

Knowing the Lord.

“THAT I MAY KNOW HIM.”—

PHILIPPIANS III. 10.

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CHRIST GATHERING TO HIMSELF.

(MATT. XI. 25-30; XII. 46-50.)

I THINK, beloved friends, Matthew xi. is the turning-point of that gospel. In the three first gospels any attentive reader can see that the Lord Jesus presented Himself to men; He went about doing good and healing all that were diseased; He brought in all the light of heaven and the power that could bless men, and that could, had He been received, have established the days of heaven upon earth. There were none of the effects of sin or evil that the Lord could not remove, as well as overcome the power of Satan. He could bind the strong man and spoil his goods. In the beginning of this chapter we see the effects of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ here upon earth. John the Baptist had sent messengers to Him, and He tells them to go and tell John the things that they heard and saw—"the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." But notwithstanding, there came a moment when He was rejected. This

chapter brings before us His rejection ; it is not that the rejection was absolutely consummated—that takes place in chapter xii., when they say that the power by which all this was done was the power of Beelzebub ; “ This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils,” and when the power of the Spirit of God, which Israel were quite familiar with, was denied. They were familiar with the Spirit working in their midst, as with Moses in bringing the people out of Egypt, and leading them through the wilderness. Their own prophets attributed it to the Spirit of Jehovah. (Isa. lxiii. 11, 12.) They were quite conscious that the Spirit of Jehovah had acted in their midst. When Moses complains of the burden of the people, God says, “ Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel . . . and I will take of the Spirit that is upon thee and will put it upon them.” The Spirit of God had acted by the prophets. He wrought by Elijah and Elisha both in word and in act. A prophet was one who spoke and acted for God ; the power of God was with him ; Israel were perfectly familiar with the power of the Spirit of God, and when the Lord Jesus Christ came and was acting here they ought to have known that all that He was doing was really by the power of the Spirit of God. He was still among them ; the Lord says when they came out of Babylon—“ According to the

word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my Spirit remaineth among you." They ought to have recognised the Spirit of God. He came upon Zachariah, the father of John; He came too and spoke by Mary. The Spirit was there and they ought to have known that the Lord Jesus Christ was doing all by the Spirit of God. Their disbelief as to Christ could have been forgiven, but this blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is never forgiven.

But the rejection of the Lord morally takes place in chapter xi. For the moment even John the Baptist was in doubt about Him and sends messengers to the Lord to ask Him, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" We wonder that a man like John, to whom it had been said, "Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit of God descending and abiding, that same is he that baptiseth with the Holy Ghost," should say, "Art thou he that should come?" but John for a moment was bewildered; John had borne faithful witness to Christ and against evil, calling men to repentance, and his voice had been hushed. He had been cast into prison; he does not see Christ received and he says, "Can it be the coming One? Is it so that He is refused?"

It is much the same at the present moment. To go no further than this country which is called "Christian England," a country that has had the light of Christianity in a remarkable way for

three hundred years—Where are people all around us? only hear what they say about the Lord Jesus Christ. The greater part of Christians even go very little beyond the thought that He came to meet their needs, such as we get in the first part of the chapter, “the blind receive their sight,” &c., as if Christ only came to meet the state and condition of man. I suspect that more Christians are at home in Psalm ciii. than they are in Ephesians i., where all that is theirs is consequent upon the counsels of God, that have come to light through the Lord Jesus Christ being raised from the dead and glorified. There is something now that was never seen before, a Man in the glory of God, something which angels had never seen before. It must have been a wonderful thing for them to have seen Him in the manger, to know that Jehovah had become a Man, but it must have been more wonderful to see a Man take His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. There was a new thing altogether that the highest archangel could never even have thought of. If he stood in the presence of God he could only veil his face, but there was a Man with unveiled face sitting down at the right hand of God. Now the truth of Ephesians depends on that fact. But the greater part of Christians are more at home in Psalm ciii., that is, all the blessing coming to me down here. We can take up Psalm ciii., “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all

his benefits : who forgiveth all thine iniquities ; who healeth all thy diseases ; who redeemeth thy life from destruction ; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies." But then is that all—what He is to me down here ? Thank God He is all that to me ; all the goodness and grace that have ever come to us have come to us through the Lord Jesus Christ, but then there is another side of the truth, and that all hangs upon the fact of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at the right hand of God, and yet people in Christendom have sunk down to the thought that He was only here to benefit man, and everything is judged from this standpoint. And though true Christians do know the forgiveness of sins and something of the spiritual blessing that the Lord Jesus Christ brings to them, yet alas, there are a large number who would put Him on the same level with Moses and Elijah and others, as a mere benefactor of mankind.

There is a class, they come out in this chapter, a perplexed class, people who say, "We do not know what to believe, some say this and some say that." If such persons were to come into this room and hear what is taught, they would perhaps say, "That is what you think, and if I go somewhere else, I shall hear what they think ;" how perplexed such must be. That was the case in Matthew xi. How perplexed

people must have been. Was He really the Messiah? was He really the Christ of God? how was it that He was not received? was He a prophet? Do any of the rulers believe on Him? The Lord tells His disciples beforehand that He was not going to Jerusalem to sit on the throne of David. He was going there to suffer and to take His departure from this world altogether. How bewildered they must have felt; they did not understand it, and yet behind it all lay the counsels of God for eternity. The Lord allows man to play himself out, to show his ignorance, his opposition, and his hatred, all that man may be in intelligence and power and wisdom, religiousness, everything else, He allows it all to come out. Man did not appreciate Him when He came into the world. Nobody can appreciate Christ till he has become as a little child and been taught of God about His Son. No one knows the Son but the Father, and no one can teach you and me about God's dear Son but God Himself, by His blessed Spirit, and for that we want to become little children. There may be difficulties around us, all kinds of things, all kinds of thoughts, but what every one of us has got to do is to go down and be as a little child. It is not the subject here, but it comes out in Luke's gospel that men were tested by Christ's presence in this world. Simeon says in the beginning of that gospel, "This child is set

.... that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." Consequently you will find in Luke's gospel that it is oftentimes some remark by those around Him which draws out the teaching of the Lord. One says, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." The Lord says, "I see where you are, you are covetous, you want an inheritance in this world;" and another says, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God;" and then you get the great supper, and people are tested, they would not come; and so you get the thoughts of men's hearts revealed in a very remarkable way. You get more characters grouped around the cross in Luke than in any other gospel; all shades of characters come out. Every one is tested by the Lord Jesus Christ. You get Judas, Peter, the chief priests, Herod, Pilate, the soldiers, the multitude who smote upon their breasts, the daughters of Jerusalem, and so on. Every one is tested by the Lord Jesus Christ specially at His cross. I take the fairest of them, the daughters of Jerusalem. They follow Him weeping, and one might say, "Well now, they have some feeling for the Lord Jesus Christ;" but it was only human feeling, and the Lord turns round and says, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves." He did not want their tears; what He came for was their faith, that they should trust Him and learn of Him, and

trusting Him that they should have no confidence in themselves. If I am to trust the Lord Jesus Christ, it is not merely that I believe that He did this or that, I do believe He did a mighty work upon the cross, but I tell you where faith comes in—"I believe in *Him*"; it was the same thing with Abraham—Abraham believed *God*; he believed, not merely that God would keep His promise, but in God Himself. No doubt God had said that He would do things for him. He said, "Look at the stars, so shall thy seed be," but it is not simply that he believed that He would do what He said, but he believed in *God Himself*. He had found some one far and away above himself and all that he was. Even if he looked at the stars, how small he must have felt, just as David says in Psalm viii., "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers . . . what is man?" He must have felt his own nothingness, and yet as Moses, in "the prayer of the man of God," says (Psalm xc.), "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God," and there the faith of a poor creature like Abraham reposed, so do we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. I have found a Person for whom I can give up all hope in myself, and everything that is in myself. I can trust Christ with everything.

Perhaps you put your finger upon some passage of scripture and say, "That is written and therefore I can rest." Quite so, so can I, but the scripture reveals something more, it reveals to me a living Person and what He wants is my faith, He came here to be believed, and trusted. Who can lead us to that? who can make the Lord Jesus the very centre of one's soul? All, everything around us, no matter what it may be, is nothing compared with that blessed Man. What is all in this world compared with Him up there in the glory of God? And yet dear souls are bewildered as they look round the world; one says one thing and another another. People have tried to raise up bulwarks in Christendom by systems that are called churches which hold certain doctrines. You get doctrines and creeds and systems of men formed, and all, with the very best intention, to be a kind of bulwark of faith, but that is not faith reposing in the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. What we see to-day is Satan attacking every article of belief among men, and all is crumbling. Let me ask you, Where does your faith repose? Even John the Baptist was in doubt, the Lord having to say, "Go and tell John the things ye hear and see," and "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be stumbled in me." Then He speaks of the "*men of that generation*, as being like children sitting in the markets and calling unto their fellows." It is what you would

call playing with the thing, just like children playing in the street. You see children on the seashore playing. They build up a heap of sand and say, "This is a castle, and this is a house," and presently the waves come and sweep it all away; it is all play, there is no reality in it. So people take up religion. John came in the way of righteousness, saying the axe was laid at the root of the tree, and so on. They do not lament, they listen to it, but there was no reality in it for them. The Lord Jesus Christ came in the way of grace, piping as it were the news of the way of life and peace; there was no rejoicing. No, that was "this generation." It is a word that often comes out in the gospels. What the Lord puts in opposition to it in Luke's gospel is the "little flock" that believed in Him.

"Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not." There is no acknowledgment of Him, no turning round from the things of the world, but going on just the same. He had come into the world and the cities where most of His mighty works were done had not turned to Him, and He has to pronounce, "Woe, woe, woe"! "Woe to thee, Chorazin! woe to thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judg-

ment, than for you." Nothing can be more terrible than to hear "Woe" upon the lips of the blessed Lord. It is positive rejection, and the Lord has to pronounce the words of judgment, "Woe to thee! woe to thee!" Now look at the blessed Lord, the Son of God; the Father knew Him, and He knew the Father. He walked in the light and consciousness of a relationship that man knew nothing of. It was a relationship quite outside this world. Men rejected Him, but He was in the light of another world. He knew a system of holy love and affections that existed between Him as a blessed Man down here and His Father. He was known of the Father as His own dear Son, and He walked in the light of relationship. No one knew it but He, and He retires into it. Then, while He accepts the whole condition of things down here—"Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight," and takes His place outside of it all in the light of another world—He turns round and says, "Come unto me all ye that labour." There is a new gathering point. He is not gathering as Messiah upon earth, He is not building up anything here; He takes His place in the knowledge of His relationship with the Father, and the Father's with Him, and then He turns round and says, after all that has taken place, "Come unto me." This is taken oftentimes as the gospel, as an invitation for a weary heavy laden sinner to

come to Christ. But it means a great deal more than that. It means the Lord Jesus Christ taking His place outside the whole scene of this world, as a gathering centre to which you can come. Amid all the voices that are in the world and all the distress, it is a wonderful thing to be able to look up into heaven and say, The loved Son of the Father is the One that I can go to, the One that I can trust.

The end of chapter iii. of John's gospel, where John the Baptist speaks of the Lord increasing and himself decreasing, is very much like this. It says, "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand." Here the Lord says, "All things are delivered unto me of my Father." In the beginning of the next chapter of John's gospel you get the Lord going away from Jerusalem and passing through Samaria. He sat alone upon the well, but "as he was." You must join that on to the end of chapter iii. In our ordinary version it says, "He sat *thus* on the well," but in the new translation you will find it rendered, "He sat *as he was* on the well," apparently a weary, lonely stranger, but in reality who was He? He was the loved Son of the Father. Nobody knew Him. A person passing by might have said, There is a weary stranger sitting on the well and asking for a drink of water, but He who sat there was the loved Son of the Father.

There is no more wonderful sentence in this book than "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand." Whatever opinions men may have of Him, He was the loved Son of the Father. That, I think, explains what is spoken of in Colossians as the "kingdom of the Son of God's love." The kingdom is not yet established in power, but the Lord has had everything put into His hand, and therefore the kingdom becomes to us the kingdom of the Son of God's love. We know the kingdom under that title. Of course it is the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven, but we know it as the kingdom of the Son of God's love, and we are translated into it. The Lord was conscious of the love of the Father, and He wanted to bring the light of heaven and all the love of God to souls, He wanted to bless them with the blessing of heaven. Men were quite willing to be blessed in their circumstances, but they were unwilling to have the light of God brought into their souls. Jesus takes His place outside, but in the light of His Father's love, and He says, "Come unto me and I will give you rest." Can you find anything more blessed than that? The Father's love is resting upon that One, and all things are put into His hand by the Father. The whole universe of God has been put into the hands of that blessed Man, Son of His love, and He says, "Come unto me." No matter what

people say and think. Depend upon it there will come moments of testing for us all, it may be sorrow, bereavement, or poverty. How often the Christian will turn to the word of God (I admit its value), will look for a text, and perhaps find one, and rest upon it. I do not want to take it from you, but did it make you know the company of Christ in your sorrow? That is something more than a text of scripture, it is the company of Christ Himself. What led me to read the few verses in the end of chapter xii. was the sense of what the Lord can be to us, and how we can have His company. I am perfectly assured of this, that if you and I in any wise are bowing to the will of God, and the will of God is that I should own His dear Son, we shall be in the enjoyment of the Father's love for His Son. The Father as it were says, "I love Him." The world says this or that of Him, but the Father says, "He is my Son and I love my Son." Even John the Baptist is in doubt about Him, but the Father says, "He is my beloved Son, and I delight in Him, and I tell it to you that you may believe in my Son; I want you to know the love that I have to my Son, that you may love Him." How wonderful it is for us!

In the end of chapter xii. you see the Lord Jesus looking upon His disciples as those who had done the will of the Father; it might be that they had done it very poorly, very feebly,

but they had. The Lord gave great credit for very little faith. They really had believed in Him, and loved Him. It is very striking, for He often had to say, "O ye of little faith." Can you conceive anything more beautiful than the Lord stretching out His hand to those poor disciples in the midst of the world and whatever was going on, and saying, "Behold my mother, and my brethren"? Would not you like the Lord to stretch out His hand to you? I do not care what men think about Him, my thoughts are very feeble, but I have been brought to know in some little way what the Father thinks of that Son. I am brought to know that the Father loves that Son, and has put all things into His hand. All the blessedness that has flowed from the Father to the Son of His love goes back to the Father in one deep response from Him, and it is beautiful that I, a poor little creature, should be owned of Christ. Christ owns us, He stretches out His hand to us. Never mind the world, or this person or that stretching his hand to you, saying, "I will give you a lift up." You do not want the world; what does it matter if Christ will own you as one that does the Father's will in heaven? The will of the Father is that we should own His Son. The world does not own Him. I daresay His mother and His brethren represent Jewish, natural, associations. In that sense Israel is looked at as the mother of

the Lord. The Lord was born of Israel, but He says, "I disown all that." He stretches out His hand to those who do the will of His Father, and the will of the Father was that they should own Him and believe in Him, and take a place at His feet and learn of Him as little children. What will He teach me? He will teach me of the scene that He knows so well, all the love of the Father.

May the Lord keep us, in the midst of all that is going on around us. May one blessed object fix our hearts just as it did David's and Abraham's of old. They did not know what we know, yet one object fixed their faith. Now that object is presented to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. All is presented to us in Him. May the Lord keep us humble, trusting in Him, taking our place outside, not minding whether we are owned of this world or not, so that we are owned of Christ.



HEAVENLY PRINCIPLES UPON EARTH.

(MATT. XIII. 10-17, 34, 35, 51-58.)

WHAT is greatly on my mind to bring before you in these addresses is the way in which the Lord presents Himself to His disciples. I sought to shew you last time that the Lord was taking a place outside of all that was here, and inviting poor weary souls to come away to Him from all that was going on in the world of confusion and evil, because He belonged to a scene where there could be no breakdown. I will refer to a passage which perhaps will illustrate a little more what I mean, the end of John xvi. There the Lord speaks of the fact of His going away—He says, “I came forth from the Father and am come into the world; again I leave the world and go to the Father.” That is, He speaks as One who had come from a place with the Father and who was going to a place with the Father. It was a parable to His disciples, as He had said to them, but they said, “Now speakest thou plainly and speakest no parable; by this we know that thou camest forth from God.” They did not understand. They said that they believed that He came from *God*, but He said, “I came forth from the *Father*.” It was another relationship. In a

certain way you might speak of Moses and of Elijah as having come from God. Moses came from God and spoke to the people on God's behalf, but the Lord knew a relationship with God as His Father, as He said to the Jews, "My Father of whom ye say, that he is your God." (John viii. 54.) The disciples did not get the idea of God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that He had come from the Father and was going to the Father. The Lord goes on to say, "Do ye now believe? behold, the hour cometh when ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." He takes up the passage in Zechariah in a different way to what we find Him doing in Matthew, where He speaks of the Shepherd being smitten and the sheep scattered. In John He does not speak of the Shepherd being smitten but that they did not know His relationship with the Father, and that they would be scattered. They must have felt that everything had broken down when as the Messiah He was rejected, and what they thought He would have established here was all gone. Two afterwards said, "We thought it should have been he who would have redeemed Israel." All thought of the redemption of Israel was gone when Jesus died, all their hopes were dashed to the ground, but if they had known His relationship with the Father they

would not have been scattered. They all went to "their own," because they had got no gathering centre. Christ, who was their gathering point, was gone from them, but if they had known Him as the Son of the Father they would have said, That scene up there is not touched, He is "cut off and has nothing," His relationship with Israel is gone, but His relationship with the Father is not touched. They would have said, There is another home that He belongs to and so it belongs to us. He has said, "I go to prepare a place for you." But they did not understand, it was a parable to them. That shews you what I think is the force of Matthew xi.

