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COMMENTARY

ON THE

HOLY GOSPELS AND THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES,

ARRANGED

ACCORDING TO THE TABLE OF LESSONS

FOR

DAILY SERVICE;

DESIGNED FOR

FAMILY READING.

BY THE

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TO
EDWARD,
BY DIVINE PROVIDENCE LORD BISHOP OF NORWICH ;
WHOSE DAILY DOMESTIC EXPOSITIONS OF
HOLY SCRIPTURE
ARE A SOURCE OF INSTRUCTION TO ALL HIS CLERGY WHO
ARE PRIVILEGED TO HEAR THEM,
AND A MODEL FOR EVERY HEAD OF A HOUSEHOLD TO FOLLOW ;
THIS ATTEMPT
TO ENCOURAGE THE FAMILY READING AND UNDERSTANDING
OF THE DAILY LESSONS APPOINTED BY
THE NATIONAL CHURCH,
IS DUTIFULLY AND RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED.

ADVERTISEMENT.



THE design of this Commentary is to encourage, among my Parishioners especially, and such others as it may reach generally, *a regular course of Scripture Reading in their Families*. There has been no attempt at novelty, no pretence to learning, no following of a School of Divinity, in my mind during its composition. The Church Calendar is the guide that has been followed in its arrangement; the Head of the Church, the Guide whose Will has been sought in its matter.

Many families read a portion of Holy Scripture once at least daily, before or after family prayers; but few have any regular plan whereby they attain a systematic acquaintance with the Bible. I have hoped that the following the Order of the National Church's teaching, so far as the Gospels and the Acts are concerned, would do much to supply this deficiency.

On eleven days in the year there are Special Second Lessons appointed, and these are not always taken from the Gospels or the Acts: on such occasions, the Gospel appointed for the Day would afford a fit subject for Family Reading.

NOTE—This Commentary is not intended to be read continuously, or as an independent book: but that the Comments upon each several chapter are intended to be read immediately after such chapter has been perused.

THE CHURCH CALENDAR:

So FAR AS IT'S ELATBS TO THB .SAILT BEAOINO OF
THE HOLT SOSFELS AND THE ACTS.

THE CHURCH' CALENDAR:

So FAS AS IT RBLi.TBS TO TBB TtAllH HEASIVO OF
THE HOLT GOSPELS AM THE ACTS.

i

JULY TO DECEMBER.

THE CHURCH CALENDAR:

so FAR AS IT BELATB8 TO THB :I>AIJ.T RBAOINO OF
THE HOLT €o8P£L6 AND THE ACTS.

THE CHURCH' CALENDAR:

so FAR AS IT RBLATBS TO THE DAILY HEADING OV
TEE HOLT GOSP£LS iM TBE ACTS.

COMMENTARY,

^^^^^krf^^^^^^M^

Januart 2— May 3— August 31.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 1.

The Gospel, the good tidings of the grace of God, brought to man by Jesus Christ, is calculated to excite in us the liveliest emotions of wonder and of love: of wonder, at the clear development of the mysterious atonement for sin; of love, at the price the Son of God

was willing to pay for the redemption of a fallen race. Unlike all human schemes, the wisdom of GrOD deals rather with the heart than with the mind of man: His revelation, while it never contradicts, often surpasses our reason, and thus humbles while it exalts us, and excites our admiration while it wins our affection.

In reading the Gospel of St. Matthew, we must bear in mind that it was written especially for the Jewish people; and hence, that much stress is laid on the Israelitish descent of Our Lord according to the flesh. On the genealogy which we have just read, it may be remarked, that in two instances a sinful descent is exhibited; and in a third the descent of an alien is named, herself the remote offspring of sin. These instances are Pharez and Solomon in the first case, and Ruth the Moabitess in the second. The lesson to be learned from this is of a twofold character. First, it shows the faithfulness of God in the fulfilment of His promises; and that the sins of men, however dangerous to themselves and their posterity (1) B

Jan.'2—Mai/il] FAMILY READINGS. [Augutt SI

inilicidually, are not permitted to interrupt the course of (Jod's covenanted blessings to His people generally. Secondly, that God exhibits tenderness and mercy towards the descendants of those who have erred from his laws—though the sins of the father axe visited to the third and fourth generation, yet the wrath of a long-suffering God is rapidly exhausted: and we find that the children of Tamar and of Bathsheba united with the offspring of Lot in transmitting to future ages the blessing of the seed promised to faithful Abraham.

The mystery of the incarnation as recorded by St. Matthew should bring to us the deepest thoughts of gratitude. Had it not been for this act of mercy, man could not have wrought out the resurrection from the dead, to replace the race in the condition that it occupied before sin entered into the world, and death by sin. The work of the sanctifying Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, was necessary to create the pure and unsullied offspring of the Virgin's womb, ere a clean thing could be brought out of an unclean; and thus, the course of Nature was altered, that the course of Grace might be fulfilled!

The character of Joseph, "a just man," seems exhibited as a pattern for us to follow: while under the painful impression of being betrothed to an unworthy person, he was willing to bear his humiliation and his grief in private, rather than make her a public example, and bring her to a shameful end—for death, by stoning, would have been her punishment according to the law. Unlike this, too many of us are given to blazon abroad the infirmities and errors of our brethren, rather than to screen them with that charity which covereth a multitude of sins.

Nor was the charity and forgiving disposition of Joseph the only point in which he is set before us as deserving of (2)

Jan.S^May4^ rAMlJ.Y READINGS. [September I

imitation. His ready reception of, and obedience to, the revelation of God, stand in striking contrast with the conduct of the world at large, who will not rouse themselves from the sleep of sin to listen to the tones of that revelation calling them to repentance.

January 3— May 4— September 1.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 2.

The different ways in which the purposes of God are accomplished, and his foreknowledge shown in the fulfilment of prophecy, are strikingly exhibited in this chapter.

Whence the wise men came is still a doubtful question; but the instruction to be derived from their coming is not, on that account, the less manifest. These, our Gentile fathers, the sheaf of the first-fruits of the heathen presented to our great High Priest, exhibited an instance of perseverance, of boldness in the cause of truth, of a manly sense of duty, of obedience to the revelation of God, and of a firmness of faith, which Christians in modern times would do well to imitate. And when we remember that their faith depended on the solitary prophecy of Balaam, added to such imperfect knowledge as had been attained from the traditions of the Jews who had been scattered hither and thither during their captivity in the East; while

we have the whole prophecies of the ancient Scriptures spread out before us; we may well feel humbled at the littleness of the fruits we exhibit, contrasted with the large harvest gathered in to God's glory by them.

The massacre at Bethlehem teaches us how the feeblest

instruments may be made to promote the glory of God. (3) B 2

Jan. 4-Maif 5] FAMILY READINGS. [S^ttmber 2

The unconscious testimony borne by these innocents was^ as a martyrdom in deed though not in will, of less moral dignity than that testimony which is borne by will as well as deed. But it answered nevertheless its purpose of marking the sin of the opponents of Christ, and writing in characters of blood the record of the incarnation; holding, out at the same time a fearful warning as to the lengths of sin to which the indulgence of evil passions often hurry our fallen race. The kings of the world stood up, and the princes took counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed; but their counsels were defeated, and the hostility they menaced was turned against their own bosoms, when the cry of Rachel weeping for her children entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, to caU for vengeance on their murderers.

January 4— May 6 — September 2.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 8.

A GENERAL expectation pervaded the East, that some great person was to be revealed as a Deliverer to the Jewish nation, when an extraordinary personage made his appearance in the wilderness of Judea. Dressed in the prophetic garb, as of old Elijah was wont to appear before Ahab— exhibiting in his diet the most rigid self-denial—and manifestly endued with that prophetic power which had slumbered for four centuries before—crowds of penitent sinners in turn trembled and melted under the resistless power of his eloquence, as he called upon them to " Repent, for the kingdom of heaven was at hand!" This personage was John the Baptist.

(4)

Jun. 1st May 5] FAMILY READINGS. [September 2

The faithful preacher of repentance earnestly protested against that too common error of the Jews, who rested upon their privileges as descendants of Abraham, without walking in the steps of that faith which characterised their spiritual ancestor; and from this we should learn that we too have responsibilities attached to the blessed privileges we enjoy, as brethren by adoption of the promised Seed. The Baptist had no more reason to remind the Sadducees and Pharisees of the future sifting of the family of Israel, than the heralds of Christ in the present day have to remind us of the future purification of His Church. And it seems as if God intended that His written word should keep us in mind of these things, even apart from His ministry, when we find such passages as that in the chapter before us written for our learning.

Nor should we fail to observe, that powerful as the Baptism with water unto repentance was under the teaching of Christ's herald, yet he indicates a still more efficacious Baptism, that of the Holy Ghost. We ought then, in reflection on this passage, to observe, that we must be subjects of one of two things prophesied:—either of the Holy Ghost, which sanctifies and preserves ; or of the unquenchable fire, which burns up and destroys.

The Baptism of Christ by His forerunner, would seem to partake somewhat of mystery, inasmuch as the sinless one does not appear to be a fit subject of the Baptism unto repentance : but the expression of our Lord with reference to it, "thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," seems to have reference to the perfect righteousness which is by the law, which Christ desired to fulfil. The High Priest, under the old dispensation, had been washed with water previous to his initiation into office; and thus the High Priest, under the new, deemed it fitting to undergo the same rite. Nor was this (5)

duty left without acknowledgment; for immediately on its performance, we find a testimony from heaven borne to the mission of the Son of God. The Spirit of love, and peace, and holiness, rested

on that divine brow; and the voice of Him, that of old shook the earth with thunders and lightnings, now testified in the tones of paternal affection, that the seed promised to the patriarchs was come, to hallow the earth and bless the nations with his presence.

January 6— May 6— September 3.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 4.

No sooner had the Son of God received the token of His Father's acknowledgment, than His and our great enemy, Satan, sought to beguile Him from the fulfilment of filial obedience. Not only in the agony of Gethsemane was the contest of salvation carried on : not only in the physical pain of the cross was the battle of man's atonement fought: in the forty days of long enduring abstinence—in the painful vigils —the weary nights—the awful loneliness of the rugged deserts of Judea—yea, and still harder to be borne, in the seductive temptations of the arch-deceiver, to supply the wants, and " fulfil the desires of the flesh and of the mind," " in weariness and painfulness, in watchings and fastings,"* was the awful conflict maintained between the prince of the powers of the air and the well-beloved Son of God.

In the Three Temptations brought by Satan before our Lord, we may be reminded of those baptismal vows which we ourselves are pledged to fulfil. The First, having been (6)

Jon. 5~[May 6] FAMILY READINGS. [September 5]

directed against the senses^ may remind us of our promise to renounce the lusts of the flesh. The Second, having been addressed to a feeling of presumption, the root of which is to be found in a want of abiding belief in God's promises, may remind us of our pledge, to believe all the articles of the christian faith. The Third, having been addressed to ambition, may teach us the necessity of obedience in reality, as well as its mere profession in name; and thus impress upon us the third and most practical pledge of our baptismal covenant— that, not seeking the indulgence of our own, we are to

keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same during our whole life.

It is worthy of remark, that our Lord commenced His preaching with a call to repentance: and herein we may trace the harmonious agreement that exists between the herald of Christ, of Christ himself, and of the Church of Christ. John the Baptist announced the mission of the coming Messiah in the striking words, " Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand:"—Christ drew the attention of the listening multitudes to the same idea, expressed in the same language; while the Church of Christ has, for long ages, opened her daily services with sentences expressive of repentance, has exhorted her children to confess their sins with a penitent heart, has placed a repentant confession in their mouths, and has reminded them, in the conditional absolution pronounced by her minister, that God "hath given them power and commandment to declare to His people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins." And, as if the necessity of repentance as insisted on throughout her Sunday and daily services were insufficient, she states expressly, in her " instruction to be learnt of every christian before they can be confirmed," that " Repentance, whereby (7)

Jan.7^Map7] FAULT READINGS. [Septen^er 4

they forsake sin," no less than Faith, is required by persons even to be received into covenant: thus exemplifying in the most forcible manner that vital truth of Christianity, that Penitence is the humble arch, beneath which we must bend our stubborn wills, before we can pass even the threshold of the house of God ; that it is the key, without which even the door of Faith cannot be unlocked; that its dim, and yet imperfect light, is the very first effect of the dawning illumination of God the Spirit,—of the everlasting day-spring from on high! If then, this be the case, we should examine carefully into our own hearts, to see whether we have felt the influence of that Repentance, the necessity of which has been thus strongly insisted on.

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January 7— Mat 7— September 4.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 5.

Surely, there never existed so absolute and entire a reformation of recognized principles of action as is to be found in the first twelve verses of this, our Lord's Sermon on the Mount. Human dignity, worldly joy, pride, desire of large possessions, love of rule, all that the world holds most dear, are[^][^]at once set aside; and humility, meekness, truthfulness, mercy, purity, peace, gentleness, endurance, enthroned in their place. It is difficult for the heart of the natural man to recognize the beauty of the system thus enjoined. But when the spirit of grace has touched the soul, and "old things are passed away and all things become new" to the believer, there is the superiority of Christ's teaching to the worldly code at once made manifest. The mind whose affections are set upon things above, can afford to think lightly of the things (8)

Jan. 1[^] May] FAMILY READINGS. [September A

highly esteemed on earth. The soul, whose rest is found amid the enduring realities of immortality, is elevated beyond the lower influences of a quickly passing existence, except in so far as they are subservient to the attainment of the life which is to come. A sense of the dignity and permanence of its position, as an agent for God, makes it feel the awful nature of the duties it has to perform, and the expansive power with which under grace it has been gifted. Thus, its whole life and system of action is altered from what it had been, while in a state of darkness as to God's will. Its light ceases to be either of a restrained or of a selfish character; and, with enlarged perceptions, it is readily devoted to an enlarged course of usefulness.

While our Lord was encouraging such an elevation of mind as this. He seemed desirous to impress upon the attention of His hearers the fact, that this teaching was not alien from the spirit of the law ; but rather the realization and fulfilment of it, however apparently opposed to the letter: and hence He took occasion to preach one of the most practical homilies ever uttered, from the text of the lawgiver Moses. Righteousness, forbearance, forgiveness, purity, conjugal

fidelity, simplicity of thought and word, submission to evil, and love ybr off, are here holily and beautifrdly enjoined upon us. How must we mourn, that with such teaching before us, so many fail to be influenced by it: how should we personally implore our Father in Heaven, that when we read such " words " as these of Christ, they may be made " spirit and life " to ourselves. The standard set before us is indeed a lofty one; but we may feel assured that Christ has enjoined upon us no more than He will enable us to fulfil, if we seek that mind which dwelt in Him.

Jtm ^>^Ma^^} FAMILY READINGS. [September 5

January 8— May 8— September 5.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 6.

The portion of the Sermon on the Mount contained in this chapter is, equally with the last, a protest against a worldly, and the erection of a divine, standard of thought and action. The spiritual character of almsgiving is set forth under our Saviour's teaching: the idea of reward is not withheld from the charitable mind, but the kind of reward which we should desire is shown to be of a heavenly and not of an earthly character. Prayer, too, like almsgiving, is similarly treated, and a similar reward foretold.

Perhaps this teaching was intended to guide the mind to the true doctrine of human merit. Were we to speak (zbaolutdy of meritorious service before God, we should be contradicting the language as well as the general tenor of Holy Scripture : but the passages in the chapter we have read show us that we may speak of human merit rdatively. Reward would not be given by a perfect judge, without desert of some kind ; and though man cannot deserve reward for the performance of that which is only duty, yet he may, in a relative sense, deserve it, as having done that duty better than those vriith whom he was brought into comparison.

The divine model of prayer, here set before us, is so perfect and so beautiful as to be beyond all human praise. May we have grace to use it as it was intended by Him who uttered it! recognizing God as our

Father—showing in holiness our desire to hallow His name—striving, in so far as our instrumentality is blessed, to bring about the coming of His

Kingdom—exhibiting an obedience constant and ready as (10)

that of the angels—receiving as a gift^b with grateful hearts, our daily bread—exercising in our minds a perpetual act of forgiveness toward those who injure us—vesting on the strength that is made perfect in weakness, to resist temptation, and keep free from evil—and in all things ascribing power, and kingdom, and glory to Him to Whom alone those attributes belong.

To almsgiving and prayer our Lord annexes "the spiritual duty of fasting and self-denial, contrasting, it at the same time with that adherence to ritual discipline as a mere external form, which seems to have been characteristic of carnal Israel. The true treasure of the soul, the true light of the eye, and true singleness of service, are here also pointed out; and the chapter ends with a warning against over-carefulness, and an affectionate adjuration to increased faith. Were our faith indeed sound, we could never fall, so long as we had these words impressed on our hearts! But careless ears and carnal hearts mark the Christian as well as the Jewish disciple. A thoughtless inattention or an indolent forgetfulness are common snares of Satan, fraught with consequent evil. Let us watch and pray against such temptations!

