so dimly discern. We do not behold the excellency of heaven with sufficient clearness. But the day shall come when those who now see imperfectly shall see face to face, shall know even as they are known.

"O glorious hour, O blessed abode,

I shall be near and like my God,

And flesh and sin no more control

The sacred pleasures of the soul."

Those are indeed miserable who say, "We see," though they see not. Let us continually cry, "Anoint our eyes, that we may see more and more of your divine glory, O blessed Lord!"

May 17

Matt. 16:13-20. He pronounces a blessing upon Peter.

In this passage we are permitted to behold Jesus and his disciples in sacred retirement. The towns of Caesarea Philippi were situated at the northern part of the land, where the Lord was in some degree relieved from the pressure of the multitude. Such seasons he devoted to the instruction of his beloved apostles. With them he joined in holy exercises. We never hear of his praying with the multitude; but we know that he often prayed alone with his chosen flock. After his prayer, he conversed with them upon sacred subjects. He asked them, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" It appears from their answer, that the multitude did not believe him to be the Son of God. But when he asked his disciples who he was, Simon Peter answered for the rest--"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

The Lord was pleased with this bold confession of faith, and he said, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona." When Peter first came to Jesus, Simon was his name, but Christ gave him the name of Peter which means a stone. Who was it that taught Peter that Jesus was the Son of God? Flesh and blood had not taught him; that is, no man had taught him; but the Father himself. Men can never make us believe in Christ; they cannot give us faith. It comes from God alone. Those who have not been taught by God, may appear to be religious; but they will forsake Christ in times of persecution. But Peter would in the end (though not at first) prove firm as a stone. Christ knew this when he said, "You are Peter."

But was Peter the rock on which Christ would build his church? No. There is only one rock, that is Christ himself. Peter had just declared, "You are the Christ." By believing this truth, sinners are saved. Peter, after his Lord's ascension, often proclaimed this truth. On one occasion, he said before the enemies of his crucified Master, "This is the stone which was set at nothing of you builders, which is become the head of the corner; neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:11, 12.) Have we believed in this name? Unless we do believe, we must perish.

True believers are called the church. It was of this church that Christ spoke when he said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." By the gates of hell he meant the powers of darkness, or Satan and his angels, who are now trying to destroy the church of Christ; but they never can succeed, because it is built

upon the eternal rock.

Christ showed great favor to Peter, when he said, "I give unto you the keys of the kingdom of he

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