What I have before me is that we should come to the knowledge of the Lord. It is a great thing to know the Lord. Not merely to know that He is the Lord and to know that He is a gathering centre, but to get acquaintance with Him. The Lord had broken with Israel, and He had proposed Himself as a gathering centre. "Come unto me all ye that labour and I will give you rest." As to the actual state around, the disciples found themselves in a very mixed condition of things. That comes out in these chapters. Look at chapter xiv. There I think you get the political state of things in Israel. Herod, the wilful king, was reigning. I have no doubt his connection with Herodias was a representation of wicked Israel, unfaithful to her husband, to

Jehovah, united with the wilful king that will reign in the land of Israel. It will come out fully in the last day. You get it mentioned in Isaiah lvii. 9, "Thou didst go to the king with ointment and didst debase thyself even unto hell." That was the political state of things, apostate condition, and Christ's witness murdered, that was the world they were in at that moment; such the condition of things in Israel. The result was that the Lord went away into the wilderness, just as the remnant of Israel will have to go into the wilderness at the time of the murder of the witnesses of Christ in the last day.

When you come to chapter xv. you get the religious character of things that they were in; scribes and Pharisees of Jerusalem finding fault with the disciples because they ate with unwashen hands, and substituting the traditions of men, as if they had equal weight, for the commandments of God, and sometimes putting them above them. It is easy to see that we are in a condition of things like that, where things are advanced on the authority of the fathers.

Now what can the Lord be to us in such a condition of things? That is the point I want to bring before you, to know the Lord and what He can be to us.

Another thing comes out which is important. If the Lord's connection with Israel was broken, would He be in connection with anything on this

earth? Have you thought of it? Is it not an immense thing for Christ to have a place here on earth still, though He has been cast out, that He should be able to say, There is a company, "My assembly," where I have a place though rejected in the world. There was another thing which was to come in also, and that was the kingdom of heaven. These are the two things which were to take the place down here of Israel, the kingdom of heaven, and what Christ calls "My assembly."

Let me make another remark here; that Matthew is a dispensational gospel. What I understand by a dispensational gospel is that it developes God's ways with man upon the earth. God may be pleased to bring out certain ways in which He deals with men at certain times. And so we may speak of the dispensation of the gospel, that is, that God is not addressing men on the ground of the law, but dealing with them, and approaching them with the gospel at the present moment. It may introduce us to what was in God's mind before there was a world, to what was fixed eternally in Christ according to God's own counsels, but there is no dispensation in that. A dispensation refers to God's dealings and ways down here in this world with man, and thus Matthew's gospel come in. He made this world and it has a course to run, and when that course is finished there will be a new heavens and a new earth.

Matthew never goes outside this world. It is a remarkable thing that while he refers to heaven he never goes outside the world. Matthew does not speak of the ascension of the Lord, he does not shew the Lord gone up into heaven. We might suppose He was still in Galilee. Matthew closes with that. We might suppose the Lord stopped upon earth and sent out His disciples from Galilee if we only had Matthew's gospel. The Holy Spirit by Matthew meant to teach us certain things that were connected with the dispensations of God in this world.

We have a twofold character: we belong, as to the present moment, to the kingdom of heaven and to Christ's assembly here upon earth; and then we have another character as united to Christ in heaven—His body. That is something that was eternally in the mind of God and not connected with the course of things on this earth. But for the moment everything connected with God's mind and thoughts connected with the earth is taken up in the church, the church looked at as Christ's assembly and the house of God, not as the body of Christ.

I want to bring before you in a clear way if I can, that the kingdom of heaven is that which was to take the place of Israel in the world.

First of all, the title—the kingdom of heaven—is very simple, it signifies the rule of the

heavens over the earth, but that in the person of the Son of man exalted in heaven. It is not exactly the Messiah ruling in Israel and sitting on the throne of David, but the idea is, first, the rule of heaven and, secondly, all the principles of heaven established now upon this earth by the word, while the Son of man is exalted to God's right hand in heaven. I need hardly say that the kingdom of heaven has not come out in power and glory yet. In chapter xvii. you get a figure of it—but God's means now of establishing the kingdom are twofold, one by the word, which is, perhaps, more connected with the term, the kingdom of heaven, and the other by the Spirit, which is, perhaps, more connected with the term, kingdom of God. The kingdom is established, not in outward power and glory, but established in the hearts of people. The seed of the kingdom is sown in the heart of man. Christ goes to the seaside—the sowing is world-wide now, He leaves the house and goes by the free seashore—a figure that the word was to go out to the farthest ends of the earth.

You cannot confine the heavens to Israel, you cannot confine the heavens to one country or kingdom, the heavens are for all. Psalm xix. shews that. When it is a question of heaven it is really for all. In Psalm ciii. we read, "The Lord has established his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom rules over all." The Lord goes

out by the seaside (I have no doubt it is a figure of the word of the kingdom going out to the nations), and there He publishes the good tidings, sowing the seed, and we get its falling on all sorts of ground.

Another point that comes out here is the Lord speaking in parables. It is the first time you get Him speaking in parables and it is in judgment. He says, "Therefore speak I to them in parables, that hearing they might hear, and not understand," &c. It was fulfilling the word of Isaiah. (Chap. vi.) He expounded all things to His disciples, but He spoke to the people in parables that they should not understand, that it should always be to them a parable, and that really was judgment upon Israel. The remarkable thing is this is a parable simple enough to him that has understanding. The Lord, speaking to the disciples, says, "He that has ears to hear let him hear, for to him that hath shall be given, but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away that which he hath, and therefore speak I to them in parables that seeing they may see not." Just like He said in John ix. 39, "For judgment I am come into this world, that . . . they which see might be made blind." When He spake the parables to them their eyes were blinded and their hearts were hardened, and they did not and could not understand them. What shews their state more than any one thing is

this, that they resisted grace and brought upon themselves judgment to the uttermost for resisting what the Lord was then doing, propounding the gospel of the kingdom *by the free seaside*. The apostle says, speaking of them, "Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved to fill up the measure of their guilt alway." So you see how completely the Jews were out of accord with the mind of heaven, everything that brought in the mind of heaven was a parable to them. Take Psalm xlix. where the psalmist says he would open his mouth in a parable. There is not a single thing in it that men do not know perfectly well. It is a psalm that speaks of men acquiring riches, and calling their lands by their own names, and all that kind of thing, yet they die. A man may heap up riches, but he cannot give a ransom for his soul. Like sheep they are laid in the grave. It speaks too of the righteous having dominion over them, an exalted place in the day of glory and so on. Oftentimes we hear of a successful man who has heaped up money and died, and men say, "Where are his riches now? All he can have now is six feet of earth for his grave." People see these things and see the folly of it all, but if they have the chance they do exactly the same thing. That is what makes it a parable. The psalmist says, "This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approve

their sayings." I only quote it to show you the idea that is contained in a parable.

What our Lord refers to in this chapter is Psalm lxxviii., where it says, "I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old." That psalm is the whole history of Israel according to the flesh, it ends with everything failing, the children of Ephraim carrying bows but turning back in the day of battle, all flesh failing until you come to the moment when the ark is taken and Ichabod is written on them. Everything is utterly broken down as to man and then all depended upon the election of God, that is, that God should bring in the man of His choice—David—and that He should set up the mountain of Zion, the hill of the Lord, the place that He chose. God had a right to do so, He had a right to choose His own man, and when you consider it you see the wisdom and blessedness of it. That is why, in speaking of election, I say, Do you know where election began? Election began with Christ. What would you do without election? "Behold mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth." If God had not chosen Christ where would man ever have found a Saviour? Where among men? Of what use was Saul? The people chose him, God found him for them, but the people chose him. He stood a head and shoulders higher than other men, but the enemy had got a man a head and shoulders above him—Goliath.

Then there was Eliab, of what good was Eliab? He could not face the Philistine. God chose David, He had the right of election. Who among the sons of men could ever have found the Saviour? He is God's elect, His chosen One. Where was a stone to be found on which anything could be built unless it was God's elect stone laid in Zion by Himself? Therefore towards the end of Psalm lxxviii. election comes in, God's election, the election of David and the election of Mount Zion, God's foundation and God's King all brought out by election.