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January 9— Mat 9— Septbhbbr 6.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 7.

A POWEKPUL reason for moderation in judgment is set before us by our Lord in the conunencement of dtis chapter. Were our thoughts, and words, and actions, fully revealed and weighed in the balance of strict justice, and we bound to stand or fall by the award pronounced upon them, which of (11)

US would be enabled to view fearlessly the terrors of judgment? Let us remember then, when we pass opinions or censures on the conduct of others, that, "with the same measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again." If we bear this rule in mind, we shall find it a perpetual incentive to charity.

The instruction to treat with cautious reverence that which is holy, seems to have been addressed to the disciples in their peculiar character of teachers of others; as though it were meant to be their special office to bring out that which was true and real from kindred minds, and not to waste their instruction upon unsympathizing feelings. But although this was probably the case, a similar lesson may hence be learnt by all—that is, to cultivate a holy communion among saints, rather than waste their gifts by seeking the society of wilful despisers of the will of God. True, such instruction might be misinterpreted by a carnal mind: one who had fallen into the snare of spiritual pride, might, under its influence, be led to foster an unkind and exclusive spirit; but the real disciple of Christ would readily detect such a snare of Satan, by applying the test of the preceding words— "Judge not, that ye be not judged."

It seems almost as if this train of thought were passing through the Saviour's mind, when, immediately after the instruction adverted to. He directed His disciples' attention to the duty of continued prayer. In this we find the destruction of all selfishness—in this is required an absolute prostration of the suppliant before the throne of grace. The man of prayer goes out of himself, that he may be filled with God, even as Christ emptied Himself of divinity, that He might assume the human nature: and hence our Lord follows up

His injunction to the duty of prayer, by an exhortation (as

(12)

though it would follow as a necessary consequence) "to do to others, as we would have them do to us."

The argument whereby our Saviour convinces the disciples of God's readiness to hear their prayers is perfectly conclusive. Earthly

parents love their offspring, and even the less indulgent among them give what is needful for their food and sustenance. How much rather then shall the great and beneficent universal Father provide for the needs of those who are called into the adoption of His sons! Nor should we fail to remark, that this argument was applied to the disciples immediately after they had been assured of their own sonship by Christ himself, who taught them to address God as their "Father."

Nor, if we admit this argument to have been conclusive to them, can we fail to admit it as equally conclusive to ua, who, by the terms of our baptismal covenant, are made members of the body of the same Christ, and children of the same eternal Father!

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~ M ~ - - - - - ^-

January 10— May 10— September 7.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 8.

One of the most interesting and instructive parts of this chapter is the account given of the healing of the "servant" or the child of the centurion—^for the word used in the original bears either of these significations. The faith of the Gentile officer was of extraordinary power, and realized that internal vision which stamps the highest order of belief. His modest reply to our Lord's proposal that He should come and heal his child, conveys, imder a beautiful analogy, a picture of the perfect (13)

JmnI O^May \&] FAMILY READINGS. [SeptewAer 7

power of Jesus over the spiritual world. How feeble is our faith compared with this! How imperfect are our conceptions of the unseen influences ever going on around us! We do indeed in theory recognize God's power; and in the language of the Psalms, which we frequently repeat, we admit that "the hosts of God encamp around the dwellings of the just:" but few, very few, realize to themselves, as did this pious Gentile, the fact that the unseen ministers and messengers of God are ever on the wing ready to obey His behests, and to bring or to withhold the balm of healing according to His omnipotent will. Surely we ought not even to allude to this fact, without striving to retain in our minds more vividly those words of our Church's office for the visitation of the sick— "that Almighty God is the Lord of life and death, and of all things to them pertaining, as youth, strength, health, age, weakness, and sickness." Nor should we rest here: as with our bodies so with our souls: as with our temporary tabernacles so with the spirit that animates them: "Christ is head over all things to His body, the Church;" and if indeed we be members of that mystical Body, we must not only recognize, but feel the vitality that He imparts to us. Whether indeed we feel it or not, we are under its influence: but how sad a thought is it, that we should allow such blessed influence to be going on around us, and yet not be partakers of its blessedness.—May the lesson of the Centurion's faith be made the means of strengthening ours!

But the lesson thus learnt is not the only one: we are taught by this record the fact afterwards insisted on by St. Peter, "that in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him" And hence, we learn not to pride ourselves on the privileges to which we

are called, as though their possession alone would secure to (14)

Jan, 10—May 10] FAMILY READINGS. [September 7

US a pre-eminence in God's favour throughout eternity. How solemnly should those words come home to every disobedient child of God's covenant, whether Mosaic or Christian: "many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but the children of the kingdom

shall be cast out into outer darkness^ Of many other records in this chapter fraught with instruction, that of the difficulties in the way of following Christ is perhaps the most deserving our observation. This is a practical question, as important to us as to those of whom we have just read. The earnest desire of the Scribe was met by our Lord with a declaration that He renounced the world. More homeless than the beasts of the field, or the birds of the air. He indicates herein that His followers must be equally ready to deny themselves all worldly indulgence. How this lesson was learnt by them, we know from St. Paul's expression, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." And the fact that we must be either thus crucified to the world, or if not so, dedd to Christ, is shown by our Lord's answer to the other of His disciples, who waited for his father's death before he should avow himself the Lord's follower—** Let the dead bury their dead." They that are alive to the world are dead to Christ: they that live to Christ are crucified to the world; To one of these classes each of us belongs; and how solemn should be the enquiry whether, when the final retribution comes, we shall be found among those "dead in Christ who rise first," or awake to shame and confusion efface, when we find ourselves among those " children of the Iringdom'^ who are "cast out 1"

Do we but feel the witness of the Spirit within us that we (15) ,,,...

shall be among the former^ our rest, amid the turmoil of the worldj will be as sweet and gentle as was that sleep of Jesus, which refreshed His holy frame when the waves of the stormy sea struck terror to the heart of His less feithfril disciples!

Jakuart 11— Mat 11— September 8.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 9.

The many miracles, of which we read in this chapter, are calculated to give us the most exalted idea of the power, as well as of the compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ. The connexion of the forgiveness of sins with the healing of sickness, in the first of these, should teach us to recognize calamity as the offspring of sin: and

although it might lead to presumption, were we to attempt to connect every special visitation with a special sin, we may still wholesomely reflect upon the certainty of sin requiring punishment from a God of justice; and hence scrutinize with cautious fear our own actions, lest partaking of wilful sin, they bring upon us punishment as certain as deserved. Some of us perhaps, in the comforting truth that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin, may be apt to lose sight of the moral system of God's government, and forget that personal error requires personal chastisement. It is not however consistent with our belief in God's justice, to suppose that He will allow wilful sin to go unpunished, even in the believer; and few of us who look within ourselves, will fail to trace this course of Providence as manifested even in our own career on earth.

The simplicity with which St. Matthew relates his own call to the apostleship of Christ is admirably illustrative of (16)

Jan. 11—Jifay 11] FAMILY READINGS. [Septembers

the character of the true believer, and affords a pleasing contrast to the way in which worldly men are apt to recite events in which they have been prominent actors. How earnestly should we strive after that self-denying obedience that enabled the publican at once to give up the lucrative duties of his office to obey the call of Christ! And how thankfully should we, who know the fallen nature that we have inherited, and the imperfection that characterizes all our services even as redeemed christians, receive the gracious intimation we have just read, that the Saviour came *' not to call the righteous, but sinners^ to repentance;" while "mercy" rather than " sacrifice " delights the Father of Whom, through Him, we are made the adopted sons.

In addition to the lesson we have learnt regarding the connexion of punishment with sin, this chapter also teaches us in a special manner the connexion of faith with healing.

Two blind men, who had given an earnest of their belief in Jesus as the Messiah, by addressing Him as the Son of David, (the first time, it may be remarked in passing, that this title was given Him, except by

the angel Gabriel before His birth) were brought into the house before Him; and on being questioned as to their faith in His power, were healed with the remarkable words *'according to your faith be it unto you." May we not hence believe, that were our faith equally strong, we might be made partakers of similar proofs of its efficacy?

The way in which the Pharisees argued against the miraculous power of our Lord, proves how ready are servants of Satan to do their master's work in seeking to neutralize the will of Jehovah: but the record of the Evangelist teaches us how such opposition is to be met, viz, by continuing in the path of duty and goodness. Immediately after the statement (17) c

Jan. 12—Afay 12] VAMILT RBADINo8. [September 9

of their opposition^ we read the account of our Lord's continuing mercies to the afflicted. Let this guide us in our personal course of conduct: if we meet with opposition in our christian career, let not a carnal temper induce in us a feeling of hostility towards those who oppose us, but rather let it act as an inducement to increased perseverance, that with Mrell-doing we may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

$$\begin{aligned} & \wedge > * \wedge * \wedge * 0 \wedge 0 \wedge * \wedge \wedge \wedge \wedge > \wedge \wedge * \wedge > \wedge \wedge * \wedge \wedge * \wedge \wedge \wedge \wedge] \wedge > 0 * 0 \wedge 0 \wedge 0 \wedge 0 \wedge 0 \wedge 0 \wedge 0 \\ & \wedge 0 * 0 \wedge 0 9 0 \end{aligned}$$

January 12— Mat 12— September 9.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 10.

The call of the twelve disciples, whom our Lord also named "Apostles," as being sent forth with authority and commission from Him, seems to indicate system and regularity in the way in which He intended His Gospel to be propagated on the earth. Whether the twelve were chosen in reference to the number of the tribes of Israel,

or themselves and the other seventy also with an intention to represent the Priests and Levites of the old dispensation, under Himself the Great High Priest of the new, is not perhaps of moment to our personal salvation: but considering that all things under the Law had " a shadow of good things to come," such an idea is, to say the least, not improbable, and would seem to make the intention of God more clear to the believer in subsequent ages.

Of the twelve thus chosen, it may be remarked, that

Lebbeus, whose surname was Thaddeus, was the same person

called Judas the brother of James, in the Gospel according to

St. Luke, and was author of the Epistle that bears the name of (18)

Jan. 12--ilffly 12] FAMILY READINGS. [September 9

Jade. The injunction given to these earliest missionaries shows how marked was the intention of Christ to give every opportunity of salvation to the stiff-necked and rebellious descendants of Abraham. Even the Samaritans, partaking as they did of a partial descent from the same stock, were excluded by definite order from the preaching of the kingdom of heaven at this period. Affectionate interest in " the lost sheep of the house of Israel" filled the Saviour's mind, and to them alone was the offer of salvation to be made.

The powers with which the Apostles were invested seem to have anticipated the declaration of the Apostle Paul, that true godliness has promise of the life that now is as well as of that which is to come. They were enjoined to bring present health and manifest blessing, as well as by the teaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom to elevate the mind to communion with its Author.

The unselfishness of their mission seems also to stand in marked contrast with the love of personal advantage which characterizes the world. " Impart" was to be henceforth their motto; the free grace of God which had come to them through Jesus Christ was to flow through no limited channel, but they were enjoined to dispense to others the graces with which they were entrusted, with the same

liberality that had marked its bestowal on themselves. How admirable a lesson may we all learn from these instructions! the gifts we possess are not our own, but entrusted to us as stewards of the manifold grace of God : and, lest an over-careful prudence should make us too chary in imparting them to others, we are taught that neither gold, nor silver, nor raiment, shall ever be lacking, so long as we bear in mind the commandments and the service of God.

(19) c 2

Beyond this lesson however, of universal application, we are bound to recognize, in the chapter before us, the special authority bestowed on the appointed teachers of God's word: they are invested with an awful dignity, but a portion of the responsibility of their mission falls upon those to whom it is delivered by them. No one can listen to the word preached by them without having to answer before God for the way in which he has received it.

The mode of expression used by our Lord at the close of the chapter, as though He were the author of division, must not lead us into the error of supposing that He desires its existence. The fact is that evil, having found its place in the world, will always rise in antagonism against the preaching of the truth. Where Christ teaches unity, there Satan will insinuate the seeds of division: and this knowledge should make us examine very cautiously into the future tendencies as well as the present manifest results of our actions. We are too commonly apt to look only to the present, and thus, by our short-sightedness, to bring about evils that a prudent forethought would have enabled us to avoid.

January 13— May 13— September 10

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 11.

The reply of our Lord to the inquiring disciples of John adduces the double testimony of internal and external evidence to His truth. In appealing to His works as proof of the truth of His word. He exhibits that moral harmony which is itself an internal evidence of truth: but in the words

of His appeal. He quotes a prophecy of more than seven cen-(20)

turies old, which was an external testimony that He was the Messiah whom they expected.

The high testimony that our Lord bears to the character of the Baptist cannot cause us the surprise that we must feel at the remark which concludes it, "he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." This must indeed startle us as to the magnitude of our privileges as heirs of that kingdom. How few of us realize the dignity to which we are thus called! To regard the world around us, we might suppose that no higher dignity were offered for our acceptance than that which this world affords: wealth, rank, office, have their worshippers among those who are already called to far higher privileges than either wealth, or rank, or office can bestow. And we, who in our baptismal covenant[^] acknowledge ourselves "made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven,"* are too often found infatuated followers of some earthly bauble, despised by Christ, forbidden of God, and utterly alien from a heavenly nature.

It may be instructive briefly to recapitulate the principal facts in which the greatness of the Baptist consisted:—1. He was foretold some hundreds of years before, by Isaiah and Malachi, as a " prophet" and a " messenger of the Lord:" he was therefore their equal in office, and their superior in being the object as well as the organ of the prophetic influence of the Spirit of God. 2. His birth was preceded by a twofold miracle, and he was filled with the Spirit of God from his mother's womb. 3. He was blessed with extraordinary success as a preacher of the word of God, and, as turning very many to righteousness, became heir of the promised blessing, *[^] that he should shine as a star in the firmament for

(21)

ever and ever/' 4. He had the high honour to baptize the Redeemer[^] and to witness a miraculous attestation to the favour with which that baptism was received. 5. He had an excellency in his office[^] that was peculiar to himself of all the prophets, in fitting and preparing the

minds of the people of God for the immediate reception of the Lord of life and glory. 6. He was one of the first, who, by being enabled to bear witness to Jesus Christ as the Son of God, became partaker of his Saviour's blessing, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see[^] and your ears, for they hear: for verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear and have not heard them." These distinctions lead us readily to the conclusion declared in the chapter before us, "that none then born of women were greater than John the Baptist." Let us now consider what are the privileges pledged to us, that place us as members of the christian covenant in a higher position than that occupied by this favoured man. "Beloved, it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when Jesus shall appear we shall be like Him:" these are words of the inspired Apostle blessed to a peculiar extent by the love of Jesus, and addressed to all members of the kingdom of heaven in the affectionate but awful exhortation, commencing "Beloved, now are we the sons of God." Even now then in this world we "have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father:" even now we are "the called of Christ Jesus:" even now we are "called to be saints:" even now, ** being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God:" even now '[^] there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,

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Jan. 14—[ilfay 14] FAMILT READINGS. [September \\\

who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit—[^]for the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made them free from the law of sin and death:" even now "the Spirit beareth 'witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ."

May God keep us humble and holy under these exalted privileges, and so guide us to the realization of their high standard, that we may

not be partakers of the condemnation of those rebellious cities which refused to recognize the mighty works done in them by Christ.

January 14— May H — September 11.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 12.

The nature of the Sabbath as a day of rest and spiritual communion with God, appears to have been very little understood by the carnally-minded Jews. Jealous for the literal fulfilment of their law, they were anxious that every tittle of it should be fulfilled, while they seem not to have apprehended how holy and just and good was the spirit in which it was framed. This passage is instructive, inasmuch as it not only shows that Christ was Lord over the Sabbath, and declares His superiority to the material temple built to His Father's honour, but because it discloses the spirit and intention of the law of the Sabbath, and proves it to have been a benevolent ordinance for the good of man, and not merely a harsh injunction for his restraint.

This principle was farther illustrated in the miracle of

healing recorded immediately afterwards: and it must be with

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a painful revulsion of feeling that we turn from this instance of beneficence in Christ to the account of His formal persecutors taking counsel for His destruction. Few more powerful contrasts could be exhibited between the expansive and spiritual benevolence of the divine, and the narrow and exclusive intolerance of the carnal mind.

The work of the Divine Spirit was so manifest in the acts of Jesus, that the people at large could not resist the conclusion that He was indeed the promised son of David: but the snares of Satan were too wily and too powerful to allow free course to their testimony. Their rulers ascribed to the influence of Beelzebub the working of miraculous power; and though our Lord's argument was such as to overthrow their assertion, yet we imagine that their habitual respect for their governors was such as to prevent its having its full weight upon their minds. Indeed, we are not left to imagine this: for the

testimony of modern travellers proves the truth of the idea, inasmuch as the Jews of Jerusalem at the present day never think of denying the reality of the christian miracles, but content themselves with denying their having been the effect of Divine power.

