

SEVEN LECTURES

ON THE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES,

DELIVERED IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF ST. PAUL.

HALIFAX, NOVA-SCOTIA,

DURING THE SEASON OF LENT,

A. D. 1837.

(BEING PART II. OF THE SERIES.)

BY

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CURATE.

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To the Parishioners of St. Paul's.

Dearly Beloved in the Lord,

IN dedicating to you the second part of my Lectures on the Acts of the Apostles, I have but to accompany them with the fervent prayer, that, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, what was spoken in so much weakness, may be made instrumental to your edification and improvement. It is "not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts," that the work of grace is commenced, carried on, and accomplished. May this preaching which is "not with any enticing words of man's wisdom," come to you "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power," and so promote the Lord's glory in your spiritual benefit, is the earnest and affectionate petition of,

Brethren,

Your servant for Jesus' sake,

WILLIAM COGSWELL.

HALIFAX, April 17th, 1827.

PREFACE.

IN presenting this little volume to the public, the Author feels that the Lectures it contains are even less qualified to sustain the judgment of the critical eye, than those of the first part. It is not in any affected disregard of criticism that he makes this confession, for he is duly sensitive to its decision; but in the hope of averting its severity, by a repetition of the simple nature of the object had in view in the publication.

That object is simply to be useful to those who wish for scriptural instruction, and to present, in a plain and practical view, the varieties of Christian example, which the early Church affords. That this object may be in some degree attained, notwithstanding the imperfections in the manner of its pursuit, is the Author's humble hope. He desires here to record his gratitude to the God of all grace, for many testimonies to the usefulness of the former publication, and to express his hope, that by the blessing of the same gracious Father upon the present undertaking, it may tend to His glory in the edification of some one soul, and so his work shall not be in vain in the Lord.

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LECTURES

ON THE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

LECTURE I.

ACTS III, 1.—10.

NOW PETER AND JOHN WENT UP TOGETHER INTO THE TEMPLE AT THE HOUR OF PRAYER, BEING THE NINTH HOUR. AND A CERTAIN MAN, LAME FROM HIS MOTHER'S WOMB, WAS CARRIED, WHOM THEY LAID DAILY AT THE GATE OF THE TEMPLE WHICH IS CALLED BEAUTIFUL, TO ASK ALMS OF THEM THAT ENTERED INTO THE TEMPLE; WHO, SEEING PETER AND JOHN ABOUT TO GO INTO THE TEMPLE, ASKED AN ALMS, AND PETER, FASTENING HIS EYES

UPON HIM, WITH JOHN, SAID, LOOK ON US. AND HE GAVE HEED UNTO THEM, EXPECTING TO RECEIVE SOMETHING OF THEM. THEN PETER SAID, SILVER AND GOLD HAVE I NONE ; BUT SUCH AS I HAVE GIVE I THEE : IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OF NAZARETH RISE UP AND WALK. AND HE TOOK HIM BY THE RIGHT HAND, AND LIFTED HIM UP : AND IMMEDIATELY HIS FEET AND ANCLE BONES RECEIVED STRENGTH. AND HE, LEAPING UP, STOOD, AND WALKED, AND ENTERED WITH THEM INTO THE TEMPLE, WALKING, AND LEAPING, AND PRAISING GOD. AND ALL THE PEOPLE SAW HIM WALKING AND PRAISING GOD : AND THEY KNEW THAT IT WAS HE WHICH SAT FOR ALMS AT THE BEAUTIFUL GATE OF THE TEMPLE : AND THEY WERE FILLED WITH WONDER AND AMAZEMENT AT THAT WHICH HAD HAPPENED UNTO HIM.

AGAIN, my Brethren, has the solemn season of Lent gathered us together within the courts of the Lord's House, for the week-day exercises of devotion, and called upon us to send up to the God of grace our prayers and supplications with thanksgiving. And again am I permitted, thro' the grace of God, to attempt an humble contribution to the spiritual improvement of our assembling ourselves together, by calling your attention to the portion of Holy Scripture, on which our meditations

were engaged during the last season of Lent. And while it is my desire, my Brethren, in all humility to praise the Lord, for whatever portion of usefulness he has been pleased to assign to the last attempt at furthering His honour in the edification of souls, let me also intreat your present prayers, that the illumination of the Holy Spirit may accompany this work during the present season, and that the plain exhibition of Gospel truths, in their practical influence upon the lives of the first followers of the cross of Christ, may be blest to our instruction and improvement in righteousness!

At the conclusion of the second Chapter, the Narrator had given us a comprehensive view of the immediate influence of the doctrines of the Gospel, upon the lives and conversation of those that had been added to the Church of Christ, as the first fruits of the Apostles' preaching after the effusion of the Spirit on the day of

Pentecost. And lovely indeed is the picture which he sets before us. Stedfastness in the Apostles' doctrine; perseverance and spirituality in their communion with God by prayer, in their communion with their Saviour, and with one another as His brethren, in the breaking of bread from house to house; community of interests and of property; gladness and singleness of heart in all their intercourse with one another; and that decided consistency of conduct, which won for them the approbation of all among whom they walked, and made even their enemies to be at peace with them.* These are the characteristics of the early Church—these the strong features in the aspect which the first disciples of a crucified Redeemer present to the spectator. O! when shall that simplicity of conduct, that spirituality of life, that consistency of conversation, that harmony of interests, find their counterpart

* Prov. xvi. 7.

in the Christian church again. **May the Lord arise and have mercy upon Zion, for it is time that He have mercy upon her, yea, the time is come**

Among the particulars which are thus recorded as marking that early period of the Church, it is mentioned, that many wonders and signs were done by the Apostles. At the commencement of the present Chapter, the historian would seem to revert a little to the times which he had just comprehensively described, as is so frequently the case in Scripture narrative, and to enter upon a description of one of those wonders to which he had thus alluded. Indeed some commentators have thought, that the time at which Peter and John went up to the temple, was the ninth hour, or three o'clock in the afternoon, of the same day of Pentecost, on which such wonderful events had already taken place. But it can hardly be necessary, in a case

* Ps. cii. 13.

like the present, to bring any other argument against the probability of this idea, than the certainty that no one reading the narrative without reference to that opinion, could have thought of its being so.— Indeed in a matter of so little real importance, it were hardly worth our while to have remarked upon that opinion, but for the sake of grounding upon the remark the suggestion, that, in the perusal of the Holy Scriptures, the meaning which is first presented to a plain understanding, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, that is in the habit, not of building upon isolated texts, but of comparing spiritual things with spiritual,* is generally the safest and the best, as well with regard to the doctrines as the plain facts of Scripture.— There are those, indeed, who even in the great and fundamental doctrines of justification and sanctification, surround the subject with such a cloud of explanations and

* 1 Cor. ii. 13.

qualifications, as a plain man can scarcely find his way through: such as the unlearned reader could never have imagined; and such as, in many cases, would deprive him of the comfort and the strength, which the simply scriptural view of those great doctrines is calculated to afford him. Now it is the precious characteristic of the Gospel that it is preached to the poor!* Far be the attempt to throw the least disparagement upon human learning, as an handmaid to the Spirit of the Lord in His teaching: but we are told, that in itself it is no assistance to the reception of the simple doctrines of the Gospel into the heart, but that if any man would be wise, he must become a fool that he may be wise.† If there be danger of any essential mistake in the plain reception of the words of Scripture, according to their simple and obvious meaning; if there be any necessity for comprehending all the various sys-

* Matt. xi. 5.

† 1 Cor. iii. 18.

tems of falsehood, which the Scriptures controvert, before we can take their truths home to our hearts, and build upon their declarations, and feed upon their promises, and make their precepts our guide of life ; then were it dangerous to leave that precious volume in unlearned hands, or to trust the simple minded and the ignorant with writings so easily perverted to their peril. Blessed be God for human learning: for without it the precious Book must have been unintelligible now to any but those in whose language it was originally written! But blessed, far more blessed be His Name, that those Scriptures, put now into the hands of us all in our own tongue, are so plain in their doctrines, and so simple in their truths, which affect salvation, that he who runs, under the Lord's teaching, may read,* and that the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein.†

At the ninth hour, then, of a day soon

* Hab. ii. 2.

† Is. xxxv. 8.

after the wonderful events of the day of Pentecost, Peter and John, whose names had been previously associated together on many interesting occasions, went up together into the temple. They were together in running to the sepulchre, when the first tidings of their Lord's removal from the tomb were brought.† They were together on that last interesting occasion, on which the Lord so solemnly questioned Peter of his love for Him, and charged him by that love to feed His sheep.‡ They are together now, on the first occasion after their Lord's ascension, on which that miraculous power over the ailments of their fellow-creatures, which the Spirit of the Lord imparted, was called into exercise. They are together entering the gates of the Temple of the Lord, no longer to join in the now antiquated worship of the Jews, but hoping for an opportunity of directing the minds of those that should

† John xx. 2—4.

‡ John xxi. 15—24.

assemble there to Him who had been now revealed as the substance of their shadowy service, the antitype of their figures, the one perfect sacrifice whom all their sacrifices and ceremonies pointed at. Entering the Beautiful gate of the temple, (which derived its name from its unusual splendor, as in the beauty of its material, being made of Corinthian brass, and in the elegance of its workmanship, it outshone even the gold and silver doors) their ear is caught by the voice of supplication, intreating the charity of the passers by. A cripple, who had never walked, but for now forty years had been a helpless burden to his friends and to himself, and for a long period had been daily laid at this gate, as the best scene of his humbling occupation, seeing them entering in, asked an alms. And mark how closely imitative of their Master was the Apostles' conduct. They bid him look on them. But though he must in all probability have

seen them on former occasions, he does not appear to have recognized them as the followers of that meek but Almighty Being, who had on so many occasions displayed His power within the Temple's walls. He looks at them, expecting simply that they were about to relieve his wants, and minister some worldly portion to his need. But he looks at those who were as poor in this world's wealth as himself, but who had an everlasting portion in the love of their gracious Master, and, as they had freely received, were empowered and commanded freely to bestow on others,* the precious manifestation of the power and grace of God. Silver and gold, have I none, saith St. Peter, but such as I have, I give thee. But having neither silver nor gold, what could he have that could relieve the beggar's wants; what, that could supply his need? What has he? The delegated power of the

* Matt. x. 8.

Omnipotent Jehovah; the deputed authority of Him, who made the cripple's frame in that deformed condition, to raise it from its helpless state, to impart energy to its motions, and vigor to its limbs. In the name of Jesus Christ, the despised Jesus called of Nazareth, from which it was supposed no good thing could come,* I say unto thee, rise up and walk. And he took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he who for forty years had been a helpless cripple at the Temple gates, now walks and leaps, and enters into the house of God, praising and glorifying the Name of God. What wonder that the people are amazed,—that they assemble together in gaping astonishment, beholding the animation and activity, and listening to the delighted praises, of the renovated sufferer.

There are several particulars in the brief narrative of this striking scene, that

* John, i. 46.

are worthy of our regard. And first, we may observe the distinction at once perceptible between the manner in which our Saviour himself displayed the wondrous power of His word or of His touch, and that in which the Apostles of the Saviour manifested the same power. Behold the Saviour himself, as, in the course of His career of mercy, He exercises the Divine energy that was within Him. He stands upon a vessel's deck, amid the furious war of the contending elements: the lurid lightning's flash lights up the very caverns of the deep, as, borne to heaven's height, they descend again upon the breaking wave; He speaks:—by His own word He commands them to be still;* and wind and storm fulfil His word.† He stands beside the couch of death: there lies before Him a pale lifeless corpse; a few moments sooner, and He had found the flame yet flickering in the socket; but he had been detain-

* Mark iv. 36—41.

† Ps. cxlviii. 8.

ed upon His way, and now the stillness of death is around, and the stiffening features of a face made ready for the grave have met His eye. He speaks ; He acknowledges no superior, whose permission he requires : Damsel, I say unto thee, Arise : and she that was dead sat up and began to speak.* He stands, again, at the grave's mouth ; He bids them roll away a stone that hid the well nigh putrid corpse of one that had been dead four days ; He lifts His voice in blessing to His Eternal Partner in the godhead, that this opportunity was afforded of glorifying His Name : He speaks ; and, in a voice of power, bids Lazarus come forth ; and, behold ! he stands before them bound in his grave-clothes, but in all the freshness, all the vigor of recruited health.† But follow the Apostles in their wonder working course ; and tho' we find it true indeed that they did greater things than Christ had done, because

* Mark v. 38—42. † John, xi. 1—44.

He went to His Father; † yet mark the difference in their authority.—“ In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk !” † “ Æneus, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.” ‡ They speak as the ambassadors of Jesus; and exercise an authority, which they most watchfully ascribe, on every occasion, to Him from whom alone they had received it.

How important an evidence is derived from the difference thus observable, with regard to the full divinity of the Saviour. There had been men on earth before His manifestation in the flesh, that had wrought wondrous works: there were men on earth after His return to His Heavenly Throne, that did greater things, than Christ himself had done; but as His enemies had testified that never man spake as he, || so might they have added the testimony, that never man performed such

† John, xiv. 12.

‡ Acts, iii. 6.

‡ Acts, ix. 34.

|| John, vii. 46.

works as He. He wrought by His own power; it was the same authority which had bestowed life, that recalled it when departed; it was the same voice that gave the winds their charter, and set the waves their bounds, that now commands them into silence, and bids them be at peace!

And how important is the example to be derived to us from the Apostles' difference of manner, in these great exhibitions of their Master's power.—For surely not more evident was it in their case, that all they did was by the power of the Lord, than it is now in the case of every believer in Jesus, that it is by the grace of God alone that he is what he is.* How great should be his watchfulness, then, to ascribe every thing that God does by him to the praise of the glory of His grace; how jealous should be his regard for the Lord's honor, not only by the open disavowal of all praise for himself; but by manifesting

* 1 Cor. xv. 20.

in every act of his life, that all his strength is of the Lord his God, and by making mention of his righteousness, even of His only.* That praise on which the worldly live; that approbation which is the great end of all their doings, and in which they have their reward,† is absolutely painful to a truly christian mind, and will put the believer at once upon his guard, lest he have been robbing God of the honor due to His Name. Brethren, do ye know this jealousy for the Lord's honor? Are ye partakers of this anxious eagerness that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ?‡ O! if ye are not, surely ye are deficient in that spirit which marked the Apostles in their whole career; surely ye are without good evidence of your being really in Christ!

We may further remark upon the account given us of the restoration of this poor lame man to the vigor of life, what

* Pa. lxxi. 16. † Matt. vi. 2, 5, 16. ‡ 1 Peter, iv. 11.

an illustration it presents to us of the simple nature of true faith. We may suppose, that the means which art had devised, had been applied to effect a cure of his deformity. But all had been in vain; and, being now for forty years a sufferer, he had become a confirmed, inveterate cripple. After so long a period, he is addressed by some one, whom he had not known before, but whose solemnity of manner and earnestness of purpose gained his attention; who bids him in the despised name of Jesus to stand up and walk. What was his natural reply?—Would it not have been, “I cannot rise. For forty years have I been this helpless thing; and long, and O! how earnestly have I wished, that I might but join the crowd in pressing through those hallowed courts! Why tantalize my misery by such a command?” Yes: but he believed; he had heard of the name of Jesus: perhaps had from a distance watched His

steps, and seen Him heal the sick, and set the sin-bound prisoner free ; he makes the effort to obey ; and he is strengthened in the effort, rises up, walks, and leaps with joy. Just so it is, my Brethren! in the case of the sin-crippled soul. For years it may be it has gone on in a round of lifeless duties, and, like the cripple of the text, been laid daily at the gates of the Lord's Temple, but never been really found among those who worship God in spirit and in truth. It has been crippled by the love of sin ; been clogged with the spirit of the world ; been deformed by the indulged perverseness of its corrupted nature. The messenger of Jesus passes by. The word attracts the soul's attention. The Name of Jesus is proclaimed to it, as the one only name by which it can be saved. It has often heard the name before ; and often seen its power in raising fellow-sinners from the grasp of sin. But now that name is addressed to itself ; and in the name of

Jesus, the word of God commands it to arise and shine. What says carnal reason? "I cannot. The word of God, the voice of His ambassadors, my own sense of things, combine to assure me that I am helpless, crippled, corrupt! Of what use will be my trying to arise and walk?" But what says Faith? "The Lord hath spoken; it is His word that bids me rise; it is His voice, which addresses me as a poor, helpless sinner, and calls me as such to arise and walk. I will obey!" Such is Faith's argument: it stops not to enquire of possibilities; it sees the word of God; it takes God at His word. Now, Brethren! through this same Name, the Name of Jesus, is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins!* The reception of this truth into the heart is the very first spring of any cordial obedience to God. Ye are invited to believe that your sins are forgiven you for the Name's sake of Je-

* Acts xiii. 38

sus. What saith carnal reason ? It tells you that it is presumption to believe your sins are all forgiven, while ye continue sinning still. Ye listen to carnal reason, and go on toiling to make yourselves more worthy to take such gracious promises to yourselves. What saith a true faith ? “ I know that in me there dwelleth no good thing ;* but I thank God through Jesus Christ,† in whom He hath forgiven me all my trespasses,‡ and made me, tho’ vile in myself, accepted in the Beloved.”|| O’ look, Brethren, which is yours, carnal reason, or a confiding faith.