Now, Israel had got that psalm before them, they had there the history of their own breakdown. When everything broke down and Saul the man of Israel's choice died, God raised up David; they had the truth of God's election, but it was all a parable to them. They were under the Gentiles, having no ark of the covenant, nothing of that sort, Ichabod still written upon them, and then Christ comes in, the elect of God, owned by Satan even as the Holy One of God, and it is all to them a parable. They are ruined and they do not know it, and they will not have God's choice. Again you see it with Stephen. He goes through the whole history of Israel only to shew that the man that God raised up was the man that Israel would not have. They were saying of Stephen that he spake against Moses and against God, and yet when Stephen takes it up

he says, "*This is that Moses* that was with our fathers, to whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them and in their hearts turned back to Egypt." How He convicted them in every way, but it was all a parable to them. They had eyes but they did not see, ears but they did not hear, everything is hid, and what they had is taken from them. It is a terrible condition, but it is what will happen to Christendom. Christendom will come under a spirit of delusion. It says, "To *him* that hath shall be given and from *him* that hath not shall be taken what he hath." It cannot be confined to the Jew. Then the Lord speaks these parables of the kingdom and shews that though He is rejected upon earth yet mysteriously He would establish a kingdom, when His rights were denied, in the hearts of His people; that the kingdom of heaven would take the form upon earth of the word of Christ establishing heavenly principles in the hearts of those who received it, that it would spread, and that it would be corrupted. It would take, on the one hand, the form of a great hierarchical system, the mustard tree, very large and great, but also a leavened and corrupted form; on the other hand, the Lord shews what was in His mind as to it. That comes out in the pearl, and the treasure hid in the field that He had bought. There might be doctrines that would corrupt as seen in the leaven, but Christ

was watching the whole thing and using this mysterious form of the kingdom, because there was a treasure hid in it belonging to Him for which He gave up everything—one pearl of great price and that was the church. He bought the field for the sake of the treasure. We may say that at the present moment the kingdom of heaven is contributory to the Lord's mind and purpose.

It is a wonderful thought for us at the present moment, because as we look around us we see a great hierarchical system taking a place in the world. It is pictured by the mustard tree, something which would grow up in the world, not in Judaism and not to Christ's mind. What was in the heart and mind of Christ was the treasure hid in the field. That is a great point for us. Whatever may take place in this world, I feel I am walking about a world where, after all, Christ's treasure is hid. Midst all the things that are going on in this world, I say, I know Christ has got His treasure there.

I do not know whether you have noticed this verse in Proverbs xxiv., "Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field ; and afterwards build thine house." To me it is a beautiful thought. At this present moment Christ is preparing His work and making it fit for Himself in the field. It is a wonderful thing that we should have the sense of what the

Lord is doing for that day of glory. I see people coming under discipline, coming under the touch of the Lord, and thus He makes His work fit for Himself in the field. People cannot see it, it is all hidden, but it is all going on in souls, making ready for the moment when He will be able to say as Solomon said to Jehovah, "Surely I have built thee a house for thy name."

The kingdom is all to that end, it is the work of the Lord going on in souls; the good seed of the kingdom is sown and the discipline of the Lord's hand comes and souls are instructed, and the moment will come when the structure will be completed. ♦

The pearl refers to the beautiful unique character of the church, that one thing in the eyes of Christ in which He sees beauty, in which He sees His own image, and not merely that it is a valued treasure. He loved it and gave Himself for it that He might present it to Himself in glory.

There are two things connected with our relationship: one is that our Lord Jesus Christ has brought us into relationship with His Father so that we are children and sons. Blessed thought, we know the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The blessed Lord has put us in that position, but then He has put us in a position with respect to Himself as Man, and that is the place of the church; He loved it and gave Him-

self for it, He washes and sanctifies it that He may present it to Himself. The thought of sanctification is that He has so given Himself for it that the church is for Himself, and so gets drawn away from everything else to Himself. It is the object of the tender care of Christ in the washing of water by the word that He might present it to Himself. It is a companion for Himself as a blessed Man and that for ever.

In the end of the chapter comes a question which I feel to be most important to every one of us. I speak especially to the young. This is a day when things are called in question and young people sometimes get overthrown as to their faith. "Whence has this man this wisdom and these mighty works?" "Is not this the carpenter's son?" and so on. Now I might say to you young friends who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, you will have to face that question. You may say, I have learned all these things from my parents. That is quite right, that is God's way. The Book of Proverbs was written to give subtlety to the simple. Save that it says in one place that Jonathan was a very subtle man, this is the first time you get the word "subtle" from the time of the serpent. You want wisdom and subtlety in order to meet the wiles of the devil. Now the first word of wisdom is, "My son, hear the instruction of thy father and attend to the law of

thy mother." That is God's way. In Psalm lxxviii. it says that the fathers were to make known God's testimony to their children, that the generation to come might know, who should arise and declare to their children. You get there four generations that the testimony of the Lord might be continued. You get the same thing in the Epistle to Timothy—of course there it is spiritual—but in the same way you get four generations. The apostle says, "The things that thou hast heard of me, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." Paul, Timothy, faithful men, and others also. You get four generations. It is God's way that we should learn from those who are older than we. But then the question will come, Where did it all come from? Whence is the wisdom of this man? They only thought of what could spring up among themselves and of the opinions of men. You will find what is called higher criticism calling these things in question. Now, beloved friends, where *do* they all come from? Where *did* this blessed book come from? Why is it that men do not understand it? I will tell you, because it came from heaven, every word of it is from God. I know that much of it is descriptive narrative, but that does not alter the fact that the narrative was written according as God saw it, not as man saw it. It is not written in the way that men would write

it. I do not wonder at men being utterly confounded at the wisdom of God. They do not know whence it comes. You get the same question with the Lord afterwards. The scribes and Pharisees come and say to Him, What are you altering everything here for; who gave you authority? He says, "I will ask you one question; the baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or of men?" They reply, "We cannot tell." And He says, as it were, You confess that you do not know what is of heaven, you are not competent to judge. (Chap. xxi.)

Take Nicodemus, he was a teacher of Israel, and yet he did not know the simple things of the Old Testament. He comes to the Lord as if he was quite competent to sit down and discuss things with Him. The Lord was a teacher and Nicodemus was a teacher of Israel, could he not sit and discuss the new doctrine with Him? Oh! says the Lord, to begin with you cannot see the things of the kingdom of God, you cannot perceive them, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost; what does the world know about that? What about righteousness? Is the world a scene of righteousness? Why, every one is trying to best his neighbour. Where is peace and joy? It is a world of sorrow, and if there is any joy it is only like the crackling of thorns

under a pot. Man does not understand what comes from heaven, heavenly principles. Where are meekness, gentleness, goodness, truth? Take the principles, for instance, of what is called the sermon on the mount. A man spoke to me once, of retaliating for an unchristian act, I said, "but that is not what a Christian ought to do; in the sermon on the mount it says, 'If a man smite thee on the cheek turn to him the other;,' that is Christianity; are you going to be a Christian or not?" People think all that is gone by, of course it is all in scripture, but who thinks of doing it? I remember reading years ago the answer of the chief rabbi of the Jews—one had said that a Jew could not be a good citizen if he walked according to his judaism, but he retorted by saying, "You are Christians, what man among you ever thinks of walking according to the sermon on the mount?" Men look at the things of God in a human way. You *must* face it, whence is Christianity? It is not the emanation of men's minds, it is from heaven. The blessed Lord Jesus Christ was from heaven. You want your soul connected with Him. He came from heaven and brought heavenly light and blessing down to this earth, and died that you might have a living connection with Him outside the things of this poor world.

I do not know whether you have ever heard the verse :

“That I am thine, my Lord and God,
 Ransomed and sprinkled by this blood,
 Repeat that word once more,
 With such an energy and might,
 That this world’s flattery or spite
 With me may have no power.”

Oh that the Lord would lead you to this,
 “That I am thine,” you belong to Christ. Oh that
 it might sink into your souls!

Christ is from heaven, everything now He is
 there comes from heaven, not from this world;
 the Spirit brings everything that is heavenly—
 righteousness, joy, meekness, goodness; that it
 may be established in the heart through the
 blessed word of the kingdom of God, all that
 God delights in. Oh, how it will delight Him
 when righteousness looks down from heaven
 and truth springs up from the earth and the
 principles of the kingdom of God spring up too.
 There is joy and there is righteousness and
 peace, but God is effecting that in our souls now.
 Christ is preparing the work in the field with a
 view to removing us to the heavenly kingdom
 above. He will build the house in view of its
 coming out in that day of glory. Think what
 Christ is, as dedicating the house of God. Oh, to
 know Him, to know whence He is, not to have
 all these things as parables to our souls but to
 know them in the light and power and truth of
 them.



SUPPLY FROM HEAVEN.

(MATT. XIV. 13-36.)

THESE chapters bring before us the state of things in that day in Israel. No doubt it will be much the same in the time to come, and in principle it is the same now. We get the state of things in which the testimony of God has to be rendered.

I would just recall certain points that we have had before us. I go back a little. In chapter x. the Lord sends out His disciples to preach. In chapter xi. all that He has done has had no effect. Then He presents Himself to all that are weary and heavy laden, really the bewildered remnant of Israel. He presents Himself in entirely new relationships, new associations that did not belong to this world at all. People could understand a Messiah, a Saviour come to do them good, but what He was to the Father they did not know. All His relationships in another world they were utterly unacquainted with. He had come here in grace, and the very places where most of His mighty works were done had not received Him or repented. Then He speaks of His relationship with the Father. He says, I can reveal the Father, come unto

me, I can tell you of all the love wherewith my Father loves me. He introduces us to that love. It is a wonderful thing that we should know the thoughts of God about His dear Son, whatever men think about Him. Blessed thought for our hearts. I daresay there is not one here but would feel, though through God's grace we have been brought to believe in Him and to love Him, how poor our thoughts about Him are. Very often why we feel our thoughts are poor is because He has done great things for us, and hence we ought to love Him more, but there is more than that—there is what He is to the Father; the Father loves Him, He is the Father's Son. He was here not merely a Saviour for us, but the sent One of the Father, walking here in the Father's love. That introduces us into totally new relationships.