The awful warning against blaspheming the Holy Spirit, should teach us the extremest reverence for the written word of God, and for the living Church, as well as for the person of Christ. These are each as much the work of the Spirit as was the quickening of the Saviour's holy body: the words recorded of Christ are spirit and life as well as those spoken by Him, and the mighty fabric of faithful souls in all ages, built up a spiritual house in Him, has been cemented together only by the same omnipotent agent. Parts of this mysterious and gigantic building we have personally to show forth our

union therewith; if our hearts be still indulging their cor-

(24)

ruption^ or our language still impure^ we are weaving the web of Satan into the frame-work of the body of Christ, and thus rendering ourselves liable to that awful condemnation, ** If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy." In the subsequent part of the chapter, our Lord sets forth that doctrine so frequently urged in Holy Scripture, that increased privilege brings with it increased responsibility, while the allusion to the forgiveness of Nineveh is calculated to speak peace to the troubled mind that believes an irreversible sentence of condemnation has gone forth against it. Against the Ninevites the word of condemnation had gone forth: but receiving the sentence in humility and contrition, the condemnation was recalled and pardon sealed in Heaven. The greater than Jonas hath procured a Uke recall for us, born under the wrath of GoD, and too often alienated still farther from Him by personal sin: " we had sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God that raiseth the dead, who delivereth from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us."

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January 16— Mat 15— September 12.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. IS.

The mode of instruction by parable seems peculiarly suitable to the genius of the eastern nations. Not only is their taste encouraged by presenting a visible symbol before them, but their active imagination delights to seize and apply the truth hidden under the covering that contains it. Our Lord (25)

appears to have adapted with peculiar nicety the subject matter of His instruction to the minds He had to instruct, and to the scenes amid which He was moving. It might appear somewhat harsh that this uncertain kind of teaching should be given to those who needed the simple elements of the knowledge of salvation: but the true clue to this apparent harshness is given in the chapter before us, where our Lord says, " whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." This principle is carried out in the whole of God's dealings with man; and to us, who live in the midst of privileges, abounding in greater number than any other period or country ever exhibited, it should convey an awful warning; lest we, having much without, prove to have nothing within, and that which has been given be henceforward taken away from us.

* The parable of the sower warns: us against the temptations which beset those who have once listened to the word of God. That of the tares and wheat tells us of the power and subtlety of our enemy, of the necessity of sifting ourselves to see to which of the classes we belong, and of judging ourselves that we be not judged of the Lord. The certainty and the nature of the coming judgment is likewise herein prefigured in striking terms: the main difference to be noted being that living, sentient, and responsible creatures are represented under the image of material substances. An argument is also implied in this parable that should reconcile us to the imperfect constitution under which we now exist; the admixture of evil with

good, that we see everywhere around, is the effect of the working of Satan, and the manifestation of his servant. Sin—the existence however of this evil should strengthen

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rather than weaken our faith; all things work together for good to them that love God, for He that is with us is mightier than he that is against us; and if at times iniquity seems to predominate over justice^ it must be the part of the christian to look forward in undoubting confidence to that final retribution^ " when all things that offend and do iniquity shall be gathered out of the kingdom of the Lord."

The figures of the grain of mustard-seed, the leaven, the hidden treasure, and the pearl of great price, seem to reiterate the same lesson—that is to say, that religion is the one thing needful, and that compared with it all others are insignificant. The parable of the net is an instance of that peculiar appropriateness which distinguishes so much of our Lord's teaching. He was still by the sea-shore, and addressing Himself to men who were for &e most part fishermen by profession: and while the intention of the parable indicates the lesson of final retribution which had been just previously taught^ by that of the tares and wheat, it seems also to direct them to an universal system of teaching, which should embrace the despised and outcast of society as well as the learned and wise and noble of the world. All who would receive their teaching were to be made subjects of the Kingdom and Church of Christ; it was to be left to the infallible wisdom of God to decide who should remain members throughout its eternal glories.

We should not read of the contempt with which our £de« deemer was received by the neighbours of His own houBdlu^, without observing how frequently a similar feeling is displayed amongst ourselves. We are.dften unwilling to receive truth for truth's sake; and we >reject it if it does not come in a form which pleases our tastes, or coincides with our preconceived ideas. Let not the punishment of the Galileans be lost upon

(27)

US: Jesus did not there many mighty works because of their unbelief; and if we are partakers of their want of faith^ we too must expect a withdrawal of the g^ace and favour of the Son of God.

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January 16— Mat 16— Sbptbmbbr 13.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 14.

A STRIKING instance of the power of conscience is given U9 in the case of Herod (Antipas): and yet, though his conscience was so much aroused as to make him believe that the living Christ was the dead Baptist; though we find it shook his faith as a Sadducee, and made him doubt and even repudiate his previous denial of the resurrection of the dead; yet this farther lesson is to be drawn from his conduct, that conscience alone does not produce reformation; that an acknowledgment of wrong may be made without leading to the performance of right. Thus, while conscience, which is part of our aelfy may produce remorse, we must go out of our self, if we wish to attain a change of heart: the working of the Spirit of God is needed before the natural will can be converted to Him.

Our Lord's conduct in withdrawing Himself from the power of the murderer of His herald seems to teach us that caution is not inconsistent with faith: the enthusiasm of an over-excited mind might lead man to tempt God by courting unnecessary danger: the mind of Christ, as revealed in the chapter before us, explains that prudence is not less necessary in the world because faith has attained perfection.

In the miracle of the five thousand fed by five loaves and

two fishes, we have many lessons taught us: the most im* (28)

portant of these seems to be the divine manifestatioii that was

thus made in the person of Jesus. One of the miracles

wrought under the Mosaic leading was that of feeding the multitude with bread from heaven: the Jews therefore might naturally suppose (as indeed we learn from St. John that they did) on the sight of a similar miracle^ that the performer of it could only be that "prophet" whom Moses had declaied
** should be raised up by God like unto him." Thus their faith would be confirmed in the fact of Jesus being the Messias^ at the same time that they would see a power manifestly divine exhibited in the promised son of David. They would also be led, by viewing His Sovereign power over the laws of nature, to see that His Kingdom was not merely one of this world, but that His sway was exerted over the invisible things of the creation: and thus they might be led, or at least prepared, to appreciate the spiritual nature of the dominion He was to establish. Their bodies being sustained, would teach them dependence upon Him for the supply of all earthly needs; while the mode of sustenance would teach them also His power to bestow upon them heavenly gifts. The miracle of Christ walking on the water, and His mercy in saving His disciple whose £edth failed him, should lead us to contemplate with reverence and affection the divine

power and unfailing love of our Lord. We, like the doubting Apostle, are too frequently alarmed out of our faith by the storms of difficulty and blasts of temptation that beset us amid the waves of life; and yet the everlasting arms are around us, as surely as the arm of Christ was stretched to save the sinking Peter, if we will but open our inward vision under His teaching, and walk by & with as seeing things invisible.

No wonder, when this manifestation was made to the Apostles, that they came and worshipped Him as the Son of God : but (29)

it is not enough for us to recognize their conduct, we must also co-operate with it: we too must see and feel the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus: we too must cling close to Him, worship Him, fear Him, love Him, follow Him: and as, under the power of His Spirit, we grow more and more conformed to His image and likeness here, so shall we be gradually fitted for enjoying the fulness of His presence and participating in His glories hereafter.

January 17— Mat 17— Sabbath 14.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 15.

The early part of this chapter sets forth, under a striking lesson, the duty of conscientious honesty. The Scribes and Pharisees were contented with a formal obedience to the ceremonial law^e but did not perceive that which was holy, and just^t and good, concealed beneath its surface^e. Our Lord exposes their error, and teaches that they who do not serve God with an honest heart serve Him in vain.

We cannot be surprised that the Pharisees were offended at such teaching as this being delivered to the multitude. Few of us like to be told of our faults; none to have them exposed before the sight of

others. But this sin of the Pharisees was so gross and glaring, so mischievous as well as offensive, that nothing short of a public exposure seemed likely to effect, its cure. We should ask of ourselves. Are not we guilty: of self-deception even as they? Our natural corruption,, our heart-impurity, needs a heart«cleansing as much as theirs; and inasmuch as we have no power of ourselves to

think anything as of ourselves, we must seek the cleansing (80)

power of God's Holy Spirit, and ever bear humbly in mind that our sufficiency is alone of Him.

From the compassion of our Lord displayed towards the suppliant mother of Canaan, we learn that the urgent faith of the alien is acceptable with God. It was not because His disciples besought Him to send her away (that is, to heal her daughter and dismiss her,) but because of her own great humility and undoubting faith that He granted her petition. This should be an incentive to us to exhibit those graces which Christ thus acknowledged to be acceptable in His sight; and though the relationship wherein by God's covenant we stand to Him, as baptised into His body, gives us a claim to approach Him which she did not possess, yet that very relationship is itself a gift of grace, and an additional reason for us to bear in our body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

When we read in the latter part of the chapter of the love of Christ displayed toward the multitudes, of their wonder at His power, and of the grateful praise wherewith they glorified the God of Israel, we too shall have our hearts lifted up in thankfulness, remembering that these records have been written for our learning, to lead us as disciples to the feet of Christ, through whom all temporal blessings are acquired to us, as well as those spiritual gifts which our hearts acknowledge. Even as He fed the fainting multitudes in the wilderness. He continues to sustain now those who come to Him for their daily bread. Let us, then, like the wandering multitude, lift up our hearts and voices in thankfulness to Him from whom we derive our sustenance; and endeavour, under the support of His Spirit, to show forth our gratitude " not only with our lips but in our lives."

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Jam. 1e—1f^ 18] VAMILT RBADINo8. [Sqi^ember 1&

January 1&^Mat 18— September 15.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 16.

When man with a carnal and unbelieving heart demands as a right a sign of favonr from God, he will meet with rejection, as did the Scribes and Pharisees. And yet it is observable, that even in Christ's rejection of them a word was dropped by the way, that if any one spiritual person were among them he might profit by it. The sign of the Prophet Jonas was mentioned by our Lord, to shadow forth to any who would receive it the mystery of His coming death and subsequent resurrection.

The dulness of the disciples in apprehending the teach-ing of their master, with reference to the leaven of the Pharisees, shows us strikinffly how very hard the heart of man Is, and ii.at this Section of nTture doth remain even in them that are regenerate. To those who suffer trial as to the means of subsistence, the reference of Christ to His power in multiplying the means of life, sh6uld convey a sense of hopeful confidence. Our heavenly Father knoweth that we have need of these things; and they who are taught by His Spirit to feel their filial relationship may rely undoubtingly upon Him for all needful supply.

But the allusion to the leaven of the Scribes and Pharisees should not be allowed to pass, without leaving useful matter for reflection behind it. The great father of lies, the author of their, and of all, hypocrisy is ever seeking to introduce His leaven, not only into the world at large but into our own hearts personally. Satan is just as anxious to withstand Christ now as he was then, and inasmuch as he is

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powerless against Him personally, he seeks to wound Him through the sides of His brethren; and if we would desire to withstand him

unsuccessfully we should take unto us the weapons of Christ—
^humility, obedience, and love.

It was no light testimony that was borne by the people to the power that Christ exhibited, when some took Him for the Baptist, some for Elijah, and some for other of the Prophets. They were feeling after the truth, and, like all who do so in sincerity, made some approaches to it. But man cannot by searching find out God ; and it was to the enlightenment vouchsafed by His Spirit alone, that the rock-like confession of Peter was to be ascribed, '* Thou art the anointed one, the Son of the living God."

It is much to be feared that we do not sufficiently acknowledge this truth. The personal work of the Spirit in grafting us into the Church is far too little thought of; and thus the baptism into His name, in union with that of the Father and the Son, is often degraded into a mere ritual ceremonial. The personal sustaining of the soul by the same blessed Being is also too frequently lost sight of amid the bustle and excitement of the world. May we have grace to think more of the Spirit (as we declare Him in the Creed to be) as the Lord and Giver of life to us.

As the faith of Peter in his confession is an example, so is his worldliness in his subsequent rebuke of Christ a warning to us; he seems to have expected to gain the crown without first submitting to the cross, and that this error is prevalent even yet, our own hearts too painfully prove. Let us then seek to bear more constantly in mind (and let the value of the human soul, as laid down by Christ Himself, enhance the recollection) that Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow His steps. (83)

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ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 17. A wondrous mystery is revealed to us in the commencement of this chapter— God has proved Himself to the Apostles to be the God of the living • He of whose sepulchre no man knoweth unto this day, and he who was visibly taken up from the wondering gaze of the faithful Elisha, are sent in spiritual but visible life to converse with the transfigured Jesus in the sight of His favoured Apostles. The giver of the law, and one of the most eminent among the prophets, converse with the Messiah in this opening scene of His glory, concerning His decease which He shall accomplish at Jerusalem. What a wondrous and glorious consent is here set before the eyes of the faithful! The Law, the Prophets, and the Christ agree upon that death which is to be the wages of sin. The power of the Holy Ghost invests them with a visible glory; and the voice of the Father testifies that He is well pleased with the way in which His beloved Son will fulfil His mission.

The return of the three Apostles with their Lord from Mount Tabor was marked by a fresh evidence of His divine power; and the faithlessness of His disciples, as proved by their impotence over unclean spirits, met with a deserved rebuke from Him who had called them to the exercise of faith. The rebuke is as useful to us as to them; it is our unbelief that makes us weak; we, as they, can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us; but if we wilfully give up His promised aid and trust to ourselves, then will our impotence proved as manifestly even as was theirs. In resisting

'temptation to sin, in aiming at a higher standard of holiness, in
therefore overcoming indolence, and a natural disinclination to heavenly

things, we must ever faithfully seek the assistance of a Spirit

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higher than our own. In the strength of that Spirit we may triumph over the world, the flesh, and the devil, to resist whom we are pledged by the vows of our baptismal covenant: but if we rest content with such strength as is natural to us, and seek not in all things the aid of the Spirit of Christ; the world, the flesh, and the devil will assuredly triumph over us.

In the conclusion of the chapter the divine doctrine of obedience to government is very distinctly laid down: and if we be faithful followers of the Lord that bought us, we like our Master shall be subject to principalities and powers, obey magistrates, be ready to every good work, speak evil of no man, be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men.

January 20— May 20— September 17.

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ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 18.

The natural man seeks after; greatness and distinction upon earth. Even the disciples of Christ are not free from this failing. His personal followers exhibited it when on earth, and vast numbers of the members of His Church are equally subject to it at the present day. If we are of the number of these weak brethren, let us learn from the commencement of this chapter that humility and docility are signs of true greatness. The infant in age is an object of care to the angels

of God ; and the infant in spirit, he who is humble, and meek, and lowly in heart, is an object upon which rest the affections of God himself.

Selfish ambition, like other sins, if it be not cast out by the spirit of grace, grows with our growth and strengthens with our strength. Our errors become as it were a part of our-self; as much identified with our moral nature as our members (85) D 2

Jan. 20—3rd Jan 20] FAMILY READINGS. [September \7

with the body whereof they form a part. But we must learn, from what we have just now read, that if we value our eternal salvation, we must cast them from us be they dear as a right eye or a right hand. If we tamper with our sins, we are tampering with that which has power to drag both body and soul down to hell.

And when the weight of sin really presses heavily upon us, and we feel our own weakness and inability to shake it off, then should we most cheerily remember our Saviour's most gracious words, that He came to seek and to save that which was lost. To the mind trembling under the sense of its own lost estate, the Saviour's love brings holy and healing balm. The good Shepherd, who gave his life for the sheep, is ever on the watch to call the wanderer home, and to supply him with that divine grace which is, through the will of the Father, perfected in human weakness.

The grace of charity, the power of prayer, the judicial authority committed to the Church, the pledge of Christ's presence to those who unite to supplicate the Father in His name, are all set forth in this chapter; while in the parable recorded at the end, the doctrine of forgiveness is clearly laid down. Like that of our heavenly Father, our forgiveness toward those who trespass against us should be unrestrained: unrestrained, that is, not to the encouragement of error, but when the error is confessed; for confession, in cases of

human error as well as those directly committed against God, is a necessary preliminary to forgiveness. May we have grace fully to feel our own need of forgiveness before God, and in true humiliation to offer that prayer *' God be merciful to me a sinner," which of old was not, nor ever will be, offered to the throne of grace in vain.

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January 21— May 21— September 18.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 19.

The love of Christ in healing the multitudes that followed Him, and the malignity of the Pharisees in seeking to involve Him in a contradiction of the law of Moses, are set forth in striking contrast in the commencement of this chapter. Even our human apprehensions readily perceive how lovely is virtue in the abstract, and how offensive is its opposite vice. But though our moral nature freely recognises this as an external law, it requires something more than this to lead us personally to the practice of holiness. One of the most vicious monarchs that ever existed, is recorded to have said that he respected virtue in others though not virtuous himself; and thus our moral sense is ready enough to confess the superiority of holiness, while in our own persons we serve the law of sin.