That ye may have a better evidence than that of mere feeling to decide by, observe a moment longer the conduct of the renovated cripple. He entered into the Temple walking and leaping and praising God. It was thus that he acted under the sense of a great temporal mercy ; and can there be really the belief of the

* Rom. vii. 18.

† Rom. vii. 25.

‡ Col. ij. 13.

|| Eph. i. 6.

possession of that great spiritual blessing, the forgiveness of sins, in a soul that is not warmed by it and quickened to walk in the Lord's ways, and to go on from day to day praising God with the lips as well as in the life! Impossible! Faith worketh by love.* The belief of so much love for us on God's part, where it is a real belief, must lead those who believe to love Him. Love hath its seat in the heart; but from the abundance of the heart, the mouth will speak,† the hand will act.—To this then, Brethren, let all your examining of yourselves be directed; not to the discovery of some grounds in yourselves, on which to build the hope of acceptance; but to the ascertainment whether ye be in the faith;‡ and may God in His abundant grace so assist you in the examination, that ye may discover your true state, and be led, for a remedy for all your transgressions, to the sweet, the precious, the prevailing Name of JESUS.

* Gal. v. 6. † Matt. xii. 34. ‡ 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

LECTURE II.

ACTS III, 11.—26.

AND AS THE LAME MAN WHICH WAS HEALED HELD PETER AND JOHN, ALL THE PEOPLE RAN TOGETHER UNTO THEM, IN THE PORCH THAT IS CALLED SOLOMON'S, GREATLY WONDERING. AND WHEN PETER SAW IT, HE ANSWERED UNTO THE PEOPLE, YE MEN OF ISRAEL, WHY MARVEL YE AT THIS? OR WHY LOOK YE SO EARNESTLY ON US, AS THOUGH BY OUR OWN POWER OR HOLINESS WE HAD MADE THIS MAN TO WALK? THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND OF ISAAC, AND OF JACOB, THE GOD OF OUR FATHERS, HATH GLORIFIED HIS SON JESUS; WHOM YE DELIVERED UP, AND DENIED HIM IN THE PRESENCE OF PILATE, WHEN HE WAS DETERMINED TO LET HIM GO. BUT YE DENIED THE HOLY ONE AND THE JUST, AND DESIRED A MURDERER TO BE GRANTED UNTO YOU; AND KILLED THE PRINCE OF LIFE, WHOM GOD HATH RAISED FROM THE DEAD; WHEREOF WE ARE WITNESSES. AND HIS NAME, THROUGH FAITH IN HIS NAME, HATH MADE THIS MAN STRONG, WHOM YE SEE AND KNOW; YEA, THE FAITH WHICH IS BY HIM HATH GIVEN HIM THIS PERFECT SOUNDNESS IN THE PRESENCE OF YOU ALL. AND NOW, BRETHREN, I WOT THAT THROUGH

IGNORANCE YE DID IT, AS DID ALSO YOUR RULERS. BUT THOSE THINGS, WHICH GOD BEFORE HAD SHEWED BY THE MOUTH OF ALL HIS PROPHETS, THAT CHRIST SHOULD SUFFER, HE HATH SO FULFILLED. REPENT YE THEREFORE, AND BE CONVERTED, THAT YOUR SINS MAY BE BLOTTED OUT, WHEN THE TIMES OF REFRESHING SHALL COME FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD ; AND HE SHALL SEND JESUS CHRIST, WHICH BEFORE WAS PREACHED UNTO YOU: WHOM THE HEAVEN MUST RECEIVE UNTIL THE TIMES OF RESTITUTION OF ALL THINGS, WHICH GOD HATH SPOKEN BY THE MOUTH OF ALL HIS HOLY PROPHETS SINCE THE WORLD BEGAN. FOR MOSES TRULY SAID UNTO THE FATHERS, A PROPHET SHALL THE LORD YOUR GOD RAISE UP UNTO YOU OF YOUR BRETHREN, LIKE UNTO ME; HIM SHALL YE HEAR IN ALL THINGS, WHATSOEVER HE SHALL SAY UNTO YOU. AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS, THAT EVERY SOUL WHICH WILL NOT HEAR THAT PROPHET, SHALL BE DESTROYED FROM AMONG THE PEOPLE. YEA, AND ALL THE PROPHETS FROM SAMUEL, AND THOSE THAT FOLLOW AFTER, AS MANY AS HAVE SPOKEN, HAVE LIKEWISE FORETOLD OF THESE DAYS. YE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE PROPHETS, AND OF THE COVENANT WHICH GOD MADE WITH OUR FATHERS, SAYING UNTO ABRAHAM, AND IN THY SEED SHALL ALL THE KINDREDS OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED.— UNTO YOU FIRST, GOD, HAVING RAISED UP HIS SON JESUS, SENT HIM TO BLESS YOU, IN TURNING AWAY EVERY ONE OF YOU FROM HIS INIQUITIES.

WHEN the Lord Jesus stood at the grave's mouth, from which he soon afterwards called forth in renovated strength the departed Lazarus, he lifted up His voice in praise to God, that He had heard

Him. "And I knew" He said "that Thou hearest me always, but because of the people that stood by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent me."* And we may suppose, that whatever motives of tenderness to the sufferer, and of desire to relieve so tried a fellow-creature, may have influenced the Apostles' breasts, in bidding the cripple at the Beautiful gate arise and walk, their great aim was that Jesus might be glorified, their great desire that the people that stood by might be led to the acknowledgement of the Name, by which such wondrous things were wrought, and to the following of that Jesus whose blood was shed for their forgiveness. An opportunity of asserting the honor of that Name soon resulted from the miracle they had wrought by it. For as the man that was healed held them fast, and, while blessing and praising God as the cause, could not refrain from expressing his gratitude to

* John, xi. 42.

them as the instruments of his recovery, the people ran together to them, greatly wondering.

.. We cannot but wonder at the astonishment excited by this miracle among those who, for so long a time, had been accustomed to meet the blessed Jesus as He went about doing good, and healing those that were oppressed of the Devil.* We should suppose, that, after three years of such a ministry as He had exercised on earth, they could no more have been surprised at any wonder that should meet their eye. But our surprise at the gaping wonder with which they regarded this miraculously renovated man must be less than our amazement, that, after all they had seen and heard, they still looked on in unbelief. Imagine such scenes, my Brethren, among ourselves, as were of every day's occurrence in the cities of Judæa. Imagine some fellow-being, to all appearance like our-

* Acts, x. 38.

selves, going about, as Jesus or His Apostles did ; standing, as an Angel of light, beside the bed of languishing, and by a touch restoring colour to the cheek, and vigor to the limbs : bending, as some visitant from heaven with healing in his wing, over the couch of death, and breathing into the deserted clay the life that had departed. Imagine such a one passing with love-directed step along our streets, and, by a word of power, causing the lame man to leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb to sing ;* passing between the sun's rays and some wretched cripple, and by the mere shadow that fell upon him as he passed restoring him to health ;† and commissioning some kerchief he had worn, or apron brought for his benediction, to bear the healing virtue to a distant sufferer.‡ Imagine such a one among us, and can we deem ourselves so dull as not to see and to acknowledge all His claims to

* Is. xxxv. 6. † Acts, v. 15. ‡ Acts, xix. 12.

more than earthly power, to more than Angel's might. Surely we should believe! Yes, Brethren, it may be that we should, as we do now, believe; that we should give the testimony of our understanding to claims so well supported: that we should yield assent to the truth, as matter of fact, of the events that so had taken place. We now believe, but O, what sort of a belief is it? A belief that finds us still astonished at every new manifestation of the power and grace of Jesus: a belief that still doubts the freedom, the fullness, the abundance of His grace: a belief that still withholds the heart from Him who claims it as His blood-bought right, and treats the solemn things, death, judgment, heaven and hell, as distant visions, which engross the rapt enthusiast's mind, but scarce arrest the eye, still less engage the heart, of the multitude that profess to believe them. Yet O! learn from the scene before us in the text, how powerless are any events in

themselves to produce a spiritual surrender of the heart to God. From the very grave of Lazarus some went away ; they could not doubt the reality of all that they had seen ; they could not but believe, that he who had been dead four days had by a word been freed from his dark prison-house, the grave ; but they went away to the enemies of Jesus, to add new fuel to their rage by telling them what new thing He had done.* And is it not as strange, that from the very grave, where they have seen consigned to its kindred clay, the mortal tabernacle of some fellow-being's soul : where they have stood as it were before an uplifted veil that gives their eye a glance into Eternity, and seen in the light it throws the true estimate of all the plans and projects, the pursuits and pleasures that engage the mind of man,--men should go away into the world among the enemies of Jesus, as all the unconverted and ungodly are, and live as

* John, xi. 46.

tho' the world were their home, the present their only scene, the grave annihilation. Is it not as strange, how often those, that have been themselves the mourners beneath the hand of God, are found by the revolving months as thoughtless of Eternity, as they were before His finger touched them, as unsubdued, as un sanctified, as unholy. It was by miracles, that the Lord sent His messages in days of old: it is by the no less intelligible voice of bereavement or of suffering, that now He speaks; but it is His own grace alone that brings either message home spiritually to the heart; it is His own accompanying Spirit, that, in either case, invests the word with power to the conversion of the soul. O! then, rest not, Brethren! in any means, how well soever they may seem calculated to effect the end of leading you to heaven: look to the source from whence the means proceed, from whence alone the blessing flows upon the

means ; look to the Spirit of the Lord, pray for Him, wait for Him. Without the accompanying power of God's Spirit, sacraments are but forms : ordinances but mockeries : the word of God a sealed up mystery : and affliction or sorrow, an unmingled evil. O ! then look for, pray for, wait for the promised Spirit of the Lord.

The spirit of contrasting present privileges with those of past days, to the disadvantage of the present, was as rife among the Jews of the Saviour's time, as it has ever been with Christians since. They then said,—“If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.”* And, with these words upon their lips, they cried out against Him, who was greater than all the prophets, Him of whom Moses and the prophets did write,† Crucify Him, Crucify Him !‡

* Matt. xxiii. 30. † John i. 45. ‡ Luke xxiii. 21.

Hear how St. Peter takes advantage of the opportunity now afforded him, to bring this home to his assembled hearers. He trifles not: he plays not with his words, for fear of offending them by so bold a charge; he plainly indicts them with the rejection of Him, who, independently of any other claim on them, was so pure, so meek, so spotless in His life, as to be pre-eminently the Holy One and the Just: with their preference of one who had been a ringleader in iniquity, a rebel, and a murderer: and with the wilful and cold-blooded slaughter of the Prince of Life. When we look at Peter, standing in the Temple at Jerusalem, surrounded by a multitude, whose malice even when unprovoked he had seen so bitterly displayed, and hear Him charge them with all their guilt, are we not constrained to ask ourselves—Is this the man, that, a few weeks ago, trembled at a maid-servant's enquiry, and, in his miserable fears, deni-

ed with oaths and curses that he even knew who Jesus was.* And are we not constrained, in recognising in the present bold advocate of the Name of Jesus the man who then so tremblingly denied it, to ascribe all praise and glory to the Lord, and to acknowledge and admire the faithfulness of the Word of Jesus, who had promised this effect: and to glorify the mighty Spirit of the Lord, who had so transformed the shrinking coward into the fearless champion of the cross of Christ. The timid, the trembling believer in Jesus may look upon this scene;—that one I mean, who while clinging to the precious Saviour as the Rock of his Salvation, yet finds the weakness of a fearful heart overpower all his efforts to speak a word for Jesus, and quench all his determinations to bear a testimony to His Name;—he may look upon this scene, and learn that nothing but the Spirit of the Lord

* Matt. xxvi. 74.

can overcome those fears, and that, by that Spirit's grace, he may be enabled to speak boldly, as Peter spoke, for the honour of the Lord he loves.

But the scene we are contemplating, presents a more general, and a more important lesson even than this. It gives to every other Messenger of Jesus, the example of that Apostle to whom the keys of the kingdom of heaven were entrusted,* as his sanction for a plain, a bold, a personal appeal to the consciences of his fellow-sinners, as his authority for an unshrinking faithfulness in the application of the word of truth to their hearts for their conviction and self-condemnation. It shews us that the conviction of sin, of its vileness in the sight of God, and of the hateful part each sin hath had in the murder of the Prince of life, lies at the root of true repentance and conversion of the soul to God; that sinners must be con-

* Matt. xvi. 19.

vinced of their corruption and vileness, before they can be led in earnest to the Saviour: and that as their souls' welfare depends on their being interested in Christ, no fears of present consequences must be permitted to withhold from them a true and faithful view of their state by nature and by practice in the sight of God.— Have circumstances so changed, that men must be no longer addressed in the same language as St. Peter used to his assembled hearers? Is sin less hateful in the sight of God, because it is committed by one who bears the name of Christian, instead of Jew? Is the Saviour less rejected now by those, who, though baptized into His name, give themselves to the service of the world and sin, than He was by those who nailed Him to the cross, preferring a murderer to Him? Or does a participation in Gospel privileges, by those whose lives are a practical denial of the Gospel, worldly, selfish, idle, and

unprofitable, render a complete and thorough change of heart less necessary, than to those that had never heard of Christ, or having heard of Him, yea and seen Him, had refused still to come to Him that they might have life. Nay! surely not: a change in outward privileges, a difference in the period of the world at which men live, a difference in the character of the dispensation whose shadow they enjoy, makes no difference in the necessity of the change of heart, of the spiritual application of the truth to every man's conscience, and of an individual interest, to be enjoyed by each one for himself, in the promises and precepts of the Gospel of Christ Jesus. On every one, therefore, that has a soul to be saved, must be pressed the sense of his corruption, his defilement, and his guilt. To every one must it be the constant endeavor to bring home the conviction of the soul's natural depravity, of its pollution by prac-

tice, and of the heinousness of every the smallest transgression that has stained it, in the sight of a pure and holy God. The preaching of the Gospel will have been in vain to every one, on whom it has not fastened the charge of his iniquity and sin, and to whom it has not discovered his lost and perishing condition. The Gospel is indeed “glad tidings,” but the very gladness of the message arises from the condition of those to whom the message comes. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,”* saith the Lord Jesus by His prophet and afterwards, appropriating the words, in His own person, “because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.”† To any then but the poor, the broken-hearted, the captive, the blind, the bruis-

* Is. lxi. 1.

† Luke, iv. 18.

ed, there are no glad tidings brought ; and it must therefore be the first object of the ambassador of Jesus, to convince all, and every one for himself, that they are in just such a state. It may be offensive, it must be humbling, to have every refuge taken from the soul, and to see no alternative left but the acknowledgement of the heart's vileness, and the soul's pollution and desert of wrath ; but until it is so, the Gospel falls pointless on the ear ; it comes but as a physician's visit to a person in full health : it comes but as the promise of his freedom to one that never knew the pressure of a fetter, that never felt restraint upon the impulse of his will. On this point then, Brethren! as it is my usual object, let it yet again be my endeavour, to suggest to you the examination of yourselves. Have ye ever seen, and known and felt the misery of your condition? Have ye ever found the remembrance of your sin to be grievous, and felt its burden to be intoler-

able?*" These are not questions of course, my beloved Brethren! they are not to be answered as mere words of form ; but O! ask them, O! answer them, as in the sight of that Holy One who seeth the hearts.