In the end of chapter xii. He is thoroughly rejected, and then He stretches out His hand to His disciples—a lovely and beautiful action—and owns them. He said, "Behold my mother and my brethren."

Then in chapter xiii. He speaks in parables to the multitude and tells what His true service here really was. It is not His relationship to the Father exactly, but what He was among men dispensationally, what in fact He had been from the first a sower sowing the seed of the word of God, and that was in view of a

crop. A man does not sow except in view of a crop. In the end of chapter xiii. they say, "Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?" I sought to shew you last time that every one has to face that question, "Where does it come from? whose truth is it?" Where did Jesus come from? Was it something that sprang up here in this world? Did Christianity spring up here? People talk about religion as if it was a thing that sprang up from men's minds and intelligences. But is it of man? Is it the emanation of man's mind, or does it come from heaven? We know that the Lord Jesus Christ was here as the sent One of the Father, bringing everything that was heavenly to this earth that He might connect us, not with the thoughts, ways and things of men, but with what is from heaven.

In chapters xiv. and xv. we get the state of things in the world at that moment, in chapter xiv. politically, and in chapter xv. religiously. There is the political world and the religious world. One has to look at it in that day with regard to Israel, who were outwardly the people of God. But it is pretty much the same thing with us, because we are in that portion of the world which has been, and is, the sphere of God's special dealings. It is that sphere in which the gospel of the kingdom is being preached, in which the word has been sown. There is an extensive

portion of the world at the moment which we call Christendom in which the word of the kingdom has been sown, and it has produced certain effects and fruits, both inwardly and outwardly, it has produced the mustard tree, for instance, and a leavened mass. If we look at it in connection with the sowing of the word of the kingdom we see it takes the form of the kingdom in mystery. When we look at the state of the world in which that seed was sown we see there were two great oppositions, one was the political aspect of things, king Herod reigning in the land in a guilty and unholy alliance. I do not doubt that it is a kind of figure of Israel's state. Israel ought to have been true to Jehovah. Herodias, who was a figure of Israel and ought to have been true to her husband, was married to this king, just as Israel joined alliance with the world. They did it finally and thoroughly when they said, "We have no king but Cæsar." But already there were Herodians, that is, those who were favouring Herod, dallying with the pomp of the court of Herod. Herodians were people who liked to go on with the court of a king because it advanced them in the world. Then this unholy alliance produced thorough hatred to what was of God. It was not so much in Herod as in the guilty Herodias. You see the same thing of old in another apostate king. Ahab was not so bad

as Jezebel his wife. That is taken up in Revelation ii.; there we get in the church of Thyatira the same guilty thing called Jezebel. She stirred up Ahab to do wickedness in the sight of God. And so does Herodias stir up Herod and murders Christ's witness. The same thing will take place in the last day. There will be an apostate king and an apostate Israel, and apostate Israel will go to the king with ointment as it says in Isaiah. There will be a similar state of things and the murder of Christ's witnesses. Jezebel is a murderess. We know in days gone by that which professed to be the church murdered those that were Christ's witnesses. There was that state of things and there will be. That is the world we are in, where Christ has been rejected and His witnesses and saints martyred. People say, It is different today. Well, it may be outwardly through God's restraining hand, but that does not alter the fact that that is the world in which the testimony of God has been launched.

What we find in chapter xiv. is what Christ can be to us in all kinds of circumstances. That is the important thing though the circumstances are not altered. Christ could have altered them, but He did not. Instead He shews us what He can be to us. It is an immense thing to know the Lord. God has a way for us and Christ is the way. There is a verse often

quoted when we are in trouble, "As for God, his way is perfect," and it leads to submission to His will. I think a great mistake is often made in quoting that verse. People look at the circumstances as if they were God's way. I do not think the circumstances are God's way, He may permit them, but the point is that He has got a way through them. I may find myself in trouble or affliction or distress, I could not exactly say that all those circumstances are God's way, but I think that God has a way for me through them, and that is a perfect way. Christ went through every circumstance down here perfectly. If we know God's way it will make our way perfect.

When the Lord heard of the murder of John the Baptist He took His disciples apart and withdrew into the desert. It is what He told His disciples to do. He said, "When they persecute you in one city then flee to another." In the last days when Israel is again persecuted, the woman is to flee into the wilderness. Christ has been in the wilderness before, and therefore He will be able to sympathise with them in the day to come when the wilful king murders the witnesses; they will have the sympathy of Christ. It is a great thing to have His sympathy and His support. He may not alter the circumstances, but He gives us His sympathy and support.

I would like you to see how wonderfully God

can weave things together. In Mark's gospel we read of it in quite another way. God can unite two or three things in the same event so that the same event should be the means of teaching two or three lessons. In Mark I get another lesson brought out. Evidently the sending out of the twelve, their preaching and the casting out of the demons and so on had drawn attention to them. Great works were being done, and that drew attention to them. Oftentimes when that is so the Lord has to give us a check, because we may think things are going on smoothly. Attention may be drawn to us, but we must not forget that we are in a world that rejects Christ. When the disciples came back to the Lord, the work was such that there were many coming and going and they had no time to eat. There is great danger in moments like those because we are apt to think that our work and preaching is so important. The world has attached importance to the church. You have only to look around and see the great cathedrals and buildings set up to make Christendom important in this world. Now what does Jesus do just at that moment? He takes His disciples away into the desert. Often God has to deal thus with His servants, they begin to think they are important. God often takes a servant aside into a desert place. Christ is rejected in this world; He is the stone that was disallowed of

men though chosen of God and precious, and what He is doing in the world is hidden work. What is going on *of God* is hidden. I have no doubt it is a great work, but it is not with outward show. Then there was a great work going on, but where? Not in the streets of the city, "He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets," but in the wilderness. A great work went on in the wilderness; multitudes were there, all the children of want and woe, and Jesus had compassion on them. And then you see how small the disciples were when it came to the point. They had been casting out demons and telling people to repent. Luke says that they came back to the Lord full of rejoicing, "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name." It is all wonderful work. The Lord takes them into the wilderness because there was a necessity to go there to retreat from the hostile world and also for fear the disciples should get important. When Paul came down from the third heavens the Lord gave him a thorn in the flesh. We are just the same, we cannot bear success, the flesh in us is in danger of being puffed up. He took them away into the desert, but there is plenty of work in the desert. A great multitude came, but now you see the utter weakness of the disciples. They come and say, "This is a desert place." This world is a desert

place, that is in consequence of the rejection of the Lord, there are no springs of God in it. It is not like we read in Isaiah, "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree : and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." Oh ! no, the world is a wilderness wide, there are no springs of God in it. But what I want you to learn, and what the Lord wanted His disciples to learn is, they were there with Jesus, and that is worth being there for. They were withdrawn from the world. They were there with Him and there they proved what He was. Their weakness comes out. They come and say, "This is a desert place send them away that they may buy themselves bread." No, He says, "Give ye them to eat." See how weak they are. In another place one says, How are we to feed them, if we had two hundred pennyworth of bread it would not suffice ? Ah ! but the compassions of the Lord, how great they are ! They did not know the greatness of the heart of the Lord. Neither did they know the greatness of the supply of heaven. There was nothing in the world, but oh ! what a full supply of heavenly grace. How little we have learned of Christ, how little we know Him really. I think that is exemplified, in the disciples, by the five loaves. They did know a little, it was but a little of

Christ, and a great deal of it mixed up with Jewish feeling no doubt, but the Lord says, "Bring them hither to me," and when they are put into His hands He looks up to heaven, and He connects the little with heaven and heavenly grace and then all is multiplied. See what it is to get with Jesus alone and find what an immense supply there is in Him. If I were to give an illustration now, I might take one simple, well-known text: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have everlasting life." Look how that has been multiplied! Who can tell the thousands and thousands who have drunk in of divine love from that small text? A person might say, I know but very little, but I do know something about the love of God in giving His dear Son, I have got, so to speak, one of those five loaves, "God so loved the world." How that could be multiplied to thousands and thousands and thousands of souls and yet leave baskets of fragments over. It is exhaustless, free; who is going to tell of all that Christ has done in ministering the grace and love of heaven in this poor desert world? There is an end of our importance. There is an end of building up the mustard tree, when Christ takes us into the desert place with Himself. And there we find the resources that are in Himself, and they are there for every one. We

may not be called to serve or to preach the gospel, but in our daily lives we are called to glorify Him. There is an old saying of a servant of the Lord, "God will take care *what* you go through, do you take care *how* you go through it," so that you may go through it to His praise. When I come to what is in Christ I find what He can be to me in every circumstance, no matter what the difficulties or circumstances. You could not have more adverse circumstances than the murder of the servant of God on the one hand, and on the other hand a desert place. Ah, but Jesus was there. The more we go on, the more will our hearts be brought to the sense of our own insufficiency and nothingness, and of the sufficiency in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I have no doubt that the apostles were taught in that way how to serve Him, Christ meant to teach them that in the state of things in which they were. People like to have things go well, many coming, perhaps, to hear the gospel and so on. Christ has to teach us that He is not looking for great things in this world. I do not doubt the harvest will be very great. The Lord says, "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground . . . and the seed should spring and grow up . . . first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear, and then he putteth in the sickle." There is sure to be a harvest, but now it is as if Christ

were asleep, not looking on, but the kingdom goes on in a hidden way. People do not see things grow. I may go into a garden and say, Well, this has grown since I was here last. But I did not see it grow, it went quietly on. The Lord is sowing, the seed grows, and the time of harvest comes, is sure to come; what we want is to know what the Lord can be to us in the midst of all these circumstances.

