

## JANUARY

### Day 1

#### *A Morning Prayer*

*Heavenly Father, we implore your grace and protection for this new year that is now upon us. Keep us temperate in our food and drink, and diligent in our various callings. Grant us patience under any affliction that you shall see fit to lay on us as well as minds content with our present condition. Give us grace to be just and upright in all our dealings, quiet and peaceable, full of compassion and ready to do good to all men according to our abilities and opportunities. We humbly ask all these through the merits and mediation of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.*

### A NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION

Matthew Henry

***"For I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day." (2 Timothy 1:12)***

Firmly believing that my times are in God's hand, I here submit myself and all my affairs for the ensuing year to the wise and gracious disposal of the divine providence. Whether God appoint for me health or sickness, peace or trouble, comforts or crosses, life or death, his holy will be done.

All my time, strength, and service, I devote to the honor of the Lord Jesus; my studies and all my ministerial labors, and even my common actions. It is my earnest expectation, hope, and desire, my constant aim and endeavor, that Jesus Christ may be magnified in my body. In everything wherein I have to do with God, my entire dependence is upon Jesus Christ for strength and righteousness. And whatever I do in word or deed, I desire to do all in his name, to make him my Alpha and Omega. I have all by him, and I would use all for him.

If this should prove a year of affliction, a sorrowful year upon my account, I will fetch all my supports and comforts from the Lord Jesus and stay myself upon him, his everlasting consolations, and the good hope I have in him through grace. And if it should be my dying year, my times are in the hand of the Lord Jesus. And with a humble reliance upon his mediation, I would venture into another world looking for the blessed hope. Dying as well as living, Jesus Christ will, I trust, be gain and advantage to me.

Oh, that the grace of God may be sufficient for me, to keep in me always a humble sense of my own unworthiness, weakness, folly, and infirmity, together with a humble dependence upon the Lord Jesus Christ for both righteousness and strength.

*The Life of Matthew Henry and the Concise Commentary on the Gospels*

## Day 2

### *A Morning Prayer*

*O God most high and holy, we come into your presence confessing that our offenses are many. Cleanse us, we pray, and take away every prejudice that hinders us from a clear view of ourselves. Your word declares that the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Yet how blind we are to our own shortcomings and how quick to detect the shortcomings of others. Let Jesus be our example, and lead us in his steps. Give us his meekness and patience, his endurance, and his faithfulness even unto death. Whatever comes our way, be it evil or good, suffering or joy, let us praise your name and acknowledge your providence working for us. And with our confidence anchored in you, we shall walk through the valley of the shadow of death fearing no evil. Hear us for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

### **THE UNKNOWN TOMORROW**

**Alexander Maclaren**

***"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons,  
which the Father has put in His own power."***

**Acts 1:7**

We are standing now at the beginning of a New Year, and the influence of the season is felt in some degree by us all. Not for the sake of repressing any wise forecasting which has for its object our preparation for probable duties and exigencies; not for the purpose of repressing that trustful anticipation which, building on our past time and on God's eternity, confronts the future with calm confidence; not for the sake of discouraging that pensive and softened mood which if it does nothing more, at least delivers us for a moment from the tyrannous power of the present, do we turn to these words now; but that we may together consider how much they contain of cheer and encouragement, of stimulus to our duty, and of calming for our hearts in the prospect of a New Year. They teach us the limits of our care for the future, as they give us the limits of our knowledge of it. They teach us the best remedies for all anxiety, the great thoughts that tranquilize us in our ignorance -- that all is in God's merciful hand, and that whatever may come we have a divine power which will fit us for it. And they bid us anticipate our work and do it as the best counterpoise for all vain curiosity about what may be coming on the earth.

#### I. The narrow limits of our knowledge of the future.

We are quite sure that we shall die. We are sure that a mingled web of joy and sorrow, light shot with dark, will be unrolled before us. But of anything more we are really ignorant. We know that certainly the great majority of us will be alive at the close of this New Year, but who will be the exceptions? A great many of us, especially those of us who are in the monotonous stretch of middle life, will go on substantially as we have been going on for years past with our ordinary duties, joys, sorrow, cares. But to some of us, in all probability, this year holds some great change which may darken all our days or brighten

them. In all our forward-looking there ever remains an element of uncertainty. The future confronts us like some statue beneath its canvas covering. Rolling mists hide it all, except here and there a peak. . . .

Then this being so, what is the wise course of conduct? Not a confident reckoning on tomorrow. There is nothing elevating in anticipation which paints the blank surface of the future with the same earthly colors as dye the present. There is no more complete waste of time than that. Nor is proud self-confidence any wiser, which jauntily takes for granted that "tomorrow will be as this day." The conceit that things are to go on as they have been fools men into a dream of permanence which has no basis. Nor is the fearful apprehension of evil any wiser. How many people spoil the present gladness with thoughts of future sorrow and cannot enjoy the blessedness of united love for thinking of separation!

In brief, it is wise to be but little concerned with the future except in the way of taking reasonable precautions to prepare for its probabilities [and] to fit ourselves for its duties.

One future we may contemplate. Our fault is not that we look forward but that we do not look far enough forward. Why trouble with the world when we have heaven? Why look along the low level among the mists of earth and forests and swamps when we can see the road climbing to the heights? Why be anxious about what three hundred and sixty-five days may bring when we know what Eternity will bring? Why divert our God-given faculty of hope from its true object? Why torment ourselves with casting the fashion of uncertain evils when we can enter into the great peace of looking for "that blessed Hope"?

## II. The safe Hands which keep the future.

We have not to depend upon an impersonal Fate, nor upon a wild whirl of Chance, nor upon "laws of averages," "natural laws," "tendencies" and "spirit of the age," nor even on a theistic Providence; but [we can depend] upon a Father who holds all things "in His own power" and wields all for us. So will not our way be made right? Whatever the future may bring, it will be loving, paternal discipline. He shapes it all and keeps it in His hands. Why should we be anxious? That great name of "Father" binds Him to tender, wise, disciplinary dealing and should move us to calm and happy trust.

## III. The sufficient strength to face the future.

"The power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you" is promised here to the disciples for a specific purpose. But it is promised and given to us all through Christ, if we will only take it. And in Him we shall be ready for all the future. The Spirit of God is the true Interpreter of Providence. He calms our nature and enlightens our understanding to grasp the meaning of all our experiences. The Spirit makes joy more blessed by keeping us from undue absorption in it. The Spirit is the Comforter. The Spirit fits us for duty. So be quite sure that nothing will come to you in your earthly future which He does not Himself accompany to interpret it and to make it pure blessing.

## IV. The practical duty in view of the future.

(1) The great thing we ought to look to in the future is our work. Not what we shall enjoy or what we shall endure, but what we shall do. This is healthful and calming.

(2) The great remedy for morbid anticipation lies in regarding life as the opportunity for service. Never mind about the future; let it take care of itself. Work! That clears away cobwebs from our brains, as when a man wakes from troubled dreams to hear "the sweep of scythe in morning dew," and the shout of the peasant as he trudges to his task, and the lowing of the cattle, and the clink of the hammer.

(3) The great work we have to do in the future is to be witnesses for Christ. This is the meaning of all life. We can do it in joy and in sorrow, and we shall bear a charmed life till it be done. So the words of the text are a promise of preservation.

Then, dear brethren, how do you stand confronting that Unknown? How can you face it without going mad unless you know God and trust Him as your Father through Christ? If you do, you need have no fear. Tomorrow lies all dim and strange before you, but His gentle and strong hand is working in the darkness and He will shape it right. He will fit you to bear it all. If you regard it as your supreme duty and highest honor to be Christ's witness, you will be kept safe, "delivered out of the mouth of the lion," that by you "the preaching may be fully known." If not, how dreary is that future to you, "all dim and cheerless like a rainy sea" from which wild shapes may come up and devour you! Love and friendship will pass, honor and strength will fail, life will ebb away, and of all that once stretched before you nothing will be left but one little strip of sand fast jellying with the tide beneath your feet, and before you a wild unlighted ocean!

*Expositions of Holy Scripture*

### Day 3

#### A Morning Prayer

*O merciful Lord God, we beseech you to hear us now as we begin another year. Enable us to pray earnestly so that we may receive effectually and thereby gain a blessing. Give us that persevering determination of Jacob when we go to our closets to pray. Let us there wrestle with you until the sought-for blessing is gained. Uphold us by your Holy Spirit, lest we faint or grow weary because you do not answer at once. And though you may delay, yet an answer has never been denied to earnest and continued pleas, for the prayer of faith cannot be lost, cannot return void. But our faith is very weak, even when we think it strong. Help, therefore, our unbelief and be gracious to us, granting those mercies both temporal and spiritual that shall sustain us in our daily walk. And while we seek a benefit for ourselves, may we also seek to benefit and bless others, to do good unto all men. Let our prayers for each other be sincere and fervent, as if they were for ourselves. We pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, our great high priest. Amen.*

#### PRIVATE PRAYER

Arthur W. Pink

***"But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." (Matthew 6:6)***

Eight times in the space of this verse is the pronoun used in the singular number and the second person--a thing unique in all Scripture--as though to emphasize the indispensability, importance and value of private prayer. Private prayer is the test of our sincerity, the index to our spirituality, the principle means of growing in grace. Private prayer is the one thing above all others that Satan seeks to prevent, for he knows full well that if he can succeed at this point, the Christian will fail at every other.

Alas, how remiss we have been, how sadly we have failed to discharge this duty, and what irreparable losers are we by this sinful neglect. Shall this year witness a repetition of the sad failures of the past? It is the exercising of ourselves in secret prayer which distinguishes us from hypocrites who go through their religious exercises merely to be seen of men. The hypocrite places a far higher value upon the applause of his fellows than he does upon the approbation of his Maker.

It is striking to note that God has often granted the freest communications of himself to those who were before him in secret. It was so with Moses on the mount, when Jehovah gave him the Law--and again when he gave him the pattern for the tabernacle. It was while Daniel was engaged in private prayer that God sent his angel to reveal to him the secrets of his counsel concerning the restoration of Jerusalem and the duration thereof, even unto the Messiah. It is in the secret prayer closet that God usually bestows his sweetest and choicest blessings. Cornelius was highly commended and graciously rewarded

upon the account of his private prayer. Peter was granted that wondrous vision concerning the Gentiles while praying alone.

Let us now make a few suggestions on how this duty is to be performed. First, *reverently*. In all our approaches to God, we should duly consider his exalted majesty and ineffable holiness--humble ourselves before him. Second, *sincerely*. We cannot be too strongly or too frequently warned against that mere external worship to which we are so constantly prone. Third, *submissively*. Our petitions should ever be presented with the provision, "If it be Thy will." Fourth, *confidently*. He bids us "come boldly unto the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy." Fifth, *fervently*. It is not sufficient that our tongues babble out a mere form; our hearts must be in this work. It is a striving in prayer.

*"My voice you shall hear in the morning, O Yahweh; in the morning I will direct it to you, and I will look up,"* (Psalm 5:3). Let this be our resolve, and, so long as we are spared, our practice throughout the year we have just entered.

*Studies in the Scriptures* (condensed)

## Day 4

### A Morning Prayer

*Heavenly Father, you have implanted in us parental instincts and commanded us to train up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We feel our solemn responsibility in this task and ask that you would give us wisdom in discharging our duties. Let us not seek great things for them as to this world, but let our greatest prayer for them be their salvation, that they may live to please you and be numbered with your saints in glory everlasting. And may we guard against multiplying riches and leaving them incentives to pride, vanity, idleness, and sensuality. Enable us instead to lay up treasure in heaven, leaving behind an inheritance of godly prayers and examples of godly virtues. And by our example may we teach them that true happiness does not consist in a life free from trials and afflictions, but in exercising patience when calamities and reproaches are our portion, for your word declares that such patience will be blessed and rewarded in heaven. We pray in the name of Christ our Savior. Amen.*

### THE BEATITUDES

John Calvin

***"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*** (Matthew 5:3-12)

Now let us see, in the first place, why Christ spoke to his disciples about *true happiness*. We know that not only the great body of the people, but even the learned themselves, hold this error: that he is the happy man who is free from annoyance, attains all his wishes, and leads a joyful and easy life. At least it is the general opinion that happiness ought to be estimated from the present state. Christ, therefore, in order to accustom his own people to bear the cross, exposes this mistaken opinion that those are happy who lead an easy and prosperous life according to the flesh. For it is impossible that men should mildly bend the neck to bear calamities and reproaches so long as they think that patience is at odds with a happy life. The only consolation which mitigates and even sweetens the bitterness of the cross and of all afflictions, is the conviction that we are happy in the midst of miseries, for our patience is *blessed* by the Lord and will soon be followed by a happy result.

This doctrine, I do acknowledge, is widely removed from the common opinion, but the disciples of Christ must learn the philosophy of placing their happiness beyond the world

and above the affections of the flesh. Though carnal reason will never admit what is here taught by Christ, yet he does not bring forward anything imaginary, but demonstrates that those persons are truly happy whose condition is supposed to be miserable.

Let us remember that the leading object of the discourse is to show that those are not unhappy who are oppressed by the reproaches of the wicked and subject to various calamities. And not only does Christ prove that they are wrong who measure the happiness of man by the present state, since the distresses of the godly will soon be changed for the better, but he also exhorts his own people to patience by holding out the hope of a reward.

*Calvin's Commentaries*

## Day 5

### A Morning Prayer

*Forgiveness, O good Lord, is your blessed attribute. You love to exercise mercy more than justice. You do not will that any should perish, but that all should come to you and be saved. Jesus, our great example, walked in the same spirit, being ready to forgive. Bring to our minds and hearts the great need we have of forgiveness, for we have often offended you in thought, word, and deed. And dare we come to you for pardon when we have not forgiven all who have offended us? Lord, open our eyes that we may read our hearts aright and see if our forgiveness of those who have offended us is sincere. And if any of them are yet unforgiven, this day lead us in the spirit of Jesus to forgive that one, even should he be our most bitter enemy. Let us pray that you would turn his heart, lest ruin follow on his iniquity. Implant such a love of you in our hearts that your love may influence all our dealings with our fellow men, and that peace may prevail and love abound, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.*

### THE WOMAN WHO WAS A SINNER

Alfred Edersheim

***"Then one of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him. And he went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at his feet behind him weeping; and she began to wash his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed his feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, 'This man, if he were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.'" (Luke 7:36-39)***

The precise place and time of this event are undetermined, but it most likely occurred almost immediately following the raising of the young man at Nain. The invitation of Simon the Pharisee to Jesus does not necessarily indicate that he had been impressed by the teaching of Jesus. It would be only in accordance with the manners of the time for the leading Pharisee to invite the distinguished "teacher" to his table.

Let us picture the scene. They are all lying around the table, the body resting on the couch with the feet turned away from the table in the direction of the wall, while the left elbow rests on the table. And now from the open courtyard, up the veranda steps, perhaps through an antechamber and by the open door, passes the figure of a woman into the festive reception room and dining hall. How did she obtain access? Had she mingled with the servants or was access free to all? Or had she, perhaps, known the house and its owner? We must bear in mind the greatness of Jewish prejudice against any conversation with a woman, however lofty her character, and fully realize the absolute incongruity on the part of such a woman in seeking access to the Rabbi, whom so many regarded as the

## God-sent Prophet.

The shadow of her form must have fallen on all, but none spoke. It did not matter to her who was there or what they thought. It was Jesus to whom she had come. And so she "stood behind at his feet." Reverently bending, a shower of tears "bedewed" his feet. As if surprised, or else afraid to awaken his attention or defile him by her tears, she quickly wipes them away with the long tresses of her hair that had fallen down and touched him as she bent over. She had not come to wash his feet, but to show loving gratefulness and reverence as her poverty and humility would allow. And now that her faith had grown bold in his presence, continuing to kiss his feet, she begins to anoint them out of the flask of perfume which the women of her time carried around their necks.

Jesus had read Simon's unspoken thoughts. Presently he would show them to him. Yet not, as we might, by open reproof that would put him to shame before his guests, but with infinite delicacy and in a manner still that could not be mistaken.

Of two debtors, one of whom owed ten times as much as the other, who would best love the creditor who had freely forgiven them? Though to both the debt might have been equally impossible of discharge, and both might love equally, yet a Rabbi would, according to his Jewish notions, say that he would love most, to whom most had been forgiven. If this was the undoubted outcome of Jewish theology--so much for so much--let it be applied to the present case. If there were much benefit, there would be much love. If little benefit, little love. Conversely, in such a case much love would argue much benefit, little love small benefit. Let him then apply the reasoning by marking this woman and contrasting her conduct with his own.