In addressing the multitude that surrounded him, St. Peter mentions a feature in their conduct, which, though it did not excuse, yet did in some measure account for the sinfulness of their conduct. "I know, brethren," he says, "that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." So far indeed from admitting this as an excuse for their conduct, he follows up this admission, and the declaration that God hath overruled their ignorance to the accomplishment of his own purposes in Christ Jesus, by the earnest exhortation to repent and be converted. He gives it, indeed, what weight it may have in keeping them from the despair, which a due consideration of their guilt might throw

* Confession in the Communion Service.

them into, by affording them a hope that they had not sinned utterly past forgiveness; but no more. He allows it not as any justification of their conduct; he admits it not as any palliation of their guilt. Could such a plea be admitted, then might every sinner that has ever lived upon the earth have some excuse to urge, when the Lord enters into judgment with him. It is the sad description of the lost, that the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ who is the image of God, should shine unto them.* It is indeed, it must be in ignorance, that any can go on in a state of unconversion, of worldliness, of unbelief. It must be because they are ignorant of themselves, and of the vile blackness of their own hearts. It must be because they are ignorant of the true character of the world, how hateful even its friendship is in the

* 2. Cor. iv. 4.

sight of God † It must be because they are ignorant of God, of the purity, the perfection, the holiness of His nature, and of the impossibility, which arises from the character of His perfections, that any thing unclean can enter into His presence. But, can this ignorance be an excuse to them? O! certainly not to any that have been within hearing of the Gospel,—to any to whom the solemn truths of God's word have been addressed,—to any that have been told of their corruption: and urged to flee as guilty sinners to the cross of Jesus. How often is the poor sinner met with, who, when prest upon the truths of salvation, replies, “I have no learning, I am a poor ignorant creature, I cannot understand these matters.” How often too are they to be found, who, tho' they would spurn the imputation of ignorance in other matters, will contentedly put away from them the solemn truths of God, with the

† James, iv. 4.

remark, "I cannot enter into these subtleties; such speculations about faith and works are too mysterious for me; my doctrine is that he who does his best to serve his generation and to please his God is safe enough." But it requires no learning to perceive the blackness of sin; there is no great mystery in the doctrine, that except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God;* there is not much speculation in the truth, that it is by grace men are saved through faith;† that by works no flesh living can be justified;‡ that he that believeth in Jesus, and he only, hath everlasting life.§ O, no! Brethren! the difficulty is in the perverseness of the will; the mystery arises from that willing ignorance, which will not ask of God the wisdom that it lacks; the subtlety is in that deceitfulness of sin, which hardens the heart against conviction, and

* John, iii. 3.

† Eph. ii. 8.

‡ Gal. ii. 16.

§ John, iii. 36.

flatters it into security, and self-satisfaction, and ease.

From such a state of ignorance as this, the Apostle calls upon his hearers to arise. “Repent ye and be converted.” And he points them to the same Jesus, whom they by wicked hands had crucified and slain, as the only way through which they could repent and turn to God. “Unto you first, God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.” And to leave them no further excuse either for ignorance or for prejudice, he shews them that this blessed Jesus was the ordained of God; that it was He of whom their own great a w giver had spoken as the prophet that was to be raised up to them superior to himself; that it was He of whom Samuel and the prophets had not only testified, but had foretold these very things which had come to pass; yea, that He was that very promised seed of whom it had been

said to Abraham, "that in his Seed should all the kindreds of the earth be blessed."

The very prejudices of the Jews, which it was necessary thus to meet, might be said to afford some excuse to them for their slowness of heart to believe, which exists not in favour of any in nominally Christian lands, to whom the message of the Gospel comes. What, my Brethren, have we for instance to rest upon; what can we have as even an imaginary ground of confidence, except a living interest in the Lord Jesus? What escape have we from the call to repentance, and the conversion of our souls to God? Shall we, with the view of the Jews' ignorance and blindness, and of their fall, before our eyes, adopt their error, in making the outward ordinances of religion the foundation of our trust? Shall we, as they, cry out, The temple of the Lord are we, and deem that having been baptized, been brought early and constantly to the

Lord's house, and even been partakers in the Sacrament, we therefore are Christians. These things are privileges, indeed, and means of grace, but they are means, whose only importance is in their conducting us to the end,—a spiritual regeneration, and a life of faith in Jesus. Yes, they are privileges which but increase our solemn responsibility to repent and turn to God. Jesus may be seen in them: and His Name, through faith in His Name, can make the helpless sinner strong: yea, the faith which is by Him, gives perfect soundness to the vilest sinner that hears His voice, arises and walks. To you, my Brethren! is a crucified and risen Jesus now set forth, as the ordinance of God, appointed ere the worlds were made for your justification, your acceptance, your conversion to God. Unto the Jews first, but unto you now, hath God sent Him, by His word and Holy Spirit, to bless you by turning away eve-

ry one of you from your iniquities. **His** Name, by faith in **His** Name, alone can make you whole: **His** blood alone can cleanse you: **His** righteousness alone can cover you: **His** obedience unto death alone can answer for you. **Repent** ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out; that so, by the gathering in of wanderers into the fold, **His** kingdom may be hastened in **His** own good time; that so the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the **Lord**: that so **He** may send again **Christ Jesus**, who hath already been preached unto you; whom the heavens must receive, until the times of restitution of all things, which **God** hath spoken by the mouth of all **His** prophets since the world began. **The Lord** bring it to pass, according to **His** good pleasure! **Yea Lord, Thy Kingdom come! Amen.** Even so, come, **Lord JESUS!**

LECTURE III.

ACTS IV, 1.—12.

AND AS THEY SPAKE UNTO THE PEOPLE, THE PRIESTS, AND THE CAPTAIN OF THE TEMPLE, AND THE SADDUCEES, CAME UPON THEM, BEING GRIEVED THAT THEY TAUGHT THE PEOPLE, AND PREACHED THROUGH JESUS THE RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD. AND THEY LAID HANDS ON THEM, AND PUT THEM IN HOLD UNTO THE NEXT DAY; FOR IT WAS NOW EVENTIDE. HOWBEIT MANY OF THEM WHICH HEARD THE WORD BELIEVED; AND THE NUMBER OF THE MEN WAS ABOUT FIVE THOUSAND. AND IT CAME TO PASS ON THE MORROW, THAT THEIR RULERS, AND ELDERS, AND SCRIBES, AND ANNAS THE HIGH PRIEST, AND CATAPHAS, AND JOHN AND ALEXANDER, AND AS MANY AS WERE OF THE KINDRED OF THE HIGH PRIEST, WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AT JERUSALEM. AND WHEN THEY HAD SET THEM IN THE MIDST, THEY ASKED, BY

WHAT POWER, OR BY WHAT NAME, HAVE YE DONE THIS? THEN PETER FILLED WITH THE HOLY GHOST, SAID UNTO THEM, YE RULERS OF THE PEOPLE, AND ELDERS OF ISRAEL, IF WE THIS DAY BE EXAMINED OF THE GOOD DEED DONE TO THE IMPOTENT MAN, BY WHAT MEANS HE IS MADE WHOLE; BE IT KNOWN UNTO YOU ALL, AND TO ALL THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL, THAT BY THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OF NAZARETH, WHOM YE CRUCIFIED, WHOM GOD RAISED FROM THE DEAD, EVEN BY HIM DOTH THIS MAN STAND HERE BEFORE YOU WHOLE. THIS IS THE STONE WHICH WAS SET AT NOUGHT OF YOU BUILDERS, WHICH IS BECOME THE HEAD OF THE CORNER. NEITHER IS THERE SALVATION IN ANY OTHER: FOR THERE IS NONE OTHER NAME UNDER HEAVEN GIVEN AMONG MEN WHEREBY WE MUST BE SAVED.

AT the first out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, when, under His miraculous influence, the Apostles spoke to the assembled multitude in all their different languages, and caused the collected throng from every nation under heaven to hear each in his own tongue the wondrous works of God, there were some who mocked.* Their opposition went no farther than mockery; but why? because the prejudice of man or the malice of the Devil was not aroused

* Acts, ii. 7—13.

against the budding of the Gospel mustard seed?† Nay; but because the Lord's eye was on it, and He would not suffer it to be tried by the fierce heat or stormy blast, before he had nurtured it into some degree of strength to bear it. The Apostles had on that occasion found the faithfulness of their ascended Lord: for it had been given them in the hour of trouble, what they should say.‡ They had found the fruitfulness of the bold and faithful exhibition of His word: for they had gathered in, as the first-fruits of the Gospel, into the church of Christ, three thousand souls.§ By the experience, then, which they had had of the disinclination of many to receive the truth; and by the trial they had made of their Lord's faithfulness and love, they were prepared for the further issues which awaited them in their career. Nor had they long to wait. The opportunity they had gained of address-

† *Mat. xiii. 31, 32.* ‡ *Mat. x. 19.* § *Acts. ii. 41*

ing another large assemblage of the people, on the occasion of the cure of the cripple's lameness, was an opportunity permitted to the children of the world and of the Devil, at the Arch-enemy's instigation, to begin their assault upon the Gospel plant. As the Apostles, Peter and John, spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them. They were actuated by different motives, the two principal of which are recorded. The priests, and captain of the temple, or chief of the band of Levites, to whom the custody of the temple was in weekly rotation entrusted, were grieved that they taught the people. They liked not this intrusion upon what they considered their right; they considered not the wondrous nature of the call which had been given the disciples; they were unwilling to admit the possibility, that two such unlearned and plain men could truly teach the things of God.

The Sadducees, who had taken advantage of priestly prejudices, to urge the priests and Levites to a foremost part in the opposition, had themselves the gravest charge to bring against the doctrines which these disciples taught. They were grieved, because the Apostles preached through Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

The distinguishing feature of the Sadducees' doctrine was their denial of any spiritual existence, and of the immortality of the soul; and, as a consequence of this, the denial of any rewards and punishments in a future state. The Pharisees, on the contrary, confessed all these truths; but looked upon the strictness of their own morality, and their rigid observance of outward forms and ceremonies, as giving them an abundant title to the rich rewards reserved for the righteous. Let us remember this difference in our future considerations.

The great design of our Lord, and the

great tendency of His preaching, was to represent the spirituality of the law of God; that so, convincing His hearers of the impossibility of their rendering such an obedience as a perfectly spiritual and holy God could accept, He might lead them to Himself, as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.* This doctrine would not suit the spirit of the Pharisees, who had made void the spirituality of God's law by their traditions,† and carried not their observance of the law beyond the punctilious attention to the mere letter of its demands. And, accordingly, from the beginning to the close of His career, the Pharisees were His bitter, His constant, His inveterate opponents. The Sadducees seem to have distinguished themselves but little among the adversaries of His teaching. It mattered little upon their system, to what extent the spirituality of the law was carried; for so that they

* Rev. xiii. 8.

† Mark vii. 13.

had its protection, and enjoyed its privileges, and escaped its penalties now, they looked no further. But the Apostles of the risen Saviour, justly regarding the doctrine of the resurrection, as the great proof of the whole scheme of Christianity, brought it prominently and boldly forward. It was He whom God raised up, of whom they spake. It was the Prince of life whom God had raised from the dead, as they were witnesses, whom they announced, and through whom they further preached the resurrection of the dead.— Their preaching aims a blow at once, then, at all the Sadducean system. It cuts at the very root of all their cherished notions. But did it merely strike at some favourite notion, some cherished doctrine? O! more, much more than this. It struck at all their peace, their comfort, their indulgence. Connected with the thought of a resurrection from the dead, must always be the idea of a future retribution. And

with what feelings could they contemplate the very possibility of a judgment to come, whose whole lives were formed upon the principle, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die,*—whose whole conduct and conversation were for this world alone, aiming only at its pleasures, dreading only its pains. "Nay, away with such fellows," would they surely cry: "stop such unwelcome tidings; down with unsavoury doctrines such as these!" And the unwilling dread of their own error, and the fear of admitting the very possibility of their being wrong in a point, which vitally affected all their peace, would add wings to their determination to crush these notions even in the very bud.

There are Pharisees and Sadducees in Gospel times, as much as there were in Jewish. And still are the two classes, which we might so name, among the most decided opposers of the truth as it is in

* 1 Cor. xv. 32.

Jesus. We dwell not upon the resemblance between the Pharisees of old, and those whose self-righteousness, and pride, and self-complacency, the doctrine of a free salvation through the blood of **Jesus**, provided as much for the meanest and the vilest, as for the loftiest and most moral, if only they will come to **Jesus** that they may have life, most mortally offends. Our present attention belongs to the Sadducees of the present day. And among the warmest opponents of the Gospel truths, are found those whose lives, addicted to the world, immersed in pleasures, fed on the applause and honor of this passing scene, leave them no hope, if they alone are safe who are converted to God, raised from their state of trespasses and sins to newness and holiness of life, and living, by the faith of **Jesus**, even as **Jesus** lived. They are grieved, that we preach through **Jesus** the resurrection of the dead. It is not indeed the truth, that this frail body, hav-

ing been turned to its dust, shall rise again from the grave to be re-united to the soul for ever; it is not this that grieves them. But this resurrection of the body is an emblem of a spiritual resurrection from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness, which must take place in the inmost soul, before it can have a hope of entering heaven. It represents to us a change, a thorough, an entire, a spiritual change of heart, which must be wrought, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in all that would hope to enter into the Lord's kingdom.— And this, the worldly, for they are the Sadducees, like not. They love the present scene, its vanities, its delights; they are contented with its honors, its applause, its wealth; they wonder what harm there is in the innocent amusements and harmless gaieties of life: and mark that man "fanatic," who would bid them come out and be separate from the recreations, the pursuits, and joys in which the worldly

live. They acknowledge another world, but they live for this : they recognize the God of Heaven, but they worship the God of this world : they speak of the Spirit of the Lord, but he, whose sway they own, is the Spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience.* O ! then, what death to their hopes, the solemn truth, Ye must be born again ! † What confusion to their expectations of heaven, the announcement, Except ye be converted, ye cannot see the kingdom of God. ‡ If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. ¶ What a mystery to them the Scripture, by which the heirs of heaven are pourtrayed. The Spirit of God beareth witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God. ||

O ! are there any such before me, who are led through the worldliness of their own lives, and their fondness for

* Eph. ii. 2 † John iii. 7 ‡ Matt. xviii. 3.

¶ Rom. viii. 9. || Rom. viii. 16.

the pleasures and indulgences of life, to dislike the truths which set before them the need of a spiritual change, and urge on them the absolute, the indispensable necessity of the conversion of their hearts to God? Let me intreat you, Brethren! to consider whether ye are not, not only fighting against God, but sinning against your own souls. Yes, your own consciences must tell you, that could ye be transplanted just as ye are to heaven, ye would have no fitness for it; ye could not, as ye are, enjoy it. Ye have no relish for its joys: no taste for its employments: no love for Him who fills it with His presence. Either heaven or you, then, must change; judge ye, which? Either God or your souls must alter; say ye, which? I say not, Brethren, that there is any peculiar, or aggravated sin in the pleasures or indulgences of the world: that there is any merit in abstaining from them, that abstinence from them is any sure mark of a Christian mind, or that

there is any peculiarly damning guilt in entering into them: but this I say, that the love of them is a mark of an unconverted heart: a fondness for them an evidence of an unchristian spirit: the enjoyment of them, inconsistent with that conversation in heaven, which he aims at maintaining, who is looking for his Saviour, the Lord Jesus.*

Notwithstanding, however, the opposition which the preaching of the Apostles excited; yes, even in the midst of that opposition, many of them which heard the word believed,—so many that the whole number of the members of the Christian church, exclusive of women and children, was five thousand. There are those who consider this to have been the number of persons brought into the fold of Christ on this particular occasion. But a careful perusal of the narrative, and of the particular form of the sentence which records the

matter, can scarcely afford a confirmation of this opinion. Independently of the improbability that a larger fruit should be vouchsafed upon this occasion, than was gathered into the fold on the day of the first miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we can scarcely suppose, that such a wonderful event, if it had so taken place, would have received such a mere incidental notice. The structure of the sentence, even as it is in our translation, but more especially as it stands in the original, would lead us rather to consider the historian as marking, as he passed, the progress which the yet infant cause of Christ and His Gospel had already made. Many of them that heard the word believed: and by their addition, the number of the men alone that composed the Church was made up to five thousand.