Then He dismisses the multitude and goes up into the mountain to pray, a figure of His present service. We may look at Him in His service here upon earth, now carried out in the power of the Holy Ghost, and we may look at Him as having gone on high, and making intercession for us. Then the disciples go over the stormy waves of this world. Everything lies on the other side. It is on the sea they find the storm, it is to the other side they had to go, but the Lord rejoins them, and they reach that other side and He is received where once He was rejected. The winds and waves I believe refer to the hostility of Satan. He is the prince of the power of the air, and he it is that raises the storm and the wind of opposition. We have to contend not merely with what is upon earth, but we have to contend with the spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places. We have two things to contend with, the state of things here in this world, and the forces of evil of which the prince of the

power of the air has command. He can raise opposition to our passage along, as those that have a heavenly course. What comes out is that not only is there the intercession of the Lord on high, but He goes to them in a power which was totally above and superior to the whole power of the enemy. It was not altering the circumstances, He did not still the storm, but came in a power that was above it. The Lord Jesus, as Son of God, was always in a power that was superior to the power of the enemy, but it is manifested now that He is in resurrection. He went into the stronghold of the enemy and won the victory over the whole power of the enemy, and is above it all. The great thing for us is that He lifts us above it. Peter alone learned it in that day. That is the meaning, I believe, of what you have in Ephesians, where it says that we may know the power that wrought in Christ, when God raised Him from the dead. Look how everything came against Christ. Was it altered? Nothing. Every wave beat against Him, every foe was there. Was anything altered? Not one single thing. What came in? Resurrection, He was delivered right out of it all. Now that power is the power that works towards us. It is not that God cannot still the storm if He pleases, He can. But there is another and greater power, and that is, He can lift the saint altogether above it. You get the same

idea in Colossians, where it says, "Having been buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who raised him from the dead." All I want to shew you is the way in which God is operating at the present moment. When the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world, God was operating by Christ in stilling the storms, healing the sick, lame, deaf, dumb, blind, and raising the dead. It was all operating down here. But He is not doing that now, it is not that God cannot do it, and does not do it, He does, but that is not exactly the line in which God is operating now. He is operating in putting us in touch with Christ risen from the dead. You are risen, He says, you are above it all, you are above the whole power of death with Christ risen. You have faith in the power of God, the operation of God that raised Him from the dead. That is the way in which God is operating now, to set the saint right above present things.

Next we get here that Christ can give us to walk on the water, to come into association with Him. We have indeed to learn our own weakness. Peter said, "If it be thou, bid me come to thee," it was affection drew him. Whether it be in the wilderness, it is to be with Jesus, or walking on the water, it is to be with Jesus. Whichever way it is, it is to be with Jesus. That is the great point. If our hearts knew Him better,

how we should be drawn to Him, and we should find what He can be to us. It was when Peter saw the waves, when he measured everything by himself, he began to sink. The point is not whether I can walk on the water, Christ can. It is not whether I can feed the multitude, Christ can, and I am in association with Christ. Paul says, "that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings." That is where it comes in. Paul says, I do not want to escape the sufferings here, Christ had them, I want to know the power of His resurrection. That is the great thing. I would like every one here to know more and more what companionship with Christ is in every circumstance, not desiring that He would alter the circumstance, but that He would support you in it. He is our strength, He is above the circumstance, and He has all heaven at His command. He lifts His eyes up to heaven and blesses the bread. All power is His, everything is His. He can support me. Could I walk on the water? Not if I was not supported by Christ. It is no use looking at ourselves. You and I could not please God in any circumstance apart from Christ. Who can support me in all difficulties and dangers here? Christ, He is bringing His disciples to know Himself, what He can be to them. He says, I will make a way for you to walk with Me, I can lift you, I can support

you, I can put out My hand, and I can take you by the hand and lead you. If we did but know Him, how we would be able to walk with Him, and glorify Him in the midst of circumstances here !

Now a few words on chapter xv., just to give you a sketch of it. You get there the religious world, as great an opposition as anything before, but in a different way. Scribes and Pharisees of Jerusalem, like we get in Timothy, "Having a form of godliness but denying the power," and setting aside the commandments of God for the commandments of men. It is what *men* would say and do, all the outside, washing of cups and platters, making clean the outside but the heart left untouched. The Lord exposes the whole condition of things. It is from themselves the defilement came, "Out of the heart of man proceed evil thoughts" and all the terrible evil and sin that is in the world. People may think it is all outside ; no, it is all from the inside. Then there is with this a terrible putting on of a show of religion by the Pharisees and scribes. God commanded that we should love our father and mother. It is a simple thing for a man in this world doing his duty by his father and mother, but they said, If it is an offering for God you are free. Supposing a man had a sovereign to give to his father and mother, they said, You ought to give that sovereign to the offerings of God.

Then he cannot give it to his father and mother. They said, You are exempt from that commandment, you have given it to God. God did not command that. The remarkable thing was that the only offering God commanded was simply half a shekel, and everybody had to give it. God did not command a great offering, but He did command that a man should love his father and his mother, and do his duty by them. All godly duty was set aside for religious service, all was done for an outward show, and the commandments of God made of none effect through their traditions.

We have to steer through that kind of thing to-day. It is extraordinary how people like to frame everything into a kind of system. People do not like to have their souls regulated and actuated by the word of God, linking all their affections with God Himself. Here the Lord takes one simple commandment, "Honour thy father and thy mother," and so in the third chapter of John's Epistle, it says, Christ "laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." People now would say, That is a very great thing; could I lay down my life for a brother? Well, God does not call you to do a great thing (though it might be that one might have to do it), but He says, "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need," he comes down to a very

little thing. Do I care for a brother in the way in which I can ? I may not be called upon to lay down my life for him, but there is a very simple thing, I see my brother have need and open my heart to him. It is a little thing that tests our hearts, not a great thing. It is just going the way of God's love and commandments in little things that tests our hearts. It finds out where our hearts are with regard to God, whether we love God or whether our religion is a formal thing, consisting in systems of doctrine. I believe that is a great danger for us, we do not form systems, we have not got creeds or confessions of faith outwardly published, and catechisms, and yet there is great danger. I will tell you another danger, that of getting intelligence in scripture. It is interesting to see how wonderfully scripture is written, but if I merely read the Bible because it is interesting, and seek to get the scope and idea of certain chapters, and to see how the chapters follow each other and what they set forth, I may fall into a system of things that does not one single bit affect my heart, I have got all in my head ; and if it came to some simple commandment of God that I should walk according to it, like helping my brother in need, I might find how cold my heart was. I might know all sorts of things and yet the simple commandment of God, the effect really of divine love in one's soul, might

be left undone. May the Lord keep us from that. May He keep our hearts fresh in His own love.

We have got all these oppositions, and they are real oppositions. I want you to feel what a terribly evil world we are in. We may thank God that we live in such a country as this, but still the same principle is at work, and nothing but divine grace can keep us. That is what I would like every one to have the sense of and that your heart should seek the Lord more and more.

Sometimes I hear people pray and I say, Those people are seeking the Lord, they want to get to the Lord, it is not merely that they are approaching a throne of grace which is a very long way off up in heaven and they are down here, and sending their petitions up there for what they want, but they are getting right near the Lord and they lay hold of the fulness that is in Him, they are seeking the Lord, and when you seek the Lord you find what He can be to you. It is not, I have this want and that, but I want *Thee*, Lord, and I know what Thou canst be to me ; I know how Thou canst support me even if it is on the water, and how Thou canst bring heavenly grace in and multiply it and enable us to pass it on, and what Thou canst be in the midst of all the circumstances. Thou canst lay hold of a poor weak hand and support

me where otherwise I could not possibly stand. That is what the Lord can be to us. And then He would make the heart to know the mind and thoughts of God, so that we should not live in the doctrines and thoughts of men, but in the blessed communications of divine love.



A PLACE FOR THE LORD.

(MATT. XVI. 1-20.)

I DESIRE to speak to-night upon what Christ has established here for this time. He has brought in the church and the kingdom as that which superseded Israel; but I would like to shew you the connecting links, the Lord helping me.