On Simon's own reasoning, then, he must have received but little and she much benefit. Or, to apply the former illustration now to reality, *Forgiven have been her sins, the many--* with the knowledge on her part that they were many. And although the Lord does not actually express it, it would also hold true that Simon's little love showed that little is forgiven.

And now Jesus turns to her for the first time. "Thy sins have been forgiven." He does not heed the murmuring thoughts of those around who cannot understand who this is that forgives sins also. "Thy faith has saved thee. Go in peace."

*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*

## Day 6

### A Morning Prayer

*O Lord, you try the souls of sinful men by suffering, giving them bitter waters of affliction to drink and a cup of sorrow as their portion, that they may confess their guilt and turn to you in repentance and faith. Enable them to see the righteousness of their punishment, that you are a long-suffering God who does not take delight in the death of the wicked, and that they may come to you for salvation and not be turned away. Draw them this day by your Holy Spirit and grant them saving faith for Jesus' sake, in whose name we pray. Amen.*

### REVERENCE FOR GOD

Job Orton

***"Then they said to one another, We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us. And Reuben answered them, saying, Did I not speak to you, saying, Do not sin against the boy; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us. . . . Then Joseph gave a command to fill their sacks with grain, to restore every man's money to his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. . . . Then it happened as they emptied their sacks, that surprisingly each man's bundle of money was in his sack; and when they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid. And Jacob their father said to them . . . All these things are against me." (Genesis 42:21-36)***

The fear of God, wherever it prevails, will promote a sense of humanity. Joseph dared do no wrong, no, nor deal unkindly with those who had injured him, because he feared God--the almighty, all-knowing, and merciful God. Though Joseph was a great man, he was sensible there was one infinitely greater than he to whom he was accountable, and whom he ought to reverence. This is the best principle for social duties to be discharged by. Reverence for God will make us deal honestly and tenderly. It will guard us against all rigor and severity. It was a strange and absurd speech of a great man, that he was "the friend of God but the enemy of mankind." The best way to incline us *to do justly and love mercy is to walk humbly with God, and be in his fear all the day long.*

See the force of conscience. It brought to the mind of Joseph's brethren those crimes that were committed twenty years before. Their conscience immediately struck upon this; they remembered their faults that day. Conscience brings old sins to a new reckoning. Though it seems to be asleep, it records faithfully, and will be a fearful accuser another day. Let us guard against sin, for it may be very bitter many months, yea many years, after it is committed and forgotten. Reuben had this satisfaction--that he did not consent to this wicked act. It will be comfortable amid the calamities we may suffer with others to think we had no hand in the guilt. *Herein, then, let us exercise ourselves to maintain a conscience void of offense toward God and man.*

See the usefulness of affliction in bringing our sins to remembrance. These men perhaps never thought much of Joseph before, nor were much concerned about what became of him. But now they think of his case with deep sorrow and repentance. God will write bitter things against us to bring our sin to remembrance, and humble us for it. Afflictions, in this view, are great mercies, and it is God's common method of dealing with men. Let us therefore patiently bear God's rebukes, and consider why he contends with us, and resolve that wherein we have done iniquity, we will do so no more.

How ready are we to draw rash conclusions, as Jacob did, who said, "*All these things are against me,*" when all were for him and working together for his good. We are ready to conclude, when we lose our wealth or fame, our health or friends, all this is against us. But God intends it for our good. To judge by passion or affection is the way to judge wrongly. Jacob's grief darkened his mind and overwhelmed his faith. We are in great danger of forming a wrong judgment of the divine dispensations, especially of those which are a source of grief and sorrow. Jacob was happily disappointed.

Let us learn to judge nothing before the time but patiently wait till the mystery of providence is opened, and then we shall see the truth of Paul's observation, that "*all things work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose.*"

*Short and Plain Exposition of the Old Testament, with Devotional and Practical Reflections, for the Use of Families*

## Day 7

### A Morning Prayer

*Heavenly Father, we come now imploring you to hear our prayer as we remember the sacrificial death of your only Son, Jesus Christ, the son of David. Give us that strength which shall enable us to be ever ready to follow him in all things, even unto death. May we be prepared to give up our health, strength, and worldly substance as proofs of our patience and obedience and love, if it be your good pleasure. Endue us with your Holy Spirit that we may think no sacrifice too great if it brings us nearer to you. May no labor be too arduous if it assists us in perfecting holiness and bringing men, both Jew and Gentile, to the saving knowing of Jesus the Messiah. And in all our troubles and in every sorrow, teach us to draw nigh to you. Let us walk by faith, trusting in your divine providence, and casting all our cares upon you in the full assurance that you care for us. We ask in the blessed name of Jesus the Messiah. Amen.*

### THE MACEDONIAN PHANTOM

Henry Melvill

***"And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them." (Acts 16:9,10)***

The Apostles and first preachers of Christianity differed greatly from ourselves in that they were endowed with extraordinary gifts and miraculous powers. But it is distinctly to be observed that they were not, on this account, exempt from the necessity of exercising faith. It might have been thought that, possessed as they were of superhuman might and privileged with immediate revelations of the will of God, there would have been in their case but little opportunity or demand for that trust or dependence which is among the chief things required from ourselves. But God so ordered his dealings with them that, notwithstanding their wondrous endowments, they appear to have had the same life to lead as any one of us, who always in weakness and often in darkness must labor at duty and submit to trial.

That the Apostles were able to work miracles did not secure to them the supply even of their daily wants. St. Paul, in reckoning up to the Corinthians his multiplied endurances in the cause of the Gospel, enumerates "hunger, and thirst, and fastings." And you will all remember how this Apostle, anxious to prevent his being burdensome to the churches which he had planted, wrought at the business of a tentmaker and thus earned what was necessary for his subsistence. It was a strange but an instructive spectacle, that of a man who could heal the sick and raise the dead obliged to labour like a common artisan in order to the procuring a meal. Would not the energy which sufficed for so many and greater wonders have availed to the obtaining, without all this drudgery, the supply of everyday wants? But God, we may believe, in order to keep his servant dependent on himself, would

not allow him to exercise on his own behalf the powers which were so mighty in subjugating the world; but, while He enabled him to shake the vast fabric of heathenism and placed, in a certain sense, all the elements of nature under his control, obliged him to be industrious in order to the warding off starvation, and required from him all that diligent and faithful use of instituted means which is required from the lowest and weakest of his people.

Then, again, it is true that Apostles had the gift of prophecy; and that privileged with immediate revelation, they knew far more than common men of the will and purposes of the Almighty. But it is very observable that this--their insight into futurity--was no more allowed to destroy or even to diminish the necessity for the exertion of faith in regard to themselves than was their power of working miracles,. You might have thought that men gifted with the faculty of anticipating events, and determining long beforehand what God had appointed to take place, would have never been at any loss with regard to their own plans, but would have been saved all that doubt and perplexity in which we ourselves are necessarily involved from not knowing what a day may bring forth.

Yet this was far from being the case. The Apostles appear to have had just our trials of faith. They were called upon for the same patient waiting on God, the same watching the leadings of his Providence, the same studying the minute indications of his will. Able to pierce futurity and discern "the man of sin," opposing and exalting himself above all that is called God, St. Paul was nevertheless unable to make arrangements for a journey with any certainty that he should be allowed to accomplish it. Hear how he speaks to the Thessalonians: "Therefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again, but Satan hindered us." He had often, you see, desired and planned a visit to Thessalonica; but as often, some obstacle had arisen which had been as completely unforeseen by him as though the gift of prophecy had in no degree been possessed.

Thus, as with the gift of miracles so with that of prophecy, God allowed nothing to interfere with simple, prayerful, dependence upon Himself. He brought it to pass that those whom He enabled to marshal before them the august and awful occurrences of distant centuries should, in their private capacity, be as thoroughly obliged to the "walking by faith, not by sight," as any one of ourselves from whom the future veils all its secrets, except those which prophets have been commissioned to announce.

If you look at the verses which immediately precede our text, you will find abundant evidence that St. Paul and his companions were required, like ourselves, to go forward in faith, uninformed as to the precise course which God would have them take, but acting on the assurance that He directs the steps of all such as commit themselves to his guidance. In the sixth verse you read, "Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia . . ." Their intention had evidently been "to preach the word in Asia." But they were not allowed to carry their intention into effect; God interfered to prevent it. St. Paul had, no doubt, prayed to be directed aright. But to keep faith in exercise, he was permitted, in the first instance, to determine wrong. Then in the next verse you read, "After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered them not." Still, you see, they are only as men feeling their way. It seemed to them that Asia being closed, Bithynia

presented the most desirable field of labour; and accordingly they took measures for entering that province. But again they were proved wrong. It was not to Bithynia that God meant them to turn, and they are still in doubt as to what course to pursue.

At last there is granted unto Paul the vision recorded in our text, from which he is enabled assuredly to gather that the Lord designed him to preach in Macedonia. Yet, what a roundabout method this seems of communicating information. What delay! What loss of time! Why was not the Apostle, in the first instance, explicitly told what the will of God was in place of being left to make useless plans as to Asia and Bithynia? And why, at last, was he only taught through the medium of a vision, which might have admitted of diverse interpretations, and in regard of which there might even have been doubt whether it was indeed to be received as a communication from God? We will not say that such questions can be satisfactorily answered. We will not even say that they can with propriety be put. But at least we may gather a lesson for ourselves from what is thus recorded of St. Paul. We see that even St. Paul was thrown upon his faith; that he had to find out the will of God by successive experiments; that the leadings of God's providence, in regard even of this his favoured and exemplary servant, were obscure and circuitous; and that, so far from the Apostle being allowed to ascertain long beforehand how to shape his course, he had to grope his way step-by-step, doubtful whether he was to turn to the north or to the south, and obliged to make the attempt in order to the determining whether it were what God approved.

Shall we then wonder, or shall we repine, if God demand from us the exercise of faith; if He show us not at once and by any unquestionable manifestation what his will concerning us may be, but require from us the patient waiting upon Him, and exercise us by the frequent frustration of our plans?

We hear much of the leadings of God's providence. And it is our business, as Christians, to be always on the watch for these leadings, assured that as God taught his people of old by the cloud upon the tabernacle when they were to rest and when to set forward, He will not fail now to vouchsafe guidance to those who in all their ways acknowledge Him and lean not to their own understandings. But we are not to expect that the leadings of providence will be always, or even often, very marked and distinct. This would be to change the character of the dispensation beneath which we live, for if the pillar of fire and of cloud went visibly before us, it would be by sight and no longer by faith that Christians were required to walk. Let us not hastily conclude that God's providence marks out for us this or that course. And let us be specially circumspect when the path which appears thus prescribed happens to be one which agrees with our own wishes. It is the easiest thing in the world to imagine the leadings of providence where we have already got the leadings of inclination. And we may learn from the instance of St. Paul that, even where there is prayerfulness and the meek wish of entire submission, it may be only by dark intimations, and after many frustrations, that God's providence will mark out our course.

*Sermons Preached on Public Occasions*

## Day 8

### *A Morning Prayer*

*We come before your throne, O holy Lord God, knowing that you abhor sin and will punish the sinner. You are of purer eyes than to behold iniquity and will not excuse the guilty. Look upon us as we ask for pardon and peace, not for ourselves only but for our country also. Put away the filthy habits which abound, the pollution which cleaves to us. Show us our immorality in its true colors. Wake up the wicked from dreams of pleasure to the awful reality of justice and judgment to come. And for us who profess to be your disciples, enable us to put away every impure thought, to cease from every indecent expression, and to abstain from those abominable acts in which the scoffer and evil worker delight. Alas, we regard these things as light matters, and the blush of shame is almost unknown. Virtue among the people of this nation has become a bye-word. And yet, O Lord, will you not visit us for these things? Will you not be avenged on a nation like this? Oh let your mercy yet spare this nation a while longer and save us from the wrath to come, for we ask in the name of Jesus, our Savior and king. Amen.*

### **THE CERTAINTY OF THE FINAL JUDGMENT**

**George Crabbe**

***"Now as he sat on the mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matthew 24:3)***

The three evangelists, St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke, have related at some length the discourse of our Saviour to his disciples concerning two very important events--the destruction of Jerusalem, and the end of the world. Of these St. Mark appears to be most particular. Our blessed Lord begins his reply with warning them that false Christs would come and deceive many; that they should be persecuted; that great tribulation should arise; brother betraying brother, and father son. He foretells them that they must be brought before rulers and kings, and some of them put to death; that there should be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes; that many false prophets and impostors would arise and deceive many. These, and some other particulars, our Lord foretold concerning the destruction of Jerusalem; and he added, moreover, that all should come to pass before the end of that generation, that is to say, before threescore years.

All this our Saviour seems to have spoken of Jerusalem, and the final destruction of the temple and nation. But concerning the end of the world he is less particular, only saying that in those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light; that the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers of heaven be shaken; that then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory, who shall send his angels and gather his elect from the uttermost part of earth to the uttermost part of heaven. And concerning the time of this great event, very different is the account from that of the destruction of Jerusalem. Of the end of that nation it is expressly said, that generation

should not pass away till all be fulfilled; but of the last day our Lord adds, "No man knows, no, not the angels of heaven, but the Father only."

Thus, then, our blessed Teacher utters two prophecies: one with many particulars, the other with few; both awful and impressive. If one of these be true, no question but the other is also, having the same divine authority. And if the destruction of Jerusalem was in every particular foretold, who shall question, who shall dare to dispute the certainty of that great day which relates to the end of the world and its final judgment?

Now the state of the Jewish nation in the time of our Saviour was as secure, as apparently fixed and firmly ordered and established as any country or government in the earth. True, they were under the Roman power, but so were almost all other nations; and this was so far from being an apparent cause of their destruction that it seemed an argument for their continuance, because no rebellions could arise within and among themselves nor any enemies among the neighbouring nations. Their conquerors were ready to protect them, and indeed we find that their nation never enjoyed more security than at that period. Their people were extremely numerous, and Jerusalem abounded with riches. Wicked indeed they were, blind and forgetful of their God. In all outward appearance they stood safe and happy, in peace, opulence, and false but full security, blindly confident and content. But that divine Person who saw into the future pronounced their coming destiny. He said plainly that within a few years, before the end of one generation, these things should come to pass [away]. I repeat them, that we should remember the accuracy with which they were completed.

The ruin of the temple and city is clearly foretold, the extraordinary afflictions of the time. He declares that the gospel must first be preached to all nations; that his disciples should be persecuted; that false Christs should arise and deceivers, and that wherever the Roman eagles or standard, that is, the abomination of desolation of the prophet Daniel, should be placed, there should be the ruin and slaughter of the Jewish race. Our duty is, therefore, to inquire if all these things thus prophesied did come to pass, and when. All this is happily left on record by a learned historian of their own nation, Josephus by name, a priest, but not a Christian. He was, therefore, not partial, much less would he, or indeed could he have written falsities which every one living could have disproved.

Now this Hebrew historian expressly informs us that about forty years after our Saviour's death, and before that generation was passed away, the temple was burned. In the tenth day of the month of August, the same day and the same month in which it had once been destroyed by the king of Babylon, the city was taken after five months' siege, in which the sufferings of the Jewish people were beyond description, almost beyond imagination. Before this event, the gospel was preached by St. Paul and other disciples to all nations in the then known world. These disciples had also suffered the predicted punishment, and had taken the warning given by their Master, that is, wherever they found the Roman armies approach, they fled that place which was sure of destruction.

And now let us seriously consider what should be our thoughts when we contemplate these important prophecies, when we find that [prophecy] concerning the fall of the Jews so very complete, so exactly fulfilled. Must we not be sure--be entirely and fully satisfied--of the

truth of the other prophecy, and look with faith and assurance for the end of the world when the Son of man shall come with his angels in great power and glory, that day and hour of which no man knows? It seems as if our Redeemer meant that we should have this great proof of his future coming to banish all our doubts, to fill our minds with reverence, hope, and patience. He was pleased to describe a peculiar event to take place in the world, at a particular time, and with particular circumstances, so that when that event came to pass--just in the way and at the time foretold--no one should reasonably have a doubt of the other event foretold with it as certainly to be fulfilled in a future time known to God alone, but by us to be reverently expected.