In the exposition that our blessed Lord gave of the Mosaic law with reference to marriage. He showed that there was an accommodation therein to the low tendencies of our carnal nature. This imperfection exhibits plainly the temporary character of the legal dispensation, while the high ground of moral purity laid down in the Gospel sets forth as manifestly its enduring and permanent character. Here, as in the preceding chapter, we have testimony of God's love for little children: and it ought to impress the youngest child of our families with a holy gratitude, to know that such as he are objects of angelic watchfulness, and called by a voice of love to receive blessing from their Redeemer.

The interesting history of the rich young man teaches to all who will receive it the snare of wealth, the duty of holiness, and the necessity of self-denial: but beyond this, it teaches (37)

Jon. 22—Jfoy 22] FAMILT RBADIMGS. [SepUmberr \9

also the all-sufficiency of the grace of God for rich or poor who trust in Him.

How wonderful a prophecy was that of the Lord Jesus[^] when twelve thrones of judgment were promised to the twelve Apostles[^] and yet one of the twelve then present became a son of perdition, and by transgression fell from the exalted honour intended for him! Should not this teach to us the lesson of humility, and make us fear lest we to whom the promises are sealed through Christ Jesus should also be cut off? If indeed we lay firm hold upon Christ as the rock of our salvation, no power can separate us from His love: the reward of the faithful shall then be ours. But if we be tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, wavering and of doubtful mind, then indeed we have cause to fear that we shall not receive any favour or blessing of the Lord.

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January 22— May 22— September 19.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 20.

The expression of our Lord that many that were last should be first and many that were first should be last, seems to have been considered by Himself to require explanation: for immediately after its utterance He proceeds to show how this should be, by the parable of the labourers hired into the vineyard. The sovereignty of God, as universal proprietor, is here displayed, as well as the justice of His covenant vindicated : in the language of the translators of the Bible, the parable " showeth that God is debtor unto no man." It is

supposed to refer specially to the Jews as the earlier, and the Gentiles as the later, called into God's family, and thus to

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shadow forth the mystery, from the beginning hid in God, of the ingathering of the Gentile to an equal privilege with the Jew. But apart from this, while it vindicates God's justice in "keeping covenant," it also strikingly exhibits His goodness in '* showing mercy:" and if there are among ourselves those who have experienced a late conversion of heart to Him, while that life which was His by right had been previously squandered in indolence or self-indulgence, we surely should from this parable be made to feel the greatness of His love, and be led thereby to devote ourselves more unremittingly to His service during our remaining time in His vineyard on earth.

Twice before this had Christ foretold His coming death to His disciples ; but now for the first time did He state the mode of that death: a mode that must have struck them as almost incredible, when they knew that He was not likely to commit any offence against the Gentile (that is, the Roman) government, and that they were not likely to persecute Him for religious opinions to which they were utterly indifferent. The perfect knowledge, however, of future events thus displayed by their master, must have strongly confirmed their faith in and dependence upon Him when, shortly after, they found them verified to the minutest particular.

What a lesson to ambition is that read by our Lord to Salome and her sons, and their fellow-disciples! Service, not Rule, is the order thus given to all members of Christ. May we have grace to bear this ever in mind, and seek to follow the holy example of Him who came not to be ministered unto but to minister!

The closing miracle recorded teaches a lesson by which all of us may profit. Let us not heed the rebukes of the

worldly multitude who would keep us back from Christ, but (39)

Jon. 25—Afa^ 23] FAMILT READINGS. [SepUnJfer 20

call on the Lord Jesus in faith, as the Son of David, the promised King of Israel, and we too may hope to have our vision enlightened, the darkness of nature taken away, the veil removed from our hearts, and ourselves enabled to gaze undazzled on the full Beveladon of the Sun of Righteousness!

January 23— May 23— September 20.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 21.

If the disciples' minds were not so habituated to miracle as to be unmoved by its recurrence, they must have been deeply impressed by the circumstances of the Lord sending for the colt He needed, as well as by the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies, which He exhibited on using it for His entry into the City of Jerusalem, or as it is poetically termed "the Daughter of Zion." No less than three of these were thus realized:—Malachi had declared that "the Lord was to come suddenly to His Temple," and He did so; Haggai had declared that "the glory of the latter house (that is, of the second Temple, rebuilt after the return from the seventy years captivity in Babylon) should be greater than that of the former," and by the visible indwelling of the Lord of Life, it became so; and Zechariah had uttered the prophecy quoted in the chapter just read, which, inconsistent as it seemed, was equally fulfilled by the entry of Jesus which has been recorded.

The purification of the Temple requires perhaps a little explanation. It seems strange to us that oxen, doves, and money-brokers' desks, should find place at all within those holy precincts. The reason was, that it was found more conve-

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Jan. 23_Afay 23] FAMILY READINGS. [September^

nient for worshippers from a distance to purchase on the spot the sin and peace-offerings required by the Mosaic Law than to bring them from the country: but this convenience grew in time into an offensive traffic^ which encouraged cupidity and the lowest feelings in the

dealers^ and dishonoured the sanctity of that building which was consecrated to the service of Jehovah. Hence it was, that the Son, jealous for His Father's honour, purged the Temple of this abuse. Perhaps also the act was farther intended to show the useless-ness of such sacrifices under^the coming dispensation of grace.

The cursing of the unfruitful fig-tree—so unlike most of the miracles of the loving Saviour—while it shows forth at once His divinity and humanity in the power and in the ignorance displayed upon the occasion, seems to have been recorded for some special purpose. This may have been to indicate the end of the Apostate Judas, whose special unfruit-fulness was so soon to be exhibited. We should take warning by the solemn lesson so painfully and practically illustrated.

And as this gives us warning, may we not also take example from the parable of the penitent son ? Which of us can look into his heart and say he has always obeyed his Father's will ? Shall we not then repent and do the first works appointed to us, ere it be too late ? The voice of the Lord, by parable, by warning, by example, sounds throughout His written word, calling us to be built up upon Him the tried corner-stone! If we are truly rooted and built up in Him no power shall separate us from His love: but if, while we profess to go and work in His vineyard, we are found still lingering in the world at large, this same corner-stone, that might have been our salvation, will fall upon us to our everlasting destruction !

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Jon. 24—Jlfa^ 24] FAMILY READINGS. [September 21

January 24— May 24— September 21.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 22.

If they who rejected the invitation to the marriage of the king's son were cut off from his favour, can we wonder that the Jews who rejected and crucified the Lord of glory should be visited with the armies of God and have their city burned up ? And all this did

happen to them within forty years of the time of the parable we have read being uttered. But let us carry on the idea a little farther. The Jews, the descendants of faithful Abraham, were for their wickedness cut off from the Great King, and He sent out His servants to call us, members of the Gentile family, to fill up the gap made by their falling off. Have we then come to His summons clad with the requisite wedding-garment ? It would be an awful thing to deceive ourselves on this point. The message of God to us was intended to bring us into the closest relationship with Himself, even that of sons. It was no less than to make us His heirs. His joint-heirs with Christ. The righteousness of Christ constitutes the wedding-garment which we are to wear. We cannot assume this garment of ourselves, but it is provided for us and offered to us to wear. Are we wearing it now ? Are we partakers of that true fellowship with the Father and the Son through the Spirit which enables us to recognize Jehovah-Jesus as our righteousness ? How solemn is the consideration that, although all of us as a christian family are among the many called, there may be some of us who are not among the few chosen!

The picture given us of the subtle attempt of the disciples of the Pharisees with the Herodians to lead the obedient Son of God into rebellion against the civil authority, is well

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Jan, 2i—May 24] FAMILY READINGS. [September 21

worth the attention of the christian student in all ages. The powers that be are ordained of God : and surely God will never so contradict Himself as to make it a duty in any one of His children at any time to lift the standard of rebellion against constituted authority.

When our Lord explained the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, and the spiritual character of His Father's revelation to Moses, the multitude were astonished: a clear proof this, that God's word had not free course so as to be glorified amongst them : and though perhaps the explanation was given for the special refutation of the Sadducee, and the general instruction of the unbeliever of that day,

yet may we not ask. Is not this a warning to the days of high christian civilization as well as to those of Jewish darkness ? Our christian life is assuredly not sufficiently recognized amongst ourselves: and if all of us, masters and servants, parents and children, equally felt that our life was hid with Christ in God, as the Bible teaches us, we should realize more the mutual relationship that exists between us, and understand better the mighty Unity in which we are bound up together!

The closing verses of the chapter show how love and wisdom triumph over all opposition. Did we but seek those high qualifications in humble prayer from Him who alone can give them, we too might hope to rise superior to all the difficulties with which we are surrounded in a world that lieth in wickedness, and especially from those which emanate directly from Satanic subtlety. Let us seek more earnestly henceforward to obtain grace to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we have been graciously called of God !

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Jnn,^^May25] FAMILY READINGS. [September 22

January 26— Mat 25— Septmber 22.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 23.

The opening of this chapter very impressively sets forth the dignity and responsibility of all placed in authority: and the principle laid down in our Saviour's words applies as closely to heads of families and masters of households as to those holding the station of public rulers. In goveming and in teachiligy those who sit in the seat of authority are to meet with respect and obedience, even if they themselves fail to act up to the spirit of the rules given them by the source of all authority: but as they have a Master, in heaven. Who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, they must beware, lest, by erroneous teaching or rash exercise of the power committed to them in trust, they render themselves liable to divine judgment.

How fearful that judgment is we may gather from the woes denounced by the Redeemer against the exclusive, hypocritical, formal, blind, and wicked Pharisees. His omni* science took away the cloke that concealed the deformity of their sin, while His justice denounced the woe that was its due.

These stern rebukes have led some to believe that persons convicted of error should meet with similar rebukes from ourselves in the present day; and hence, an indiscreet zeal, or even a censorious or uncharitable spirit, seeks to shield itself under cover of the Saviour's example. But it is observable that our Lord's rebukes were directed against a class, not against individuals of that class. Nicodemus, a disciple, was one of these; and assuredly from what we read of him, we cannot suppose that such censures would apply to him personally. This then may teach us that our

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Jan, 27-^Mi^ 06] FAMILY READINGS. [September 2S

oppositioii^ when called for, must be directed rather against error itself, than against the sinner who has fallen into its commission. We may compassionate the fallen person, while we hate the sin that has seduced him. But even this compassion may be carried too far; as in the case of repeated, unrepented, wilful sin being indulged. In such case, the apostoKc injunction must be fulfilled by those in authority — " them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear!" we must strive so to exercise government as not to interfere with the law of charity; and so to exercise charity as not to offend against the law of justice.

The pathetic lament of the Lord Christ over fallen and impenitent Jerusalem shows how sore is the strife when charity and justice contend in a loving heart. None feel this more strongly than the parent in his rebuke of the child of his affection. And if Parents know this by sad experience to be true, how should it act with a reflex effect upon themselves as children of God ! The Universal Parent beholds us. His children by adoption into Christ Jesus, with watchful love; let us strive, in the grace of His Spirit, so to fulfil the desires of His love,

that, unlike His daughter of Zion, we may never provoke His anger or His jealousy!

January 27— May 26— September 23.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 24.

What do we learn from the prophecy of Jesus in answer to His disciples' admiration of the buildings of the Temple ? Was it not an indication of the fall of the system which the temple represented ? The law which had a shadow of good things to come was now waxing old, decaying, and

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ready to vanish away. It had fulfilled its temporary purpose; having only been added to the original purpose of God because of transgressions; and only being intended to last until the Seed should come to whom the promise was made. It had acted as a schoolmaster in bringing the world to Christ; and now that Christ was come, its end was answered and its duty was accomplished.

But the prophecy of the destruction of the Temple led the disciples to inquire, and our Lord to reveal, still more concerning the then unfulfilled purpose of God. It would perhaps savour of presumption, did we attempt to say exactly where a line was to be drawn, separating the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem from that of the final judgment. But the striking fulfilment of most of the events predicted up to the end of the thirty-fifth verse within forty years of the utterance of these awful words; the special reference made to the symbol of Roman power, the eagles that were to gather together over the carcasses of the slain; the distinct declaration that that generation was not to pass until the prophecies announced should be fulfilled; all these considerations would make us believe that, in a primary sense at least, the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in the year of our Lord seventy-two, was the realization of that which was revealed.

The concluding portion of the chapter has probably a more direct reference to the final coming of the Son of Man, and was intended for the guidance of all time generally, as well as specially for the believers of the apostolic age. And it is not improbable that the earlier as well as the later portion of the chapter has a spiritual reference to that awful day, of which the coming of Christ in judgment on Jerusalem was but a type.

How solemnly then should the words of the prophetic

Redeemer "watch therefore," ring in our ears! The dwellers (46)

Jan,^^May2T\ FAMILY READINGS. [September24

of the doomed city, like those of the cities of the plain, and like the victims of the flood, refused to watch: and fearful judgment fell upon them unawares! May it not be so with the Gentile Church? May not strife and division, faithlessness and sensuality, covetousness and want of charity, be our characteristics at His coming, even as they were theirs?—Let us then watch and be sober, living as *' faithful and wise," not as " evil" servants of the Lord Jesus, holding ourselves ever ready for His summons, not merely " looking for," but " hasting unto the coming of the day of God !"

January 28— May 27— :SEPTEMBER 24.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 25.

One lesson of watchfulness was not thought sufficient by our kind Lord. He repeats it again and again; as it was the point of instruction in the last chapter, so also is it in this. Be ye ready, be ye ready, is the note of warning which the voice of Christ ever echoes in our ears.

And how do we receive the instruction? Are we the more ready because we are told to be so? Or are we still disobedient children, *'stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears?"—Let the wailing cry of the virgins shut out from the presence of the bridegroom teach us the fearful consequence of neglecting to seek the unction from the Holy One!

The parable of the talents teaches us to add to watchfulness diligence. God has given to each of us a work to do. To every one according to his several ability some gift is entrusted, which he may use to God's glory or abuse to his own condemnation. Not only is man placed in a relationship to

God by the revelation of His will; but on the mode in which (47)

Jan. 28-^lfay 27] FAMILY READINGS. [Stpieaber ^

he fulfils that relationship depend the interests of others also: and just as the temporal interests of others would have been affected by the increased wealth of the unprofitable servant in the parable, so will the spiritual interests of those with whom tee are connected be advanced or retarded by the use we make of the gifts of grace wherewith we have been entrusted. If we shroud from view our knowledge of the Son of God — if we are ashamed of Christ and His words—if we deny the relationship to the Father which He by His Spirit has wrought in us—we may not only ourselves be cast out at the last, but find that our negligence and sin have been instrumental also in keeping back others from the joys of the kingdom of heaven! The closing section of the chapter is in the highest degree interesting. It not only gives us by implication an account of the christian duties in a social point of view—not only bids us prepare for a personal examination before the throne of Christ—^not only holds out the glorious assurance that we relieve and comfort Him in the person of His feeble and suffering members—not only reads to us the solemn lesson of *' everlasting punishment" to the sinner, and " life eternal *' to the saint—^but beyond all this, it gives to us most valuable and practical instruction, by teaching us the very imperfect con-ceptions men have of their ovm doings. The righteous know not how much good they do; the wicked know not how much they leave undone! the righteous act from a sense of duty and reap reward: the wicked act from a love of self and reap rebuke. Surely, if this were taught us merely as a guide to worldly actions, it would influence our conduct and teach us to add humility and obedience to the diligence and watchfrdness already enjoined! How much rather then should it influence us, when the prize for which we are striving is a crown of immortality.

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JoH. 2d^Map 2S] FAMILY READINGS. [September 2&

January 29— May 28— September 26,

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 26,

If this chapter had been read as a tale of fiction it would have melted half the world to tears. As a series of most awful facts, it is too often passed by with the most reckless neglect. Prophecy of His coming, betrayal, and crucifixion, by The Victim, first attracts our attention: then comes the record of the consultation of His enemies: then the incident of the anointing at the festival, which brought forward our Lord's sanction of sumptuous outlay for great purposes, and His prophecy that the deed should be had in continual remembrance, while it also led Him to prepare His disciples still more plainly for His withdrawal from them: then the record of the fall of one of the chosen twelve in his traitorous covenant with the Lord's enemies: then the awful conviction of the traitor in the presence of his brethren: then the earliest account of that memorial of dying love wherein the faithful of eighteen centuries have shown forth the Lord's death, and wherein the faithful living and yet to live will show it forth till Hb come: then the great sanction for christian Psalmody, a prophecy corroborated by a prophecy, a weak though fervid protestation grounded on human affection and invalidated by human weakness, a truth revealed through the foreknowledge of God : then the description of that crowning scene of affliction, when Gethsemane witnessed the final strife between the enemy of souls and the obedient Son of man; of the rest of the nine, of the drowsiness of the three, of the suffering, the rebuke, the prayer, the agony of the One: then the account of the betrayal by one, of the

defence attempted by one, of the submission of the One, of the

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Ja»« 29—J#ay 2H] FAMILT READINGS. [Sqttember 25

desertion by all!—then the false, yet true, witness against Christ, the adjuration of Caiaphas, the acknowledgment of Sonship and Messiahship by the Lord Jesus, His condemnation by the assembly, and the contumely of the multitude!— then, finally, the denial, the self-accusing recollection, and the penitence of the most zealous disciple of the Saviour!