I go back for one moment to chapter xi., where the Lord takes a place outside of Israel and says, "Come unto me all ye ~~that~~ labour and are heavy laden;" it was in a kind of way for them what we have seen in chapter xiv., quitting the ship. Like Peter quitting the ship, they left the fold of Israel to come entirely to the Lord. It has often been said that it is a place where no foot of man could possibly stand. What nature could walk on the water, as Peter did? It is not in the nature of man to do so. It is no part of this creation that a man should walk on water. And yet we see the Lord walking on the water and that too when it was boisterous. If I take a place with the Lord, everything must depend upon my appreciation and apprehension of the Lord, not only that there is that in Him which draws me to Him, "Come unto me and I will give you

rest"—and we see there was that in Peter, "If it be thou, bid me come to thee"—but there must be faith's apprehension of who He is. Can I trust myself outside of what seems stable upon what seems thoroughly unstable? I could not unless I were conscious of who the Lord was, and knew that He could support me. There comes in the question of faith.

I refer to one point connected with it which comes out in connection with the assembly, in order that I may shew you how necessary it is that we should have the sense in our souls of who the Lord is.

There is a text in chapter xviii. which was the sheet-anchor in early days of those who left the various systems of men. I suppose a great many of us have left the systems of men. The systems of men once seemed to us stable. Men have formed creeds and confessions of faith and systems in order that they might guarantee truth. One of the commonest things that has been done in England is, when some chapel is built, for trustees to be appointed and the title deeds to guarantee that certain doctrines only shall be preached in it. People have tried to guarantee things in that way. What they thought was the proper confession of faith was perhaps some peculiar doctrine, baptism or the doctrines of Wesleyanism or Presbyterianism, but all guaranteed in some such way and apparently stable. I

can look back a great many years and I see things that were in my young days looked upon as bulwarks against heresy swept away to-day. The Articles of the Church of England used to be considered a thorough bulwark, and the confessions of faith of other bodies were looked at as great bulwarks, but they are all swept away now by what is called the Higher Criticism. There never was a moment when souls who desire to be true were more perplexed. Some take refuge in Rome, and say there is stability there. The great boast of Rome is that she does not change, and people try to find refuge in her, but, beloved friends, there were in early days, and I trust there are to-day, those who are willing to trust themselves to Jesus. As to the things that men put forth against Christianity, to tell you the truth, I do not think they are even worth looking at. I see that what is of God and of Christ is so outside man altogether that whatever men might write upon it would not affect me a bit. Christianity is altogether outside his province. He may write about anything in this world, but what is of Christ is not of this world. It does not affect me whatever man may say about the scriptures, he does not understand them, he does not know them. It is not that he cannot read, but he is like Nicodemus. He thought himself competent as a Rabbi to come and sit down with

the Lord and discuss the new doctrines. The Lord tells him at the beginning, You do not even see the kingdom of God. The word "see" means "perceive." You do not understand what it means, you have not an idea of the things of God apart from being born again. A man may have a mighty intellect in this world, but it is all futile in the things of God. The moment a man crosses the bar of this world, all the things of science, all his thoughts perish, science is no good to him. The simplest child that has received the word of God knows more.

I refer to chapter xviii., "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." That was the great sheet-anchor, I might say, of those who left the ship. They came to the Lord and sought to walk with Him. Now I am greatly afraid to-day that the text is a kind of acknowledged truth. I am afraid whether there is really faith in it. There was real faith in early days, in the fact that the Lord Jesus was on high as Lord and that the Holy Ghost was on earth, and that where two or three were gathered together to that name, that name had all its virtue and value as much as it had when Christ first took His place at the right hand of God, made Lord and Christ. Do you suppose that the value of that name could alter? Here we are nearly 2000 years

after the ascension, do you suppose the value of that name has altered because of the passage of time? Not one bit. Do you not suppose that there is as much virtue in that precious name as ever there was? I do not mean merely for salvation but for everything in the sphere of which He is Lord. The only question is, have *we* faith in it? Those dear men that came out first had faith in it, they believed that where two or three were gathered to His name there He was. They had faith that the Lord would be there. Now it is very easy to accept that as a mere doctrine. People may, in a kind of way, take it up and act upon it without faith; I do not think they will get much of the support of the Lord in that, but where there is faith in His name and subjection to Him I believe we may count on what He is as He sits there at God's right hand.

I have been seeking to bring before you who the Lord really is. He takes the disciples into the desert, and is not He sufficient for them? When He was here could He not feed the 5000? The disciples were in the storm, did not He see them? Do you suppose the ship could sink? He was not there, it is true, like He was in the first storm, but up there on high He saw them. He was on the mountain top, but He saw them toiling in rowing, and when He came to them it was in a power that was altogether

beyond man. The Lord Jesus is now in a power and glory that is utterly beyond man. The thing is whether we are in the faith of it. You would not trust any one else for your salvation, but will you trust Him for everything? Will you trust Him in His administration of the things of God? The disciples had really got to leave Judaism. It was judged, the Lord had judged it. Then we get the great opposition of the political world, Herod, the wilful king, and his apostate wife. And then the scribes and Pharisees of Jerusalem and all the religious system there, pretty much like Romanism to-day, all opposed to the testimony of God that Christ had brought in, the testimony of the kingdom of heaven.

Then also in chapter xv. we get the Lord going away from Israel, among the very worst of the Gentiles, into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, where the accursed race of Ham dwelt. A poor woman is there who, when she hears the Lord is there, comes to Him with a want as to her daughter. She comes as if she had got a title but she had none. Every one has to be brought to this point, that with regard to any blessing, there is not one single atom of title to it. It is painful work to be brought down on to that ground of pure mercy. In my young days I was brought up in the Church of England; it was a common idea that in baptism people are brought

into the covenant of grace and therefore, though they may know that they cannot be saved apart from the sacrifice of Christ, still they have the sense that they belong to the covenant of grace and have a kind of title. It was a terrible awakening to me when I found out that I was a lost and ruined sinner and had not one single atom of title whatever. I give you a deeper illustration. You know Israel stood convicted of a broken law when they made the golden calf. In that sense it was all over with them ; God, in His mercy, owing to the intercession of Moses, put them on the ground of longsuffering mercy, He put them back under law but law mixed with mercy. The name of the Lord was proclaimed to Moses, "The Lord God, gracious and merciful, slow to anger" and so on, "forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin," but then the sting came in the tail, "will by no means clear the guilty." The effect of that would be that the more gracious and the more longsuffering He was to them, if they failed—and what else could there be under law but failure—the worse their case was. All the longsuffering and goodness only increased their guilt. That could not help Israel. They will come under the judgment of God till they find out that Christ has borne their judgment and that nothing but mercy will meet their case. I may think of how longsuffering God has been with me and yet I have sinned against Him, I have

broken down again and again, what is the end of it all to be? I must take the place before God of being entirely a debtor to mercy. What have I to plead? Nothing, nothing whatever. Could I say to God in any way, that I have had one good thought that I could plead in order that He should be gracious to me? I have not even a thought that I can plead. If He is gracious to me He must be gracious unto me because there is mercy in His heart, I could not plead anything. It brought me to this point, I looked up to God and said, Is there mercy in God Himself? I could not say there was not. Could anybody? That was what this poor woman was brought to. She was a Gentile. She says, Are not there crumbs for the dogs? I remember when I was brought to this; could you say that there is no love in the heart of God for such an one as you? I could not say that, but there is nothing in me, I have not got one claim. I will tell you a text that came to me, "If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned." You cannot purchase love. Could I love God so as to be loved? No, a man has to come down to this, that he is lost, and then comes the great thought of mercy in God. Blessed be His name there is mercy in the heart of God. It comes out here, the poor woman comes down and says, Is not there a crumb for the dog? And the Lord answers her as never

before, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

I believe the whole blessing of the church is built up on mercy. It is what there is in the heart of God, it is no question of deserts or what man is or anything else of that kind.

I remember once going to visit a christian woman, and I began to speak to her of what there was in the Lord. Oh! but, she said, there is this, that and the other in me. I said, You are putting it exactly the wrong way, scripture puts it entirely the other way, and then I quoted Ephesians ii., "And you"—"hath he quickened"—we have in our version but it should not be there—"And you—." Well, what about you? "Dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." That was a black picture of the Gentiles, dead in trespasses and sins, driven along by Satan's power, and then he goes on to speak of the Jew: "Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh . . . and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." That was another black picture of the Jew, "children of wrath even as others." That is all about you. Now what comes in? "But God." Look at that contrast. "And

you," "but God." I said to her, You put it the wrong way about. I have been speaking of what there is in God and you say, "But me." But scripture speaks about you and then says, "But God," "But God, according to his *wealth in mercy*, for his great love wherewith he loved us, when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." How the apostle piles up those words, "wealth of mercy," "great love," "exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus," and so on. And what is the spring of it all? God Himself. He brings us down to what we are and then there is what is in God Himself. I believe that lesson is learnt in the end of chapter xv.