Let us be assured that however delayed his coming, yet our Lord will come. A thousand years are as one day to him who endures forever, and all will stand before his judgment seat. These things being discovered [made known] to us, our safety lies in constant watchfulness and in sincere prayer for the aid of the Holy Spirit, which alone can enable us to live in sobriety, righteousness, and holiness in this present world.

*Posthumous Sermons* (condensed)

## Day 9

### A Morning Prayer

*O Lord, hear our cry, let your ear be attentive to the voice of our supplications! We confess that we do not know our own hearts as we ought, that they are deceitful and ever leaning to evil. They flatter us in thinking that we are not as wicked as some of our neighbors, they whisper peace to us when there is no peace. Alas, if you should mark iniquity, who can stand? But there is forgiveness with you. Jesus has died on the cross to secure it. Enable us to seek it as we would a great treasure and to cleave to it as the anchor of hope, for with you there is mercy and plenteous redemption. Time is short, and the hours pass swiftly away. Year follows year, and we forget that now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. Let your Holy Spirit teach us this truth and so write it on our hearts that no pleasure of time or sense can blot it out. Then shall we walk in its remembrance and be secure through Christ, in whose all-prevailing name we pray. Amen.*

### THE BRAZEN SERPENT

Joseph Milner

***"And the people spoke against God and against Moses: 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.' So Yahweh sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, 'We have sinned, for we have spoken against Yahweh and against you. Pray to Yahweh that He take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. Then Yahweh said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.' So Moses made a bronze serpent and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived." (Numbers 21:5-9)***

***"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:14, 15)***

What is meant by being exhorted to believe on Jesus? What dispositions of mind does the expression imply? And what are the true exercises of faith? Could you desire a clearer practical account of these matters than this before us? As the wounded Israelites beheld the brazen serpent for their cure, so must we, feeling our perishing condition by sin, look with the eye of our souls to the cross of Christ and see him redeeming us from the curse and from all the miseries of sin. And if in the temporal case healing followed, so does it in the spiritual. You shall not perish but have eternal life.

Here then is the most important subject that can be conceived. Does not every other subject dwindle into insignificance in comparison with it? You are taught the way of

obtaining eternal happiness, the way of knowing and enjoying the true God. Moreover, this way is laid open to rebels and sinners who are in a perishing condition, who are under a sentence of wrath, and who otherwise have no means to help themselves.

The conviction of our perishing state is a trying point indeed, yet absolutely necessary. What were the motives which inclined the poor wounded Israelite to turn his longing eyes to the brazen serpent? What were the circumstances which rendered it necessary for him to do so? The pain of his wound, the consciousness of imminent peril, the danger of a moment's delay, and, lastly, the sense he had of his own inability to cure himself. All this is easily transferred to the spiritual case before us.

Oh, that we were as ready, with as much feeling and with as much alarm, to seek and to use the true remedy for our distempered souls as we are in temporal cases for our sick bodies! Men have no inclination to consult a physician if they are well, or if they think themselves well. "They that are whole need not a Physician." Assure yourselves then, that if you feel not your perishing state by nature, it is not possible for you to have so much as one believing look at Christ crucified. The story of his death may possibly be an affecting history, but its spiritual use you cannot fathom and its supreme beauty you cannot relish. It will never reach your heart nor be effectual to salvation unless in your own eyes you become a lost, miserable, condemned sinner justly deserving God's wrath and eternal destruction.

Fellow sinners, it is not enough to put this matter in a cold, trifling, unfeeling, inapplicable way. It is a bad sign when we are satisfied with such general expressions as "to be sure we are sinners" and "nobody is perfect." It is a bad sign when it offends our pride to hear the fundamental doctrine of the depravity of human nature enforced, and when we are glad to have such subjects turned to something else we can relish better.

Let everyone, without a single exception, examine his own heart closely by the holy law of God, and let not the examination cease till you are convinced of your helpless undone state by nature. Then pray fervently that so important a truth will be brought home to your conscience. It is then, and not till then, that you will look aright at Jesus for salvation. You will understand that He was lifted up on the cross so that believing on him you will not perish but have everlasting life. In a word, Jesus will show himself both able and willing to "save to the uttermost all who come to God by Him." Yet it is an indispensable condition of his salvation that you should understand and feel yourselves to be in a state of death if ever you hope to enjoy his precious eternal life.

It is the lack of this conviction that keeps so many back from Christ. Suppose you had seen the brazen serpent elevated on the pole with its healing virtue, and yet beheld a number of wretched people mourning in excruciating tortures and hastening to death turning away their eyes from the only object that could restore their health, and absurdly hoping to be cured by some fanciful way of their own. Would you not view them with pity, even indignation, at their folly? Would it not make rivers of tears run down your cheeks to see men so averse to their own happiness? How much more miserable is it to see men perishing in sin, yet hoping still to be saved while unwilling to look to Jesus, the only remedy! It is in this act of looking at the Saviour--depending on Christ--that is the true

essence of saving faith.

Show a man that he is utterly corrupt and cannot in his present natural state please God by any of his works, and at the same time show him that those who in true humility apply to Jesus for pardon, peace, and holy dispositions will in no way be cast out but receive more than he can ask or think, and it may please God soon to open his eyes and cause him to have joy in believing.

*Practical Sermons* (condensed and lightly edited)

## Day 10

### A Morning Prayer

*O eternal God, creator and governor of the universe, give us such a sense of your majesty and greatness that we may worship you with a humble heart. Keep us free from all idolatry, that no work of man might interfere with our duty to you. Preserve us from the love of riches, which eat as a cancer and are the root of all evil, and keep us from the desire for earthly honors, which occupy time and talents. Show us the hollowness of fame, for which men labor as for a good thing. We are too much tempted by the things of time and sense. Our natural hearts seek them rather than you, and our spirits cleave to them more than to you. We daily declare by our actions that we will not have you to rule over us, and yet at the same time confess that you are God in heaven above and in the earth beneath. O Lord, make our actions more conformable to our professions. Teach us how to acknowledge you as God alone, not merely by saying "Lord, Lord," but by doing your will, by giving you all our heart for the love of your dear Son, our Saviour and God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

### LABOR NOT TO BE RICH

Matthew Henry

***"Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle." (Proverbs 23:4,5)***

How Solomon dissuades the covetous man from toiling and tormenting himself. *"Do not aim to be rich, to raise an estate and to make what you have in abundance more than it is."* We must endeavor to live comfortably and provide for our children and families, according as our rank and condition are, but we must not seek great things. Be not of those that will be rich, that desire it as their chief good, and design it as their highest end. Covetous men think it is their wisdom, imagining that if they be rich to such a degree they shall be completely happy. But it is a mistake; *a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses.*

Those that aim at great things fill their hands with more business than they can grasp, so that their life is both a perfect drudgery and a perpetual hurry. But be not such a fool. What you have or do, be master of it and not a slave to it. Moderate labor, that we may have to give, is our wisdom and duty. Immoderate labor, that we may have to hoard, is our sin and folly.

Solomon dissuades the covetous man from cheating and deceiving himself by an inordinate love and pursuit of that which is vanity and vexation of spirit. The things of this world are things that are not. They have a real existence in nature and are the real gifts of Providence, but in the kingdom of grace they are things that are not. They are not a happiness and portion for a soul, are not what they promise to be nor what we expect them

to be. They are a show, a shadow, a sham upon the soul that trusts in them. They perish in the using.

Riches are very uncertain things. They are not durable and abiding. *They make themselves wings and fly away.* Those that hold them ever so fast cannot hold them long; either they must be taken from us, or we must be taken from them. They go irresistibly and irrecoverably, as *an eagle towards heaven*, that flies out of sight and out of call. There is no bringing her back. Thus do riches leave men, and leave them in grief and vexation if they set their hearts upon them.

*Matthew Henry's Commentary*

## Day 11

### *A Morning Prayer*

*O God, you manifested your Son in the humble and lowly guise of man, and you placed him among the poor of this world that he might be our example. We would therefore pray that we would follow him in all things, but especially in humility, that most excellent and Christian grace. Help us toward the attainment of this gift, because it does not belong to man by nature. It does not spring from worldly philosophy or human wisdom, but it is only given by you, the author and giver of all good gifts. Humble us, for we have nothing of which we can boast, because we have nothing that we can call our own or that cannot be lost at any moment. Preserve us from pride, for we know that pride gives no rest but goes before destruction. Preserve us from all presumption and keep us in the humility of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.*

### **A GODLY MAN IS A HUMBLE MAN**

**Thomas Watson**

***"A man's pride will bring him low,  
but the humble in spirit will retain honor."***

**Proverbs 29:23**

*Question:* How may a Christian know that he is humble and consequently godly?

A humble soul is emptied of all swelling thoughts of himself. He has lower thoughts of himself than others can have of him. David, though a king, still looked upon himself as a worm: 'I am a worm, and no man.'

A humble soul thinks better of others than of himself, and values others at a higher rate than himself. This is because he can see his own heart better than he can see another's. He sees his own corruption and thinks that surely it is not so with others; their graces are not so weak as his; their corruptions not so strong. 'Surely,' he thinks, 'they have better hearts than I.' A humble Christian studies his own infirmities and another's excellences, and this makes him put a higher value upon others.

A humble person bemoans not only his sins, but also his duties. When he has prayed and wept, 'Alas,' he says, 'how little I have done! God might damn me for all this.' He says, like good Nehemiah, 'Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me.'

A humble man is willing to have his name and gifts eclipsed so that God's glory may be increased. He is content to be outshone by others in gifts and esteem, so that the crown of Christ may shine the brighter. This is the humble man's motto: 'Let me decrease; let Christ increase.' A humble Christian is content to be laid aside if God has any other tools to work with which may bring him more glory.

A humble saint likes that condition which God sees best for him. A proud man complains that he has no more; a humble man wonders that he has so much. When the heart lies low, it can stoop to a low condition. A Christian looking at his sins wonders that it is no worse with him. He does not say his mercies are small, but that his sins are great. He knows that the worst piece God carves him is better than he deserves. Therefore, he takes it thankfully upon his knees.

*The Godly Man's Picture*

## Day 12

### *A Morning Prayer*

*Almighty Father and God, we rejoice before you in the light of another day, and confess that it was solely by your mercy that we passed safely through the darkness of night. As the sun now goes forth to do your bidding, enable us to do the same. Lead and guide us that we may walk boldly, and yet carefully, as we go forth to the work appointed for us. And let us keep our eyes focused on the promised prize, an incorruptible heavenly crown, all the while keeping our body in subjection as we contend with the world, the flesh, and the devil. Be our companion, our friend and counselor this day, and keep us from sin for your dear Son's sake, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

### **PREPARING FOR THE CONTEST**

**Thomas Scott**

***"And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified." (1 Corinthians 9:25-27)***

The words of our text are evidently full of most important instruction. There is throughout the whole passage a reference to the public games and sports which were exhibited in the immediate neighborhood of Corinth, and which were called the Isthmian games. In these, prizes were proposed, amongst others, to those who excelled in running and in boxing. To these especially the apostle refers in the text as illustrative of that spiritual race and conflict in which he was engaged.

"I so run not as uncertainly," or *obscurely*. He did not run as the racer did when privately exercising himself for the course, when he cared not if his exertions were occasionally suspended or his attention drawn aside. But he ran as the racer when actually conflicting, when the prize was in view, his competitors by his side and ready to leave him behind, when the eyes of all the spectators were turned toward him, and when a few more efforts were to decide whether he should be crowned with glory or depart disgraced from the field.

"So fight I, not as one that beats the air." Not as the boxer who strikes to the right or to the left when he is only exercising for the conflict with an imaginary foe; but as when his formidable antagonist is before him, parrying his blows and endeavoring to strike him to the ground, when the slightest failure in watchfulness may produce defeat, disgrace, or even death. Such is the emblem which St. Paul makes use of to represent the conflict he had daily to maintain in "making his calling and election sure." "They did it to obtain a corruptible crown, but he an incorruptible."

And the contest belongs not, my brethren, to St. Paul alone. It is ours also. To us the prize is exhibited; to us the enemies are opposed; we too are "made a spectacle to the

world, to angels, and to men;" to us victory is glory--eternal glory. Defeat is "shame and everlasting contempt." The apostle tells us who the enemy was he had to contend with, from whom he apprehended special danger. It was not indeed the only foe he had to combat, but it was one always ready for the conflict, always at hand to avail himself of every opportunity. This foe is the body. The terms "the flesh," "the body," "the members," are often used by the Apostle to represent the corrupt and carnalized state into which the soul of man as a fallen creature is sunk. With this no parley is to be held, no quarter given to it. It must be destroyed without mercy. Its very existence is inconsistent with the happiness and almost with the safety of the Christian.

But here the apostle does not speak of an enemy that is to be utterly destroyed, but of one who is to be mastered, kept under, and reduced to a state of subjection and servitude. This is then the body with all its members, which was originally given to the soul as its servant, capable of performing the most important services, but which in our present fallen state has risen in rebellion, and even ventures to usurp dominion over the soul desirous of returning to God and being reconciled to him. While the soul continues to be subject to Satan, the body readily yields all its members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin. But no sooner does the work of regeneration and renovation commence than it shows the utmost unwillingness to render them instruments unto holiness. It is perpetually throwing obstacles in the way of the man who desires that God may be glorified in him and by him. Hence it becomes the source of much danger to everyone who is "working out his salvation with fear and trembling."

This is a subject with which all must be in some degree acquainted, who have ever applied themselves to the work of religion with seriousness. Yet it is necessary that it should be illustrated a little more fully.

The apostle, in the passage before us, is asserting the right of the minister of the gospel to a proper maintenance from the people of his charge. But then he observes that owing to peculiar circumstances, he had never insisted on this right while preaching Christ and his salvation among the Corinthians; but he had "labored with his hands" as a tent-maker to support himself and those that were with him, lest the people should say that he "sought not them but theirs" and was turning the gospel into a source of wealth. This led him to refer to other sacrifices which he made and other hardships which he endured in the discharge of his ministry. Now to all this the body would raise opposition. It would call for indulgence, it would require ease, it would shrink from suffering--and so persuade St. Paul to relax his exertions and to consult his ease, enjoyment, and respectability. Complied with in one instance, it would have advanced fresh demands for indulgence till it had robbed him of all his glory and joy, and left him a self-indulgent useless minister, of no use to the church and of no benefit to the world.

Such alas! has been the case in unnumbered instances, with those who ought to have been zealously engaged in preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ to a perishing world. St. Paul was aware of the danger, and repelled it. And such also, you will readily say, ought to be the conduct of all who are put in trust of the ministry.

*Sermons*

## Day 13

### *A Morning Prayer*

*O Almighty Lord God, our governor and preserver, let your face shine upon us and your Holy Spirit influence us while we pray. Speak peace to our souls, and take away whatever may hinder us from offering undivided service. We adore you, O Lord, as the supreme and only God. We worship you as the one to whom we owe everything, because we received everything from you. You have a claim upon our best service, though we can never fulfil what we owe nor perform what your law requires. Enable us to comprehend your nature and attributes, your majesty and power, in order that we may offer a spiritual worship. And to this end, give us an abiding faith in that mysterious union which binds three persons in one Godhead. Let not vain presumption lead us to deny that saving truth. Spare us, we plead, from such awful heresy, such daring impiety and sin, and keep us true and sincere worshipers of the triune God, for we pray in the name of our divine Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

### **THE COUNCIL OF NICEA**

**Philip Schaff**

***"As soon as it was day, the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, came together and led Him into their council, saying, If you are the Christ, tell us. But He said to them, If I tell you, you will by no means believe. And if I also ask you, you will by no means answer Me or let Me go. Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God. Then they all said, Are You then the Son of God? So He said to them, You rightly say that I am. And they said, What further testimony do we need? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth." (Luke 22:66-71)***

Nicea, the very name which speaks of victory, was the second city of Bithynia, only twenty English miles from the imperial residence of Nicomedia, and easily accessible by sea and land from all parts of the empire. Here, in the year 325, the emperor summoned the bishops of the empire by a letter of invitation, putting at their service the public conveyances and liberally defraying from the public treasury the expenses of their residence in Nicea and their return home.

The formal opening of the council was made by the stately entrance of the emperor, Constantine the Great. After a brief salutatory address from the bishop on his right, the emperor himself delivered, with a gentle voice in the official Latin tongue, the opening address.