When we look back upon the change which had taken place, in the short time between the first assembling of the little

band, that had just parted with their Lord, and the gathering which we have here observed, how wonderful appears the operation of that Spirit through whose grace it had been effected. The number of names together when first they met in the upper room at Jerusalem, comprising every sex and age, was but one hundred and twenty.* But now they reckon the *men* alone of their company by thousands. So mightily grew the word of the Lord and prevailed.†

And it grew amid opposition, and flourished, even when the hand of persecution was stretched out against those that proclaimed it. Yes; the Arch-enemy of souls appears not yet to have learnt the lesson, in which he has since attained such fatal skill, that the most dangerous weapon, with which the purity, the spirituality, and the increase of the Gospel kingdom can be assailed, is worldly prosperity, and outward ease. I mean not, by the

* Acts, i. 15.

† Acts, xix. 20.

Gospel kingdom, to describe those who have been brought under the name, and admitted to the outward privileges of the Gospel. To an increase in such members as these, a time of worldly prosperity and ease is indeed favourable. But if the subjects of a kingdom which is not of this world* are men who are not of this world, but converted, self-denying, consistent, holy, spiritually-minded men: then surely a time of outward ease, a time at which union and conformity with the world are so easy, a time at which a certain degree of profession, if it go not too far, is creditable,—surely such a time is most unfavourable to such a spiritual growth. The conversion of one soul to God now from the heartlessness and formality of a mere nominal Christianity is more rare and more remarkable, than seems to have been the accession of hundreds and thousands,

* John, xviii. 36.

to the number of the saved in times of trial, and persecution.

Yet let us remember, that while the power of the Spirit, which enabled the Apostles to speak with other tongues, and with such fluency and fervour to proclaim the things of God, was purely miraculous; yet the grace which opened their hearts to attend to the things spoken,* and influenced them to believe and act upon the truth, was simply what may be termed His ordinary operation—the same as we are permitted to ask for and expect in as large and abundant manifestations as then characterized the gift. Why then is it, that so little of the operation of that grace is now bestowed? Even because it is so little asked for, so little waited for. Surely it is because Ministers come not in a spirit of real prayer to their flocks, in public and in private, looking for and expecting the accompanying presence of the Spi-

* Acts, xvi. 14.

rit with them in all their ministrations. And as much, if not more, is it because they are not helped by the prayers of their flocks: because there is, among those who profess to have tasted that the Lord is gracious,* so little earnestness in pleading with the Lord, that His Spirit may always accompany and bless the sowing of the seed, and water the seed sown, and guard the tender blade, and foster the forming ear, and fill the ripening corn with an abundant increase. For thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock.† Upon you, then, my Brethren, who have been brought, by the Lord's grace, within the number of His faithful followers, how great is the obligation to extend your petitions beyond the limits of your own necessities: and to let your souls go forth before the Lord in earnest supplication for

* 1 Pet. ii. 8.

† Ez. xxxvi. 37.

your dying fellow-sinners; that the Spirit may be with each word in whatever weakness spoken in the Lord's Name, and that He may manifest himself, as He did of old, in gathering in a large and abundant increase into the garner of the Lord;—that He may shew Himself again in the conversion of souls beneath the preaching of the word of grace, and add daily to the church of Christ such as shall be saved.*

The continued conduct of the Apostles Peter and John, in the circumstances in which they were now placed, affords us a sweet evidence of the faithfulness of the ancient promise,—As thy days, so shall thy strength be:†. Their holy boldness, their courage, and their zeal seemed to gather strength as they were exercised. As it was evening, when they were found addressing the multitude in the temple, they were put in prison till the next morning. They had thus a taste both of the disposi-

* Acts ii. 47.

† Deut. xxxiii. 25.

tion and the power of their enemies.— From their prison they were brought out on the next morning, and placed before an array of dignity, and pomp, and authority, and rank, enough to have daunted the stoutest heart of unassisted man. But their eye quailed not, nor fainted once their heart. What were they, that they should be afraid of men that should die:* and of the sons of men that were but as the grass of the field? They stood before the tribunal of earthly pomp, as the ambassadors of the **King of Kings**, the vindicators of **His** insulted **Name**, the messengers of **His** mercy to a lost and dying world. **The Lord** was their light and their salvation, whom then should they fear; **the Lord** was the strength of their life, of whom then should they be afraid?† **Rulers, Elders, Scribes, High Priest**, and all his kindred,—a terrific array indeed! surround them, and call on them to de-

* Is. li. 1 .

† Ps. xxvii. 1.

clare, what secret charm, what diabolic incantation they had used to bring about the deed, which they could not deny was done. Such seems to have been the meaning of their question. But while Peter addresses them with the respect which belonged to their station and to the capacity in which they questioned him, he seems but to gather increased boldness from this very circumstance, and charging them, the rulers of the people and elders of Israel, with the murder of the Prince of life, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, he announced that in that Name which they well knew, a Name belonging now to one exalted to the right hand of God, they had made the cripple whole. And with a holy fervor, well worthy of the cause in which he spoke, and with an anxiety lest they interrupt him in his reply, he continues, "This is the stone which was set a nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner; neither is there

salvation in any other : for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

How fraught with saving truths this brief reply ! Jesus, the Corner Stone ! Jesus, the only Name whereby we must be saved !

Even when the first Adam fell, the Lord of Hosts laid the foundation of a glorious Church ; a Church to be built up in this time state, to be the everlasting joy and dwelling-place of God Himself throughout Eternity. The corner-stone of this foundation was now brought in, and laid amid the wonder of the Heavenly throng, cemented with the blood of God himself, a solid, a tried, a precious, and a sure foundation. This stone forms the beauty, the solidity, the value, the glory of the whole building. Though in the eyes of man it had no comeliness, and was rejected as a refuse stone, in the Lord's sight it was indeed precious, honourable, and

glorious. **I**n **H**im alone believers are built up a spiritual house.* **O**n **H**im alone they can with safety rest. **F**rom **H**im alone they derive all their value and their beauty in the eyes of **G**od. **H**e loooketh in **H**is love and mercy at the **C**orner **S**tone. **A**nd all the stones, from whatever hole of a pit they may have been digged,† that are cemented with the blood of **G**od, and united to this **C**orner stone, are safe in such a union only: and in that union partake the **F**ather's love, and share the glory which, for **H**is own **N**ame's sake, **H**e puts upon this honored stone. **O**, **B**rethren! are ye built up in **H**im, united to **H**im by **H**is own blood: clothed with **H**is righteousness, filled with **H**is grace? **T**hen when **H**e shall bring forth the headstone with shoutings, crying, **G**race, **G**race unto it,‡ shall ye be sharers in the glory of the **L**iving **S**tone.

* 1 Pet. ii. 5.

† Is. li. 1.

‡ Zec. iv. 7.

But there is no salvation in any other ; there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved, but the one only Name of Jesus. In making this so important declaration, the Apostle turns from the question of the cure effected upon the suffering body of a fellow creature, to point out the efficacy of the same way for the healing of the soul's diseases, and for the deliverance of his fellow-sinners from sin, and misery, and death. The one remedy for all the most desperate cases as well as those that shew but the first symptoms of mortality, is the same, the Name of Jesus! There is no other way. Salvation is of the Name of Jesus only.

There have been many ways, which either the unassisted darkness of the natural mind hath groped after, or a borrowed glimmer from the light of revelation hath disclosed ; and there are many ways,

which men, with the revelation of God's way in their hands, have mingled up more in accordance with their own wishes, their prejudices, or their pride, by which they hope, if God is the merciful Being they take him to be, to enter heaven: but to one and all,—to the frigid system of the mere moralist, and the motley mixture of grace and works, which others build upon, as well as to the dark gropings of the heathen, it must be replied, Let what excellences there may be attached to your several plans, there is one argument destructive of them all,—they are not the Lord's plan. His way is the Name of Jesus, and there is no salvation in any other. To the ignorant sinner, to the guilty sinner, to the aroused sinner, to the polluted sinner, the Name of Jesus is proposed as the sovereign cure. Look unto Him and be saved:* for He is made of God

* Is xlv. 22.

Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption, to every one that believeth in Him.†

O! then, Brethren, let me urge on you this one thing, Examine yourselves, whether ye are in the faith‡ of Him. Try yourselves by scriptural tests: and the Lord give you grace, that finding there is no salvation in any other, ye may build upon that only Name whereby ye can be saved, the Name of JESUS.

† 1, Cor. i. 30.

‡ 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

LECTURE IV.

ACTS IV, 13—17.

NOW WHEN THEY SAW THE BOLDNESS OF PETER AND JOHN, AND PERCEIVED THAT THEY WERE UNLEARNED AND IGNORANT MEN, THEY MARVELLED; AND THEY TOOK KNOWLEDGE OF THEM, THAT THEY HAD BEEN WITH JESUS. AND BEHOLDING THE MAN WHICH WAS HEALED STANDING WITH THEM, THEY COULD SAY NOTHING AGAINST IT. BUT WHEN THEY HAD COMMANDED THEM TO GO ASIDE OUT OF THE COUNCIL, THEY CONFERRED AMONG THEMSELVES, SAYING, WHAT SHALL WE DO TO THESE MEN? FOR THAT INDEED A NOTABLE MIRACLE HATH BEEN DONE BY THEM IS MANIFEST TO ALL THEM THAT DWELL IN JERUSALEM; AND WE CANNOT DENY IT. BUT THAT IT SPREAD NO FURTHER AMONG THE PEOPLE, LET US STRAITLY THREATEN THEM, THAT THEY SPEAK HENCEFORTH TO NO MAN IN THIS NAME.

HAD we seen and known less of the character of the audience which St. Peter

had just addressed, we might have surely expected a more powerful impression to have been made both by the intrinsic importance, and the solemn delivery, of His reply to their question. The direct charge upon them of the leading part they had taken in the crucifixion of Jesus; the solemn assertion of the exaltation of that same Jesus, by the hand of God, to the head of the corner; the repeated reference of the miracle they had wrought to the sole power of His Name, thro' faith in His Name; and the extended announcement that there was no salvation,—that is, either from present misery or eternal woe,—in any other, since that was the only Name under Heaven by which they could be saved: these were important matters in themselves, and appear to have been delivered with an earnestness, a boldness, and a zeal, which we should have thought likely deeply and savingly to impress the hearts of those that heard him. But wa

are thus early taught the truth of what St. Paul afterwards announced as characteristic of the Gospel, that not many learned, not many noble, not many mighty are called.* The same charge which was now made against these Rulers, and Elders, and High Priests, attended with the exhibition of the saving power of the Name of Jesus, had already been addressed with wondrous efficacy, through the accompanying power of the Spirit of the Lord, to the hearts of thousands of the common people. The number of those from among this class that believed in the Lord, had been just stated as amounting to five thousand men. But, with but rare exceptions, just enough to shew that there is no impossibility in the way of the rich, the learned, and the great, this same Gospel appears to have been addressed almost in vain to the exalted in station, in dignity, in wealth. When, indeed, those assembled on the pre-

* 1 Cor. i. 26.

sent occasion beheld the boldness of Peter and John, they marvelled. They wondered at the mighty power with which the words of such unlearned men were clothed. They wondered at the moral courage, with which men, so unaccustomed to such scenes, were enabled to stand up in the face of so august an assemblage, and boldly to proclaim a Name which that assembly had already cast out, and which they now affected at least to despise. They marvelled to see such things. But their feelings were no otherwise excited, than to such a mere wonder at such an extraordinary event. No conviction seems to have fastened itself upon their mind ; there was no pricking of the heart, no eager cry, Men and Brethren, what shall we do? But ah! how much is it so still. How many still are compelled to wonder at the transforming power of the Name of Jesus, and to express an unwilling acknowledgement of the efficacy of that Name alone to

the support of the weak, the comfort of the cast down, and the turning the hearts of sinners from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God,* who yet are so fortified by self-complacency as not to feel, or so incased in prejudice as not to acknowledge, their own need of a change, and to apply as convinced sinners to the Name of Jesus. Men are not indeed now urged in vain, in nominally Christian lands, to the bearing of the Name of Jesus; since it were deemed uncharitable to deny the name of Christian to any that have been baptized, though their whole lives may have been practical denials of the faith of Christ. Nor, indeed, if the faith of Jesus be compatible with worldliness of conduct, and the unconversion of the heart, would it be true that there is any peculiar difficulty in bringing the learned, the wealthy, and the noble to such a faith as that. But

* Acts, xxvi. 18.

to that faith of Jesus which worketh by love :* to that faith whose effect is seen in the change of the heart : to that faith which leadeth to self-denial, to separation from the world, and the single devotion of body, soul, and spirit to the Lord's service, it must be painfully confessed, that either the higher temptations, or the stronger prejudices, or the greater pride of the mighty, the learned, and the rich make them hardest to be brought. Raised by superiority of education, or guarded by the customs of society against the grosser vices which deform humanity, and ignorant of that spirituality of God's character, which requireth truth in the inward parts,† and condemns as sin every alienation of the mind from Him, and every failure in that perfect love of Him which His law demands, they are harder to be convinced of their sinfulness, and to be shewn the necessity of that righteousness

* Gal. v. 6.

† Ps. li. 6.

of God, which is by faith alone upon all that believe.* Imbued, perhaps, with high principles of worldly honor, accustomed to the respect with which their fellow-men regard their talents or their worth, or satisfied with the comforts, the station, the enjoyments which wealth provides, they are more difficult of access to the humbling truth, that as guilty sinners they need the blood of Jesus as much as the meanest and vilest of their fellow-creatures, and harder to be taught the vanity of all things present, and to be led to the pursuit of that one thing, which alone is needful. They can sometimes wonder at the fortitude, with which, in the most trying circumstances of penury or privation, the additional burden of an agonized body is endured; they can sometimes marvel at the peaceful joy, in which the soul of tried and weary pilgrim is sustained by faith in the loving arm of God, as seen reconciled

* Rom. iii. 22.

in Christ Jesus. They can sometimes marvel at the boldness and the fervor, with which men, ignorant in other respects, can give a reason of the hope that is in them,* and appeal to the law and to the testimony,† to the word and promise of the Lord, as the ground of their confidence before God. But while they wonder, and are in many cases constrained to confess that the power of the Lord has been present to effect the change they marvel at, too often, alas! their wonder results but in a confirmation of their prejudices, and the hardening of their hearts.

The Chief Priests and Elders appear to have imagined, that in the tomb where the body of the crucified Jesus was laid, were buried all the dangers they had anticipated to their church and nation, from the continued exhibition of his pretensions, and of the wondrous miracles by which they were supported. Imagine, then, their

* 1 Peter iii. 15

† Is. viii. 20.

surprise, and we may suppose their dismay as well, at perceiving His place supplied by others manifesting the same powers ; and not diverting the people's minds by new pretensions, but exhibiting all their powers in confirmation of His claims whom they had thought for ever silenced. Imagine their surprise and their vexation, when, having their attention called to the Name of JESUS, and being led by it to look more earnestly upon the men that stood in the midst, they recognized them as disciples and followers of Him whom they had slain. "They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." They remembered them now as men whom they had seen with Him, when they laid wait for Him in the temple, to catch Him in His words. And in recognizing their persons, they could not but recognize their spirit also, and perceive, that while the same miraculous power had been exhibited by them in healing the diseased, there

was the same faithfulness of language, the same boldness of reproof, the same earnestness and holy fervor of spirit, mingled with the same deferential regard for the office which they held as rulers of the Lord's people, which had marked Him, whose followers they recognized.

And can we avoid remarking, that the true followers of the blessed Saviour have ever since been, and still may be, known by the same token. Men may take knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus.