Thoughts too deep for words must crowd on the believer's soul, when he reads or hears such a record as this. It is of THE Redeemer of the world that it is related. It is of his living Redeemer. It is of Him, but for Whom, and for Whose sufferings there described, he would not have been enabled to address the great God by the endearing title of Abba, Father!

The relationship we bear to God is bound up with all of these events. Apart from their occurrence we have no knowledge of a Saviour. Apart from the sins of our race that Saviour need not have so suffered. Are we then of those who, with the faint-hearted disciples, would desert the Lord that bought us and redeemed us by His blood ? of those who, with the more culpable Peter, would deny Him? of those who, with the most guilty Judas, would betray Him ?

We have need to be penitent and contrite like the awakened Peter—and faithful, constant, and loving, like the favoured John—if we desire to show ourselves believers in the record we have read to-day!

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January 30— May 29— September 26»

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 27.

We are drawing near to the closing scene of all. The malice of the Jews, who lacked power to put Jesus to death,, was so far successful as to bring Him in bonds to the Roman governor. Perhaps we may understand this record better, and trace more strikingly the foreknowledge and providence of God, if we bear in mind the fact that the Jews, by their subjugation to Rome, had lost the judicial power of life and death, and thus had of themselves no power to pass

sentence on Jesus whom they persecuted. Thus it was that the Lord's prediction of His "being lifted up" was fulfilled, in the face of all human probability: thus it was that the prophecy of His being "delivered to the Gentiles" was realized while the Jews only bore Him enmity: thus it was that the death by stoning, for the blasphemy of which He was accused, was changed to death by crucifixion, for treason of which He was not even supposed to be guilty.

And how wonderfully in all this was the foreknowledge of God exhibited \ The Potter's field recalled the words of Zechariah', the buffeting and scourging those of Isaiah; the mocking and jeering those of David.

And as if the reference to the past were insufficient to

prove the wondrous dignity of Him who suffered, earth, air,

and mountains joined in the marvellous tribute and the rent veil

of the temple told its work was done: the graves gave forth

their sheeted tenants to the air, and saints, as a sheaf of the

first-fruits of the harvest of the dead, spread the glad tidings

through the holy city that the power of death was annihilated I (51)
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But let US observe the marked contrast exhibited between the hardened sinner and the faithful child of God. The latter in awe-stricken faith, was enabled to trace all these testimonies to the Messiahship of Jesus: even the terror-stricken Gentile was compelled, by the force of the visible testimonies borne to Him, to acknowledge Him to be the Son of God. Not so the wilful sinner, hardened in unbelief: He could see nothing but the crucified malefactor stiffening on the accursed tree!—And is not this an exact picture of the faithful and unbelieving in the present day? the latter can see no farther than the material testimony of his senses carry

him. The former traces in grateful joy the guiding hand of an unseen Providence, and recognizes life and government where others see nought but death and fate.

Again, towards the conclusion of the chapter, we are struck with the surprising fulfilment of ancient prophecy, when the deposition from the cross, under the direction of the wealthy Arimathean, took the holy body of the Lord from " His grave with the wicked," and placed Him " with the rich in His death."

The watchful fidelity of the sorrowing Marys gives us a beautiful picture of feminine tenderness and devotion. Eve-like, they mourned over the murder of their righteous Abel! and while they thus displayed their loving reverence, the enemies of the Lord gave an equally powerftil illustration of the hideousness and impotence of human enmity. They sought to chain the Lord to the tomb to which they had driven Him: and while the faithful disciples were '* resting the sabbath day according to the commandment," the chief Priests and Pharisees combined to break it, in the vain hope of keeping Him a prisoner who was about to rise triumphant over death and the grave.

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January 31— May 30— September 27.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. 28.

ThA revelation of God to the wicked is harrowing and terrible: to them who seek Jesus which was crucified, it comes with cheering tones to banish fear. The word of the angel to the Mthful watchers did that which the written word does to us. It heralded the risen Christ. It pointed to His humanity in showing the place where the Lord lay, and thus convinced them of His perfect sympathy with themselves. It announced His divinity in the tidings of His Lordship over death, and thus convinced them of His power to free themselves from him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. It declared

His future manifestation to them, and encouraged them in the hope of re-union with Him, and thus assured

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them of His will to exercise the power He possessed on their behalf.

All this the written word does for us. The Gospel according to St. Matthew, which we have now concluded, brings us to the knowledge of the Son of God, pre-existent, incarnate, instructing, suffering, triumphant, mediatorial, supreme.

Let us ask of ourselves then, have we received Him as

He is thus revealed to us ? Have we, like the holy Joseph,

and the faithful eastern Magi, recognized the divine and

kingly power manifested in the infant offspring of the Virgin's

womb ? Have we, like the listening multitudes, and attached

disciples, received with joyful hearts the instruction Christ's

teaching has bestowed ? Have we, like the Cyrenian Simon,

learned to bear the cross of Christ's suffering ? Have we,

like the joyful Marys, learnt to believe the revelation of

Christ triumphant? Have we, like the contrite Peter, ac-(53)

Jim. 31—[cf. y 30] FAMILT READINGS. [S^Hember ^

quired a knowledge of the lore of Christ mediatorial ? Have we^ like the worshipping disciples^ bent low at the feet of Christ supreme ?

If we have thus learned from the record of St Matthew to know the only true God^ and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, then have the words of the Gospel been made spirit and life—even life eternal—to

us! then may we rejoice abundantly in these good tidings of peace and love—then may we ponder on the words of inspiration with joy unspeakable and full of glory, in that He who came to be a propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and to restore to forgiven man all that he had lost in Adam, has been revealed to us therein as our Mediator, our Intercessor, yea our Saviour !

END OF THE COMMENTARY

ON THE

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW.

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COMMENTARY

ON THE

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK.

February 1— May 31— September 28.

ST. MARK, Chap. 1.

The marked difference between the commencement of this and the preceding Gospel is, that St. Matthew thought it necessary to trace the legal descent and announce the miraculous birth of the Lord Jesus: these are assumed by St. Mark, who proceeds at once to announce the office of the Baptist and relate his baptism of Christ.

The fact of our Lord's temptation immediately after His public recognition of God from heaven, would seem to indicate to us the necessity of watchfulness after Grace received: it is at such times that Satan is most active in his temptation to lead the soul away from God, and neutralize the benefit his gifts have bestowed.

When we read of the call of Simon and of Andrew, and of the sons of Zebedee, we shall be wholesomely reminded of the way in which most of us have been engrossed by worldly callings before we have recognised the voice of the Son of God calling us to leave our worldly business and to follow Him, to set our affection on things above rather than those on earth.

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There is a striking lesson also conveyed in the record of the Evangelist, that immediately after witnessing the effect of His miracles on the people^Our Blessed Saviour sought privacy and prayer: how should this teach us humility under success^ and the duty of seeking communion with God after every exercise of exciting duty!

When Our Lord was reminded of what would in worldly language be called the success of His preaching, we find that He immediately left the scene of His popularity to carry elsewhere the blessings of His instruction. This betokens the unselfishness of His ministration, and should serve as a practical protest against such as seek the praise of man rather than the performance of duty before God.

His teaching also in the synagogues, and His direction to the cleansed leper to show himself to the priests, and thus fulfil the Law of Moses, should teach us the debt of gratitude which we owe to the family of Israel, through whom we have received the oracles of God. If Christ thought them worthy of His love and His instruction, it cannot be the part of the Christian to despise or condemn them; and though the sins of Israel were consummated in the Crucifixion of Him who came to redeem them, yet we must remember that blindness has but in part happened to Israel, and that their restoration is an event still to be hoped and prayed for; while the lesson of their fall is calculated to bring to us, who, as Gentiles, are concluded under sin with them, a striking warning, and teach us not to be high-minded, but fear lest we also should be cut off.

(56)

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1%6.2--Jioie 1] FAMILY READINGS. [September^

Febtjart 2— June 1— September 29.

ST. MARK, Chap. 2.

The miracle of which we have read in the commencement of this chapter is valuable not merely as a testimony to the power of the Son of Man to forgive sins on earth, but also as proving the efficacy of Faith in those who seek His blessing. Were our feelings more consonant than they generally are with those of the four who bore the sick of the palsy—were the thought uppermost in our minds when we see our friends and neighbours palsied with sin, *' let us seek to bring them to Christ,"—^we might indeed look for an increase of His gifts in the world, and humbly hope to be made instrumental in promoting His glory among men.

The conduct of the Scribes and Pharisees in despising Our Lord for His communication with publicans is unhappily too often realized in the present day by many, who undervalue the efforts of His self-denying followers to make known the truths of the Gospel to those of their fellow-sinners who yet lie in darkness and in the shadow of death: let us not in this respect be partakers of other men's sins, but rather bear constantly in mind^ that if that mind dwell in us which was also in Christ Jesus, our part will ever be to promote, by all means in our power, the calling of sinners to repentance.

We are taught in this chapter also the existence of

a duty too much slighted in the present day-^he discipline of

fasting and sdf-denial. The Bridegroom has been withdrawn

from his spouse, the Church; and we, the Children of the

Bridechamber, mourn for Him who is taken away from us:

happy for us if we mourn in a rightful spirit, for then we shall be comforted, and He who now Touchsafes us but (57)

Feb. S[^]~Jtme 2] FAMILY READINGS. [SepUmber 90

spiritual glimpses of His mysterious power[^] will[^] in the day when He maketh up His jewels, reveal Himself to us face to fiice as a man speaketh with his friend.

The right use of the Sabbath is also here taught us: that Holy Day was not given to be profaned by the reckless, or abused to the purposes of sensual indulgence, but was bestowed as a direct gift from God, wherein one-seventh portion of the primal curse of toil was remitted to man, and a holy and blessed Channel opened, whereby he was not only authorised, but enjoined to approach the presence of that God from whom by sin he had been alienated. May our Sabbaths here on earth be so consecrated to the service of Our Lord in Heaven, that they may fit and prepare us under grace for that enduring Sabbath—that rest that remaineth for the people of God, where there is fulness of joy and life for evermore !

momo^{*^t^^t^t^^t^o^o^oto^ototo^^^t^k^^>^t*^»}
^{^*^^^*^^^>^^^}

February 3— [^]June 2— September 30.

ST. MARK, Chap. 3.

Our Blessed Lord had scarcely laid down the principles on which the Sabbath was founded, ere He had occasion to illustrate them. It appears, that His previous remarks had already kindled the suspicion of those rigid formalists the Scribes and Pharisees, for they were watching at this time to see whether He would do anything which was, in their estimation, an infringement of the Sabbath. It is no marvel to us that the Lord's anger was kindled against such hardness of heart as they exhibited; but when we read the record, we should

look into our own hearts, to see whether there be not there also a dependence on formal observances, rather than on

(58)

Feb. 3--Jun 2] FAMILY READINGS. [September 90

that spiritual obedience which seeks to do the will of our Father: we may not indeed[^] with the Pharisees and Herodians, take counsel against the Lord, yet we are but too apt to participate in the blindness of the former, in looking to the externals of conduct rather than receiving into our hearts the life and spirit of the words of Christ.

The language used by St. Mark, in recording the selection of the twelve Apostles, teaches us the purpose that Christ has of a separate order of men being set apart for the ministry of His word. He did not send all his followers to preach, but only consecrated of them to that sacred office whom He would; and hence, from this alone, were it not also abundantly evident from the writings of St. Paul and others, we should infer, that although all Christians are bound to shine as lights in the world, holding forth the Word of Life, yet that the ministry in the Church of Christ need a separate call and distinct ordination to their appointed service.

On this part of the chapter, there seem two points especially worthy of note:—First, that even the separation of the ministry under Christ's personal call did not save Judas from final apostasy—Next, that no sooner had Christ organized his system of teaching, than his friends looked upon him as out of his right mind. And each of these points brings with it its lesson—the former is, to pray for our ministers lest they, like Judas, fall from grace—the latter, that as devotion to God assumes the aspect of madness in the eyes of an unbelieving world, we must be prepared to bear the cross of derision and contempt (yea, even from those near and dear to us) when we devote ourselves in earnest to the pursuit of the truth as it is in Jesus.

To this pursuit, the concluding verses of the chapter

afford a most winning encouragement: the brotherhood of (59)

Christ is stamped upon those who do the will of God ; and if we, under the guidance of His Holy Spirit, bear the Injuries of His brotherhood in suffering obedience here. He will not deny the relationship when He comes to reign in glory hereafter.

m^o^o^o^^mo*o*^*o*o*^to*^^o*o^o*o^*o*o^o*o^^i*»o*
o^o*^^mo^

February 4—June 3— October 1.

ST. MARK, Chap. 4.

It must have been a very striking scene to have witnessed the little vessel near the shore of the sea of Galilee, with the Saviour of the world teaching from its deck the thronging crowds that came to listen to His doctrine. Happy is it for us, that that doctrine is preserved entire for our learning, even as it was delivered to the multitudes of Syria of old. The instruction of the parable of the sower must come home to our hearts, just as it did to theirs: the thoughtless and the reckless wayside hearers—the glad but fickle receivers of the word—the sensual, who cannot resist the temptations of riches or the flesh—yea, and thank God, the meek and devoted followers, who bring forth fruit to their Master's glory—all exist now as then: but surely, when we make this acknowledgment, we ought to look very seriously into our own hearts, and strive to ascertain to which of these classes we ourselves belong. The words of Christ have not been brought to us to be but as a "sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal;" and if they have been really fraught with light to our souls, that light must be exhibited in fit proportion to those around us. Some such reflection as this seems to have been passing in the Saviour's mind, when he carried on the similitude of the

kingdom of God, and showed its gradual development in (60)

Feb. 5—JUNE 4 FAMILY READINGS. [October 2

holy practice. The harvest that courted the isickle was intended to be laid up in the garner of the eternal Husbandman; the plant that grew to unexpected magnitude was intended to give shelter to God's creatures; and thus the two leading objects, designed by God to be manifested in us who receive His word, are made known—Christian beneficence, which shall promote His glory on earth—Christian fruitfulness, which shall redound to His glory throughout eternity.

The closing miracle, which showed the power of the Son of God over the restless elements, succeeded^ as we may weU have imagined, in bringing out the adoring wonder of His disciples; and shall we, as moral and responsible agents, be less obedient than the boisterous wind or raging ocean ? Shall we, whose hearts and minds were intended to be sanctified instruments to God's glory, be so excited by the vain coimotions of the natural passions of carnality, as not to recognise that voice of love which alone has power to bring them peace and stillness? If our ears are opened and our hearts softened, those tones will be as powerful to us as to the elements of old; and, safe imder their directions, we too shall find ourselves brought safely to the haven where we would be.

«^ ^l^ ^ ^lMtfW«M*W«MaW«MtfWWW«tfN»«M*V«MMMM[

February 5— June 4— October 2.

ST. MARK, Chap. 5.

When we read the records of demoniacal possession, we n^ust feel thankfiil that that curse has been mitigated in subsequent ages. True, the legions of Satan axe abroad, and unclean spirits are perpiitted to hold a limited power over us,

(61)

but the great comfort that the Gospel brings to us is the assurance that He that is for us is mightier than they that be against us: angels (evil as well as good) and principalities and powers being all subject unto Christ our Head.

The conduct of the Gadarenes in requesting our Lord's departure after He had conferred on their locality a manifest advantage^ would have seemed strange as well as imaccount-able, were it not that we are familiarized with similar conduct in such as reject the mission of the Gospel among ourselves. Certainly no greater folly could be chargeable upon them for requesting the Saviour to depart out of their coasts, than may be charged upon those who, with the word of Christ in their hands and His promises repeated in their ears, still wilfully reject the proffered blessing, and cling to that sin the wages of which is death.

But though the Gadarenes at large rejected the Saviour, one grateful heart at least responded to His love. The healed Demoniac sought to follow his Benefactor, and wished to spend his life in duteous attendance upon His person. The answer of our Lord to his request is fraught with instruction to all of us— " Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord has done for thee and has had compassion on thee." Let us take the lesson home to ourselves; and if indeed we feel that the grace of God has called us from a state of sin to a yearning after the presence of Christ, let us not expect that that yearning, which may perchance be characterized by something of our natural wilfulness, is to be fiJfilled as we desire, but rather let us seek to fulfil the Lord's expressed will, and make known to others the effects of His power on our souls. If indeed Christ dwell in our hearts by faith, we shall not be able to retain Him as a selfish possession:

His love will oharacterize our life; His grace irradiate our (62)

Feb. e^^une S] FAMILY READINGS. [October 3

conduct: His difiusive charity exhibit itself in our thoughts^ words^ and actions.