*"It was my highest wish, my friends, that I might be permitted to enjoy your assembly. I must thank God that in addition to all other blessings, he has shown me this highest one of all: to see you all gathered here in harmony and with one mind. May no malicious enemy rob us of this happiness. Discord in the church I consider more fearful and painful than*

*any other war. As soon as I by the help of God had overcome my enemies, I believed that nothing more was now necessary than to give thanks to God in common joy with those whom I had liberated. But when I heard of your division, I was convinced that this matter should by no means be neglected, and in the desire to assist by my service, I have summoned you without delay. I shall, however, feel my desire fulfilled only when I see the minds of all united in that peaceful harmony which you, as the anointed of God, must preach to others. Delay not therefore, my friends, delay not, servants of God; put away all causes of strife and loose all knots of discord by the laws of peace. Thus shall you accomplish the work most pleasing to God and confer upon me, your fellow servant, an exceeding great joy."*

The council of Nicea is the most important event of the fourth century, and its bloodless intellectual victory over a dangerous error is of far greater consequence to the progress of true civilization than all the bloody victories of Constantine and his successors. It forms an epoch in the history of doctrine, summing up the results of all previous discussion on the deity of Christ and the incarnation, and at the same time regulating the further development of the Catholic orthodoxy for centuries. The Nicene creed, in the enlarged form which it received after the second ecumenical council, is the only one of all the symbols of doctrine which, with the exception of the subsequently added *filioque*, is acknowledged alike by the Greek, Latin, and Evangelical churches, and to this day, after a course of fifteen centuries, is prayed and sung from Sunday to Sunday in all countries of the civilized world.

The wild passions and the weaknesses of men, which encompassed the Nicene council, are extinguished, but the faith in the eternal deity of Christ has remained.

*History of the Christian Church, vol. III*

## Day 14

### A Morning Prayer

*Almighty God, it is a fearful thing to fall into your hands, for judgment is yours, and we know you will not excuse the guilty. Are we ready this day to meet you face to face? Enable us by your Holy Spirit to ask ourselves this question, and press it home upon us. Make our hearts feel and acknowledge its importance, and grant that we deceive not ourselves in the reply we give. Let us not fall into the delusion that because we rose from our beds this morning in safety and are now in health and strength, therefore we are secure for this night also. Who can call even the passing moment his own, much less the future? Time is ours now, but the existence of today must cease when the hour of our dissolution comes and we are put in the grave. But a time of resurrection is certain. Will we then be ready to give an account of our life? O Lord, enable us to reflect on this solemn truth with all seriousness. If we have not come to the only fountain of mercy, the blood of Jesus, then to die now will secure condemnation at that day when every word, deed, and thought shall be brought to remembrance, and every neglected opportunity rise as a witness against us. Oh, grant that none will let this day pass without making their salvation sure. We ask in Christ's name. Amen.*

### **THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION AND THE FIRST RESURRECTION Samuel P. Tregelles**

***"Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection."  
Revelation 20:6***

In Revelation 20 we read of "the first Resurrection." The whole scene is thus described: *"I saw thrones, and they sat upon them; and judgment was given unto them; and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and [those] which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years."*

This is not only a vision, but also an explanation. John is taught what the thrones with certain sitting upon them meant. They are the faithful in Christ in general (i.e., the whole family of faith from Abel onward), and one special class--those suffering for the witness of Jesus. And the glory given to them is explained to be the first resurrection. This is in full accordance with other Scriptures; for instance, I Cor. 15:23, where the order of the resurrection is taught: *"Every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward (next in order), they that are Christ's at His coming."*

Thus, in the teaching of Christ himself and of His apostles, the one object before the souls of believers is His own personal coming in manifested glory. This is our hope; for then, in body and in spirit, we shall share His glory. That coming will bring destruction on Gentile power then in its height of blasphemy and persecution. Then will Israel look on Him whom they pierced and mourn for Him. Then shall the spirit of grace and supplications be poured on them, and then shall they know the fountain for sin and for uncleanness to be opened for them.

If we receive this hope as taught us from the Word of God, we must also see that it is given to strengthen and sustain us during the intervening time; not as telling us that there is no such interval, but as sustaining us through it. So that while we learn of false teachers and evil in the Church, and while we know much of the course of sin and its fruits in the world, we have before us the brightness of the morning to sustain us during the darkness of the night.

*The Hope of Christ's Second Coming*

## Day 15

### *A Morning Prayer*

*O gracious God, we beseech you to illumine the hearts and minds of lost sinners to know the truth of your word. They cannot learn it on their own, nor can the world teach it to them, for it comes from heaven. Such truth is spiritually discerned. Therefore we will praise your name because the poor laborer can know it as fully as the leader of the most powerful nation, and there is none so weak that he cannot receive it and none so poor that he cannot procure it. Who shall despair when there is hope for all? Show them now the glorious truth, that Jesus did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Set forth this truth with convicting grace, that they might come to the foot of the cross and trust in his atonement for their salvation. And let us, your disciples, spread this good news far and wide that each day may witness the conversion of many. Make us an instrument in so glorious a work, we pray, granting it for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.*

### **THE MINISTRY OF HOPE**

**J. H. Jowett**

***"Having no hope. . . . But now in Christ."***

**Ephesians 2:12, 13**

"Having no hope." We are familiar with hopelessness in common life. We know the rout that begins in the sick chamber when hope goes out of the room. So long as the patient remains hopeful, the doctor has a mighty helper in his ministry; but when the patient loses heart and hope, the doctor strives in the face of almost assured defeat. The influence is similar in the ministry of the nurse. I was impressed by a phrase uttered in my hearing by a nurse in a conversation which I had with her concerning the nature of her work. "I like a life-and-death case," she said, "with just a chance for life!" She rejoiced in the struggle if the bias was on the side of victory. But when the last chance is gone, and there is no possibility of recovery, and the nurse has to labor confronted by sheer defeat, the service becomes a burdensome task.

It is not otherwise on the battlefield. Armies that go out without the inspiring presence of hope prepare themselves for defeat. I know there is what we call a "courage of despair," but it lacks the very elements of radiant victory. It has dash but no sight; it has force but no song; it is a wild leap and not the jubilant march of strength.

Now, what prevails when hopelessness invades the sick room and the battlefield is also experienced in the more secret life of the spirit, in the realm of religion. When a man becomes hopeless in religious life he loses the very springs of activity, and he sinks in ever-deepening degradation. The Scriptures employ a very powerful figure to express the state of those in whose life there is no hope. "They that sit in darkness." It is a very graphic picture. Try to realize it. You sit by the fireside on a winter's night with a bright fire

making the room genial and cheery. You sit on until the fire burns low and eventually dies out, and the warmth gives place to a searching chill. Then the light goes out and darkness is added to the coldness. You sit on. "They that sit in darkness." And there are people whose soul-life is just like that. There is no fire in the grate and their light is gone out, and they abide in cold and dreary desolation, "having no hope."

Now, what are some of the causes of this dingy and paralyzing hopelessness? Surely I must in the first place mention *the tyranny of sin*. When sin enters into a life and is welcomed there and entertained in daily hospitality, certain consequences assuredly happen. One of the first things to happen is this: sin puts out the light of joy. . . . There is disquiet and unrest, and a sense of a great and hungry uncertainty, and these are incompatible with the abiding presence of joy. No, that light is turned out. But sin goes farther and proceeds to quench the heart of endeavor. When sin ceases to be a visitor and becomes a tenant in the home of my soul, it assumes the position of master of the house, and I become its servile attendant. Repeated experiences of the power of sin create within me a sense of impotence, and I feel how impossible it is to regain my lost sovereignty. My endeavors become more and more lukewarm, my spiritual strivings more and more spasmodic and cold. But sin goes still farther and eventually scatters and tramples out the very fire of desire. In the earlier stages a man may feel the uselessness of endeavor while still he may eagerly wish to regain his lost estate, but in the latter stages his very wishes are destroyed and he sinks into the "ill of all ills, the lack of desire." The light of joy has been turned out! The heat of endeavor has been quenched! The fire of desire has died away! And the man is reduced to a state of cheerless and wintry desolation, "having no hope."

The second cause of hopelessness which I will name is *the tempest of sorrow*. I saw an account a little while ago of one of our steamships which had passed through tremendous seas, and the waters had got down into her engine room and put out the fire. When I read the record I immediately thought of a kindred experience in the spirit, which I find expressed in the ancient words of the Psalmist, "All thy waves and thy billows have gone over me." The passage through heavy seas of sorrow may be attended with complete security, or it may be accompanied by unspeakable loss. It is when the water of sorrow gets down among the fire of life--the driving passions, the loves and the joys and the hopes--that dire ruin is wrought. . . .

And the third of the causes which I will name is *the monotony of labor*. All monotony is tedious and depressing. To be compelled to listen to one persistent note of the organ would be an intolerable affliction and would weigh the life down in heavy depression. To be obliged to listen even to a monotonous speaker tends to drain away the springs of inspiration. It is the unchanging note that makes the life sink in weariness. And this perhaps is pre-eminently so when one's daily toil is one of unrelieved monotony. . . . There is no expectancy in the day, no surprise by the road. The hammer of the daily experience hits the same place at every moment until life settles down into a benumbment which has no vision and no hope. The spring goes out of the spirit; and frequently it happens, as it did in other days, that "because they have no changes, they fear not God."

Now, so far we have not brought in the Lord Christ; and just because He has been so

deliberately left out, the hopelessness of men has been unrelieved. Let us now bring Him into the dark cold life and see what happens. "But now in Christ Jesus"--what? What kind of hope does the Master kindle when He enters into communion with a human life? . .

*Christ kindles hope in the perfectibility of self.* He comes to me--a poor, sensitive, devil-governed man--[and] whispers to me that I too can attain to freedom and put on the strength of the ideal man. I stand amazed before the suggestion. Quietly He reassures me and tells me that I too can be perfected. Who, me? What, with the fire out, a poor bit of driftage upon life's sea, can I be renewed and filled with power and made master of circumstances and voyage happily and safely to the desired haven? Can I be perfected? I have seen my fellows take a mere refuse [rejected as worthless] place in the city, one of its eyesores, and turn it into a place of beauty. Yes, I have seen the place of refuse transformed into a garden. And even now I hear my fellows speaking confidently of the reforesting of the Black Country, and turning the place of slag and cinder heaps, of blackness and death, into a place of sweet growth and pleasantness and beauty. But my Master tells me that the same miracle can be wrought in the realm of the spirit, that the black country in the soul can be reforested, that the place of indiscriminate refuse can be turned into the place where the Lord would delight to dwell. "The wilderness shall become a garden, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose." I too can be perfected! . . .

*The Master kindles hope in the instrumentality of all things.* If He purposes my perfection, then all my circumstances will be made to conspire to the accomplishment of His will. Nothing that comes to me will make me despair. I am hopeful that He will convert everything into a helpmeet and friend. "All things work together for good to them that love God." Even sorrow? Yes, sorrow. Sorrow is one of the "all things" and is subjected to the Master's will, and is one of His instruments for the attainment of His ends. Sorrow can accomplish what comfort would always fail to do. There is a legend that tells of a German baron who, at his castle on the Rhine, stretched wires from tower to tower that the winds might convert it into an Æolian harp. And the soft breezes played about the castle, but no music was born. But one night there arose a great tempest, and hill and castle were smitten by the fury of mighty winds. The baron went to the threshold to look out upon the terror of the storm, and the Æolian harp was filling the air with strains that rang out even above the clamor of the tempest. It needed the tempest to bring out the music! And have we not known men whose lives have not given out any entrancing music in the day of a calm prosperity, but who, when the tempest drove against them, have astonished their fellows by the power and strength of their music? "Stormy wind fulfilling His word." . . .

And surely this applies to my work, however monotonous it may be. With the assurance that my Lord will use it for my spiritual profit, into my labor I shall put a song, and the way of drudgery will become the very highway of my Lord. Everything will give me a lift if I am in close communion with my Lord.

*The Master kindles hope in my personal immortality.* "Because I live, ye shall live also." "He has begotten us again unto a living hope." "He that believeth on Me shall never die." What a hope He kindles! Such a hope gives to life an amazing expectancy. When Samuel Rutherford was near his end, he was so gloriously excited at the prospect that those about

him had to counsel him to moderate his ecstasy! The fine flavor of that glorious expectancy should pervade all our days. That we are to live forever with the Lord is a prospect that should fill our life with quiet and fruitful amazement. To have that life in front of us will enable us to set all things in true perspective and to observe their true proportions. Set money in the line and light of immortality and we at once observe the limits of its ministry and range. Set rectitude [moral virtue] in the same radiant line, and we see how it clothes itself with abounding glory. Everything must be placed in that long and glorious line, or nothing will be truly seen.

*The Silver Lining*

## Day 16

### *A Morning Prayer*

*O Lord God, you are the governor of the universe, ordering all things according to your good pleasure. Look upon us as a nation, we pray. We require your merciful protection, for vice abounds and iniquity threatens us with ruin. Love for you is very feeble, and few possess it. The desire for your honor is weak, and men have it not because they seek their own glory. You have mercifully revealed yourself to this nation by many acts and proofs of love, and we have been favored above all lands with the pure word of Scripture. In it we read of wise men who traveled a great distance to worship Jesus, the infant King of the Jews. And shall men of this nation, who possess their very own copy of the Bible, despise the Savior it reveals? Oh, enable all in authority to study that word and to walk and govern by the holy law which it imposes. Open their eyes to see that the best welfare of a nation can only be secured by governing in the faith and fear of you, and by taking the word of truth as the guide for every action. We ask for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord and God. Amen.*

### **DEATH OF MOSES** **Alfred Edersheim**

***"So Moses the servant of Yahweh died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of Yahweh. And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day." (Deuteronomy 34:5-6)***

All was now ready and Israel about to cross the Jordan and take possession of the Promised Land! It was only natural that Moses should have longed to share in what was before them. Looking back the long vista of these 120 years--first of life and trial in Egypt, then of loneliness and patient faith while feeding the flocks of Jethro, and lastly, of labor and weariness in the wilderness--it would indeed have been strange had he not wished now to have part in the conquest and rest of the goodly land. He had believed in it; he had preached it; he had prayed for it; he had labored, borne, fought for it. And now within reach and view of it, must he lay himself down to die?

*"Then I pleaded with Yahweh at that time, saying: 'O Lord GOD, You have begun to show your servant your greatness and your mighty hand, for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do anything like your works and your mighty deeds? I pray, let me cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, those pleasant mountains, and Lebanon.'"*

The deep feelings of Moses had scarcely bodied themselves in the language of prayer. Rather had it been the pouring forth of his inmost desires before his Father in heaven. "Nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done." And it was the good will of God that Moses should lay himself down to rest without entering the land. Although it came in punishment of Israel's and of Moses' sin at the waters of Meribah, yet it was also better that it should be so--better for Moses himself. For on the top of Pisgah, God prepared

something better for him than even entrance into the land of earthly promise. And now, calmly, as a father sets his house in order, did Moses prepare for his departure. During his life all his thoughts had been for Israel, and he was faithful even unto the death. His last care also was for the people whom he had loved, and for the work to which he had been devoted--that Jehovah would provide a shepherd to lead them out and bring them in.

His last words were a blessing upon Israel. Then, amid the respectful silence of a mourning people, he set out alone upon his last pilgrim journey. All the way up to the highest top of Pisgah, the eyes of the people must have followed him. They could watch him as he stood there in the sunset, taking his full view of the land, there to see for himself how true and faithful Jehovah had been. Still could they descry his figure, as, in the shadows of eventide, it moved towards a valley apart. After that, no mortal eye ever beheld him until, with Elijah, he stood on the mount of transfiguration. Then indeed was the longing wish of Moses, uttered many, many centuries before, fulfilled far beyond his thinking or hoping at that time. He did stand on "the goodly mountain" within the Land of Promise, worshiping and giving testimony to Him in "Whom all the promises are yea and amen." It was a worthy crowning of such a life.