The true Christian, for instance, is a man of prayer. The gracious promises of the Lord's spiritual presence are vouchsafed, not alone to the public offering, but to every private, or social outpouring, of praise and supplication to the throne of grace. In prayer, the true believer holds communion with his God and Saviour. In prayer, he finds heaven opened, and is permitted to converse with holy confidence

and filial reverence with Him in whom he finds his great High Priest, and Advocate with the Father, who is interested in all his sorrows, can sympathize with all his infirmities, and has atoned for all his sins. And as the first evidence of the spiritual life is found in the declaration, Behold, he prayeth;* so may he discover by the interest, the energy, the fervency, and the delight he has in prayer, as by a spiritual barometer, the state of spiritual life and vigor in which his soul is.

The true Christian, too, is a man of the Scriptures. In them, as the mirror of the Lord's perfections, he gazes upon the glory of the Lord. In them, as the revelation of his Lord's will, he receives and meditates upon the messages of God to him. In them, as containing Christ Jesus upon every page, he sees, and converses, and holds communion with his Lord.

* Acts ix. 11.

In their promises, as they are **Yea and Amen** in **Christ Jesus**,* he finds the ground of **His** hope, and the communication of his strength, the comfort of his sorrows, the sweetness of his joys. In their precepts, as they are embodied in the perfection of the obedience of **Christ**, he sees his rule of life, the pattern of his conduct, the guide of his conversation. And thus, in meditating upon the **Scriptures**, he holds communion with **Jesus**; he has **Christ**, the **Word of God**, for his companion, his guide, his comforter, his friend. The true **Christian**, I say, delights in this communion. It may be, that he has no time for continued and lengthened perusals of the word of **God**, without neglect of those duties which are equally with religious study, a part of his **Christian** course. But still in the midst of the busiest cares, will it be his joy to take to him the dove-

* 2 Cor. i. 20.

like wings of meditation, and fly away, and hold converse with His Saviour in His word.

But how may the world know this? How may they take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus? Is it by the display of his love of prayer, and by calling on the world to witness, how many of his otherwise retired moments are busied in the studious contemplation of the word of God. Oh! no, indeed: not such the spirit of the Gospel of Jesus. But if the spirit of the Gospel be opposed to such display, no less contrary is it to that worldly spirit, which deems the introduction of sacred things into the every day business of social life an intrusion, and banishes from the ordinary intercourse of those who profess to hope for heaven all symptoms, such as social prayer, and spiritual converse would afford, of that conversation which is in heaven. For can any one be a man of prayer, delighting in

this communion with his gracious Saviour, and finding Him precious to the soul, and go forth into the world fresh from such heavenly intercourse, and bear with him no savor of that Spirit, thro' which he has held communion with his Lord? Can he come forth from his closet, where he has been privileged to address God as a loving Father, and to plead the love of Jesus as his ground of confidence in such approach; and not manifest in his conduct the loving spirit, the meekness and gentleness, the patience and forbearance, the charity and forgiving disposition of his Lord? Can he come forth from such intercourse, as he, an unworthy sinner, is privileged, through the blood of Jesus, to hold with God the Father, and not manifest in his life the desire to glorify so gracious and so kind a Father in every thing he does; and by indirect means at least, if not direct ones, to bring others to see and know and love

the same Saviour? And can any one be a man of the Scriptures, whose conscience has been at all enlightened and aroused, and not recognize the bearing of the word of truth upon all the conduct of his life, and not in some degree carry abroad with him the impress of those heavenly precepts, the influence of those precious promises, the savor of those blessed truths, on which he finds it his delight to dwell? Can he receive the Scriptures as the record of his Father's will concerning all his conduct, and in going abroad neglect the guidance of His counsels, and contemn the spirit of His heavenly instructions? Can he receive the Scriptures, as full, in every page, of Christ and His Salvation, and in his heart accept the Saviour they display as both his sacrifice for sins, and also his ensample of godly life: and not aim in his whole life and conversation, by following the example of Jesus, to glorify Him whom he clings to as his refuge and

his Righteousness? Surely the influence of a prayerful Spirit, upon the whole habits of the mind, and affections of the heart, and character of the conversation; surely the effects of a constant reference to, and delight in, the word of God, in producing the daily conquest of sin, the subduing of the temper, the subjection of the passions, in short, the holiness of the life, and the habitual readiness for death; surely these are evidences by which men may be recognized as followers of Christ,—these are symptoms by which indeed they may be taken knowledge of, that they have been with Jesus.

Why, then, it may be asked, is it so much the present day's complaint, that it is so difficult to distinguish between the followers of Jesus and of the world? And alas! it must be answered, that it is because those who profess to have joined themselves to the Lord as His servants, are in reality so little with Jesus: that

they are so easily satisfied with the profession of a spiritual interest in Jesus, that they spend but little of their time in lively communion with Him, find not their joy in prayer to Him, delight not in His word, nor exercise themselves day by day in living by faith upon Him. A cold, a doubting, a hesitating profession, while it is most uncomfortable and unsatisfactory to the professor, tends also more to the dishonor than the praise of Jesus' Name: and what else but a cold, a lifeless, an unspiritual profession can be the result of so little communion with Him, who is the fountain of all light, and heat, and life?— O! that the Lord would revive His work among us, and bring all who profess to be spiritual disciples of the Name of Jesus to closer, and more constant spiritual communion with Himself! O! that He would truly quicken His slumbering, lukewarm, inconsistent followers, that so both

their souls may be established, and His cause may grow through their means.

Do I address any such as these, that profess themselves truly believers in Jesus, but yet are in conduct lukewarm, compromising, and undecided? Let me ask you, Brethren, by what signs men could take knowledge of you that ye have been with Jesus; how may you be recognized as his spiritual followers; how may ye be manifested that ye are not the children of the world? The signs and tests which the Lord hath given you are plain enough. They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts.* If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.† If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.‡ By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another.§ Love not the

* Gal. v. 24.

† 2 Cor. v. 17.

‡ Luke ix. 23.

§ John xiii. 35.

world, neither the things that are in the world.|| Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?† O judge yourselves by these tests, examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; remembering that every professor of vital godliness, is as a city set upon a hill, and that to every one of them is in some degree entrusted the honor of the Saviour, whose he professes himself to be. And, O! aim, by such spiritual communion with Jesus in His word and ordinances, at having His impress so stamped upon you, that men may take knowledge of you that ye have been with Jesus.

The recognition of these two Apostles, as having been followers of Christ Jesus, coupled with the undeniable nature of the miracle that had been wrought by them, and aided probably by some uneasy reflections, with regard to the part they had taken in the execution of the same Jesus,

|| 1 John ii. 15.

† James iv. 4.

through faith in whose name the miracle of healing had been wrought, and almost as great a miracle been effected in the changed spirit of these unlearned and ignorant men, seems to have not a little disconcerted this dignified assemblage. At a loss how to act concerning them, they put them forth a little, that they might confer upon so important a matter, as they evidently felt it. And now behold the principles of worldly wisdom, in operation against the counsels of the Most High. They are obliged now to confess, as they had before been compelled to acknowledge in the case of Christ himself,* that indeed a notable miracle was done; and that however their own inclinations might lead them to cast suspicions upon its reality, yet the publicity of the act, and the notoriety of his character and condition who had been healed, had so affected the minds of the people that had witnessed it, that an attempt to

* John xi. 47.

deny it would only expose the weakness of their judgment, and the inveteracy of their rage. But what effect has the undeniable nature of the miracle upon their minds? Might we not suppose that it would lead them to institute further enquiries, and, in a spirit of candour, to call for further proofs of the claims the Apostles grounded upon the exercise of such powers? But when the God of this world hath blinded the mind, how dark the infatuation, how thick the cloud by which the judgment is perverted, and the true exercise of the reason impeded. Their only object is to prevent the spreading of the fame of such a miracle, and to check the progress of a cause, whose truth, their efforts against such a testimony in its favour strongly corroborated. Their design was only how to put them down whom God would exalt. Their deliberate decision was, that, though the Name of Jesus had been proved so powerful in a confess-

edly good and benevolent work, and tho' the Apostles had declared their firm conviction, that there was no salvation in any other, and that this was the only Name under Heaven, given among men, by which salvation could be attained, yet they should be commanded, yea, and straitly threatened in case of disobedience, not to speak any more in the Name of Jesus.

How weak in judgment, as well as vicious in principle, does such a determination seem? Yet we need not consider it as peculiar to the Jewish assemblage, before which Peter and John had so boldly and faithfully proclaimed the Name of Jesus. It is a picture of the opposition which the natural man, under whatever outward aspect, has always made against the truth of God. There is an inability to comprehend the things of the Spirit of God, and a consequent inability to understand and enter into the feelings by which

those that have received the Spirit of the Lord are actuated, which always produces weakness of judgment and error in principle, in the nature of the opposition by which they that love not the truth would check its progress. Or rather should we say, that there is a Mighty One dwelling on high, whose cause the truth as it is in Jesus is, who turns even the furiousness of men to His praise, and refrains the fierceness of them. It was His over-ruling might, which caused the fame this miracle had attained so to act upon the minds of the chief priests and elders, as to repress the violence of their wishes against the infant cause of Christ. It is the same overruling power which now prevents the natural heart from those outbreakings against the simplicity of the truth as it is in Jesus, which, if the feelings of that heart alone were consulted, would soon be manifested. But as the Lord looketh upon the heart, He seeth

there the enmity against Him, which still exists, in whatever way it may shew itself, or however its display may be controlled. And how awful must be the reckoning to Him, which every heart must render, whose natural enmity to Him and to His cause is unsubdued, whose feelings unchanged, whose affections unrenewed! And such is the heart of every one that has not fled to Jesus, of every one who is not in Christ, a new creature, having the Spirit of Christ, living by the faith of Christ, seeking only the glory of Christ, and looking for and hasting to the coming of the day of Christ. O Brethren, that day is coming: how shall ye meet it, whose hearts are yet unchanged, unreconciled, unrenewed, unsanctified? The day is coming that shall burn as an oven,* when the Lord shall come and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that

* Mal. iv. 1.

serveth him not.† The righteous are they only who are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. And all that are not in Him by faith, are classed in one general description among the wicked. If then the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear ?‡ O, let the yet unconverted sinner think of this, and ask himself solemnly this question ; and may the grace of God impress it, and bring you all and every one, my beloved Brethren ! to that only refuge from the wrath to come, the Lamb of God, the chief corner stone, the only Saviour Jesus.

† Mal. iii. 18.

‡ 1 Peter iv. 19.

LECTURE V.

ACTS IV. 18—22.

AND THEY CALLED THEM, AND COMMANDED THEM NOT TO SPEAK AT ALL NOR TEACH IN THE NAME OF JESUS. BUT PETER AND JOHN ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO THEM, WHETHER IT BE RIGHT IN THE SIGHT OF GOD TO HEARKEN UNTO YOU MORE THAN UNTO GOD, JUDGE YE. FOR WE CANNOT BUT SPEAK THE THINGS WHICH WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD.— SO, WHEN THEY HAD FURTHER THREATENED THEM, THEY LET THEM GO, FINDING NOTHING HOW THEY MIGHT PUNISH THEM, BECAUSE OF THE PEOPLE: FOR ALL MEN GLORIFIED GOD FOR THAT WHICH WAS DONE. FOR THE MAN WAS ABOVE FORTY YEARS OLD, ON WHOM THIS MIRACLE OF HEALING WAS SHEWED.

THE result of the solemn deliberation, in which we left the Chief Priests and Scribes and Elders and Rulers engaged, is here before us. They called again before them men who had exhibited the power of the name of Jesus, in healing the

diseased bodies of their fellow creatures, and charged them to speak that Name no more. Sad symptom this of their benevolence! They called before them men, who had declared their belief that in the Name of Jesus only was salvation to be found, and charged them to speak that Name no more. Sad feature this of the blindness and perverseness of their hearts! Not only doth the Lord refrain the furiousness of man, but turns their very wisdom into folly. The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God;* nay, in this case, it is foolishness even in the eyes of man.

But what was the effect of such a charge upon the hearts of the Apostles?

What should we expect its effect to be, if he of whom they had so spoken, had been but a human friend? Had he been one to whom they were merely bound by ties of friendship or affection,—one whose

* 1 Cor. iii. 19.

memory it was their delight to cherish, simply on account of the amiability and excellence of his character when living, and the tenderness of his parting charges to the old companions of his suffering lot on earth, this had been a hard demand, that they should never mention His Name again. Yea! had he been one to whose instructions they were no more indebted, than had been the disciples of a Plato or a Seneca: one whose lessons of morality they had imbibed, whose ethic precepts they had dwelt upon, whose example they had admired and striven to imitate, and whose doctrines they deemed salutary to their fellow-men, this had been a serious requisition, that they should deliver none of his instructions, nor teach in his name again. But there were higher, far higher, grounds than these for their resisting such a charge. Their own reply briefly states the grounds of their resistance. "Whether it be right in the sight of God, to

hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”— It was not a matter in which they could, without sin, obey the command addressed to them. They were acting under the commands of one whom they declared to be the eternal God. And well did they put it to the consciences of their judges to decide, whether it could be right that they should listen to the command, or be influenced by the threats by which their silence was attempted to be enforced in the face of the solemn authority under which they acted. Yet, however they might judge in such a matter, the decision of the Apostles’ own mind was, that they could not but speak the things that they had seen and heard.

This reply of the Apostles to the command which had been laid upon them furnishes a lesson of instruction, as well to those who have received the same commis-

sion which the Apostles had to go and preach the kingdom of God,* as to every individual Christian.

The commission which the Minister of the Lord receives is of a very solemn nature. These are the words in which the Lord Jesus himself gave it. "Go thou into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth, and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."† With reference too to this commission, doth the Apostle Paul remark upon the blessed truth, "Whosoever shall call on the Name of the Lord shall be saved." "How then," he saith, "shall they call on Him, in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?"‡

Not only then the solemn charge of the Lord Jesus, but also the immense

* Luke, ix. 2. † Mark xvi. 15, 16. ‡ Rom. x. 13, 14:

responsibility which rests upon every one invested with a commission to preach the Gospel, that the means which the Gospel of Christ Jesus proposes for the salvation of the souls entrusted to them be diligently employed, render it in an especial manner incumbent upon the Minister of the Lord to set forth in all its simplicity the truth as it is in Jesus.* The work is not indeed his. He may exhibit the plain truths of the Gospel in such a manner that the mind of the Spirit shall be evident in every discourse: and yet it is only of the sovereign grace of the Spirit to shew these things to each soul, and to give the very word of Christ itself any efficacy to the conversion of the soul. Yet this dependence, for the very minutest success, upon the grace of the Spirit diminishes not in the least the solemn duty of all the Ministers of Christ, to set forth the plain and simple truth, just as it is in the Scriptures,

* Ephes. iv. 21.

neither decorated with the enticing words of man's wisdom, nor qualified by the suggestions of man's fears, nor weakened by the influence of man's worldliness, nor paralysed by the effects of man's example. Well does our Church set forth the solemn nature of this responsibility, in the charge delivered by the mouth of her prelates to all whom, in the Name of Jesus, she investeth with the priestly office. She reminds them that the "weighty office and charge, to which they are called is this, to be Messengers, Watchmen, and Stewards of the Lord ; to teach and to premonish, to feed and provide for the Lord's family ; to seek for Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for his children that are in the midst of this naughty world, that they may be saved through Christ for ever." And urging them to consider earnestly the end of their Ministry, she charges it upon them to "see that they never cease their diligence, their care and

labor, until they have done all that lieth in them, according to their bounden duty, to bring all such as are or shall be committed to their charge, unto that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left among them either for error in religion, or for viciousness in life.”