We should not leave this chapter without feeling our faith as well as our gratitude strengthened. The instance of the father who not only sought relief in His child's sickness^ but believed in the power of Christ over death, as well as that of the strong but timid faith of the afflicted woman, who felt that even the garment of Christ would bring purity with its touch, should both powerfully impress us as

examples to be followed. Were our faith like theirs, we should be lifted far above the stream of worldliness that too often sweeps us along in its course. Our hearts and hopes would alike be elevated, and the world around would see more clear tokens of spiritual life than the present cold obedience even of believers commonly displays.

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February 6— ^June 5— October 3.

ST. MARK, Chap. 6.

While the wisdom of Christ accounted for His unfavourable reception at home, on the principle that a prophet is not esteemed in his own country, His revelation has left us the fact for our guidance, that want of faith on the part of those to whom the word is preached neutralizes the purpose of God for their salvation. How solemn is the instruction this conveys to us. How closely should we examine into our own hearts, to see whether we are thus among those who resist, until at last by resistance we quench the Spirit.

The commission given by our Lord to His Apostles, whom He sent two and two before Him, should make us very careful how we slight the tidings which His messengers bring (68)

J?«6.6.-^/lia€ 5] FAMILY READINo8. [October 3

US in the present day. The doctrine of repentance and remission of sins is preached by them as well as by their predecessors in the Church; and this doctrine can no more be rejected by us than by the then inhabitants of Syria^ without risk of involving its rejectors in that judgment which will be less tolerable to be borne than that of the cities of the Plain.

The record of the sin of Herod Antipas^ and the power of conscience as exhibited in him^ is more fully related in this chapter than in the record of St Matthew. An over-admiration for worldly accomplishments was the instrumental cause of his crime; and hence we may learn^ that though those things which embellish life are

nowhere forbidden in Holy Scripture^ while used for innocent purposes, yet that they may very easily be perverted to evil, and become destructive of the soul's well-being.

We have in this chapter another instance of our Lord's seeing privacy and prayer as a miraculous exertion of His power; recorded again thus early, apparently with the intention of establishing in us the practice of frequent private communion with God. It is thus only that we can expect to be sustained against the frequent assaults of our great enemy. The world may believe that it is impossible for a man to live without society | the christian knows that it is impossible for him to live spiritually without solitude. True, his duties require him to be much in public, but in order to perform those duties fitly, he must be much with God in private. It is the communing with one's own heart in the stillness of one's own chamber that enables man to realise to himself the continued presence and superintending providence of God : and without a sense of that presence, however active or energetic or benevolent man may be, he never can fulfil God's purposes as

a faithful son, because he will be always led astray by the (64)

i^«6. 7~Jim« 6] FAMILT READINGS. [October 4

objects of sight: the christian's walk must be that of one as seeing things that are " invisible/' and, until he attains this inward vision, his mind will still be " of the earth, earthy," and incapable of appreciating the high destinies of members of Christ's body, and sons of God by adoption.

We have a sad testimony to the truth of such reflections as these, when we read of even the favoured Apostles, that " they considered not the miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened." May such hardness of heart be taken away from us; that we, following Christ in single-minded earnestness, and realizing His promised presence in the midst of His Church, may be enabled to walk by faith and not by sight, until the glorious time shall come, when we shall see Him face to face, and faith be lost in fruition.

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i riri_rij'v.>M'

February 7— June 6— October 4.

ST. MARK, Chap. 7.

Of all the vices that disfigure man, none has been so severely censured by our Lord as that of hypocrisy. The Pharisee of that day seems to have been a living lie—a man whose whole aim was to attain credit in the eyes of others for that which he was not. How such a system could ever have gained credit even among people possessed of common sense, much less of a revelation from God, seems strange to us; but the fact is manifest from our Saviour's words that this degraded class enjoyed considerable reputation among the Jewish people at large. The mere adherence to external ceremonial would have been comparatively of slight importance; but when it was made a substitute for the real and living truth that it represented, it could not but be an abomination in the sight of God !

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The illustration which our Saviour gives in the case of what is called " Corban/' may require some brief explanation. The nominal dedication of a son's property to the service of God was supposed to free him from any obligation to support his parents in indigence; and thus^ by a false pretence of religion, these hypocrites screened themselves from the performance of a direct religious duty. May we not hence take a lesson home to ourselves of the scandal necessarily brought upon our holy faith by those who assume a sanctity which has no real existence ? Surely religion has never had enemies so dire as those who cmiy pretend to be its friends. If the truth of God finds a home in our bosoms^ it will indeed show itself to those among whom we move; but if we make a mere external profession of a faith that.is unreal, we can only be laying up in store for ourselves that hopeless condemnation which awaits the hypocrite at the final judgment.

The parable which immediately follows our Lord's condemnation of hypocrisy continues the lesson previously enforced. It shows us that a radical and entire change must be effected in the heart of man before he can "believe unto righteousness," or "do works meet for repentance." No longer looking upon the actions as constituting the man, the world was thenceforward taught to look to the man as originating the actions. The perishable body with its accidents varies from day to day, but the man within is intended to endure for ever to God's glory: we, therefore, must look within ourselves and scrutinize our own hearts, to see whether they be right with God. If the divine Spirit has been recognised by us as the author of a new creation within, we may then hope and believe that the work of

sanctification will go on unto perfection: but if we are still

(66)

insensible to any agency save that of mental power or of moral guidance, we must seek to realize the deficiency that exists, and strive in prayer for that Holy Grace which can alone "create a clean heart and renew a right spirit within us."

The mercy of Christ as exhibited to the gentile woman we have had occasion to notice in reading the Gospel of St. Matthew, but the remaining miracle recorded in this chapter does not appear to be mentioned by the other Evangelists. This act of mercy deserves notice for its being accompanied by an external sign. It was clearly in Christ's power to produce the effect merely by a command, yet we find that the external agency was not dispensed with: may not this teach us to receive with grateful hearts those "outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace given to us," which He has vouchsafed to His Church in the two Sacraments? May we have grace not only to trace His mercy in giving us these pledges of His love, but also to show forth our gratitude by an humble and faithful use of them!

February 8— June 7— October 6.

ST. MARK, Chap. 8.

The compassion of our Lord in feeding the multitude on a few loaves and fishes is calculated to teach us more lessons than those already deduced in our previous consideration of it. We are so apt to regard the operations of nature as things of course, that we forget to trace the working of divine power therein as a perpetually recurring miracle; and yet to us, were it seen for the first time, it would be as strange that (67) r 2 the seed which we cast into the ground at one season should multiply itself in rich abundance and luxuriant beauty at another, as that the loaf, which from that seed is made, should have been multiplied as it passed through the hands of the Apostles; like the gourd of Jonah, which sprang up in a moment of time, but which, under the ordinary economy of providence, would have taken a lengthened period to reach maturity! But surely, as a principle, it requires no undue amount of faith to believe that the power which made laws can also dispense with them; or, that He that gave nature a being, could change its course at His will ?

We cannot read without surprise in this chapter that the disciples again should be so blind and hard in heart as to have misapprehended our Lord's warning against the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod: but we ought not to read it without calling to mind how repeatedly we ourselves are guilty of similar blindness, when we allow the threatnings and the warnings, yea and the affectionate invitations of Christ, to come to us so often unheeded. The bread of life, " the true manna that came down from heaven," is offered for our acceptance; the exhortation to follow Him as the only Way is again and again repeated; and yet, in reckless inattention, too many of us refuse His gracious offers, in order to follow the natural inclination of a worldly mind and an unbelieving heart.

The gradual healing of the blind man instructs us not

to expect the work of spiritual conversion to be in all cases all at once completed. Many there be whose eyes are not thus suddenly opened to the truths of the Gospel of Christ; and if such be our case, and we feel that we are but yet in a transition state, this miracle may afford us encouragement and lead us to wait for the second application of the Saviour's (68)

^Feb.O—JttneS] FAMILY READINGS. [October 6

touch, whereby we may be enabled to recognize Him as the true Tree of life, ever standing in the midst of the garden of the Church.

The faithful confession, yet subsequent want of faith, of the Apostle Peter, should teach us humility in our confession of Christ: lest that, like him, being puffed up with the Saviour's commendation, we presume to think ourselves wiser than that Saviour Himself! How seriously should we ponder on His summons to self-denial in the cause of His Gospel— How solemnly should we listen to His warning on the value of the immortal soul—and how careful should we be, lest a false earthly pride should make us in any case *' ashamed " of Him, who would thus be led to be ashamed of us, when He comes in glory to claim the kingdoms for His own!

February 9— June 8— October 6.

ST. MARK, Chap. 9.

The opening verse of this chapter is connected with the conclusion of the last; and seems to have reference to the winding-up of the Mosaic and the commencement of the Christian dispensation.

We have had occasion to notice the mystery of the transfiguration in reading St. Matthew's Gospel, but there is one point in this record that calls for especial remark. We are informed, that, after our Lord had foretold His death and resurrection, the disciples questioned

among themselves what the rising from the dead should mean. This indicates that they were still ignorant of the spiritual nature of their master's kingdom: and the fact of this ignorance should teach (69)

Feb. d'-June»] FAMILY READINGS. [October 6

US a lesson of gratitude for the fulness of the revelation with which we ourselves have been blessed. It may, and indeed must seem strange to us that we should be in possession of a greater amount of knowledge than the Apostles in immediate attendance upon Christ; and yet it is perfectly clear, that if they in the period under review had seen the Creed which bears their name, it would have been fuller of mystery to them than it is now to us.

The miracle of healing, which immediately followed the transfiguration, is recorded at greater length here than in the previous Gospel. The encouraging remark of our Lord, that all things were possible to him that believeth, is here added; and the earnest supplication of the afflicted parent is described with graphic simplicity. The tearful request of the latter for grace to supply his involuntary mistrust should come home to all of us in the hour of earnest prayer: there are many who are willing with him to make the confession, " Lord, I believe;" but how few of us feel his sense of imperfection in the faith we profess, and add the humble petition "help thou mine unbelief!"

It is worthy of remark also, that in this chapter the Apostles were twice informed of the coming death of the Lord. According to St. Matthew's Gospel sorrow was their prevailing feeling at this second announcement, but we find from this that ignorance as well as a mysterious fear mingled with their sorrow. This seems to throw more light upon the state of their minds; it shows that the majesty of Christ had impressed them with a solemn reverence for His person — a striking testimony this to the dignity of the Man of Sorrows.

There is a great lesson taught us in the rebuke of our Lord to the gentle John, who forbade the performance of

(70J

-F«6. 10—June 9] FAMILY READINGS. [October 7

miracles by one who followed not with their company: the lesson seems to be that of toleration. Our Lord gives no commendation to irregularity, nor does He say how far such an one might expect encouragement or blessing from Him: He simply points that if there be good done, that good must redound to His glory. May we not take this home to ourselves? Does it not teach us, that the extension of the kingdom of Christ is to be carried on by tolerant charity, not by coercive exclusion? We, like the disciples of Christ of old, have our own work appointed us to do, and for that we shall hereafter have to give account. If others see, or think they see differently, our part is not to "forbid" them, knowing that in some way or other their testimony will have its effect. We are neither to sanction nor encourage such testimony, but we are to leave it to take its own course, knowing that it will be overruled for good by our Divine Master; while the zeal which they who separate from us display, may teach us to be more earnest in our privileged duty of following close to Christ.

February 10— ^June 9— October 7.

ST. MARK, Chap. 10.

The law of matrimony is here laid down as in the parallel passage in St. Matthew's Gospel; but from this record we find that it was our Lord who originated the reference to the law of Moses.

We have also herein Christ's testimony recorded to the dignity of young children, and the favour they enjoy in the sight of God. How thankful should this make the heart of every parent, who learns hence to recognize the guardianship of the Almighty over His own beloved little ones! (71)

Fti.lo—Jk»t9i TiULY RBADIKOB. [Otiiber 7

The record of the rich young man who came running in haste to pay his devotion to Christ, and asked of Him the way to an eternal inheritance, is here repeated with the interesting addition, "that Jesus beholding him loved him." We are tempted to inquire, can the love of Jesus have been bestowed on any one in vain? but the future history of the

youth is left in obscurity. The lesson, however, on the

temptation of riches, drawn from his unwillingness to give up the treasures of earth for those of heaven, should not be lost by any who read it. It would seem enough to make us all in love with poverty, when we find the arena to which wealth exposes its possessor; yea, and beyond this, when we read

the promise of blessing to the poor, inasmuch as "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Did but the rich man bear always in mind that he was God's almoner, and the poor that he was God's pensioner, the temptation of either class would indeed be infinitely lessened. It is this absence of recognizing God's intention, this walking by sight and not by faith, which makes every situation in life so fraught with snares to man. May we have grace to look less to ourselves and more to Him, and then we know that His guidance will not be denied to us.

The journey to Jerusalem recorded in this chapter must have been so sad and sorrowful, that we need not wonder at the disciples being both amazed and afraid: for here we find that, for the third time, our Lord foretold His approaching betrayal and death. To us indeed it may seem the least mournful, because we know that the resurrection was foretold - 'at the same time; but we must bear in mind that they were

ignorant of the power of that resurrection, which has been revealed to us; and hence, that they could not have the

consolation under the trial of which in the present day we

possess. (72)

Feb. 6 - June 10] ^ FAMILY READINGS. [October 5

In the account given of the sons of Zebedee soliciting posts of eminence in their master's kingdom, there is this difference between the present record and that of St. Matthew, viz; that here it is stated to be their own request, there that of their mother. A fair inference from this would appear to be, that the ambition of the mother induced and carried into effect the petition ; but that they notwithstanding participated in the desire, and hence became subject to the rebukes of our Lord.

May the words of those who brought the summons of Christ to the blind suppliant be applied by the Holy Spirit to each of our own hearts—"be of good comfort, rise. He calleth THEE!"

$$\begin{aligned} & \ast^{\wedge}t^{\wedge\wedge\wedge}t^{\wedge}t^{\wedge}t^{\wedge\wedge}t^{\wedge}t^{\wedge}t^{\wedge\ast\wedge}\rangle^{\wedge}n^{\wedge}t^{\wedge}l^{\wedge}\rangle^{\wedge\ast\wedge}t^{\wedge}l^{\wedge\wedge\wedge}t^{\wedge}to^{\wedge}o^{\ast\wedge}>o^{\wedge\wedge}ok \\ & \wedge o^{\wedge}o^{\ast\wedge} \end{aligned}$$

Februart 11— June 10— October 8.

ST. MARK, Chap. 11.

How marvellous a fulfilment was that of the prophecy of Zechariah, when the inhabitants of Jerusalem saw " their King coming unto them, just and having salvation, lowly and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass." Five centuries had passed away since he who had uttered the words was gathered to his fathers, and yet all strange and even contradictory as they seemed, they were here literally fulfilled on the entry of Christ into Jerusalem.

There seems to be a lesson of value taught us in the retirement of Christ to the privacy of Bethany, after the exciting labours of each fearful day of the week preceding His crucifixion. Mere rest and peace, one would suppose He might have secured by the simple expression of His will; but He seems anxious throughout His whole history to show

the fitness of solitude and seclusion for meditation, and the (78)

PtO. li^^June \o] FAMILY REA]]kNOS. ^ [Odober %

harmony that existed between the works of nature and a spiritual communion with its author. We cannot suppose that He needed this as an aid to devotion; but we may suppose that He thus indulged His human nature as a guide to such as would seek to follow Him in the path of holy meditation.

That the Scribes and Chief Priests should be offended with teaching directly addressed against themselves^ can be no matter of surprise to us; but the malignity of these unhappy men seems to stamp them as nothing less than the agents of Satan, when their fear led them to seek how they might destroy Jesus. The " devil was a liar and a murderer from the beginning;" and these, his wretched ministers, seem to have been but too ready to have acted out His purposes, when " they conspired together to take away the life " of Jesus, because He rebuked them for loving " to talk of lies " more than of righteousness.

It is very striking to observe how, in the midst of all the terrible trial of this afflictive week, the Redeemer's mind seems to have been ever set upon promoting the happiness of others. The lesson of forgiveness and forbearance which He inculcated as a necessary accompaniment of prayer, is clearly one fraught with benefit to all who act upon it: not merely to the one forgiving ill, inasmuch as it frees him from the threatened unforgiveness of God, but to those equally to whom his forgiveness extends: for it is next to impossible that we can experience conduct so truly Christ-like without attributing it to the true motive whence it sprung, and being led to appreciate its moral beauty. Or even supposing the extreme case of our moral perceptions being thus blunted, it must, through the proof of our hardness of heart, raise a testimony in favour of charity, from those who witness our insensibility to its loveliness.