*Bible History Old Testament*

## Day 17

### A Morning Prayer

*O Lord, to you only belong mercies and forgiveness. From no other can salvation come. You are God in heaven above, which manifestly declares your glory, and you rule over all the earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. Your eye surveys all things, and your mercy is over all your works. Oh, make us to rejoice that we are your workmanship, that it was you who fashioned us and who will not fail to preserve us! But above all, enable us to meditate upon that exceeding love shown to us, while we were yet sinners, in the death of Jesus. Make us fully sensible of it, and enable us to prove our gratitude for it by lives of holy and entire obedience. We confess that we can do nothing to compare with what you have done on our behalf, but all you ask we may give, even ourselves a living sacrifice unto you. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.*

### GODLY GIVING

Ralph Wardlaw

***"Honor Yahweh with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine." (Prov. 1:9).***

The law of the first-fruits teaches us this important principle--that God should have the first place in his people's generous giving instead of the last. The arrangement of the petitions in the Lord's prayer teach us the same lesson: those which relate to God, his name, and his kingdom precede those which relate to ourselves. The injunction of the Saviour, justly interpreted, is in spirit and letter the same--"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God." Do we then honor the Lord with our substance when, after bestowing lavishly on self all that self can wish--not withholding our heart from any joy--we give a little dribble of our surplus for Him, for his poor, for his cause and kingdom? Does he honor the Lord who, without a grudge, expends ten, twenty, fifty, or a hundred dollars on some article of ornamental elegance or mere convenience (or at any rate of very questionable necessity) while the smallest pittance can with difficulty be wrung from him for the great interests of the Redeemer's kingdom? Sums after sums, large and small, for worldly accommodations and enjoyments, and a pound a year for the salvation of the world!

Various are the motives held out to encourage the duty of liberality. In the verses before us, you may be tempted to regard the motive as a somewhat selfish and questionable one: "So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine." But second thoughts may give you another view of it. It is a *trial of faith*. And it is a trial than which few are found more difficult. It is hard to persuade a man that *giving away* will make him rich. We look with more confidence to bank interest, or the still better interest of a vested loan, than to a return of profit from what is *given wholly away*. It is difficult to convince a man that scattering will increase his store.

While, therefore, the motive in itself looks worldly and selfish, he who comes to feel it so as

to act liberally upon it exercises a *faith in God* that is rare and of the highest order. He walks by faith, not by sight. He who gives to the poor because God has said, "He who has pity on the poor lends to Yahweh" (Prov. 19:17), gives in faith. The promise is that the blessing of God shall be upon the substance and upon the industry of such liberality--upon those whose godliness overcomes their selfishness, and who show their faith and love by their liberality especially to God's own cause.

My brethren, there is too little of proving God in this matter. We can only discover God's faithfulness by putting it to the test; and without a doubt, if there were more of trial on our part there would be proportionally more of the manifestation of faithfulness on his.

And there is even a higher motive than earthly prosperity. Compliance with this injunction is not only a means of increasing our temporal good but of augmenting our blessedness for eternity. For while all the happiness of the world to come shall be bestowed and enjoyed on the ground of grace, yet there shall be degrees of blessedness and glory corresponding to the measure in which the principles of faith and love have been practically manifested; a correspondence between the one and the other, as the apostle expresses it, like that between the seed sown and the crop reaped--the reaping corresponding in amount to the sowing. The right use of worldly substance is one of the ways in which the Lord exhorts his disciples to "provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail" (Luke 12:33). But He whom we serve knows the motives by which we are influenced, so that if one is giving either in the spirit of self-righteousness, or of ostentation, or of any other unwarranted principle, [then] "Let not that man think that he shall obtain anything of the Lord" (James 1:7).

*Lectures on the Book of Proverbs* (condensed and lightly edited)

## Day 18

### A Morning Prayer

*Almighty God, with what shall we come before you? How shall we give you the honor due your name? All that we have is unworthy of your regard, and our best offerings serve only to remind us how gracious you are in receiving them. You continue to bless us day to day and permit us to come into your presence because you delight in mercy, because your goodness is from everlasting to everlasting, and because, above all, you have respect for the sacrifice of your beloved Son, who gave himself a ransom for our souls, in whose name we offer this prayer. Amen.*

### UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS

John Calvin

***"And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, Come at once and sit down to eat? But will he not rather say to him, Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do." (Luke 17:7-10)***

The object of this parable is to show that God claims all that belongs to us as his property, and possesses an entire control over our persons and services. Therefore, all the zeal that may be manifested by us in discharging our duty does not lay him under obligation to us by any sort of merit, for as we are his property, so he on his part can owe us nothing. He adduces the comparison of *a servant* who, after having spent the day in severe toil, returns home in the evening and continues his labors till his master is pleased to relieve him. Christ speaks not of such servants as we have in the present day who work for hire, but of the slaves that lived in ancient times. Their condition in society was such that they gained nothing for themselves, but all that belonged to them--their toil, application, industry, even their very blood--was the property of their masters. Christ now shows that a bond of servitude not less rigorous binds and obliges us to serve God, from which he infers that we have no means of laying him under obligations to us.

It is an argument drawn from the less to the greater. If a mortal man is permitted to hold such power over another man as to enjoin upon him uninterrupted services by night and by day, and yet contract no sort of mutual obligation, as if he were that man's debtor, how much more shall God have a right to demand the services of our whole life to the utmost extent that our ability allows, and yet be in no degree indebted to us? We see, then, that all are held guilty of wicked arrogance who imagine that they deserve anything from God, or that he is bound to them in any way. And yet no crime is more generally practiced than this kind of arrogance, for there is no man that would not willingly call God to account. Hence, the notion of merits has prevailed in almost every age.

But we must attend more closely to the statement made by Christ, namely, that we render nothing to God beyond what he has a right to claim, but are so strongly bound to his service that we owe him everything that lies in our power. It consists of two clauses. First, our life, even to the very end of our course, belongs entirely to God, so that, if a person were to spend a part of it in obedience to God, he would have no right to bargain that he should rest for the remainder of the time. Then follows the second clause on which we have already touched, that God is not bound to pay us wages for any of our services. Let each of us remember that he has been created by God for the purpose of laboring, and of being vigorously employed in his work; it is not only for a limited time, but till death itself.

With respect to merit, we must remove the difficulty by which many are perplexed, for Scripture so frequently promises a reward to our works that they think it allows them some merit. The reply is easy: A reward is promised, not as a debt, but from the mere good pleasure of God. By the engagements of the Law, I readily acknowledge, God is bound to men if they were to discharge fully all that is required from them. But still, as this is a voluntary obligation on God's part, it remains a fixed principle that man can demand nothing from God, as if he had merited anything. And thus the arrogance of the flesh falls to the ground, for, granting that any man fulfilled the Law, he cannot plead that he has any claims on God, having done no more than he was bound to do. When he says *we are unprofitable servants*, his meaning is that God receives from us nothing beyond what is justly due, but only collects the lawful revenues of his dominion.

There are two principles, therefore, that must be maintained. First, that God naturally owes us nothing, and that all the services which we render to him are not worth a single straw. Second, that according to the engagements of the Law, a reward is attached to works, not on account of their value, but because God is graciously pleased to become our debtor. It would evince intolerable ingratitude if on such a ground any person should indulge in proud boasting. The kindness and liberality that God exercises toward us only lay us under deeper obligations to him.

Whenever we meet with the word *reward*, let us look upon this as the crowning act of the goodness of God to us, that though we are completely in his debt, he condescends to enter into a bargain with us.

*Calvin's Commentaries*

## Day 19

### *A Morning Prayer*

*O King eternal, immortal, and invisible, we bow before you through the mediation of the Lord Jesus, who washed us from our sins in his own blood. Though allowed to approach your divine majesty, make us never forget the humiliation and contrition which become such creatures as we are. We have merited your displeasure, and your righteousness would be completely justified in our destruction. Too often we have approached you with a presumptuous and careless familiarity, forgetting that you dwell in light inaccessible. Forgive us, we pray, and may this hour of devotion be filled with attention to your holy word. May no worldly things find room there. Amen.*

### **A GODLY MAN IS A LOVER OF THE WORD**

**Thomas Watson**

***"Oh, how I love Thy law!  
It is my meditation all the day."  
Psalm 119:97***

A godly man shows his love to the written Word by diligently *reading* it. The noble Bereans "searched the Scriptures daily" (Acts 17:11). The Word shows what is truth and what is error. It is the field where the pearl of price is hidden. How we should dig for this pearl!

He shows his love by frequently *meditating* on it. He has not only a few transient thoughts, but he leaves his mind steeping in the Scriptures. He *delights* in the Word. "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jer. 15:16). Never did a man take such delight in a dish that he loved as the prophet did in the Word.

The godly man *prefers* the Word above things most precious: food, riches, and worldly honor. King Edward the Sixth, on the day of his coronation when presented with three swords signifying that he was monarch of three kingdoms, said, "There is still one sword missing." On being asked what that was, he answered, "The Holy Bible, which is the 'sword of the Spirit' and is to be preferred before these ensigns of royalty."

Do we love the written Word? What sums of money the martyrs gave for a few leaves of the Bible! But alas, how can they who are seldom conversant with the Scriptures say they love them?

*The Godly Man's Picture*

## Day 20

### *A Morning Prayer*

*O great and glorious God, you have created all things by your almighty hand and have sustained and ordered all by your wise and righteous providence. Your mercy is everlasting and extends over all your works. Who is able to express or conceive the exceeding riches of that grace and goodness which descends upon poor sinful creatures, men who deserve nothing but to be forsaken and abhorred by you? And yet we have repaid your love with unsuitable returns. Beside the guilt of our inbred corruption, we have willingly sinned against the light and teachings of the gospel. The Holy Spirit has striven with us, but we have remained stubborn. O Lord, do not forsake us utterly and grant no more of that grace which we have so greatly abused, no more of the Holy Spirit which we have so frequently refused. Do that work of grace upon our hearts that we may have cause to give you praise and glory to all eternity. We ask in Christ's name. Amen.*

### **THE GRACE OF GOD**

**John Murray**

***"Now to him that works is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt."***

**Romans 4:4**

*DEFINITION* - The term 'grace' has various shades of meaning in the Scripture. When it speaks of the grace of God, what is in view most frequently is the favour of God. It is not always unmerited favour. Of Jesus it is said that 'he increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man' (Luke 2:52). But, generally, sinful men are in view as the objects of God's favour and then it is always unmerited favour. This is brought out very clearly when we read, 'Now to him that works is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt' (Rom. 4:4); 'And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace' (Rom. 11:6). Grace is here placed in sharp contrast with what is earned and therefore with all merit. Grace is undeserved favour and if any constraint is placed upon God, arising from worthiness on our part, whether it be of thought or word or action, then it is no longer grace.

We cannot think of sinners as merely undeserving; they are also ill-deserving. The grace of God to sinners is, therefore, not simply unmerited favour; it is also favour shown to the ill-deserving, indeed to the hell-deserving. When Paul says, 'justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 3:24), the grace in view must be understood on the background of the judgment of God referred to in verse 19--'that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.' It is guilty men, and therefore hell-deserving men, that the justifying grace of God contemplates.

It is from this primary meaning of the word 'grace' that various other meanings are derived. The grace of God can refer to the gracious influences which are brought to bear upon men (cf. Luke 2:40; Acts 4:33; 2 Cor. 12:9). It can refer to the state of grace into

which men are introduced (cf. Rom. 5:2). It can refer to the gifts bestowed and to the virtues generated (cf. Rom. 12:3, 6; 2 Cor. 8:7). But so closely related are these shades of meaning, and so dependent are they upon the primary import, that it is often difficult to be certain what particular thought is being expressed. We are always pointed back to the disposition of favour, of loving kindness in God as the source, and as that which gives character to all grace in exercise.

*SALVATION BY GRACE* - The grace of God comes to its richest expression in redemption and salvation. How plainly this is set forth in Paul's well-known word, 'By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God' (Eph. 2:8)! When he says 'and that not of yourselves,' he is reminding us of the true nature of grace, that its whole urge and explanation reside in God. It may be easy to give formal assent to this text. Every evangelical Christian will do so. But how ready we are to shy away from its implications! In reality we deny the truth here asserted when we introduce at any point in the whole span and process of salvation a decisive autonomy on the part of man. If salvation at any point is contingent upon some contribution which man himself makes, then at that point it is *of ourselves*, and to that extent it is not of grace. Paul's definition 'and that not of yourselves' is thereby effaced and the true nature of grace is denied.

*THE CROSS OF CHRIST* - The marvel of God's grace is pre-eminently displayed in the cross of Christ. It was by the will of the Father he was given and sent. It was by his own will that Christ came. He was sent to save and he came to save. The only alternative was that the whole human race should perish (cf. John 3:16; Matt. 1:21). Jesus alone is the captain of salvation. No one but he wrought redemption, no one but he made expiation, propitiation, and reconciliation for sin. How blasphemous would be the thought that we men had any part in this grand accomplishment! 'Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself' (Heb. 9:26). It is as we view the solitary uniqueness of Christ's cross, the magnitude of the grace it exhibits, and its complete effectiveness unto salvation, that we learn the riches of God's 'grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus' (Eph. 2:7). And it is here [that] the insult we offer to God's grace appears, when we try to condition its character or operation by some ingredient of our making. It is this perspective of God's great love--when we were dead in sins--that evokes Paul's word, 'by grace are ye saved.'

*ELECTION OF GRACE* - The span of salvation has its origin in election before the foundation of the world. And election is of grace (Rom. 11:5). Too often Christians have sought to intrude human decision as the explanation of the distinction which election requires. God elects, it is said, those whom he foresees will believe, and thus man's choice determines God's choice. If this is the true account of election, then we should have to say that what we *ourselves* decide determines election. In that event Ephesians 2:8 cannot apply to election, for here Paul says 'and that not of yourselves,' and the grace of election would have to be of an entirely different character. But how impossible! If election is of grace (Rom. 11:5), it must be of the same grace defined in Ephesians 2:8, and therefore in no respect of *ourselves*, but wholly the gift of God. Besides, it is *salvation by grace through faith* that is the gift of God, and so faith itself is of grace and not something that resides in human autonomy. The faith which God foresees is the fruit and not the root of electing grace. Grace demands humility, the humility that constrains us to be willing debtors all

along the line of salvation from its fount in election to its consummation in glory. Salvation is of the Lord, and it is only of him if it is all of him. This is the doctrine of grace and it is its glory.

*JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE* - It was the discovery of the grace of God that signaled the Protestant Reformation. The movement was focused in the uncovering of the great truth which Rome had buried beneath a pile of superstition--the doctrine of justification by faith alone and of grace alone. It was this same truth that Paul identified with the gospel, and it was the denial of it that elicited the severest denunciation we find in the New Testament. 'But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed' (Gal. 1:8,9). When later on he says, 'Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace' (Gal. 5:4), the thought is not that of falling away from a state of grace but rather that, if, to any extent, we look to our own works for justification, then we have abandoned grace altogether. Grace does not comport with any human contribution. If grace is in operation, if it has any place, it must have the whole place, it must be exclusively operative. If we are justified to any degree by works of law, we are debtors to do the whole law (cf. Gal. 5:3) and justification must be wholly of law. Here again we have the same principle exemplified and confirmed: grace knows no human contribution. If of grace, then it is wholly and exclusively of grace. Since salvation is of grace, it is all of grace. Human autonomy is excluded at every point as decisively as at the point of justification.

*SANCTIFICATION* - Sanctification begins by union with Christ. There is a once-for-all breach with sin in its power, love, and defilement. By union with Christ believers partake of the virtue of Jesus' death and the power of his resurrection. In that Christ died to sin, he died to sin once for all (Rom. 6:10). So believers died to sin and they live in newness of life (Rom. 6:2, 5). The unmixed grace of this release is apparent from the fact that it was by God's effectual call they were ushered into union and fellowship with Christ and therefore into the participation of his death and resurrection (1 Cor. 1:9).

Sanctification is also progressive until it is completed in glorification. It might appear that in this process there is the convergence of grace and works. We are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). This activity on the part of believers must not be denied. Our whole personality in its diverse aspects and activities is enlisted in the doing of God's good pleasure. But this doing means no suspension of grace. The apostle goes on to say, 'for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure' (Phil 2:13). Our willing and doing are altogether of God's working and therefore of grace. And this operative grace of God is not only the cause but also the urge and incentive to our activity for his good pleasure.

*SOVEREIGN GRACE* - The sovereignty of grace is implicit in its nature. If grace excludes the constraint of human merit, if its whole constraint and explanation reside in God, it must be of his free good pleasure. It is well to note the emphasis which the Scripture places upon this fact of sovereign will. When it speaks of the riches of God's grace (Eph. 1:7) and of what will redound 'to the praise of the glory of his grace' (Eph. 1:6), it is then

that we find the reiterated reference to 'the good pleasure of his will' (Eph. 1:5), to 'the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure' (Eph. 1:9), and to 'the purpose of him who worketh all things according to the counsel of his will' (Eph. 1:11). To dissociate grace in its source, progress, or fruition from pure sovereignty of will is to annul not only its character but also that by which its exercise is conditioned. And Paul's teaching here is the reproduction of our Lord's--'even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight' (Matt. 11:26).