We speak not, however, at present of any other part of Ministerial responsibility, than that which is involved in the duty of preaching the truth as it is in Jesus: of setting forth the word of life, in such way as the volume of revelation itself sets it forth, that it may be the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.* There are truths bearing a conspicuous part in the Gospel revelation, yea, lying almost at the very foundation of the Gospel plan, which yet are offensive to the natural heart, and arouse the prejudices, or

* Rom. i. 16.

assail the pride of unconverted man. Some of these are the corruption and entire depravity of the heart of man, the justification of the sinner by the merits of Christ, applied to his soul by faith, without works or deservings of his own, the necessity of a complete change of heart, and conversion of the soul to God, and the indispensable nature of a separation from the world, with its pomps and vanities, the mortification of the flesh with its affections and lusts, and the renunciation of the Devil and his wicked works. These truths, even if not openly opposed, are but too apt, from their offensive nature, to influence the minds of those that are charged to deliver them into a defectiveness of statement, or tameness of application. There is a natural unwillingness in the heart of the most conscientious proclaimer of the truth, to say things which are offensive either to the feelings or prejudices of those around them. And there is a natural fear

in the minds of those most anxious to bring sinners to the knowledge of salvation, lest the exhibition of offensive truths may drive further away from Christ those whom they would wish to bring into his fold. But as well to those who would object to the exhibition of the truth, as to these reasonings of his own heart, the Minister of God, in following the example of Peter, must reply, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken to you rather than to God, judge ye."—Duties are ours, and that duty is of all others to preach the truth as it is in Jesus, neither giving undue prominence to any one portion of the truth, nor, through fear of offence, keeping back one essential feature of the truth; for consequences belong to God; and he, who, when really convinced in his heart, and fully persuaded in his own mind, that this or that doctrine is the truth of God, and yet thro' fear of consequences keeps back from giv-

ing it its due portion in the whole counsel of God, is, in my judgment, in the error of Uzzah, who, as though God were unable to provide for the safety of His own ark, put forth his hand to steady it when shaken.*

But what is the lesson, which the reply of Peter on this occasion, suggests to the mind of every individual Christian. Leaving it to the consciences of his judges to decide the point he had referred to them, he proceeds to say, that he and his brethren could not but speak the things which they had heard and seen. What was the necessity that was laid upon them?—Doubtless it was principally the same, as that which St. Paul speaks of, when he says, Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel; † a necessity arising from the commission he had received; a necessity which, as we have seen, lies now upon every

* 1 Chron. xiii. 9, 10.

† 1 Cor. ix. 16.

minister of the Gospel. But there was a necessity no less strong, arising from the effects of the Gospel upon their own hearts, as individual sharers in the salvation of Jesus. The effect of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them was that the love of Christ was shed abroad in their hearts.* The love of Christ then would lead them, yea, would lay them under a necessity of aiming, for His own sake, to glorify Him, and in every possible way promote the praise of His Name. But one of the chief effects of the love of Christ is to fill the heart in which it is shed abroad with the love of all for whom Christ died. And surely the powerful influence of this affection would constrain them to speak to all around them of the things which they had experienced, the things which they had heard and seen; that, knowing Jesus to be the only way, the truth, and the life,† and knowing that

* Rom. v. 5.

† John, xiv. 6.

the salvation of their souls could only be effected by their being brought to an interest in Jesus, they might lead them to His Name, through faith in His Name.†

This faith in Christ, is, in all who are truly partakers of it, a faith working by the same love,§ which influenced the Apostles' hearts. The effect of this love will be, must be the same in all that are truly influenced by it. It will act upon all that are truly believers in Jesus, and have been made partakers of the preciousness of His salvation, in leading them to glorify Him in all things, and in every thing, to aim at setting forth His praise. This, doubtless, will be chiefly done in the whole tenor of the life, by acting, in the duties of life, upon Christian principles; exhibiting, in the charities of life, a Christian feeling; practising, in the habits of life, a Christian self-denial; and maintaining, in the relationships of life, a Christian

† Acts, iii. 16.

§ Gal. v. 6.

conversation and conduct. This silent preaching of a Christian life is certainly more powerful than all the eloquence, which words can embody in speaking the praise of Jesus, while the life is a contradiction. But where there is a Christian life, can the lips be silent in the praise of Christ? Where the sinner has found Christ precious as his reconciliation and his peace with God, can his tongue refrain from speaking of Him in whom his soul delighteth? When the heart is full of love to Christ, as it will be if the Spirit of Christ be there, will not its abundance overflow in the words of prayer and praise of Christ? If so be that the soul hath tasted that the Lord is gracious,* can it refrain from inviting fellow-sinners to come and see that the Lord is gracious, yea, to taste and see how good the Lord is?† O! surely, my Brethren, it is a sad symptom of the deficiency of the love of

* 1 Pet. ii. 3.

† Ps. xxxiv. 8,

Christ in the heart, when the name of Jesus and His salvation are seldom and reluctantly brought forward in the conversation and intercourse. Surely we need no stronger proof of the unchristian nature of worldly pleasures and worldly society, than the fact how incompatible the mention of Jesus and His salvation would be with their enjoyment. If there be a time at which the things of Jesus are unsuitable, a pursuit in which the glory of Jesus is set aside, an occupation in which the mention of His name is ill-timed and injudicious, surely those so engaged are not like servants watching [for their Lord,* they are not ready for His coming as a thief in the night,† they have not their conversation in heaven, where Christ sitteth.‡ And, surely, we can have no sadder proof of the lukewarmness of professing Christians, and of their deficiency in that love which is shed abroad in the heart

* Luke xii. 37. † 2 Pet. iii. 10. ‡ Phil. iii. 20.

by the Holy Spirit, than the reluctance and hesitation and backwardness which are so often found about speaking of the things of Christ, and engaging in serious conversation. A standard of piety is but too generally set up, which comes far, far indeed, short of the pattern either of Christ himself or of His early Church; which admits of many compromises with the world, and allows a worldliness of conduct and a style of conversation different indeed from the scriptural model. And alas! it is not alone the case with the worldly, but even with professing Christians, that the charges to such self-denial, and living by faith upon Christ, and living above the world, and doing every thing to the glory of God, and in the Name of the Lord Jesus, as the Scriptures themselves contain, are considered to have a savor of enthusiasm, and to be more speculative than practical in their nature. Yet surely we may recur to the Saviour's

declaration, whose truth every day's experience must confirm that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh;* and can we help seeing from that truth, that if the heart were really at peace with God, and by the influence of the Spirit filled with His love, we could not but speak the things which we have seen and heard, we could not but speak of Jesus and of His love. If indeed our hearts were really filled with the love of Jesus, not only would it not be an effort to speak of Him, but it would be pain to us to be silent, we should scarcely be able to refrain ourselves. It would be with us as with the prophet Jeremiah. "Because the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision daily, then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name; but His word was in mine heart, as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing

* Matt. xii. 34.

and I could not stay.”* O, my Brethren, believers in Jesus, surely there is need that the Lord revive His work among us :† that the Spirit of the Lord come, and breathe upon these dry bones, that they may live.‡ And for this He will be enquired of, He will be entreated by His people.§ Having then this confidence, that whatsoever we shall ask according to His will He heareth us,|| O, come earnestly and confidently to Him through Jesus Christ, and plead with Him for the Spirit. O, wait on Him for a large measure of His grace, that being no more conformed to the world, but being transformed by the renewing of your minds,§ and the restoration of decaying graces, ye may still follow after, if that ye may apprehend that for which also ye are apprehended of Christ Jesus.**

This reply of Peter had, however, no

* Jer. xx. 8, 9. † Hab. iii. 2. ‡ Ezek. xxxvii. 9.

† Ezek xxxvi. 37.

|| † John v. 14.

§ Rom. xii. 2.

** Phil. iii. 12.

other effect upon his hearers and judges, than to call forth the enforcement of their command by further threats. So treacherous a monitor is the mere natural conscience, when unenlightened by the Spirit of the Lord. There was an appeal made to their consciences, such as we should have supposed they could not resist. But, however conscience might have whispered of the strong ground of the Apostles' appeal, we see its effects no otherwise manifested, than in the increase of severity against the name they advocated, the addition of fiercer restrictions upon the freedom of their speech in His cause. Conscience, then, certainly, performed not her duty here; nor can it truly exercise an enlightened and spiritual judgment upon things which relate to the kingdom of God. In the forfeiture of the Divine image which was enstamped upon the newly formed man at his creation, conscience too suffered, and is no longer, until the

same image is renewed upon it by the converting grace of God, a fair reflection of the mind and will of God. This is not only so where by a course of abandoned iniquity, the conscience has been seared; but experience shews it to be the case in every unenlightened, unconverted man. It is a deficiency in the faithfulness of conscience, which, humanly speaking, makes it so difficult to convince sinners of their sin, and to make all,—the merely moral, however strictly moral, as well as the profane or lewd,—to see the need of a complete and thorough change of heart. Conscience fails in her part, and suffices not to bring home to the soul the sinful nature of every thought or desire, which wanders from God alone, and the polluting nature in the sight of God, of every the smallest sin, be it only a wandering thought. It is not until the Spirit of God begins to work, that the conviction of sin, is brought home with any power to the con-

science. Whatever strivings there may have previously been, and whatever uneasiness may have arisen from the suggestions of conscience, even in its fallen state, it is only when the Spirit of the Lord comes in His power upon the soul, that the nail is fastened as by the Master of Assemblies, and the word of wisdom is as a goad* to urge the soul from its past wanderings and neglect of God into His spiritual service. When the power of conscience, and its sufficiency for the discernment of right and wrong are asserted, the mind turns, for a sad denial of the fact, to the many deathbed scenes in which poor sinners are seen hurrying into eternity professing their readiness to depart, and willingness to meet their Judge, on the mere ground of their never having done harm to any one, and repelling all attempts to convince them of their utter sinfulness and need of a Saviour's blood and His right-

* Eceles. xii. 11.

eousness to cover them, by the insufficient plea of best endeavours, and sincerity of service. O, my Brethren! if any such are here, yet spared from the bed of death, take not such comforts as these to your bosom, but, as the first step to real peace in Jesus, take the word of God, and, with earnest prayer for the enlightening influence of the Spirit of truth, judge yourselves by it. Bring your thoughts, your motives, your words, your actions, all to this test, and see whether it will leave you one thing to rest your souls upon. O, no! it cannot; and when you find it cannot, may you be led to Jesus as the only Name whereby ye can be saved.

But while conscience is thus an insufficient guide as to our spiritual state, when unenlightened by the Spirit of God, we see how far its influence does extend in this condition. The Apostles' judges threatened them, but their own consciences did tell them, that they had no sufficient

ground for any further proceeding. They found in them nothing how they might punish them, because of the people; for from the age of the person healed, who had been above forty years a cripple, the miraculous nature of the cure was so palpable, that all men glorified God for that which was done.

They found nothing how they might punish them. They could not charge them even with a deficiency of respect for them, still less with any real offence. The enemies of Daniel were forced to give a similar testimony to his character. "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God."* Our Saviour the Lord Jesus hath denounced a woe against His disciples, when all men should speak well of them,† and declared that they were blessed, when men should persecute them.‡ St. Paul hath testified,

* Dan. vi. 5. † Luke vi. 26. ‡ Matt. v. 11.

that all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.* And St. Peter declares to his disciples, that it is even hereunto they were called.† Various have been the modes in which, from the days of Cain and Abel, he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit ‡ But O, how important is it, that the Christian should look well that he suffer not as an evildoer,|| and that he give the enemies of the truth no occasion at all against him, except concerning the law of his God. Be it reproach, be it injury, be the cross what it may, it is of all things necessary to remember, that it be borne for Christ's sake. Ye have never been called upon, my Brethren, to resist unto blood, striving against sin.¶ It is not for man to say, however, but that such a day may yet come. And assuredly, though persecution

* 2 Tim. iii. 12. † 1 Pet. ii. 21. ‡ Gal. iv. 29.

|| 1 Peter iv. 15.

¶ Heb. xii. 4.

may not be unto death, the more spiritually, and decidedly, and consistently, and after the pattern of Christ ye walk, the more will the enmity of the carnal heart be provoked. But O, aim, my Brethren, by continual supplication for the Spirit of the Lord, and communion through Him with the Father and the Son, at being so conformed to the image of Christ, that none other offence can be taken at you than on that ground ; and that, whatever times may be in store for the Church of Christ, ye may with St. Paul, and in his spirit, be ready, if such should be the Lord's will, not to be bound only, but also to die for the Name of the Lord Jesus !*

* Acts, xxi. 13.

LECTURE VI.

ACTS IV. 23—31.

AND BEING LET GO, THEY WENT TO THEIR OWN COMPANY, AND REPORTED ALL THAT THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND ELDERS HAD SAID UNTO THEM. AND WHEN THEY HEARD THAT, THEY LIFTED UP THEIR VOICE TO GOD WITH ONE ACCORD, AND SAID, LORD, THOU ART GOD, WHICH HAST MADE HEAVEN, AND EARTH, AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IN THEM IS ; WHO BY THE MOUTH OF THY SERVANT DAVID HAST SAID, WHY DID THE HEATHEN RAGE, AND THE PEOPLE IMAGINE VAIN THINGS ? THE KINGS OF THE EARTH STOOD UP, AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD, AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST. FOR OF A TRUTH AGAINST THY HOLY CHILD JESUS, WHOM THOU HAST ANOINTED, BOTH HEROD AND PONTIUS PILATE, WITH THE GENTILES, AND THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL, WERE GATHERED TOGETHER, FOR TO DO WHATSOEVER THY HAND AND THY COUNSEL DETERMINED BEFORE TO BE DONE. AND NOW, LORD, BEHOLD THEIR THREATENINGS : AND GRANT UNTO THY SERVANTS, THAT WITH ALL

BOLDNESS THEY MAY SPEAK THY WORD, BY STRETCHING FORTH THINE HAND TO HEAL; AND THAT SIGNS AND WONDERS MAY BE DONE BY THE NAME OF THY HOLY CHILD JESUS. AND WHEN THEY HAD PRAYED, THE PLACE WAS SHAKEN WHERE THEY WERE ASSEMBLED TOGETHER; AND THEY WERE ALL FILLED WITH THE HOLY GHOST, AND THEY SPAKE THE WORD OF GOD WITH BOLDNESS.

WE have been engaged, in our consideration of the previous part of this Chapter, upon a view of the Apostles' conduct, when brought before rulers and councils for the Name's sake of Jesus. We have seen, in this view, abundant proofs of the faithfulness of their Master's promises. They had no need to take thought, what they should say or what they should speak; for it had been given them in the same hour, what they should speak.* We have seen in this view abundant evidences of the change that had been effected in their own hearts, by the effusion of the Spirit upon them. For they had been raised above the fear of them that could

* Matt. x. 19.

kill the body and then had no more than they could do, and had been enabled to act with a simple reference to Him, who can destroy both soul and body in hell,* fearing above all things to deny Him,—fearing, more than all their enemies' threats, the very idea of keeping back what the Lord had bid them speak.

From this contemplation of the boldness and the firmness of the Christian character, in the presence of its foes, we turn us to a subject of yet livelier interest, to a view of the sweetness and loveliness of that character, in the midst of brethren and friends. Being let go, because their judges could find none occasion against them, the Apostles Peter and John came unto their own company. By their own company is probably meant the same band of one hundred and twenty, which had originally assembled in the upper room at Jerusalem,† after the ascension of the Lord

* Matt. x. 28. † Acts i. 13, 15.

Jesus. And there, in the midst of their own friends, their brethren and sisters in Christ Jesus, they unbosom themselves, speaking of all that had befallen them, telling of all that God had done by them, reporting all the rage and threats of man excited in opposition to the Name and cause of Jesus.

There is a peculiar satisfaction and comfort to the mind of man, in the assurance of others' sympathy. The very joys which delight us here attain a double sweetness from their being shared by those we love. The very charms of nature, which attract and fascinate the gaze of the admirer of the beauties of the Lord's hand in His works, seem to be invested with a double loveliness, if there be but a friend—a loved companion, by, to whom we can turn and say, How beautiful this is!