The Lord comes back into the coasts of Israel and there He repeats the miracle of feeding the multitude. I have no doubt it was a double testimony to the grace of His heart with regard to Israel. In the first miracle twelve baskets of fragments were taken up and twelve is the number of administrative perfection, that is, everything was in order, the apostles had to make the people sit down in companies, in fifties and hundreds on the grass, there was perfect order

and perfect ministry. In the second miracle it is not twelve baskets that are taken up but seven, and seven is the number that denotes spiritual perfection. I may say that there is a meaning in it which is of great importance for us. The Lord in the first miracle shews what was instituted at the first and then, after the Gentiles had been brought in, He comes back to Israel. But there is a lesson for us in it, that though there may not be at the close of the dispensation the order that there was at the beginning, yet the grace of His heart is just the same.

The people had been with Him three days. Three days means a perfected experience; God does not do things in a hurry. For instance, the Lord Jesus lay in the grave three days. In one sense there would have been just as much victory over death in resurrection if He had risen that same evening, but no, there is a kind of perfected experience that the Lord had of death. And so in other cases. Take Abraham, he had to offer up Isaac; well in one sense he might have offered him up directly, he might have offered up Isaac outside his tent door, but he had to take a three days' journey, step by step, with Isaac by his side, with the knowledge that he had to offer him at the end. Abraham had a perfected experience. He went that three days' journey in the company of the God of resurrection, proving how He could

support him all through, not merely for a few minutes, but support him for three days.

The Lord kept the multitude three days with Him that they might have a sense of what and who He was, and after that He fed them. They took up seven baskets instead of twelve, but in reality there was more in the seven baskets than there was in the twelve, for the twelve baskets were hand-baskets while the seven baskets were big baskets. There was a greater result for Christ, and so I think towards the close of this dispensation we have not got apostles and prophets and ministry as at the first but there is the power of the Spirit, and that can produce as great things for Christ as at the first in the very early days of the church. I believe that there is the Lord on high and the Spirit of God down here. I am not disheartened about things to-day. And I would like you not to be disheartened. May you know that the Lord is on high. I would like you to know the name of the Lord and what it is to honour that name. It is honoured in heaven. God has put Him at His own right hand. Be true to the Lord. There is everything in that name. That name is everything up there, let it be everything with us here, and in all the simplicity of faith let us trust ourselves with the Lord in the knowledge that the Spirit of God is down here.

All that leads to chapter xvi. In this chapter

the Lord breaks finally with the Jewish leaders that come to seek a sign from Him. He gives them the sign of Jonas, but does not say here what He did in chapter xii., He does not speak of the Son of man being three days in the heart of the earth, He merely says, "There shall no sign be given but the sign of the prophet Jonas." Jonah was an unfaithful prophet and he fell into the judgment of God, and they were unfaithful leaders of Israel. And He left them and departed. Never was there a more solemn thing than for Christ to leave them. There cannot be anything more solemn than to be left. "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone." There is no judgment more solemn than to be left alone. Solemn judgment! It will become the judgment of Christendom. One day people will awake to this, that the church is gone, and Christendom is left an empty shell here. Israel was nothing but an empty shell going into the judgment of God.

Thereupon the Lord warns His disciples against the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees were those who put on an outward appearance which had no reality. I use an illustration. Suppose a man came into Ilford, took a large house, professed to be something, had put on a great appearance, but was found to be an utter impostor. We know what people would think of that. The Pharisees were putting on an outward appearance but inside no

reality whatever, they were whited sepulchres full of dead men's bones. The leaven of the Sadducees was not so much an outward garb of religion, for the Sadducee was an infidel. We have to take care that we do not get leavened with these two things, trying to put on an appearance instead of seeing that the great thing is what we are before God, or getting the word of God leavened with all the infidel notions of men. Naturally our hearts are infidel, inclined to trust men rather than the Lord. We lean upon human opinions, what Mr. So-and-so says, and so on, rather than upon the Lord. I believe the Lord has given us leaders and teachers and helps, but nothing in that way makes up for simple dependence on the Lord. "The meek will he teach his way." "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." The great thing is to have the Lord before the soul.

Afterwards the Lord turns them to the two miracles, as much as to say, Do not you see that you have got everything in Me? You are in a place where you have no resource of your own, but do not you see that you have Me? That leads to what the church is. The church depends entirely upon Christ for its foundation, its resources, its all. The building of the church depends entirely upon Christ. Men try to build a church, but men cannot build the church. Anything that man builds Satan can prevail against,

but he cannot prevail against what Christ builds.

Then comes out the great truth of Christ as the Son of the living God. "Whom do men say that I am?" Some said this and some said that. The Lord says, "Whom say ye that I am?" Peter had it revealed to him of the Father, and he said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." It was not merely that He was the Messiah of Israel sent to the Jews, there was a title far away and beyond that, He was the Son of the living God and all that He built would be in the power of life in victory over death, just as He had shewn the power that could walk on the water. Flesh and blood is no use there, it is not made for walking on water. The conditions of human nature were no use against the power of the enemy. Flesh and blood had been tried in Israel and went down before the enemy; in itself it was utterly weak, but here was One, the Son of the living God, and no power of death or hades could prevail against the Son of God in resurrection, or against what He builds in resurrection power. There you get the first idea of the character of the assembly.

Immediately the Lord says, "Thou art Peter," that is, a stone. He gives him a name which puts him in connection with Himself as the Son of the *living* God. There is life in Christ and there

is the rock for our souls. I often feel when people speak about the blood of Christ that they leave out the Person who shed it. I need hardly say that the Person who shed it gave all its value to it. He who shed it is in the presence of God. People talk about the blood being in the presence of God. I have no doubt the blood was shed in the presence of God and that everything was settled between God and Christ at the cross on Calvary, but *life* is in the presence of God at the present moment, not death. Death was in the presence of God at Calvary, but now Jesus lives. I would like everybody to have the sense of that. Death came in, the blood is the witness of death, the Lord Jesus came by water and by blood and that was the proof of who He was. Who else could come by death? It is not in the nature of man to take up death. A man of old could kill the sacrifice but he could not handle death, another must come and sprinkle the blood, another must deal with death and put the victim on the altar, the priest must come in. Death must be handled, if it is to be effectual, by another. And so it has been. Man could not touch death. But who has? The Son of God. He came by water and blood, and turned death into the way of life and blessing. Life now is in the presence of God.

The church is built upon the fact of life being

in the Son of God. It was impossible that He could be holden of death. He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, but more than that, He was quickened in the power of His own Spirit. Life was in Him. What He builds no power of Satan or of death can possibly touch.

Then the Lord tells Peter that he is of the same order by the revelation of the Father to him of the Person of the Son. Christ puts him in relationship to Himself as the Son of the living God. And so the church is put into the place of nearness to Christ as the Son of the living God. We do not get anything more here. There is nothing about the house of God, it is supposed because Christ speaks of building; nothing about being baptised into one Spirit, and so on. The great thing that came out was that Christ would have a place here. He was going into death but going into it in the power of life. Apparently all that took place with regard to His service here was at an end, as He says in Isaiah xlix., "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought." Christ's work *as to man in the flesh* was a failure, even Christ could not build man up in the flesh. Christ must take another place in the truth of His own Person, beyond death altogether, on another platform, and then He builds the church here so that He gets a place that Satan cannot prevail against. Was He to be

driven away and have no place? Christ would build a place here to which He could come. The great point of Matthew is that Christ should have a place here. He has got a place here and it is not in the systems of men. They can be overturned and fresh systems come up. When Rome was judged by Christ—then Protestantism came in, and then numberless sects sprang up, but there is nothing in them that gives Christ a place that cannot be touched. It is only what Christ builds that stands. I may not be able to see much now, it ought to be seen, but still He has got a place here that Satan cannot prevail against. Satan is not able to overthrow the name of Christ. No power can overthrow that name while the assembly is here. You may take heart and not be discouraged.

Another thing that came out with those who left the systems to be in the faith of the Lord was that Christ should have a place here where He could come into the midst and sing praises to the Father.

Now, what have we got to say as to this? There is just as much power in the name of the Lord. Are we to say that there is no reality or power in that name? God forbid that we should. If there are only a few gathering together in real faith in that name, Christ will own them and there will be a place where He can sing praises. Is not that an immense thing?

One word more. No amount of mere teaching or understanding of the doctrines of Christianity will compensate for real faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the sense of the Holy Ghost here upon earth. What Christ builds, depend upon it, is in the truth of His own Person as the Son of the living God. Do you believe that anything can touch the life in Christ or get the victory over Christ? Do you believe that He can support you for living and for dying? Is it as true to-day as ever it was? I should be very sorry for any to be disheartened. The apostle says to Timothy, "Be not ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, or of me his prisoner." Christ sits at God's right hand and He is Lord. I want you to be in the faith of it, to say, He is Lord and I will be true to His testimony. There is as much virtue as ever in His name and the Holy Ghost is here upon earth.

May the Lord give us to be in the faith of it, and greatly bless every one here in the deep sense of His unfailing and infinite love to His people, that we might have the knowledge of Himself.