The mansions of glory will eternally resound with the praise of God's grace. It is not the minimum of salvation that the saints will enjoy but salvation the highest conceivable. No higher destiny could be appointed for them than to be glorified with Christ and conformed to the image of God's own Son (Rom. 8:17, 29). Nothing but sovereign grace at the zenith of its counsel and exercise could explain such glory. For it must be placed against the desert that is ours, the blackness of darkness forever. This contrast God's grace alone can explain.

*Collected Writings of John Murray, vol. I*

## Day 21

### *A Morning Prayer*

*Gracious Father, we bring before your throne of grace those who are yet unsaved. They have no due sense of their danger and are blind to the eternal ruin that must be their just portion unless they find pardon in that Savior who sits at your right hand. Open their eyes to see their lost condition. Send them convicting grace that they may repent and turn to Jesus, lest in the darkness of this night they are taken unawares and perish in their sins. And give us, your disciples, an earnest zeal to share the good news with them. Your word declares that the fields are ripe for harvest; yet we all too often sit with our hands folded as if there were nothing to do. Give us the compassion of Jesus, who saw the lost as sheep without a shepherd. Let us labor today to bring them into the fold, because the night is coming when no man can work. We pray in the name of Jesus, our great High Priest. Amen.*

### **THE WORK OF CONVERSION**

**John Flavel**

***"And Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." (John 6:35)***

In nothing does Providence shine forth more gloriously in this world than in ordering the occasions, instruments, and means of conversion of the people of God. However skilfully its hand had molded your bodies, however tenderly it had preserved them, and however bountifully it had provided for them, if it had not also ordered some means or other for your conversion, all the former favors and benefits it had done for you had meant little. This, oh this, is the most excellent benefit you ever received from its hand. You are more indebted to Providence for this than for all your other mercies. And in explaining this performance of Providence, I cannot but think your hearts must be deeply affected. This is a subject which every gracious heart loves to steep its thoughts in. It is certainly the sweetest history that ever they repeated. They love to think and talk of it. The places where and instruments by whom this work was wrought are exceedingly endeared to them. For many years afterward, their hearts have melted when they have but passed occasionally by those places, or but seen the faces of those persons that were used as instruments in the hand of Providence for their good.

But lest any poor soul should be discouraged by the display of this Providence because he cannot remember the time, place, instruments and manner when and by which his conversion was wrought, I will therefore premise this necessary distinction to prevent injury to some, while I design benefit to others.

Conversion, as to the subjects of it, may be considered two ways: either as it is more clearly wrought in persons of riper years, who in their youthful days were more profane and vile, or upon persons in their tender years, into whose hearts grace was more imperceptibly and indiscernibly instilled by God's blessing upon pious education.

In the former sort, the distinct acts of the Spirit--illuminating, convincing, humbling, drawing them to Christ and sealing them--are more evident. In the latter, these are more obscure and confused. They can remember that God gave them an esteem and liking of godly persons, care of duty and consciousness of sin, but as to the time, place, instruments and manner of the work, they can give but a slender account of them. However, if the work is savingly wrought in them, there is no reason they should be troubled simply because the circumstances of it are not so evident to them as they are to others. Let the substance and reality of the work appear, and there is no reason to afflict yourselves because of the lack of evidence of such circumstances.

*The Mystery of Providence*

## Day 22

### A Morning Prayer

*O Lord most holy and merciful, we come before you with grateful hearts, for although we are but dust and ashes and weak and miserable, you have given us the means and aids by which we may be accepted at your throne of grace. We therefore come pleading the merits and sufficiency of your Son and our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. This day will bring trials and temptations to prove our love for you. Shield and guide us throughout its every hour. Hold back our hands from every evil deed, let not our tongues speak lies, keep our thoughts from foolishness, and enable us to do all to your glory, and to do it with all our might. Thank you for your never-ceasing fatherly care. Grant that we may be ever conscious of it. We ask in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

### SINS OF THE TONGUE

W. B. Collyer

***"Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." (James 3:5-8)***

The most degrading and offensive vice of the tongue is *profanity*. It is absolutely without apology, and it is inseparable from infamy. The highest rank cannot palliate [gloss over] it, the lowest cannot excuse it. It prevails, alas, among all ranks, and to a degree among both sexes. I am not now speaking of that contempt and defiance which the tongue of the infidel sometimes pours forth against the Fountain of his being and the prescriptions of his word, but of that most horrible habit of swearing--or taking the name of God in vain--which affords neither pleasure nor profit while it violates whatever is sacred and tramples underfoot a positive command: *"You shall not take the name of the LORD [Yahweh] your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain."*

That the higher classes in society should indulge in this degrading vice is most astonishing. The great line of distinction between them and the lower classes is propriety of language. This marks, more strongly than any other circumstance, superiority of education, culture of mind, and select associations. This distinction they voluntarily abandon, and descend to the vulgar dialect and dreadful oaths of the uninstructed and the low for no possible gratification. And even the softer sex, who would shrink from the broad and profane oath, are nevertheless habitually guilty (especially among the higher ranks and but too universally) of using the name of their Maker with levity upon every frivolous occasion.

*"Shall I not visit for these things, says the LORD?"* Are we to suppose that he has given a

commandment without sanctions, or that he will pass over the breach of it? He has said, *"Because of swearing the land mourns,"* and will he not effect his declaration--*"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away"*? How frequently has he cut off the profane in the midst of their sin! And what other dreadful instances of wrath do we wait for before our boys and our females, our rulers and our population will learn to lay aside this shocking, this disgusting, this impious practice and listen to the warning voice, *"Swear not at all"*?

*Slander* is a vice of the tongue of the most pernicious quality. Next to inventing falsehood of another is the crime of admitting it without scruple and giving it circulation. Some persons seem to live for no other purpose than either to tell or to hear some new thing; but from a moral obliquity [mental perversity], they can see nothing amiable in another, hear nothing favorable, and tell nothing honorable. They visit, converse (I had almost said worship) for no other end, and the very sanctuary becomes sometimes, and with some professors, the mart where reputations are bartered and the altar on which character is sacrificed by looks, by whispers, by insinuations. An adjournment from the pew to the tea table removes all restraint from the tongue and gives all scope to the rancorous principle. Such employment of the tongue is odious in all men, most inexcusable in professors, but detestable beyond all reach of censure in ministers.

*Levity* appears a venial offense, but it may have a disastrous issue. Trifles in themselves become of serious consequence in their results. Lightness of speech has sometimes terminated fatally. An unguarded expression has led to murder. A sarcasm has implanted in the offended bosom implacable hatred. And general levity of speech both indicates a trifling spirit and induces pernicious effects upon the moral feeling. It is worthy to remark in what a dark association the apostle places habitual jesting: *"But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks."* He who accustoms himself to habitual levity of speech encourages a licentiousness of spirit which will render him familiar with evil, and may by degrees initiate him into the darkest mysteries of practical impurity.

*Selections from Theological Lectures (condensed)*

## Day 23

### *A Morning Prayer*

*O everlasting God, our Rock and Guide, you have always been the defense of your people in the hour of danger. You have been their refuge in every trial and their stronghold when temptation assailed. When blackness comes upon their fainting souls through sorrow or affliction, you love to shed beams of mercy upon them. When any are weary, you delight to lead and support them. Your mercy guides them to the waters of comfort where they find rest. We acknowledge with gratitude your ever present help, and humbly ask that you give us perfect satisfaction in our earthly lot, utmost confidence in your divine providence, and a patient waiting for Jesus Christ's return, when he will come in the full glory of his Father, with his angels, to establish his kingdom here on earth. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords, and our Intercessor through whom we come before your throne of grace. Amen.*

### **THE MINISTRY OF REST**

**J. H. Jowett**

***"And He said to them, 'Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.' For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat." (Mark 6:31)***

This is not the speech of an old man but of quite a young man, barely thirty-three years of age, and who is burdened with the superlative ministry of the redemption of the race. All the arrangements of His public life are made on the assumption of its brevity. And yet He made time for rest! Sometimes we allow the sacredness of our labor to tempt us to regard rest as indolence, and relaxation as waste. True rest is the minister of progress. The hour of seclusion enriches the public service.

What were the special circumstances which impelled our Lord to call His disciples apart? They were twofold. They had just experienced the shock of a great sorrow. John the Baptist had been done to death. The deed had come upon them as an awful collision with their rosier expectancies. The great Deliverer was near; the Kingdom was at hand; the Divine sovereignty was about to be established; on the morrow He would be on the throne! And yet, here was the pioneer of the kingdom, in the very dawning of the victory, destroyed by the powers of the world. The disciples were stunned and bewildered. The world of their visions and imaginations tottered like a house of dreams. And it was in this season of mental confusion that our Lord called them apart to rest.

But, in the second place, there was the constant distraction of the ubiquitous crowd. *"There were many coming and going."* There is a strangely exciting interest about a multitude. It whips up the life to a most unhealthy speed and tension. And the peril is that we do not realize the intensity when we are in it. When we are on board ship we do not realize how noisy the engines have been until for a moment they cease. We are not conscious of the roar and haste of the traffic of Ludgate Hill until we turn aside into St.

Paul's. And it is even so with the influence of a crowd. It acts upon us like an opiate. It externalizes our life, it draws all our interests to the outsides of things, and we are almost unconscious of the distraction. And this was the mesmeric influence in which the disciples were constantly moving. The outsides of things were becoming too obtrusive and the insides of things were becoming dim. And these same two presences are with us today, the calamity and the crowd, the ministers of bewilderment and distraction. And to us, as to the disciples, the call comes from the Redeemer Himself, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest a while."

Now what will these deliberately contrived seasons of spiritual rest do for the stunned and distracted soul? In the first place, they will help us to realize the reality of the invisible, the immediacy of "things not seen." I know that if we were spiritual experts, this fine perception would be experienced everywhere. But the possibility in public is conditioned by experiences in private. If we are to have a real sense of God in the crowd, it must be by discipline in secret. We require special centers if we would spread the healthy influence over the life. One special day of rest is demanded if the entire week is to become a Sabbath. One special place is to be sanctified if the Lord is to be apprehended everywhere. In my own experience, I know that the shocks of the day and the distractions of the crowd tend to remove the Invisible into the dim background until the Invisible plays no mighty and awe-inspiring part in our lives. It is apart, in the awed quietness and individual loneliness, that the Invisible rears Himself like a great mountain. When the pressure of external circumstances is relaxed and we are alone, the veil of the temple parts asunder and we are in the holy of holies, and we know ourselves to be in the presence of God. If we practice that Presence in the special moment, it will abide with us through the hour.

In the second place, by going apart for rest we shall gain a bird's-eye view of the field of life and duty. In the midst of life's moving affairs we see life fragmentarily and not entire. We note a text, but not a context. We see items, but we are blind to their relationships. We see facts, but we do not mark their far-reaching issue and destiny. We are often ill-informed as to the true size of a thing which looms large in the immediate moment. Things seen within narrow walls assume an appalling bulk. A lion in your backyard is one thing; with a continent to move in, it is quite another. There are many feverish and threatening crises which would dwindle into harmless proportions if only we saw them in calm detachment. There are some things which we can never see with true interpretation until we get away from them. There is nothing more hideous and confusing than an oil painting when viewed at the distance of an inch. To see it we must get away from it. Detachment is essential to the comprehension of the whole, and therefore to the discernment of a part.

It is not otherwise with life. We are often too much in the thick of things to see them. We cannot see the wood for the trees, the whole for the part, the life for the living. "Come ye apart!" Leave this and that and the other; and from the place of sacred and restful detachment look over the entire field of life and duty, of purpose and destiny, and the fragment shall take its appointed place in the vast design and shall no longer masquerade as an appalling and overwhelming totality.

Sometimes this season of discerning detachment is forced upon us by the ministry of

sickness. The Lord says to a long-time healthy man, "Come apart, I have something to say to you. I have things to show you which you have forgotten, or which you have never seen." And then the man is detached by sickness from the immediate labors to which he has been applying himself with fierce and blinding quest. And what frequently happens, as the outcome of the seclusion, is a transformed conception of life and destiny: "I see things quite differently now!" He had been engrossed in fireworks and had forgotten the stars. He had been busy building and enlarging his barns and had overlooked his mighty soul. He had been feverish about the transient, and negligent of the eternal. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now-----!" In the season of seclusion he obtained a corrected vision.

And sometimes a holiday provides the requisite apartness, when life passes in review and we apprehend its true significance and proportion. I think this is peculiarly true of a minister and his ministry. We are so apt to become riveted to the mere organization, and overlook the very products for which it was devised. We become engrossed with agricultural implements, and we forget the harvest. . . . And what is pertinent for the ministry would be surely fruitful to all men. We may use our holiday times as seasons for looking at things from the standpoint of healthy detachment and noting the real quality and bearings of our work, its drift and ultimate destiny.

But what holidays and sicknesses sometimes accomplish we can achieve by more immediate devices of our own choosing. By deliberately retiring from the pressure of our besieging work, we can ordain a seclusion-chamber where we can look at things in the calming, cooling, sanctifying presence of the Lord. In that sacred detachment many obscure things will become clear: "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary; then understood I." And in this sacred detachment many previous emphases will be changed. Many a valley shall be exalted and many a mountain and hill shall be made low. The thing that seemed tremendous shall sink into a plain, and some things which we had almost ignored shall rear themselves as the very hills of God. . .

Now there is nothing that so refreshes the entire man as deep, quiet waiting upon God. Every other refreshment may be welcome, but it is only partial and will leave some weary power still impaired. Get the soul restored and every part of the being will feel the mighty influence of its rejuvenation. . . . "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

*The Silver Lining*

## Day 24

### A Morning Prayer

*Heavenly Father, you are the God of all grace. We ask now that you would endue us with wisdom that we may use our time wisely, not as our own but as yours, so that we may be prepared at the last to render an account of our stewardship. Give us godly dispositions in conformity with our Savior's, that we may be meek, kind, forgiving, patient, and faithful. Teach us the forbearance that suffers long, which is your gift, the desire for our neighbor's best welfare, which is the Christian's mark, and the obedience that shows we are Christ's disciples indeed. Opportunities abound in which we may bring glory to you. Let us not allow them to pass by unnoticed, but accept them as the paths to spiritual blessing. We ask in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

### PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Alfred Edersheim

***"A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him." (Luke 10:30-34)***

This parable is connected with a question addressed to Jesus by a lawyer, probably an expert in Jewish Canon Law. The question was one of theoretic, not of practical interest, nor was it a matter of deep personal concern, as it was to the rich young ruler who, not long afterwards, addressed a similar inquiry to the Lord.

"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" At the foundation of this question lay the notion that eternal life was the reward of merit, of works. The only question was what these works were to be. The idea of guilt had not entered his mind, as he had no conception of sin within. Jesus responds using the common Rabbinic expression, "What readest thou?" which pointed him to the Scriptures of the Old Testament. "Thou shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." Jesus answers him, "You have answered rightly. Do this and you will live."

Why did Christ seem to give his assent to the lawyer's answer, as if it really pointed to the right solution of the great question? We reply, no other answer could have been given him. On the ground of works, if that had been tenable, this was the way to heaven. To understand any other answer would have required a sense of sin, and this could not be imparted by reasoning but must be experienced.

The lawyer replies, "But who is my neighbor?" He wished to vindicate his original question, showing that it was not quite so easily settled as the answer of Jesus seemed to imply. And here it was that Christ could, in a parable, show how far orthodox Judaism was from even a true understanding, much more from such perfect observance, of this Law as would gain heaven. Thus might he bring even this man to feel his shortcomings and sins and awaken in him a sense of his great need.

The parable is familiar to us all. The priest and Levite both passed by the stricken man. The Samaritan, on the other hand, not only tended to his injuries but brought him to an inn, paying for his care. The lawyer is then himself made to enunciate its lesson. Jesus asks, "Which of these three seems to you to have become neighbor to him that fell among the robbers?" Though unwilling to take the hated name of Samaritan on his lips, especially as the meaning of the parable and its anti-Rabbinic bearing were so evident, the lawyer was obliged to reply, "He that showed mercy to him."

The parable implies a complete change of Jewish ideas. It is truly a Gospel parable, for the whole old relationship of mere duty is changed into one of love. Thus, matters are placed on an entirely different basis from that of Judaism. The question now is not, "Who is my neighbor?" It is, "Whose neighbor am I?" The gospel answers the question of duty by pointing us to love.