(74)

Feb, 12^June \2] ^ FAMILY KRAPINGS. [Oeteber 9

Fbbruay 12— June 12— October 9.

ST. MARK, Chap. 12.

This most comprehensive chapter recapitulates much that has been previously recorded by St. Matthew. The object of the first parable, though directed against the Jews, is calculated to convey a serious lesson to Christians of the present generation: in this, as well as in most other of our Lord's course of instruction, we find divine wisdom forcibly illustrated, in that the instruction given on a temporary subject is calculated to confer an enduring benefit. The divine mind comprehending all the wants of the human race, so lays down its revelations as to meet the requirements of a fixture, while it satisfies the needs of a present, generation. While our Lord taught to the Jew his sin in rejecting the prophets and messengers of the most High, and prefigured His own death by their wicked hands, He instructs us of the no less punishment that awaits the favoured Gentile in the Christian Church, if he crucify the Son of God afresh, and by exhibiting a body of death instead of a form of life, put him to shame. By the ungodly life of every merely nominal Christian, the ignominy of the Cross is set forth, and a dead Christ exposed to the sneers of an unbelieving world; while the living witness of holiness in the Christian, sets forth, as a light of the world, the glory of the resurrection of the Lord.

We should indeed take solemn warning home to ourselves from the announcement made to the Jews, " The Lord of the vineyard will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard to others." When we remember the numberless blessings with which our christian country has been blessed, may we not truly say, " What nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for V* and yet, where are the rich (75)

Feb, 12~^une \2] FAMILY READINGS. [October 9

fruits that might reasonably have been expected from our National Christianity ? Where are the evidences of Christian Life^ Christian Union^ Christian Charity, and Christian Holiness,

which aught to be universally exhibited ? ^Let us, then, *' not

be high-minded but fear," lest He who spared not His rebellious people of old, cut off us also who so frequently rebel against Him now!

Apart from the individual moral resurrection necessary in the regenerate child of God, our Lord in this chapter sets forth the mystery of the second resurrection. The argument whereby He shows it to have been known to the patriarchs is not perhaps quite clear to the cursory reader: it may be briefly explained thus:— God revealed Himself to Moses some centuries after the death of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, yet He did not reveal Himself as the God of the living Moses, but still as the God of those his ancestors who were long since taken from the earth; it was manifest therefore to Moses that these his departed ancestors had a real existence at the time that God addressed him; for if they had not, God would have been the God of the dead, and not of living beings—an idea which never entered into the mind of any pious Jew. How then, the question would naturally be asked, did these departed souls exist; did they continue all the social relationships of earth; did they carry with them their earthly natures and desires ? No: personal identity and mutual recognition and reunion were indeed accorded to them; but the social and civil relationships of a fleeting dispensation, and the lower desires of an earthly nature alike perished with the using: that which was spiritual and eternal remained to ascribe glory to God in His eternal kingdom, and to fulfil with angelic power and bliss His purpose and His will, hitherto unrevealed.

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February 13— June 13— October 10.

ST. MARK, Chap. 18.

Although in the course of this chapter there are many passages which bear a palpable reference to the final coming of the Son of Man to judgment, yet it would seem clearly the intention of the Evangelist at the time that he wrote to direct attention to the destruction of the Jewish polity, not of the world at large; for although the expression of sending out His angels to gather the elect from the four winds might appear applicable to the coming of Christ in the larger sense, yet even this is limited by verses 28—30, wherein it is shown that the present generation was to see the consummation of the events prophesied. The remarkable prophecy of the fourteenth verse, with its accompanying exhortation, was literally fulfilled about forty years after its utterance, when, without any apparent cause, Gallus, the Roman commander, raised the siege of Jerusalem, and the Christians took advantage of the circumstance to escape over Jordan to Pella, so that on the arrival of Titus a few months after, not a single Christian was found in the city.

The horrors of the siege and the eventual destruction of the city were such as might well typify the final destruction of the earth; more than a million of the Hebrew race fell victims to that terrible visitation, while the fulfilment of the ancient prophecy, that the tender and delicate woman should have an evil eye towards her own children, and eat them secretly from want in the siege and straits, gave a character of horror to the judgment unparalleled in the annals of

the human race. ^

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The lesson deduced by our Lord from the prophetic announcement of these events is one that must no more be lost upon us than upon them: watchfulness indeed became him who knew not how soon the temporal judgment of God might fall upon his race; but how much more does it become us, who live in daily uncertainty of the hour when we ourselves shall have our accounts closed, and be summoned to that judgment whence there is no appeal, ^nd which shall decide our lot for ever and ever. May we have grace so to number our days

that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom; and when the temptation of the world, the lusts of the flesh, or the pride of life, hold out inducements to sin, may the thought of the Saviour's warning be re-echoed by the voice of conscience, and say to us as He did to the disciples of old— '* watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation."

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Februart 14—^TuNE 14— October 11.

ST. MARK, Chap. 14.

The complaint raised by the followers of our Lord against the costly offering of the woman who anointed Him, is one frequently renewed by nominal disciples in the present day. " To what purpose is this waste ?" is demanded by all who see an expenditure that does not agree with their own preconceived notions. The Throne, and the House and the Ministry of God, have in turn been cavilled at as needless and expensive incumbrances, simply because their immediate and practical use was not appreciated by the objector: against such a temper our Lord's remark may serve as a protest; and

though we have not, as they, the present Christ to whom to (78)

pay honour, yet in all cases where our service be of a religious or a loyal character, and the service rendered be in faithful dependence on the will of God, we may believe and feel assured that we are working a good work for Christ.

The leading events of the betrayal of our Lord we have previously noticed in reading St. Matthew's Gospel. It may perhaps give us a clearer idea of our Lord's assemblage witli His disciples, if we bear in mind that "the large upper room" is an almost universal appendage to every eastern residence; and it has been ably argued by the author of a standard work on " Primitive Christianity," that this same room where the Passover was celebrated became the regular place of worship of the early disciples, and was the scene of the miraculous gift of tongues at the ensuing Feast of Pentecost.

We should not read this sorrowful record of the betrayer of Christ being one of the favoured twelve without feeling it as a warning, that the possession of the very highest privileges does not preserve the wilful sinner from ultimate perdition. How earnestly should such a thought make us investigate our own hearts, "lest a promise having been made to us of entering into God's rest, any of us should seem to come short of it." Well may we tremble at the contemplated judgment of him who has abused the rich gifts wherewith he was intrusted of God ; and when we see the miserable end of the Apostate recorded for our learning, "labour, therefore, to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief."

And among the many privileges we enjoy, surely none can surpass that Holy Communion, the institution of which we have read in this chapter. May we not here wholesomely recall the affectionate exhortation of the Church to diligent participation in those holy mysteries—'Repent you of your

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sins or else come not to that Holy Table, lest after the taking of that holy Sacrament, the devil enter into you as he entered into Judas, and fill you full of all iniquities, and bring you to destruction both of body and soul."

We should not close our reflections on this chapter without thinking of the lesser fall of St. Peter as well as the greater fall of Judas. Denial may not indeed be a sign of our being so utterly lost as betrayal, but let us not forget that the former frequently leads to the latter; and that he who begins with the sin of Peter may end with the fall and condemnation of Judas. "Satan desires to have you that he may sift you as wheat," as well as the self-confident and too presumptuous disciple of old; let us then remember not to sleep as he did while our Master prays, but to join our prayers and our watchfulness with His, lest the hour of temptation come and find us unprepared to meet it.

The record of the contumelies offered to the meek and suffering Jesus need no human comment; they do however need our meditative and sorrowing sympathy: they should bring out our

affections and make us remember the object for which they were endured, even that " He suffered for us," " the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."

February 15— ^June 15— October 12.

ST. MARK, Chap. 15.

The circumstance that the Jews at this time had lost the judicial power of life and death, was the reason of the Chief Priests and Elders carrying our Lord before the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate. Their fierce malignity could be

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satisfied with nothing less than blood, and had they possessed this power judicially, it is perfectly clear that they would not have hesitated to use it. Thus was that prophecy of our Lord fulfilled, that He should be delivered up to the Gentiles and scourged and crucified; a fact that nothing but divine wisdom could have foreseen, inasmuch as the Gentiles themselves were not in the habit of persecuting for religious opinions, nor were the Jews who persecuted Christ in the habit of inflicting death by crucifixion. Thus, "the sceptre having departed from Judah," pointed out that it was the time for the *^ Shiloh to come;" while the Ailfilment of the prophecy of His own death, in the face of seeming inconsistencies, declared the prophetic power of that Shiloh himself.

The cry of the populace to crucify the Lord, in the face of the judge's declaration of His innocence, illustrates most painfully the wickedness of the human heart, that thus flies in the face of truth and justice to attain the fulfilment of its selfish ends and aims. Were this merely a moral question, it would be distressing to an honest mind to contemplate; but involving as it did the rejection of God's proffered mercy to the race of Israel, the denial of Christ's truth and the despite of the Spirit's grace, it forms an amount of wickedness that appals while it revolts the christian heart. We cannot conceive of any reading this record without shrinking from the sin which the Jews thus consummated. We cannot read of their cruel mockings and

scourgings, their buffetings and revilings, and, finally, of their murder of the Lord of glory, without recoiling from the idea of participation in such horrible guilt: and yet, do we not participate in this guilt, when by inattention to our revealed duties we count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and by the indulgence

of self-will rather than christian obedience, we do despite (81) o

unto the spirit of grace? With every sin the baptised member of Christ commits, a fresh thorn is planted in the brow of the Redeemer. With every hypocritical profession of unfelt faith, the scene is again morally enacted^ when they clad Him with a purple robe and cried unfeelingly^ " Hail, King of the Jews!" If then we would avoid sharing the guilt of those who crucified the Son of God of old, we must be heedful lest, by the practical atheism of an unholy life, we crucify Him afresh.

Since then, by the atonement of the cross, the vail that screened us from the view of God has been rent in twain, even from the top to the bottom, so that we have access even to the Holy of Holies through faith therein, let us take a lesson from the rich man of Arimathea, and boldly assume the reproach of that cross, and publicly declare ourselves disciples of Jesus. Let not the sneer of the worldly, nor the revilings of the unbeliever, retard us from the performance of that which is our highest privilege as well as our co-tenanted duty. Let us sorrow with him over the crucifixion of our Master, and like Him we shall be gladdened with the joyful assurance of that Master's blessed resurrection.

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February 16— June 16— October 13.

ST. MAEK, Chap. 16.

What a Sabbath must that have been which was passed by the mother of Jesus at the house of the beloved disciple, and by the other Marys, Salome, and Joanna, in tears of mournful sympathy! We

cannot but admire their strict obedience in the observation of the Sabbath that kept them from (82)

performing the pious ceremonies for which they were prepared until the following morning; and yet herein we may trace the wisdom of God^ inasmuch as thus it was^ that the human tabernacle of Christ was preserved from enduring that pollution which attaches to corruptible flesh in the last funereal rites.

This early visit of the pious mourners had moreover a farther effect of a somewhat important character^ for it was the means of giving intimation of the Resurrection almost as soon as it had taken place.

The vision that met the wondering gaze of the afflicted mourners at the sepulchre was indeed sufficient to bring trembling and amazement upon them, but the tidings given them to convey to " His disciples and Peter " are calculated to teach a lesson to us as well as to them. These words bring to us a sense of Christ's forgiveness to the disciple who denied Him; and while as a gentle rebuke they seemed to upbraid his want of faith, as a special message they convey to him the assurance, that unworthy as he was of his Master, that Master still bore him in affectionate remembrance.

So satisfied were the disciples of the termination of the course of their Lord, that it seems they neither believed the * testimony of the women who had seen the angelic messenger, nor of Cleopas and a fellow disciple who had broken bread with the risen Saviour at Emmaus. What a lesson does this teach of the danger of scepticism in the present day; if the refusal of the testimony of these five or six witnesses was sufficient to bring down the rebuke of the Lord upon the eleven who had seen Him die, how much sorer must the rebuke fall upon those who, " compassed about with the great cloud of witnesses " that bear testimony to His revelation, still turn a deaf ear to the preaching of Jesus and the resurrection.

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The commission to teach all nations is recorded in this closing chapter of St Mark's Gospel. May we have grace to feel that it is one of those portions written afore-time for our learning; and while under the teaching of Christ's spirit, we, baptised and believing, receive thankfully the assurance of salvation & may we be taught likewise to strain every endeavour to fulfil the Lord's purpose in the former part of the commission, that the Gospel may be preached abroad to every creature. The word that has come nigh to us, even in our mouth and in our heart, we are bound to speak in the ears of others; and each of us, in his appointed station in God's Church, is bound to shine forth as a light to the world, holding forth the Word of life.

KIND OF THE OOHUKHTAKT

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK.

COMMENTARY

ON TBI

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. LUKE,

February 17— June 17— October 14.

ST. LUKE, Chap. I. (v.v. 1 to 38 inclusive.)

A STRIKING testimony to the necessity of a written word is advanced by St. Luke in the opening of this Gospel: when he states to Theophilus that his object is to make known the certainty of matters previously taught, we are instructed by implication that the oral teaching of the Church would have been insufficient to evangelize the world, had not the supplementary aid of the New Testament been vouchsafed as a perpetual and irreversible text-book of reference and standard of doctrine.

It is worthy of remark, that each of the Evangelists introduces us to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ through a different channel. St. Matthew commences his Gospel by tracing the descent of the Saviour from the Patriarchs: St. Mark, by showing the

announcement of His forerunner by the Prophets; St. Luke, by exhibiting a similar connection with the law of Moses. Thus He, of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, and who was Himself promised to the Patriarchs, is introduced to us

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Feb. n^Junt \7] FAMILY READINGS. [Odobor U

severally by His inspired historians in connection with each of these; so that Jew^ Samaritan, and Gentile should each have a testimony to the Messiahship of Jesus of the character which most he needed: a striking and harmonious consent, calculated by its variety in unity to bring conviction to every searcher after truth!

The angelic announcement to the &ther of the Baptist is not noticed in the writings of the Evangelists Matthew and Mark. It is especially interesting as the record of God's earliest visible intervention in the service of the temple after the withdrawal of the spirit of prophecy, which had not been exercised for more than four hundred years previously; and must have re-kindled hopes of the Divine Blessing, and of a renewal of the Divine Presence, in Zacharias and the faithful worshippers among whom he ministered, which had long lain dormant. Though the faithful could not have doubted the promises of God, yet the long-delayed coming of the Messiah must have made them ill-disposed to expect His appearance in their own day ; just as we find that the flood found the then-inhabitants of the world unprepared for the foretold event that had been delayed, and as it is prophesied that it shall be with the world at the Second Coming of the Son of Man!

But hopeful as was the Mission of Gabriel to Zacharias, far more so was that gracious Annunciation, still devoutly recognized by the Church in her services as a cause of gratitude, which the same Angelic Being bore to the espoused Virgin, the highly-favoured Mary. The promise, in the faith of which Abraham, Isaac^ and Jacob had lived and died, was now to be fulfilled: the fulness of time had come: God was about to bring a clean thing out of an unclean: that Holy

Thing which was to be called the Son of God was now an-(86)

nounced as about to be mysteriously and miraculously made fleshy and to dwell on the earth among men!

How shall we sufficiently admire the mystery whereby mercy and truth were thus made to meet together? The perfect obedience that the justice of the law demanded, the mercy of the Law-giver provided. The pure atonement for sin which was required to blot out the hand-writing of ordinances which recorded a broken covenant, was provided by One who, being conceived and bom under the special influence of the Spirit of sanctification, never knew sin, except as " being made sin," that is, becoming a sin-offering, for the race He redeemed by His blood I Wonderful, and gracious as wonderful, was this holy work of God! Let its marvellous goodness sink deep into our hearts; and when we read the record that the Holy Child Jesus was so named ^' because He should save His people from their sins," let us adopt and apply to ourselves in heartfelt gratitude the language of the pious Virgin, " Behold the servants of the Lord—be it unto us according to Thy word! "

February 18— June 17— October 16.

ST. LUKE, Chap, 1. (v,v. 39 to the end.)

The annunciation to the Virgin Mary containing as it did an allusion to her cousin Elizabeth, who had hidden herself for the previous five months, would seem to have brought her with haste into the hill country, to learn if those things were true which had been told her. One part of Revelation was thus tested by another: an example that leads us to study Holy Scripture as its own interpreter in the

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present day^ "comparing spiritual things with spiritual/" even as the Blessed Virgin satisfied her own mind of the truth of the annunciation made to herself by examining into that which was already capable of demonstration.