But if sympathy be thus the sweetener of joys, it is in a peculiar manner the solace of the heart's sorrows. Be the af-

fliction what it may, be the sorrow, which presses on the soul, so grievous as to defy the power of the sublimest motives, and the sweetest words to administer the balm of consolation ; there is in the tear of sympathy, in even the voiceless expression of real feeling for the sufferer, a comfort which the most overburdened heart must open to receive, a soothing sweetness which the most troubled spirit cannot reject. Yet there is no sympathy to be afforded by the most refined friendship, grounded upon mere human motives and cemented by mere human principles, which is to be at all compared to the fellowship of minds, whose kindred is the brotherhood of the Gospel. Judge not of this, ye who know not the Gospel in its sweetness ; whose hearts have never been engaged by the expansive power of the true principle of love to Christ, and know not the overflowings of its affections in the tender regard for all the members of

Christ, his converted brethren and friends. Judge not of this, ye who recognize not the power of the Name of Jesus, in the engagement of the feelings and affections of the soul, and have never found it to be as ointment poured forth,* captivating the senses, and imparting the sweetness of its savor to all, whatever their earthly lot, that love the Lord Jesus in sincerity. It is a sweetness which they alone can know, who, not in name and form alone, but in the true feeling of affection, recognize as brethren and sisters, all that are truly believers in the Lord Jesus. It is a fellowship which they alone can enter into and enjoy, whose fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ;† who are, not only in profession, but in spirit and truth, accustomed to come to the fulness of the Lord Jesus, and draw from Him the Spirit, and the Spirit's fruits, love, joy, peace, gentleness,

* Cant. i. 3. . . . † 1 John i. 3.

goodness and truth.* But, O! to those that have thus known Christ, as their common fountain of all light, and grace, and life, their common way of reconciliation to the Father, and of access to the storehouse of His blessings, to the treasury of that loving kindness which is better than the life itself; † there is a sweetness in mutual sympathy, there is a loveliness and a strength in the tie that binds their hearts, which the world cannot imagine when unwitnessed, cannot understand when seen. The strongest tie which binds mere earthly friends is liable to injury by every change of circumstances; yea, even a friendship such as that of David and Jonathan, if it be cemented but by human affection, can at best last no longer than the grave. But that fellowship which is in Jesus among the members of His body, is one which is cemented by the blood of Jesus, for they are built up in Him as live-

* Gal. v. 22.

† Ps. lxxiii. 3.

ly stones in the same spiritual house: † it is based upon the love of Jesus: for it is because He so loved them that they so love one another: ‡ it is as enduring as the eternity of Jesus; for as neither life nor death can separate them from His love, || so neither can it quench that love which is derived from Him, and shall have its fulness only in Him when united to Him in glory. The heart of a true believer in Jesus, however naturally prone to reserve and even to suspicion, is drawn out at once by the marks of true discipleship evidenced by any one with whom he meets: and strangers to each other in the flesh, yea, those that have never seen each other's face, know, and feel for, and sympathize with, and pray for each other, with a brotherly kindness and affection, which mere earthly friendships know not. It was to a sympathy such as this that the Apostles betook themselves, when they

† 1 Pet. ii. 5. ‡ 1 John iv. 11. || Rom. viii. 33, 39.

came and reported all that the Chief Priests and Elders had said unto them. A sympathy this was, not grounded upon mere personal attachment to them as men, not growing out of their situation as merely tried, and threatened, and imperiled men; but flowing from their common interest in the great salvation, and awakened now by their mutual anxiety for the honor of the Name of Jesus, their mutual sense of His preciousness to themselves, and their lively and longing desire, prevailing over all mere earthly motives, that nothing might impede the course of the word of God, and interfere with the healing beams of the Sun of Righteousness. A sympathy this was, not limited to a mere anxiety about the perils to which they were exposed, and to a desire of comforting them under their present trials; but manifesting itself in longings and in prayers, that above all things they might still be permitted to glorify the Name of Christ,

whether it were by life or by death, and in desires that whatever might be their temporal portion, whatever the cup that they must drink, the baptism they must be baptized with, they might be sustained by the arm and comforted by the presence of the Lord.

In the manifestation of this sympathy, when their trials had been reported, we have a sweet evidence of a Christian spirit. They lifted up their voices with one accord, in prayer to God. They spent not their time in mere condolences with their threatened brethren ; they let not their sympathies escape in the mere expressions of fellow-feeling ; but they came with them at once to God, they joined with them at once and with one accord in referring all their trials to Him, who knew exactly what they needed and had in Himself all the supplies of grace, of comfort and of strength, upon which they could desire to draw. And this we remark to

be the distinguishing feature of true Christian sympathy, or indeed of the fellowship of Christian minds, whether in circumstances that call for sympathy or not, that those who are united by it delight in bearing each other to the throne of grace, and in making every occasion of at all an unusual character in their Christian course, a subject of united and mutual supplications before God. To those with whom religion is a thing of form, there are set times and seasons of prayer, on which indeed they make a conscience of not intrenching, but beyond which they see danger of being carried away by feelings, and becoming mere visionaries. Thus they have their stated times of private devotion, their regular seasons of family worship, their set attendances upon public prayer. These they like not to be encroached upon ; but having no real life in these, they are not led out into more frequent exercises of devotion. But to those with

whom religion is a thing of life, engaging their affections, and animating their lives, it is a joy and privilege to make every providential allotment, every apparent difficulty in their course, as well as every unexpected favour, an occasion of uniting with those around them in supplications with thanksgiving to the God and Father of all blessings in Christ Jesus. And it is sweet to the believer in Jesus, in the exercise of this Christian sympathy, to make every thing in which the Lord's hand is seen, an occasion of joining with those of his own company, the disciples of the same Saviour, the brethren and sisters of the same Lord, and lifting up their voices with one accord in accents of prayer and praise.

It is, my Brethren, the charge of the Lord Jesus to His disciples, to pray always.* St. Paul repeats the charge to pray without ceasing,† and bids his con-

* Luke xviii. 1.

† 1 Thess. v. 17.

verts in every thing by prayer and supplication to let their requests be made known to God.* The possibility of a literal compliance with these charges, when the heart is really engaged for God, is much greater than the worldly are willing to imagine. A soul determined rather to make opportunities of prayer, whether private or social, than to admit every excuse, which a supposed inappropriateness of season or of circumstances may suggest, will find times and occasions of prayer, which will no doubt shock the formal and worldly as hypocritical and over-righteous and ill-timed; but which will be truly sweet to the soul, accustomed thus to derive all its strength, and to seek all its warmth and life in direct and constant communication with the fountain of them all.

We do not find in the narrative any thing to favour the idea of there having been, as is supposed, any miraculous im-

* Phil. iv. 6.

pulse, leading the whole company to break forth simultaneously in the very same words of prayer. Nor, we must confess, does there appear any sanction for the opinion, that they used on this occasion a precomposed form. The unanimity, we should suppose, was rather seen in the immediate manifestation of a desire to commit the matter in prayer to God, and in the heartiness of the response, by which the petition of some one of the number was adopted by the rest. It does not appear to have been an occasion of public worship; but one of social intercourse and communion with the Lord and with one another. In this intercourse, they followed at once the impulse made upon renewed minds by the ordinary operations of the Holy Spirit, being led by His grace at once to seek the face of Him whose help they needed. To suppose that on all these occasions the Apostles and their company acted under miraculous influ-

ence, would be to deprive believers in **Jesus** in the present day of much of the effect of their example.

We may derive from a consideration of the petition with which they now approached the throne of grace, some useful instruction.

Let us observe, first, the invocation of the Deity with which their prayer begins. "Lord! thou art God, which hast made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that in them is." A recognition such as this of the supremacy of God, and of His creating and preserving power, is at all times desirable, as an indication of the reverence and awe with which a creature draws nigh from such an infinite distance to address the Omnipotent Creator. But there are times, and those times of trouble, in which such a recognition of the overruling power of the Lord's providence is not merely expressive of awe and reverence for the Lord, but is peculiarly a source of

comfort to the soul. It is comforting to know when earthly comforts fail, and to express the knowledge, that their failure comes from the ordinance of the sovereign Lord, who withdraws such sources of consolation that we may appreciate more fully the riches that are in Him. It is comforting, when opposition or persecutions assail us from without, to know and to acknowledge the overruling power of God, by whom alone such things are permitted, by whom they are kept in check, by whom they are turned to work together for good to those that love God,* by whom they all, when they have worked His will, shall be put to flight. In many a trouble, in many a tribulation, in opposition, even in persecution, the remembrance that **THE LORD REIGNETH**,† and that greater is He that is for us than the enemies, spiritual or bodily, that can be against us,‡ is a comfort, a stay, a rock, and tower of defence

* Rom. viii. 23. † Ps. cxviii. 1. ‡ 1 John, iv. 4.

to the soul. Thus did they,—thus may every believer in Jesus, approach the Lord, seeing His sovereign power engaged for their protection and final conquest over all their enemies.

Let us notice, secondly, the effect of the Spirit's grace upon their minds, visible in His having enlightened them to perceive and apply to their present circumstances those prophecies and promises, with regard to whose reference to the Christ they were before as much in the dark as their unbelieving brethren. That same vail, which is still upon the hearts of the Jews in reading the Old Testament Scriptures,* clouded their view also of the meaning of the prophecies and types of that sacred Volume, until the illumination of the Spirit removed it ; for they understood not these things which the prophets had spoken at the first, but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that

* 2 Cor. iii. 15.

these things were written of **Him**, and that they had done these things unto **Him**.* We find now, upon all occasions, a readiness of application of the sacred words of the prophets, which, as distinguished from their former dulness, can only be accounted for by the promise made of old, **Thy children shall be all taught of God**,† and by the later declaration of the **Lord Himself**, **When He the Spirit of truth is come, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance.**‡

The application which they make of the words of **David** is important, not alone as shewing us the scripture in which they found present comfort, but also as giving us authority to see in many other portions of the **Psalms**, which refer to the **Lord's Anointed**, a distinct relation to the **Christ of God**, the **Holy child Jesus**. **He** was the **Anointed** against whom the

* John xii. 16. † Is. liv. 13. ‡ Matt. xiv. 26.

kings of the earth stood up and the rulers took counsel together,* reconciling their former differences, as Herod and Pilate did, over the blood as it were of an innocent victim, and uniting their vain rage, to bring upon themselves the guilt of what without the permission of the Lord they were unable to effect, but what the hand and counsel of the Lord had determined before should be done.† He is the Anointed, of whom in many portions of that precious book the Royal Psalmist speaks, pointing our eyes continually to the Christ, as His own stay and shield,—marking in prophetic words the dealings both of God and man with Him the Christ, as the Anointed Mediator, Prophet, Priest, and King of His people,—and detailing most precious instances of spiritual experience, found in the intercourse of his own soul with the Lord's Anointed, such as the most advanced and enlighten-

* Ps. ii. 2.

† Acts iv. 23.

ed child of God may find it a high privilege to be able to adopt as his own. Their use of these words of David is also important, as conveying to every believer, that suffers in that way for the Name's sake of Christ, the consolation which they derived from it. They saw that what had befallen the Apostles was a part of that one work of suffering, which Christ Himself underwent in His own body, and still does in His suffering members. Thus the Saviour himself addressed Saul, whose persecuting career began not till after the Lord was ascended into the heavens, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ?* And sweet indeed is the consolation thus afforded to the tried follower of Christ, to know that in all his afflictions he is suffering with Christ ; for it is a faithful saying, If we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him : if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.†

* Acts, ix. 4.

†2 Tim. ii. 11, 12.

But let us, as we shall have time, notice, thirdly, the object of their prayer. We do not then find them, as we might at first thought have imagined, supplicating their Lord's protection against the dangers that threatened them. We do not find them pleading earnestly with the Lord to turn back the rage of their enemies upon themselves; nor even to manifest His power in frustrating the purposes of wrath, which men were forming against the preachers of the Name of Christ. Nay; we find them leaving all these things to God, content either to be full or to be hungry, to abound or suffer need,* yes, and now really willing, if the Lord willed it, both to be bound and suffer death for His Name's sake; but we hear their cry ascend with one accord to God, that He would be pleased to grant them an increase of boldness in speaking His word, and manifest Himself by stretching forth

* Phil. iv. 12.

His hand, not to consume their enemies, as some of them had before asked permission to pray,* but to heal the diseases of their troubled brethren, to heal the rankling wounds of their enemies' malicious spirits, to heal the smitten consciences of those, to whom a sense of guilt in crucifying the Lord of glory might be brought home. Yea, still we hear them cry unto the Lord, not that honor might be put upon themselves, but that the Name of Jesus might still be magnified, and that signs and wonders might yet accompany the proclamation of that Name.

Here then, my Brethren! we have a view of the object which is above all others dear to the Christian's heart, dearer than his own advancement, dearer than his own exemption from suffering or sorrow,—the honor of the Name of Christ, and the increase of His Kingdom. Let me ask you, Brethren! how dear is this object

* Luke ix. 54.

to you ? What evidence do ye thus give of the mind of Christ dwelling in the disciples of Christ ? O ! search and look, my Brethren ! that you may know that which is of all things most important to know, whether ye belong to Christ or no !

And let us lastly observe the answer to their petitions. “ The place was shaken where they were assembled together : and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and spake the word of God with boldness.” It appears probable, that there was some sensible manifestation of the Spirit upon this occasion, bearing the Lord’s answer not to their hearts only but to their outward senses also ; that as they were gifted with the power of speaking every language on the day of Pentecost, so now by some similar communication, not probably of equally wonderful character, they were endowed with an additional degree of boldness in using those tongues to the glory of the Lord. Yet, surely,

the answer which they thus received, miraculous as was its nature, conveys to us the assurance that the prayer of faith shall enter into the ears of the Lord of Hosts ; and that, as the glory of His Son is so precious to Him, they who particularly aim in their petitions at the glory of the Saviour shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of their salvation.* Yes! this is the confidence that we of the present day, as well as the immediate followers of the Saviour, may have in God, that if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us.†

What a field for contemplation is thus opened before us, in the view of the Lord's manner of answering the prayers of His people that call upon Him. The manner is as various as is the variety of circumstances, of habits of mind, of necessities, under which petitions ascend to

* Ps. xxiv. 5.

† 1 John v. 14.

His throne. But the matter of importance is, Brethren! do we know the fact,— have we ever had personal experience in our own case, that the Lord of Hosts is a prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God: What do ye, my Brethren! know of Him as such? Have ye ever known the sweet privilege of communion with Him; and found Him pitiful to you, as a father pitieth His children,* and heard His voice, in the dealings of His providence or of His grace, speaking to your souls? Have ye ever known what it is to commit all things to Him, to cast all your care upon Him, knowing that He careth for you;† and seeking only that Christ may be magnified in you in whatever way He pleases, have ye known the sweetness of an answer from the Lord, filling you with the Spirit, and giving you increased boldness in the faith?

Brethren! these are privileges of the

* Ps. ciii. 13.

† 1 Pet. v. 7.

true believer, the self-denying, Christ-exalting disciple of the Cross. O, may the Lord give those that have enjoyed them grace to know and prize them more and more ; may He this day commence the work of such grace in all that have not yet been partakers of it, for the glory of the precious Name whereby alone we must be saved, the Name of JESUS.

LECTURE VII.

ACTS IV. 32-37.

AND THE MULTITUDE OF THEM THAT BELIEVED WERE OF ONE HEART AND OF ONE SOUL: NEITHER SAID ANY OF THEM THAT OUGHT OF THE THINGS WHICH HE POSSESSED WAS HIS OWN; BUT THEY HAD ALL THINGS COMMON. AND WITH GREAT POWER GAVE THE APOSTLES WITNESS OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD JESUS: AND GREAT GRACE WAS UPON THEM ALL. NEITHER WAS THERE ANY AMONG THEM THAT LACKED: FOR AS MANY AS WERE POSSESSORS OF LANDS OR HOUSES SOLD THEM, AND BROUGHT THE PRICES OF THE THINGS THAT WERE SOLD, AND LAID THEM DOWN AT THE APOSTLES' FEET: AND DISTRIBUTION WAS MADE UNTO EVERY MAN ACCORDING AS HE HAD NEED. AND Joses, WHO BY THE APOSTLES WAS SURNAMED BARNABAS, (WHICH IS, BEING INTERPRETED, THE SON OF CONSOLATION,) A LEVITE, AND OF THE COUNTRY OF CYPRUS, HAVING LAND, SOLD IT, AND BROUGHT THE MONEY, AND LAID IT AT THE APOSTLES' FEET.