Would you know who is your neighbor? Become a neighbor to all by the utmost service you can do them in their need. The parable points to Christ who, in our greatest need, became neighbor to us, even at the cost of all he had.

*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*

## Day 25

### *A Morning Prayer*

*O Lord God almighty, in whose hands are the issues of life and death, we ask that you bless our President and direct him by your Spirit that he may seek your glory in his administration and adorn the doctrine of God his Savior in all things. Give to our elected representatives and senators wisdom and discretion, opening to them your law as the rule of every action and their guide in every council, for it must witness for or against them hereafter. Let their decisions be based upon the best and surest foundations in order that peace, happiness, truth, justice and piety may be established among us for all generations, and that your name may be magnified in this land and made known by us far and wide for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord and God. Amen.*

### **JOHN QUINCY ADAMS Wilbur M. Smith**

***"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15)***

Every one reading this book knows that the sixth President of the United States was John Quincy Adams (1767-1848), but how many have ever had the thrilling experience of reading the remarkable letters which he wrote to his son while he, the father, was Minister of the United States to Russia? Perhaps before we look at the letters themselves, those which have revealed the author's own personal habits of Bible study, we might refresh our minds for a moment in regard to Adams' personal history.

With little early schooling he accompanied his father to France in 1778. After a short training in French and Latin in an academy at Passy, he returned to America, but went to France again in 1779 and attended the Latin School at Amsterdam. He matriculated into Leyden University in January, 1781, but soon went to St. Petersburg as secretary to Francis Dana, United States Minister to Russia. In 1783 he returned to The Hague and resumed his classics under Dumas, the Editor of Vattel. On the father's appointment to the London mission the son determined to return to America, entered Harvard College as a junior, graduated in 1787, studied law at Newburyport under Theophilus Parsons, afterwards chief justice of Massachusetts, and was admitted to practice July 15, 1790. Thus, by the age of twenty-three, Adams had an education that could hardly be surpassed, and a rich experience in the capitals of Europe such as no young American of his day could boast of.

In 1809, when only thirty-two years of age, he was appointed by President Madison as United States Minister to Russia, and later, as Minister to the Court of St. James, in London. He was invited by President Monroe to become Secretary of State in his cabinet, in 1817, and in 1825 was elected the sixth President of the United States. Two years after

the close of his term he was elected to the twenty-second Congress, and had the distinction of being returned for eight successive congresses, over a period of seventeen years. The verdict of such a man should carry as much weight as that of any man in public life in our country today. (A most interesting book would be one devoted to the religious convictions of all our Presidents.)

During his residence in St. Petersburg the future President of the United States wrote to his son, who was studying in a school in Massachusetts, a series of letters that have become famous. Those that have been published are devoted almost entirely to exhortations to read the Word of God. To give added effect to his earnest pleas, the father revealed some of his own habits of reading the Scriptures. "So great is my veneration for the Bible," he wrote, "and so strong my belief, that when duly read and meditated on, it is of all books in the world, that which contributes most to make men good, wise, and happy--that the earlier my children begin to read it, the more steadily they pursue the practice of reading it throughout their lives, the more lively and confident will be my hopes that they will prove useful citizens to their country, respectable members of society, and a real blessing to their parents.

"I advise you, my son, in whatever you read, and most of all in reading the Bible, to remember that it is for the purpose of making you wiser and more virtuous. I have myself, for many years, made it a practice to read through the Bible once every year. I have always endeavored to read it with the same spirit and temper of mind which I now recommend to you: that is, with the intention and desire that it may contribute to my advancement in wisdom and virtue. My custom is, to read four or five chapters every morning, immediately after rising from my bed. It employs about an hour of my time, and seems to me the most suitable manner of beginning the day. But, as other cares, duties, and occupations engage the remainder of it, I have perhaps never a sufficient portion of my time in meditation, upon what I have read. Every time I read the Book through, I understand some passages which I never understood before, and which I should have done, at a former reading, had it been effected with a sufficient degree of attention." It has been stated, upon good authority, that Mr. Adams continued these faithful daily habits of reading the Bible throughout his life, even during his crowded days while living in Washington.

He brings to a close this particular series of letters to his son with this final exhortation and prayer: "To read the Bible is of itself a laudable occupation and can scarcely fail of being a useful employment of time, but the habit of reflecting upon what you have read is equally essential as that of reading itself, to give it all the efficacy of which it is capable. I therefore recommend to you to set apart a small portion of every day to read one or more chapters of the Bible. . . . As an expedient for fixing your attention, make it also a practice for some time, to put down in writing your reflections upon what you read from day to day; you may perhaps at first find this irksome, and your reflections scanty and unimportant, but they will soon become both easy and copious.

"And may the merciful Creator, Who gave the Scriptures for our instruction, bless your study of them, and make them to you 'fruitful of good works.' "

Emerson, who heard him in his later years, remarked: "No man could read the Bible with such powerful effect." It is of significance that Mr. Adams was a Vice President of the American Bible Society from 1818 to the time of his death, a period of thirty years.

*Profitable Bible Study*

## Day 26

### A Morning Prayer

*O Lord and Savior, while on earth you declared in plain but powerful language what was required to do your will. But man has refused to see the broad distinction between vice and virtue, right and wrong, sin and holiness. He continues in sin thinking his ignorance will absolve him when he comes before your bar of eternal justice. Send him convicting grace, we pray, that he may know that if he does not walk according to your righteous law he must be cut off, and that without remedy. O blessed Savior, your love is yet great, your mercy is still abundant, and your power is still sufficient to save all who come to you for salvation. And as for us your disciples, your word is still true that the fields are white and ready for harvesting. Make us, therefore, zealous laborers for you. Amen.*

### A GODLY MAN IS A ZEALOUS MAN

Thomas Watson

***"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for himself his own special people zealous for good works."* (Titus 2:11-14)**

Zeal is a mixed affection, a compound of love and anger. It carries forth our love to God and anger against sin in the most intense manner. But there is something that looks like zeal which is not. I shall therefore show some differences between a true and a false zeal.

*A false zeal is a blind zeal.* 'They have a zeal of God but not according to knowledge' (Rom. 10:2). This is not the fire of the spirit, but wildfire.

*A false zeal is a self-seeking zeal.* Jehu cries, 'Come, see my zeal for the Lord!' (2 Kgs. 10:16). But it was not zeal, but ambition; he was fishing for a crown. Demetrius pleads for the goddess Diana, but it was not for her temple. It was her silver shrines that he was zealous for. It is probable that many in King Henry VIII's time were eager to pull down the abbeys, not out of any zeal against popery, but that they might build their own houses upon their ruins.

*True zeal will encounter the greatest difficulties.* When the world holds out danger to discourage us, zeal casts out fear. It is quickened by opposition and will march in the face of death. Let news be brought to Paul that he was waylaid: 'in every city bonds and afflictions' awaited him. This set a keener edge upon his zeal: 'I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus' (Acts 21:13).

Christian, if you would be found in the catalog of the godly, strive for zeal. It is better to

be of no religion than not to be zealous in religion. Beware of sloth, which is an enemy to zeal. What do you reserve your zeal for? Is it for your gold that perishes or your passions that will make you perish? Can you bestow your zeal better than upon God? Was not Jesus Christ zealous for you? He sweat drops of blood, he conflicted with his Father's wrath. How zealous he was for your redemption! And have you no zeal for him?

Zeal makes all our religious performances prevail with God. When the iron is red hot, it enters best, and when our services are red hot with zeal, they pierce heaven soonest.

*The Godly Man's Picture*

## Day 27

### A Morning Prayer

*O Lord God Almighty, let your Holy Spirit bear witness with our spirits that we are children of God. Impart to us the fullness of your Spirit that we may bring forth love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness, long-suffering, patience, and temperance. Grant that we may so copy the example of our Savior as to be the letters of Christ, known and read of all men. Teach us, dear Father, to live so that we may glorify you, who has bought us with a price of such amazing value--the blood of your own Son, Jesus, in whom we offer this prayer. Amen.*

### THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT Cornelius R. Stam

***"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." (Galatians 5:22, 23)***

True spirituality will manifest itself in many ways in the life of the believer -- ways which in themselves will bespeak the blessedness of walking in the Spirit. Among these is the combination of graces which Paul, by the Spirit, calls "*The fruit of the Spirit.*"

First, it should be observed that "the Spirit" here refers, not to "the spirit of man which is in him," but to the Spirit of God who indwells the believer and causes him to bring forth good fruit. This is evident, both from the context here in Galatians 5 and from what we are told of "the spirit of man" in I Corinthians 2:11. These spiritual graces, then, do not spring from any natural goodness in us, but from the indwelling Spirit of God.

Next it should be noted that in contrast to "the *works* of the flesh" we have here "*the fruit of the Spirit.*" These graces are not the product of human energy but the natural result of life and growth.

The reader will recognize at a glance the difference between these spiritual virtues and those which the world fosters and boasts of. Here we have the delicate and beautiful finish, so to speak, of God's workmanship. This is not to concede that it is superficial or merely outward, for, as we have pointed out, it is the outflow of the Spirit's work within.

Let us briefly consider these graces, possessed by believers in the measure that they yield to the Spirit's control.

*Love.* Here we must begin, for love is the great motivating force behind the truly spiritual life. "The love of Christ constrains us" (2 Cor. 5:14). Faith "works by love" (Gal. 5:6). It is "by love" that we are to "serve one another" (Gal. 5:13). Indeed, though we give our all for others, if this is not done out of genuine love it will profit us nothing (1 Cor. 13:3). This is as it should be, for Christian service is truly blessed only in the measure that it is sincerely done and springs from heart-felt love.

*Joy.* The truly spiritual life is by no means a dull or unhappy one. Indeed, true spirituality is the key to true blessedness. And joy, be it noted, runs far deeper than mere happiness or that natural cheerfulness which many of the unsaved possess. The original word (*chara*) is a close relative to the word grace (Gr., *charis*). True joy is anchored deep in God Himself. It springs from (1) a knowledge of what God has done for us and is to us (1 Thes. 1:6) and (2) a consciousness that, being in His will, we are the recipients of His very best (2 Cor. 8:1,2). *This* can be the fruit of the Spirit alone (Rom. 14:17).

*Peace.* Another blessed fruit of the Spirit! It begins with "peace with God," appropriated by faith in Christ (Rom. 5:1), is followed by "the peace of God," which garrisons the heart and mind however dark the hour (Phil. 4:7), and naturally results in an attitude of peace, or peacefulness, toward others (Rom. 12:18; 2 Cor. 13:11; 1 Thes. 5:13). Pity those believers who fail to "walk in the Spirit," lose "the blessedness" and "bite and devour one another" (Gal. 4:15; 5:15,16) instead of bearing this blessed fruit.

*Longsuffering.* The idea here is that of patience, particularly with the failures of others. This virtue naturally follows love, joy and peace, and is, again, distinctly a fruit of the Spirit. How often we find it linked with graces *not* stressed in worldly society: "Forbearance," "kindness," "meekness," etc.

*Gentleness.* The root of this work is variously rendered "easy," "better," "kind," "good," "gracious." It has the idea of *gentle kindness* toward another. This, despite the callousness of the world about him, will be a characteristic of every truly spiritual believer. Nor will this indicate weakness; indeed, it will indicate superior strength. Only the strong can afford to be gentle. God is *almighty*, yet He dealt with us in gentle kindness and thus led us to repentance (Rom. 2:4).

*Goodness.* Following again in natural sequence, the idea here is not that of personal righteousness, but rather of a *disposition to do good*. The same root is found in Gal. 6:10, where we are exhorted: "*As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*" How this all makes for objective living!

*Faith.* The word *faith* here, however, is *not* used objectively but *subjectively*. It does not refer to what one *does* but rather to a quality he possesses. It does not denote trust but *fidelity* or *worthiness to be trusted*, as in Rom. 3:3; Gal. 2:15, 16, 20; 3:22, etc. "*All men have not faith,*" wrote Paul, referring not merely to unbelievers but to "unreasonable and wicked men," who could not be trusted (2 Thes. 3:2). By contrast every believer should be worthy of the confidence and trust of others at all times. *Fidelity* again follows the other moral virtues in natural sequence and is also a fruit of the Spirit.

*Meekness.* The meaning of this word is clear from its usage in the immediate context (6:1) where we read, with respect to the brother overtaken in a fault: "*Ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering yourself, lest you also be tempted.*" It refers to that mildness of attitude and manner which, in our case, springs from the realization that we too are liable to fall before temptation. It is a mildness which springs

from a proper humility and recognition of our own weakness. How can I be harsh and severe toward a fallen brother when I myself am so liable to stumble and fall? Yet, meekness is not a *natural* trait where the sins of *others* are concerned. It is a fruit which only the Spirit can produce and, as such, follows naturally after *faith*, or personal fidelity. The writer's mother used to teach him in childhood to be very exacting with one's self but very understanding with others. This is not the way of the world.

*Temperance.* Temperance, or self-control, is the crowning grace of all, assuming that the others are already possessed. Few believers realize how important a place self-control should have in our lives. They think of it only in connection with eating, drinking and pleasure, and fail to realize the place it should have in our entire conduct and conversation as believers. Indeed, self-control should be exercised even in our worship. How many sincere but untaught believers there are who, loving the Lord with all their hearts, yet forgetting the majesty of the Godhead and the wonder of His work in our behalf, address Him as "dear Jesus" and praise Him with shallow love songs, as if He were some earthly lover. . . .

The truly spiritual person will not go to excesses of any kind, but will, by the Spirit, exercise self-control in his eating and drinking, in his conversation and conduct -- even in his prayer and praise. May God help us, in these evil and frivolous days, also to bear *this* fruit of the Spirit!

*True Spirituality*

Day 28

*A Morning Prayer*

*O Lord our God, we beseech you to increase our faith, hope, and love. By faith may we ever see Jesus as our mediator and intercessor, trusting in him as the only sure anchor for our souls both now and for eternity. Enlarge our hope by giving it a greater confidence in your promises and providence. Let us not be cast down nor dismayed when the path seems dark, let us not be anxious over our earthly cares, and let nothing darken that bright gleam on which we have set our eyes, the return of our Savior in power and great glory. And let not love, that greatest gift, fail within. Teach us how it suffers long and is kind. Show it to us in all its excellence and beauty by enabling us to meditate on the love of Christ, who reconciled us to himself when we were yet enemies. Make us understand it as a divine emanation of the triune God. Teach us by sweet experience that all your paths are pleasantness, and all your ways peace. And uphold us against temptation that we may glorify you, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

**RETURNING GOOD FOR EVIL**

**Charles Simeon**

***"If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for so you will heap coals of fire on his head, and Yahweh will reward you." (Proverbs 25:21,22)***

The morality both of the Old and New Testament is the same. Some have imagined that because our blessed Lord said "a new Commandment I give to you," he has in his Gospel enlarged the duties of his followers beyond what was required by the moral law. But no command of his was new *in itself* but only in *its circumstances*, as being enjoined from new principles and illustrated by new examples.

Morality does not depend on any arbitrary appointment. It arises out of the relation which we bear to God as our common Father and to each other as brethren. To love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves, must of necessity be the duty of every child of man. Had our blessed Lord increased the demands of the moral law, then the Law must have demanded too little of us or the Gospel must have demanded too much. But neither of these is the case. The requirements both of the one and of the other are the same as far as morals are concerned. Love is acknowledged to be the fulfilling of the Law and the great commandment of the Gospel also.

From the words of our text we shall now be led to consider the duty inculcated therein.

By nature we all are inclined to render evil for evil. There is not a child who does not manifest this disposition as soon as it begins to act. Nor is there anyone whose own experience will not furnish him with unnumbered proofs that this is the natural bent of his own heart. Circumstances may indeed prevent us from retaliating injuries in an open way.

The person who has inflicted the injuries may be out of our reach, or be too powerful for us to contend with, or be so low as to be deemed unworthy of our notice.

But in our hearts we shall find the vindictive principle strongly operative, disposing us to take pleasure in any evil that may have befallen our enemy, and to decline yielding to him any service which we might have rendered under the influence of a better principle. The man with the workings of hatred in his heart scarcely thinks of his enemy except with pain and a direct reference to the injuries received from him. And though from lack of opportunity he may not retaliate, he has in him the spark that might soon, by a concurrence of circumstances, break forth into a flame.

In proof of this we need only see how this spirit has operated in others, sometimes rankling for years till an opportunity was presented to gratify itself, and at other times bursting forth at once into furious resentment. Simeon and Levi, the sons of Jacob, were full of indignation against Shechem for defiling their sister Dinah. They formed a plan to murder not only Shechem but every male of the city in which he dwelt. To put them off their guard and disable them for resisting, they devised a scheme the most hypocritical and infernal that could enter the heart of man. And succeeding in this plan, they executed their bloody purpose without pity and remorse. Absalom's desire for revenge over the wrongs which his sister Tamar had sustained by Amnon rankled for two full years, till by artifice he was enabled to effect his murderous design. More rapid but not the less cruel was the vindictive wrath of David when Nabal had refused to recompense his services in the way he desired. David instantly hastened with armed forces to cut off Nabal and every male belonging to his numerous household. Alas, alas, what is man when left to the workings of his own corrupt nature! His every thought accords with that Pharisaic principle, "Thou shalt love thy friend and hate thine enemy."

But the word of God requires us to render good for evil. Every species of revenge is absolutely forbidden, even in thought. "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it." Thus by the law of Moses the secret alienation of heart was to be counteracted by the exercise of actual kindness and benevolence.

But the words of our text are stronger still, and especially as they are cited by the Apostle Paul. The idea conveyed by him is that we must not merely give our enemy bread and water when he needs it, but must *feed him with the tenderness of a mother towards her little infant*. O what a victory does this suppose over all the vindictive feelings of our hearts!

We have a beautiful instance of this recorded in the history of Elisha. The prophet was surrounded by an army of Syrians determined to apprehend and destroy him. By a power communicated to him from above, he smote them all with blindness and then conducted them into the heart of Samaria. The king of Israel, now having gained this advantage over them, would have slain them. But the prophet said, "You shall not smite them, but shall set bread and water before them that they may eat and drink and go to their master."

Such is the disposition which we also are called to exercise towards our most inveterate enemies. We must "bless them who curse us, do good to them who hate us, and pray for them who despitefully use and persecute us."

Let us not be deterred by the arduousness of this duty but consider the encouragement given us to perform it. If we act in accordance with this kindness, we have reason to hope that we shall overcome the hatred of our enemy. Certain it is that no enemy was ever yet won by vindictive conduct. We may silence him by power, but we never can gain his affections by anything but love. And this will, if not always, yet sometimes prevail, as St. Paul intimates when he says, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Indeed, where there is a spark of honor left, we cannot but hope that such benevolence as this will at last prevail.

It is well known that metals are fused by heaping coals of fire upon them and not by putting fire under them. And thus shall the hard hearts of our enemies be melted by accumulated instances of undeserved love. True, we cannot convert their souls by this, for nothing but omnipotence can effect so great a work as the conversion of a soul. But we may reasonably expect to appease their wrath, perhaps also to slay their enmity against us. And one such victory will be a rich recompense for all the forbearance we have ever exercised and all the love we have ever displayed.

It is also plainly asserted in our text that such conduct shall be rewarded by God. It will be rewarded *here*, in that it will bring unspeakable peace to the soul; for whenever love rises superior to resentment and enables us to render good for evil, we find comfort springing up in our hearts.

But the promise will be yet more fully accomplished *hereafter*. Every act of patient self-denial and generous love will be noticed by God with special approbation. If a cup of cold water given to a disciple for Christ's sake shall in no way lose its reward, much less shall services rendered to an enemy for his sake pass unnoticed.

Therefore, let us guard against a vindictive spirit. You will sometimes be inclined to think that the exercise of resentment is necessary, that some displeasure needs to be manifested or your enemies will be emboldened to take still further outrages. But look at the command of God, which is clearly on the side of forbearance and love, and say, "Get thee behind me, Satan; you are an offense to me."

And set the Lord Jesus Christ before you as your example. When you were his enemy, he left the bosom of his Father for you. Yea, "when you were yet enemies, he died for you." I need say no more. Set him before you and your way will be clear. If you look to him for all needful help, his "grace shall be sufficient for you," and you shall be able to do all things through the strength he will impart.

*The Entire Works of the Rev. Charles Simeon, M.A. (slightly paraphrased)*

## Day 29

### A Morning Prayer

*O God, from time to time you have proved and tried those who are yours by sore afflictions. From your devout worshipers you have taken houses, lands, friends, or health to see if they looked more to the Creator than to man, and to make them proofs before an evil world of the power of faith and the strength of grace. We beseech you to look upon us in mercy and compassion, and give us such a measure of your grace that we may learn to be content with what we have. May we bless and praise you because you have not visited us with the calamities and distresses which abound on every side. Let us remember to confess before an unbelieving world that the absence of pain, sorrow, and distress is a blessing beyond our liveliest gratitude to acknowledge as we ought. And let no complaints arise among us, but rather keep us kindly sympathetic to one another in brotherly love, bearing and forbearing even as did Jesus, our Savior, Redeemer and God, in whose name we now plead. Amen.*

### CONCERNING ANXIETY

John Calvin

***"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Matthew 6:25,26)***

In the above passage, Christ reproves that excessive anxiety about food and clothing with which men torment themselves, and at the same time applies a remedy for curing this disease. When he forbids them to be *anxious*, this is not to be taken literally, as if he intended to take away from his people all care. We know that men are born on the condition of having some care, and, indeed, this is not the least portion of the miseries which the Lord has laid upon us as a punishment in order to humble us. But *immoderate* care is condemned for two reasons. First, in so doing, men tease and vex themselves to no purpose by carrying their anxiety farther than is proper. Second, they claim more for themselves than they have a right to do, and place such a reliance on their own industry that they neglect to call upon God. We ought to remember this promise: Though unbelievers shall "rise up early and sit up late and eat the bread of sorrows," yet believers will obtain, through the kindness of God, "rest and sleep" (Psalm 127:2). Though the children of God are not free from toil and anxiety, yet, properly speaking, we do not say that they are anxious about life, because, through their reliance on the providence of God, they enjoy calm repose.

Hence it is easy to learn how far we ought to be *anxious about food*. Each of us ought to labor as far as his calling requires and the Lord commands. And each of us ought to be led by his own needs to call upon God. Such anxiety holds an intermediate place between

indolent carelessness and the unnecessary torments by which unbelievers kill themselves. But if we give proper attention to the words of Christ, we shall find that he does not forbid every kind of care, but only what arises from distrust. *Be not anxious about what you shall eat or what you shall drink.* That belongs to those who tremble for fear of poverty or hunger, as if they were to be in need of food every moment.

*Is not the life of more value than food?* He argues from the greater to the less. He had forbidden them to be excessively anxious about the way in which life might be supported, and he now assigns the reason. The Lord, who has given life itself, will not suffer us to lack what is necessary for its support. And certainly we do no small dishonor to God when we fail to trust that he will give us necessary food or clothing, as if he had thrown us on the earth at random. He who is fully convinced that the Author of our life has an intimate knowledge of our condition, will entertain no doubt that he will make abundant provision for our needs. Whenever we are seized by any fear or anxiety about food, let us remember that God will take care of the life which he gave us.

*Calvin's Commentaries*

## Day 30

### *A Morning Prayer*

*Gracious Father, awaken us, we pray, from the paralyzing delusion that we may sit with our arms folded and our minds at ease, having nothing to do this day for you. Rouse us now, while we have energy to stir, to a sense of our danger from the enemy who roams tirelessly about seeking whom he may devour. Impress upon us the solemn and startling truth that it was anger kindled by our sins that led our Savior to the cross, and that only through his merits can we behold your holiness and glory. We confess with shame of face that our hearts have been cold and dull when reading of the cost of our redemption. We have been guilty of wandering thoughts when we should be shedding tears as we hear of the agony of him who propitiated your wrath against us. Pardon us, we plead, for such sinful neglect, and give us a burning desire to live for Christ and to share the good news that he died for sinners, for we ask in his name. Amen.*

### **WATCHING WITH CHRIST**

**Joseph A. Alexander**

***"Then He came the third time and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough! The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.' " (Mark 14:41)***

I am afraid that there are men--and Christian men!--who can allow themselves the pitiable luxury of weeping over fiction but who have no tears to shed with Jesus in Gethsemane. They regard it as a waste of time to dwell upon the circumstantial statements of the gospel, which cannot be reduced to abstract, systematic form. Or, at best, they are contented with a cold, dry knowledge of the facts related. They do not regard it as a matter of feeling; they would be ashamed to do so. I speak the experience of some who hear me. But ought this so to be? We must go back to the simple faith and feelings of our childhood. We must, at least in this respect, become little children. Those same imaginations, which have so often been the ministers of sin, must be used for better purposes. By their aid we must stand on Olivet and Gethsemane, mix with the rabble which surrounds the master, hear the deep imprecation of the Roman soldier and the louder curses of the Jewish mob, follow them to the house of the High Priest and the Pretorium, look at the false Procurator as he dooms the innocent and vainly tries to wash the blood away with water. But I need not go further. Fix your thoughts, I pray you, on these scenes as real scenes, and try to see and hear as if the sights and sounds were present to your senses. Having so done, let us gather from this night scene in Gethsemane the lessons which it teaches for our own instruction.

The first is, that the Son of Man may even now be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Men are apt to imagine that had they lived in the time of Christ, they would not thus and thus have treated him. This is, for the most part, mere illusion. They who hate Christ now would have hated him then. They who despise him unseen would have spurned him to his

face. They who now maltreat his members would have persecuted him. This is a test proposed by Christ himself. That which is done to the humblest of his followers, as such, is done to him. The interests of Christ's church are the interests of Christ. The enemies of Christ's church are the enemies of Christ. Even in our own day Christ may be betrayed. He may be betrayed by his own disciples. He may be betrayed with a kiss. For such treason the ungodly world is waiting. There are always sinners to receive him at the traitor's hands and pay the traitor's wages.

He can no longer be betrayed by the delivery of his person into hostile hands. But the disposition to surrender him to enemies may still exist--a disposition to procure the favor of the world at his expense. In short, the same state of feeling may now operate in various directions and in various forms which, if the Saviour were now present upon earth, would cause him to be first forsaken, then betrayed.

In this sense, for example, it may well be said that the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners when the truth respecting him is given up to errorists, or cavillers [quibblers], or infidels; when his divinity is called in question; when his eternal Sonship is degraded or denied; when the sinless perfection of his human nature is tainted by the breath of dubious speculation; when his atonement is disfigured and perverted; when the value of his cross and bloody passion is depreciated; when his place in the system of free grace is taken from him and bestowed on something else; when the purchase of his agonies is made to be the purchase of our own good works; when faith in him as a means of salvation is exchanged for mere submission to the government of God; when his present existence, as a man, is forgotten; when his personal presence, as a God, is overlooked; when his exaltation and his future coming are lost sight of by his people. By conceding so much to the unbeliever we betray the Saviour to him, to be buffeted and spit upon.

To mention only one other example: Christ is betrayed into the hands of sinners when his gospel is perverted, his example dishonored, and himself represented as the minister of sin. The honor of the Saviour is in some sense committed to the care of his disciples. And this sacred trust is shamefully betrayed when they give the world occasion, in despising them, to treat their master with contempt. O Christian! Have you ever thought that every inconsistent and unworthy act of yours is one step towards betraying Him whom you profess to love? And if, while you thus habitually act, you hold fast your profession, it is only adding the betrayer's kiss to the betrayer's perfidy. My first remark, then, is that even now the Son of Man may be betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Another thought which I suggest is, that when the cause of Christ is about to be betrayed into the hands of sinners, his disciples are to watch--to watch unto prayer--lest they enter into temptation. This is incumbent upon all disciples, but especially on some. And among those there is many a bold, self-trusting Peter, and many a Boanerges. Those who are office-bearers in the Church are the honored but responsible companions of their Master in the day of trial. He asks not for the exertion of their strength in his behalf. He asks not for their sympathy. He asks not for their prayers. But he does demand their vigilance. When he looks upon the purchase of his blood spoiled and ravaged by the enemy, his little flock pursued and torn by wolves, his vineyard spoiled and trodden by wild beasts, the great Intercessor pours out his own cries and tears before the Father. And although he

says no more "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," he does say to you and me, "Tarry ye here and watch with me."

Another thought, and that a melancholy one, is that when Christ's disciples are thus left to watch while he is interceding with the Father, they too often fall asleep. Some, in the touching language of the gospel, may be "sleeping for sorrow." But oh, how many others sleep for sloth and sheer indifference! And if any sleep for sorrow, they do wrong. For when our Saviour found his chosen friends asleep upon their post, he aroused them and reproached them with that mild expostulation, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" He said, indeed, as if to extenuate their guilt, that the spirit was willing though the flesh was weak. But even admitting what is commonly supposed--that flesh and spirit here mean soul and body--it does not follow that their slumber was excusable. Christ would not repeatedly have roused them from an innocent and necessary slumber. Much less was it excusable if, as some excellent interpreters have thought, spirit here means the better principle, the new heart, and flesh the remnant of indwelling sin. If this be so, it was hardness of heart and spiritual sloth that made them sleep for sorrow.

Oh, my brethren! If your hearts are full of sorrow because men make void God's law, it is no time for you to sleep! The Church, Christ's weeping bride, and the dying souls of men are at your pillow, shrieking in your ears, like the shipmaster in the ears of Jonah, "What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not." But alas! This warning voice is often heard in vain. Amidst a world lying in wickedness, amidst the untold miseries produced by sin, amidst the dying agonies of unsaved souls as they go down to their perdition, amidst the fierce attacks of open enemies upon the Son of Man and the devices of false followers to betray him to those enemies, his friends--his chosen friends--sleep on.

*Sermons (condensed)*

## Day 31

### *A Morning Prayer*

*O Lord God, who is like you, full of mercy, tenderness, and compassion? You know our infirmities and pity us because we are weak and frail. You sustain us because we cannot stand alone. You have wrought out a redemption for us because we could not redeem ourselves. You provide food, clothes, and all things necessary, even though our thoughts are not on you. You preserve us from danger and distress and are ever near to help and defend, though we neglect to return grateful thanks. O pardon our blind ignorance, our presumptuous rebellion, our daring folly, and open our eyes to see your favor working for us in every event, your providence directing all things for our welfare. And may we keep them in remembrance that they may sustain us during times of trial or affliction, even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. We ask in Christ's name. Amen.*

### **GOD'S PROVIDENCE**

**John Flavel**

***"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4)***

Now we shall consider how God's Providence will be of singular use to us in our dying hour: *It will sweeten our death to us and greatly assist our faith in this last encounter.* We find that when Jacob died, he reflected upon the dealings of God with him in the various providences of his life. In like manner, we find Joshua recording the providences of God when at the brink of the grave. They were the subject of his dying discourse. And I cannot but think it is a sweet close to the life of any Christian. It must needs sweeten the deathbed to recount there the several remarkable passages of God's care and love to us from our beginning to that day, to reflect upon the mercies that went along with us all the way when we are come to the end of it. Oh, Christian, treasure up these instances for such a time as that is, that you may go out of the world blessing God for all the goodness and truth he has performed for you all your life long.

The time of death is when souls are usually most violently assaulted by Satan with horrid temptations and black suggestions. We may say of that figurative, as it is said of the natural serpent, 'he never exerts his utmost rage till the last encounter,' and then his great design is to persuade the saints that God does not love them, has no care nor regard for them or their cries. Though they pray for ease and cry for sparing mercy, they see none comes. He handles them with as much roughness and severity as other men; yea, many of the vilest and most dissolute wretches endure less torments and are more gently handled than they.

But what credit can these plausible tales of Satan obtain with a Christian who has been treasuring up all his life-long the memorials of God's tender regard, both to his needs and prayers, and who has carefully marked the evident returns of his prayers and gracious

condescensions of God to him from his beginning to that moment? In this case, his faith is mightily assisted by thousands of experiences which back and encourage it, and will not let the soul give up so easily a truth that he has so often felt and tasted. I am sure, says he, God has had a tender fatherly care of me ever since I became His. He never failed me yet in any former difficulty, and I cannot believe He will do so now. I know His love is like Himself, unchangeable. 'Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.'

At death the saints are engaged in the last and one of the most eminent works of faith--even the committing of themselves into the hands of God--when they are launching forth into that vast eternity and entering into that new state which will make so great a change in a moment. Oh, what a sweet thing then it will be to close our lives with an honorable account of the ways of God, and to go out of the world blessing Him for all the mercies and truth that He has performed to us!

*The Mystery of Providence*