IN the portion of this sacred narrative which was made the subject of our last consideration, we traced the Apostles from their public exhibition of the principles of the Gospel in the face of opposition and danger, to the sweetness of their retired communion with their great Head and with one another. We were permitted to gaze on them, as in their separation from the noise and tumult and hatred of the world they freely and unrestrainedly held converse with one another, and, in a sense of the trying circumstances in which they were placed, approached with reverence and awe, and yet with childlike confidence and love, the mercy seat of grace. It was surely a grateful contemplation to behold these tried men mingling their voices with their brethren in one harmonious accord of prayer to God, and to witness the tenderness of Christian sympathy with which as disciples of the same Saviour, children of the same Father, filled with

the same Spirit, sharing the same trials, and travelling to the same home, they bore one another's burdens, and so fulfilled the law of Christ.*

But there is now presented to our eyes a wider and more extensive contemplation still. It might have been that in the sympathy and brotherly affection, with which the little band of an hundred and twenty regarded their tried brethren Peter and John, there was much that might be supposed to be mere human feeling mingled up. They had now for some two or three years been together followers of the Lord Jesus: they had together been the subjects of His tender reproof, His gentle admonition, His heavenly teaching: they had together been witnesses of, and we may suppose, been sharers in the contempt and scorn with which the Pharisees regarded Him, and all that believed on Him, and in the penury and the hardship of His suf-

* Gal. vi. 2.

fering lot, when he had not where to lay His head ; they had together shrunk from that fearful scene, in which the Lord was delivered into the hands of wicked men ; had together shared the comfort of His gracious message that they should go before Him to Galilee ; had together enjoyed those blessed manifestations of His presence after His resurrection, in which He breathed peace upon them ; and together had seen His precious form vanishing in the cloud, as He returned with the nature He had redeemed to His Father's throne.

Such a community of sorrow and of joy, of suffering and of exaltation, might well indeed be supposed to have bound their hearts to one another in the strongest ties. Yet when we look to the more extensive influence of the same principle of love, and perceive it to have its operation, not alone upon the hearts of a few tried and trusted companions and friends,

but upon the affections of a multitude, comprising thousands in its reckoning, we are surely constrained to feel, that it was no mere human principle which operated in such a manner, but that the Spirit of Jesus had been at work, impressing the command of Jesus upon the hearts of those whom He had drawn to the Name of Jesus, and producing the testimony of discipleship of which the Lord had spoken, when He said, By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another.* It was surely a blessed testimony to the power of Divine grace, and the truth of the religion of Christ Jesus, that the multitude of them that believed in His Name were of one heart, and of one soul. The last account we had of the numbers of the believers presented us an aggregate of five thousand men† without reckoning their families. And to look from the professedly Christi-

* John xiii. 35.

† Acts iv. 4.

an world of the present day back to those times, doth it not seem more extraordinary than any of the miraculous exertions of Divine power upon the bodies of the diseased, that such a multitude as that, drawn from various grades, and situations, and circumstances, comprising persons of so many different nations, professions, and pursuits, was knit together as one man,—one in their love for God, one in their affection for one another, one in the aim of their life, one in the hope of their calling, one in the unanimity of their purpose, one in the prospect of their home.

If this picture of unanimity of purpose, of feeling, and of affection were that which was generally presented by the early Church, well might it indeed draw forth the heathen's exclamation, "See how these Christians love one another!" Ob! how much have we to mourn, that the face of what is called the Christian world presents so different an aspect now!

And yet should we take as the distinctive limits of the Christian world, not the geographical boundaries of the lands to which the Gospel of Christ Jesus has been brought, nor even the palings of the visible communions of what profess to be Christian Churches, but the marks which Christ Jesus has himself set up as distinguishing His disciples, a lively faith in Him, producing love to Him, denial of self, and separation from the world, as its true fruits, it may be hoped and trusted that the spirit of the Gospel, as evidenced in the conduct of the early Church, may still be found largely to prevail. It ought not to be so great matter of surprise, that when the large portion of the world have no more of Christianity than the form, and have undergone no change which distinguishes them from their fellow-creatures of two thousand years ago, but a change of name,—being called Christians instead of heathens, and having the form of

Christian godliness without the power,*— they should be so little distinguished by that which is the result only of the active influence of the Spirit of Christ upon the heart, a love for the brethren and followers of Christ. For we repeat our belief, that it will still be found, that even those who conscientiously differ on some points of divine truth, and yet hold the great essentials of the Gospel revelation, not as matters of speculative belief, but of practical influence upon their hearts, will be found to hold their differences in a spirit of love; and, in the great point of the increase of the Lord's kingdom in the salvation of souls, they will be still as of one heart and soul in the singleness of their pursuit of the Lord's glory, the similarity of their views of Christ and dependance upon His blood and righteousness, and their anxiety to bring all to whom God gives them oppor-

* 2 Tim. iii. 5.

tunity, to the knowledge and love of the same Saviour.

Yet, Brethren, however this may be as to the matter of fact, there cannot be a question of the obligation, which both the precept of Jesus and the example of those who were first and most purely influenced by His precepts lay upon all that now profess and call themselves Christians, for the cultivation of such a spirit of universal charity towards all mankind, and especially of such spiritual love and union with those who are heirs with them of the grace of life,* and have obtained the like precious faith with themselves, through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.† No change of circumstances, no comparison of condition which can be instituted between the first ages of Christianity and the present day, can negative or at all diminish the force of the Saviour's test of His

* 1 Pet. iii. 7. † 2 Pet. i. 1.

followers,—“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one towards another;” nor the weight of that commandment, which St. John states himself to have received from Him, that “he which loveth God should love his brother also.”* The family of the brethren and sisters of Christ Jesus is **but** one, and the family badge is not, we are constrained to believe, any difference of form, or distinction of denomination, **but** the love of Jesus, and the single-hearted desire of His glory, shewn in humility of spirit, in the control of the evil tempers, the mortification of the flesh, and the active devotion of body, soul, and spirit, as opportunity is permitted, to the praise and service of the Lord: and where that badge is found, there will the heart of the true Christian be drawn out in love, and tenderness, and affection, and sympathy, as towards a member of the same family, a

* 1 John, iv. 21.

pilgrim in the same wilderness, a sharer in the same trials, and a fellow-heir of the same glorious home.

O! apply then to yourselves, my Brethren, the test which the words of John supply you, We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.* Have ye this love for all your fellow-Christians? Are your hearts thus drawn out towards all that give evidence that they are the children of God? Are your affections interested in all that shew that they love the Lord Jesus, and seek His glory, and desire His praise, and are hastening towards His kingdom? It is an easy thing to say we wish for the welfare of all our fellow-beings; but does your conduct shew that your ruling principle is that love to Christ, which manifests itself in a spiritual union of heart and soul with all that shew they love Him too? O, Brethren! the time is short; each day re-

* 1 John, iii. 14.

minds us as it passes, how short the time is, and how needful it is, as we would be found ready to meet and welcome the **Lord Jesus**, to cultivate that spirit of love which we know characterizes the many mansions of our **Father's** house, and which constitutes so large a part of the operations of **His** grace, who maketh **His** disciples meet for the enjoyment, as **He** has previously given them a title to the possession, of the inheritance of the saints in light.

The proof which these early disciples gave of the sincerity of their profession, and of the reality of their love for all the brethren in **Christ Jesus**, is one which cannot be mistaken. "Neither said any of them, that aught of the things that he possessed was his own, but they had all things common; neither was there any among them that lacked; for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the

Apostles' feet ; and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." A demand of conduct such as this it was, which sent away grieved the young ruler that came to Jesus, desiring to know what good thing he should do that he might inherit eternal life.* And from his day to the present, among the greatest enemies which vital godliness has to contend against in its appeals to the heart of man, is found pre-eminent the love of money, the root of all evil,† the love of the possessions, the comforts, the enjoyments, the indulgences, the station, and the importance in the world, which attend the presence of wealth. It is not alone he, whom even the world stigmatizes as a miser, with whose sordid love of the mere dust of the earth the principles of the Gospel have to contend, but with the love of wealth in those of its forms, which

* Luke xviii. 18.

† 1 Tim. vi. 10.

are by the world considered in many respects praiseworthy, and to some of which Satan, transformed into an angel of light, brings an It is written, as their sanction.

When the Gospel triumphs over such an enemy as this, it brings with it at once its plainest credentials as being the power of God. It shews the energy of the Divine Spirit, introducing and impressing the saving doctrine of the cross of Christ upon the heart, that cross by which the world is crucified to the believer and he unto the world,* when the sinner is thus convinced of the utter uselessness of present things, except as they may be employed for the Lord's glory, and is so awakened to a sense of his responsibility to God, as regards the possessions with which he has been endowed, as to say and feel that none of the things which he has are his own, but are at the very present moment

* Gal. vi. 14.

the Lord's, and to be occupied till He cometh, with a simple reference to His Name, and the benefit of His creatures. The triumph of the principles of the Gospel over that love of ease, and indulgence of pride, and spirit of independence, as it is called, and consideration of self and selfish interests and pursuits, which are comprised in or connected with the love of money, is one of the greatest which the Spirit of God empowers them to achieve. For whether or not the lust of acquisition be naturally a strong principle in the heart, abstractedly considered, we see the attainment of wealth connected with so many things that are highly esteemed and honorable in the sight of men, and with so many that are fascinating to the possessor himself, that he is not easily convinced of the unprofitableness of its possession, nor induced truly to estimate it simply in comparison with the everlasting value of the soul. And while the

prosperous enjoyment of wealth with its attendant advantages continues, it is not easy to find the soul in that state of dissatisfaction with present things, and that sense of the vanity of all earthly possessions, to which the offer of a sympathizing Friend, having the fulness of true riches in Himself, and ready to share all the wearinesses and irksomeness and distresses of the soul, is so sweetly suited. It is only of the Lord, indeed, to awaken in the soul that sense of need, which every thing around would combine to quiet and repress, and to deepen its influence to such an extent, that nothing but the fulness of Jesus, can be found adequately to supply it. It is, indeed, only of the Spirit of the Lord to take of the things of Jesus and shew them to the soul, as of such surpassing sweetness and value, that every thing earthly loses its value by comparison; and to exhibit them as of such transcendent glory, that every thing of the

present world loses its glory, by reason of the glory that excelleth.*

The instances which are here recorded of the influence of this principle upon the hearts of the early believers in the Gospel, and of its triumph over the love of their possessions, were confessedly of an extraordinary character. They were instances arising from the necessity of the times, growing out of the peculiar circumstances of the Church, and connected with its unity of situation, as well as of heart and soul. It was one Church, having no one difference in any particular, and all contained within the limits of one city.

A thing, then, which is evidently of merely temporary necessity, and connected with the exigencies of peculiar times, may not be drawn into an example of general obligation, or universal force. But we may repeat the remark, that while the

* 2 Cor. iii. 10.

development of the principle is of a peculiar nature, and so the example to be drawn from the exact circumstances in which it was exhibited, is of merely temporary and local force; yet the principle itself is the same throughout all ages, a leading principle of Gospel conduct. For as the test of discipleship, which we have before remarked upon, is of universal force, so that still all men may know the disciples of Jesus, by the love they bear to one another, so is the effect of that love upon the heart of a universal character, not venting itself in mere expressions of good will, and like the profitless faith of which St. James speaks, saying to the poor and needy, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled, while yet it gives not those things which are needful to the suffering body;* but evidencing itself in the cheerful and ready bestowal according to the ability, and from a true princi-

* James ii. 16.

ple of love to Christ, of those things which any man may need. O, let it be asked you, Brethren ! to what extent this evidence of the love of Christ in the heart, leading it out to the love of the poorer brethren and sisters of Jesus, is found in you ? O, let it be asked you, how far in this one particular, ye show that ye are the disciples of Christ ? Do ye feel and know that ye are not your own, but have been bought with a price,* and that now yourselves, your souls and bodies, your possessions and goods, your time and talents, all belong by a double right to Him, and that ye are bound to spend and be spent in His service and glory ? Do ye not count your lives dear to yourselves, so that ye may but be found in Jesus ; † and as all that a man hath he will give for his life, ‡ do ye show, that ye love not your lives more than Christ, by manifesting that ye deem nothing else too precious to

* 1 Cor. v. 20. † Acts, xx. 24. ‡ Job, ii. 4.

be given up for **Him**, and least of all can hold back from **Him** or from **His** people, those present things with which **His** hand has for a time entrusted you?

What a satisfaction and comfort were derived to the **Apostles'** minds, from the contemplation of the great success with which the power of the **Spirit** had attended their words, and made them effectual to the conversion of souls! For while the presence or absence of success, in the application of the **Lord's** word to the conscience, is no sure test of the faithfulness of the exhibition of the truth, and it may often please the **Lord** to try **His** most faithful ministers by withholding from them the knowledge of their success, that **He** may humble them and prove them whether they will still proclaim the power of the **Name of Jesus** or no; yet, can it be that a heart touched with a sense of the love of **Jesus**, and warmed with a desire for **His** sake of bringing souls to **Him**,

can but be animated in the praise of God, and quickened to increased diligence, and care, and labour, and faithfulness, by seeing the fruits of the truth of God daily ripening around them. Nay, surely the precious testimony on which we have just been dwelling, by which the Lord signified His approval of their labours,—the testimony they had to the power of the Gospel, in the spirit of harmony and love it had produced in so great and mixed a multitude, and in the disinterestedness and self-denial, by which the sincerity of their love for Christ and for one another was proved, was a means by which the Spirit of truth animated their souls, so that with great power, they gave witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Oh, with what comfort might they appeal, for evidences of the power of the resurrection upon the hearts of sinners, to the changed lives, and heavenly conversation, and self-

renouncing conduct of those, to whom the Lord had already blessed their word. And with what confidence could they urge those that had already tasted that the Lord is gracious to frequent, yea, unceasing applications to the fountain of all grace and light and life, through Him who had been raised from the dead, and was now at the right hand of God, who also made intercession for them.*

The connection, too, between the exercise of faith and the bestowal of the Lord's grace is sweetly alluded to. The Apostles gave witness with great power of the resurrection of Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. The Lord gave them the power of testifying for Jesus,—they exercised the power so given them in bearing witness of Him,—and, as it were in consequence of their faithfulness, great grace was upon them. It is thus

* Rom. viii. 34.

that the Lord declares He will give double.† He gives the grace to seek Him : and, when that grace is exercised, and the soul cometh seeking Him, behold, He cometh forth to meet it, and to give it renewed grace in communion with Himself. So gracious is the Lord, so truly tender, merciful, and loving. O, my Brethren ! what do ye know of Him ? What have ye ever experienced of this tenderness and grace ? What communion have ye ever enjoyed with Him, through the blessed Spirit of His dear Son ?

Behold ! He sitteth still upon a throne of grace. The mercy-seat before Him is sprinkled with the blood of the Atonement. The risen Jesus stands there beside the throne to bid you welcome, and introduce you to His Father. The Father loveth Him, and hath put all things in His hand* for you. O ! then, come to Him, wait upon

† Zec. ix. 12.

* John iii. 35,

Him, and let your souls go forth upon Him; for He is the light and salvation of His people, their fortress, their shield and buckler, their tower of defence, their refuge and their Rock.

The two concluding verses of this chapter might more appropriately have been made the commencement of the next, as they record a fact of Joses, surnamed Barnabas, which is placed in evident contrast with the conduct of the wretched Ananias. Their consideration, then, must be postponed till such time as the Providence of God may permit me to resume the consideration of the Acts of the Apostles, should the Lord design such a time ever to arrive to me. We are charged always to bear in mind that we know not what a day may bring forth.* And, lest we should be in danger of forgetting it, the Lord has largely taught us of late the du-

* Prov, xxvii. 1.

ty of referring to **His** will even the designs we have for the morrow's occupation. Before another year shall have passed away then, how many of us here present, shall be summoned to our account? Which of us, you or **I**, shall be called away from the dim vision of faith to the awful realities of an eternal scene? Whether it be you or **I**, my Brethren, these feeble exhibitions of the truth of God will be among the things for which we must both give an account. If they have been in any way profitable to you, to the **Lord** be all the glory now, as **He** shall have it for ever. To **His** praise **I** desire to ascribe the privilege **I** have enjoyed, in adding these to the ordinary opportunities of exhibiting the Name of Jesus.

Brethren! the time is short! May the contemplation of the wonderful events which this week recalls to our remembrance be blest to your souls; that

when the time shall come to you, ye may be found in Christ, justified by His blood, sanctified by His Spirit, walking in His love, and made meet for the inheritance He has provided you. May ye be dead with Christ, that ye may live with Him for ever.*

* 2 Tim. ii. 11.