The corroboration she needed must have been more than provided^ when the salutation she offered was responded to by the glad greeting of Elizabeth^ who hailed her as " the mother of her Lord "— a wondrous address, and in itself a fresh testimony to the reality of the beatific vision which had been vouchsafed to her!

The song of thanksgiving uttered by the Virgin on this occasion has been preserved in the daily services of our Church as a perpetual expression of thankfulness for God's fulfilment of His recorded promises, and for the gift of the Gospel—^whose opening lesson is, " Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven."

In the account of the birth of the Baptist is recorded an exact fulfilment of the sign of Gabriel, who had foretold to his father Zacharias that he should be dumb, and not able to speak " until the day that all the things prophesied should be performed."

Accordingly, when the Virgin had left them, and Elizabeth had brought forth the promised herald of the Lord, and the period for giving him a name had arrived, the speech of the dumb man was miraculously restored to enable him to praise the God who had bestowed such mercies upon him. No wonder that the people marvelled, and laid up in their hearts the remembrance of what had taken place, and inquired among themselves, "What manner of child shall this be?"

To this inquiry the inspired Priest gave in some sort an answer when, filled with the Holy Ghost, he prophesied of the future. Equally with his wife Elizabeth, he recognized

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the Blessed Virgin as the mother of the unborn Messiah. He announced that the promise given to their father Abraham nineteen hundred years before^ that in his seed all the nations of the earth were to be blessed^ was now to be fulfilled; and declared in glowing language^ that the infant before them was to be the forerunner of that high Mission that was to bring light out of darkness^ and reveal rest and peace to the feet of the wanderer.

This marvellous series of events, now first recorded by St. Luke, is calculated to impress the mind with a sense of God's wondrous care for His people, and of the minuteness of His providential dealings with His creatures. A heathen ^oidd write that the deity cared for the greater concerns of life, but left the lesser to themselves: the christian is herein taught that the domestic matters of a private family, no less than the regulation of an empire's destinies, are objects of the watchful government and providential interference of the God and Father of us all.

February 19— June 18— October 16.

ST. LTJKE, Chap. 2.

The way in which the will of man is made to subserve the purpose of GrOD is very strikingly evidenced in the circumstances attendant on the birth of Christ. The residence of the Virgin mother was at Nazareth of Galilee, in the northern part of the Holy Land. The edict of the Roman governor set the population of the whole Jewish province in motion, and brought her, with the husband to whom she was espoused, to Bethlehem of Judaea in the South; the native place of her family, and therefore the proper place for her

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taxing or enrolment. Thus the City that was '* little among the thousands of Judah'* sent forth the fiitare "Buler of Israel^ whose goings forth were from of old, from eyerlasting;" and no sooner had she with travail brought forth, according to ancient prophecy, than angelic messengers brought the good tidings to watching shepherds,

who were thus established as the earliest witnesses to the glories of the infant Christ.

The circumcision of the infant Saviour is not mentioned by either St. Matthew or St. Mark: and in the performance of this rite we find a farther connection between St. Luke's preaching of Christ and the law of Moses, which has been already noticed as existing. This fulfilment of the covenant of adoption in Him who was already a Son by eternal generation, should teach us not to despise those external observances which have been enjoined upon us by competent authority, because we do not see the use of them. Mary and Joseph, who had already had such wonderful attestation to the power and dignity of the mysterious infant, might well— if any might— ^have urged that ritual obedience was needless for Him: and if He thought it becoming that He should fulfil all righteousness, it surely holds out a holy pattern of obedience, that those of '*the one forgiven family" who are named after Him ought devotedly to follow.

May we not also trace in the joyous testimony of Simeon and Anna a sign of the favour of God upon the faithful fulfilment of enjoined ordinances? Apart from the greater question of Christ's perfect obedience to the law of Moses, it is clear, that if He had not been brought for presentation in the temple at the appointed time, these appointed testimonies would not have been raised to Him: for it is specially stated of Simeon, that He came ** by the Spirit" into the Temple, and of Anna that she came in *^ in that instant;" thus showing how the grace of God gathers, as it were, round the ordi-

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nances of His own appointment^ and teaching to all who wUl receive it, that tKey who fulfil in faith what He has enjoined, YnH assuredly meet with a blessing manifested on their obedience.

The fortieth verse of this chapter contains an extraordinary condensation of doctrine as to the person of Christ: *^ Growth" proves His bodily increase according to the laws that govern the human frame; " strength of spirit" (not of The Spirit) his accession of life, and vigour of character; ^^ fulness of wisdom" the enlargement

of mental power:—"The Grace of God" (the only time the expression is used in the Gospels,) the eminent witness of the Holy Spirit which was given to Him without measure.

Our Lord's visit to the Temple, when He stayed behind His parents in Jerusalem, was probably for the purpose of being made a Son of the Precept;—a rite in the Jewish Church analogous to that of confirmation in the Christian Church. His reply to His mother upon this occasion, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" seems to have had reference both to His divine and human nature: in the former sense, signifying His desire of sanctioning by example a necessary duty; in the latter, conveying a mild reproof to Joseph, as it should have been the care of the parent, and not of the child, to see that this duty was duly performed.

In the closing verses of the chapter, we have Christ set before us in our families, specially as an example to youth; a pattern indeed of filial obedience, but remembering that the highest filial devotion was due to the unseen Father.—Let the younger members of our families be actuated by this principle, and we shall find them, like their great Example, increasing in wisdom as in stature, and in favour with God as well as with man! (91)

February 20— June 19— October 17.

ST. LUKE, Chap. S.

The teaching of the Holy Baptist, who came to prepare the way of Christ on earth, is more fully given by St. Luke than by any other of the Evangelists. This teaching was essentially practical in its character. He first roused the people to a sense of their danger, and when He had awakened a desire of improvement, taught them in

their respective classes what they were to do. His first instruction to the people at large was a warning against selfishness. This warning, calculated doubtless for the benefit of all ages, was never more needed to be impressed upon men's minds than in the present: an age of luxury heaps superfluities around the wealthy, and cultivates a tone of selfish indulgence even among those who walk in inferior stations of life. The tendency of this is manifestly hurtful to the simplicity of the Christian character: and he who came to herald the way of the self-denying Redeemer, struck a fatal blow at the principle of accumulating superfluities, when he bade the multitudes divide that which they possessed among such as were in need: '^ he that hath two coats let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat let him do likewise."

A peculiar feature in the Baptist's teaching is its accurate fitness for the persons to whom it was addressed. The native publicans, who farmed the taxes from their Roman masters, were, as a class, unjust and extortionate; and on them consequently the forerunner of Jesus imposes the lesson of justice and moderation. The soldiers of that day, who were neither

paid nor clad as the military of the present age, were much (92)

given to violence, oppression^ and discontent: on them consequently he enjoins the duties of gentleness, probity, and order. It is no wonder that a teacher so gifted and so successful should have excited among many the idea that he might have been the promised Messiah himself: but when questioned on this point, John made it an occasion for bearing awful testimony to the dignity and power of the coming Redeemer. Did we but bear his testimony in mind, and remember that when the triumphant Jesus purges His floor the wheat alone will be gathered into His garner, but the chaff burned up with never-ending flame, how much more careful should we be to do those " good works meet for repentance " to which John exhorted, and which Christ Himself subsequently enjoined! Did we but more really feel the prayer that we constantly offer^ that His Kingdom may come, and remember that at that coming the final separation of the wheat and the chaff must take place, we should assuredly be

more watchful than we now are in walking worthy of the vocation
wherewith we are called I

The faithful preacher in public was also we learn equally faithful in
his private ministrations: he who taught virtue to the multitude at
large would not refrain his voice when he found vice needing rebuke
in the private dwelling. For this boldness he endured immediate
imprisonment and subsequent violent death: and he who spent his
life in striving to " turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of
the just," was content to close it beneath the hand of the executioner,
and by a bloody grave to win the martyr's crown.

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/•e6. 21—J«IM? 20] FAMILY READINGS. [October IS

Fkbruary 21— June 20— October 18.

ST. LUKE, Chap. 4.

It is one of our great comforts in looking up to Christ as our Lord and
Saviour, to feel that we have not an High Priest which cannot be
touched with our infirmities, but one who was in all points tempted
like as we are. A sympathy is thus established between the Head and
the members which could not have been felt, had we to bow before
the unapproachable God apart from the Manhood which is common
to both of us. This chapter sets forth the endurance of the Son, who
learned obedience by the things that He suffered, as a glorious
pattern for His brethren to follow. The flesh, the world, and the devil
assailed Him as well as us. Self-denial, obedience, and the testimony
of the written word, enabled Him to resist them all. Will not the
same weapons, aided by the Spirit of Grace, equally stand us in good
stead during the same conflict ?

Notwithstanding the eloquence and power which our Lord displayed
in the towns of Galilee, and that even the testimony of His admirers
was echoed by those who heard the gracious words which proceeded

out of His mouth at Nazareth, there was a manifest unwillingness on the part of His own townspeople to receive instruction from one whom they had been accustomed to regard as occupying an inferior station in society. The acceptable year of the Lord, the true jubilee, was not received with gratitude by those to whom it was preached. The implied rebuke, contained in the reference of Jesus to the Sidonian and Syrian, converted their hesitation into anger and opposition.

Perhaps this reference requires some explanation. Our

Lord meant to show to His hearers, that their hardness of (94)

Feb. 21—June 20] FAMILY READINGS. [October IQ

heart would lead to their rejection and the substitution of others in their place: that even as the widow of Sarepta was selected in the days of Elijah, and the leper of Syria in the days of his successor, so should strangers and foreigners receive those favours from God, of which they, by their wilful rejection of Him, proved themselves unworthy.

After our Lord escaped safely from the wrath of the Nazarenes we find Him again exhibiting miraculous power at Capernaum. The miracle here recorded of casting out the unclean spirit, was in fact the third which Galilee had experienced at his hands: for both the converting the water into wine, and the healing of the nobleman's son, had taken place prior to that recorded in the present chapter. His fame arising from these circumstances is alluded to in the twenty-third verse; but that fame must have been vastly increased when the many gifts of healing were dispensed, which are described in the conclusion of the chapter.

May we not learn from the healing of Peter's wife's mother, to admire the affectionate care with which Christ watches over personal and domestic suffering, and with which He regards the social and domestic relationships of life. Should not such miracles of mercy as these bind us closer in the bonds of personal affection to Him, who is

not less the guardian and the friend of our social life^ than the Bedeemer and the Saviour of our undying sovl ?

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Ftb. ga-^iat 3}] FAMILY RKADINoa. {OtHaber 19

Pbbruabt 22— ivsK 21— October 19. ST. LUKE, Chap. 5.

Thb simple mode of our Lord's teaching seems to indicate the class for whom His instruction was generally intended. Had His especial mission been addressed to the noble and the dignified, it does not seem probable that He would have chosen the labourers of Tiberias for His auditory, or the deck of a fishing-vessel for His pulpit: but thus it was, that the intention of the Father was to be fulfilled, that "the poor should have the Gospel preached unto them;" and that these, the weak of the world, should by their moral power overthrow the things that were mighty.

The proof of Christ's miraculous power seems suddenly to have wrought in the mind of Peter a conviction of his own unworthiness. Such a phenomenon is not uncommon in the present day. The mind first awakened to a sense of God's omnipotence is apt to shrink back in fear when it contemplates the contrast of its own littleness: and highly blessed is such contemplation to the soul of each who is thus led to feel in earnest that conviction of sinfulness which Peter expressed to his Lord. Without it, we may indeed do service to the Lord as a recognized superior, but we cannot dedicate ourselves to Him with that entire devotion, which a sense of redemption from the debt which is the wages of sin can alone inspire.

The promise which St. Matthew records to have been given both to Andrew the first-called and his brother Simon, is mentioned by St. Luke as addressed to St. Peter alone.

s would naturally arise from his having been the one to
ress the conviction of his sinfulness; but the words in the
^el passage in the Evangelist Matthew make it clear, that
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Ft;&. 22—Jiintf 21] FAMILY READINGS. [October \9

in SO far as they contained the promise of success in evangelizing the world, they were equally applicable to Andrew as to his brother.

The injunction given by our Lord to the cleansed leper to show himself to the Priest, is one of the many instances whereby He confirms the divine authority of the law of Moses. Until the great Atonement was oflFered, in which all the legal types were to find their anti-type, it was the duty of every Israelite to walk in all the ordinances of the law blameless: and hence we find on all occasions before His crucifixion, that our Lord inculcated obedience to the authority of the Scribes and Pharisees; though the great sacrifice was scarcely consummated, ere the Apostles, under spiritual guidance, forbade the heavy yoke of ceremonial ordinances to be laid upon the neck of the disciples.

The connexion* of the latter verses of the chapter does not appear quite clear with that which precedes it, but the comparison of the new piece of garment being put upon the old, and the new wine being put in old skins, appears intended to teach the same lesson: that is to say, that the old dispensation as " waxing old, decaying, and ready to vanish away," was not to be patched up or mended, but entirely superseded by the new : and that as the goat-skins in which wine was kept, if much used, were too weak to contain new wine under the process of fermentation ; so the Jewish polity, which was intended for a peculiar and isolated people, was too strait and feeble to restrain within its bounds all the people, nations, and languages to whom the Gospel of Salvation was to be universally extended !—But even while setting forth this truth, our Lord seems desirous to tell His disciples of the opposition which He foresaw arising. In the

observation contained in the last verse (recorded, it may be noticed, solely by St. Luke)

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F<6. 2d-^iuie 22] FAMILY RBADINGS. [Octo&er 20

He announces the coming exhibition of the power of prejudice. Nor is the objection, "the old is better," peculiar to the Jew. Each succeeding age has seen evil defended on the ground of its antiquity. Let us avoid this too common error, and learn, from Christ Himself, that prejudice must yield to Truth !

February 23— June 22— October 20.

ST. LUKE, Chap. 6.

How solemn a lesson is that taught to us by the night of devotion spent by Christ immediately preceding His choice of the twelve Apostles ! There seems to be a very prevalent idea that the Apostles were the twelve whom Christ called to attend upon Him, and whom therefore He sent out to preach when He determined to disseminate His Gospel abroad. So far from this being the case, it would rather seem to have been an object of prayer to the Father, to direct Him as to which of His disciples He should send out on this great mission. We read in this chapter, first, that He "continued all night in prayer to God," and afterwards, "when it was day, called unto Him His disciples, and of them," that is to say, out of the whole number, how many soever they were, "He chose twelve." And this idea of their being a selection of the whole, and being called to a special office apart from the rest, is confirmed by the fact of our Lord giving them a peculiar title; for we read that He named them "Apostles," a word signifying "Missionaries," or "men sent forth."

This example of our Lord of previous prayer before the solemn duty of sending out his Ministers was followed by the Church, when Barnabas and Saul were sent together to the Gentiles; and again by these same Apostolic men when

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i^«6. 23—June 22] FAMILY READINGS. [October 20

they "ordained them elders in every Church" in Lystra, Iconium^ and Antioch^ and other places: and under the influence of this teaching and example it is^ that the Church of the present day sets apart the solemn season of Ember weeks, immediately after which the ordination of new Ministers is appointed to be held.

The blessings of the poor, the needy, the despised, and condemned, which our Lord pronounces in this chapter, are calculated to convey as much consolation to Christian sufferers in the present day as they were to sorrowing believers eighteen centuries ago; and assuredly the warning against riches, worldly fulness, and human adulation, is not less needed now than then.

The words of Christ teach us most powerfully the probationary character of the present existence. His code of principles is calculated to form the character for eternity, and to look upon the passing period of time as at least comparatively unimportant. The whole character of His teaching leads the mind through the world inobservant of the things around, as compared with the eager watchfulness bestowed upon the things beyond it. We are to walk by faith and not by sight; but the law of faith is not to interfere with the law of charity towards others; neither is the law of charity to be lost in indolence or allowed to interfere with active holiness in ourselves. Consistency moreover must mark the Christian career. If we address Christ as our Lord, we must do the things which He ordains.

The closing remark of our Lord, wherein He likens the doer of His sayings to one who built his house upon a rock, but the mere hearer to one who built upon the sand, conveys a very striking illustration to the mind. We should think him little less than insane who built a house without a foundation ; and yet, in defiance of this simile of the Lord, how

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/«6.24—June 23] FAMILY READINGS. [October 2\

many there be who call themselves believers, and week by week at least, if not more frequently, hear the words of Christ, who yet content themselves with a formal recognition of His name, and never think of glorifying Him truly by renouncing the world to do Him service. The covenant whereby they "put on Christ," and were grafted into His body, is forgotten or despised; the world manifestly, the flesh more secretly, control those whose life should be hid with Christ in God; and the temptations of the Devil bend beneath a willing yoke the soul that continues externally to recognize the vow which pledges it to imitation of the self-denying Redeemer.

February 24— June 23— October 21.

ST. LUKE, Chap. 7.

One of the most touching passages in the whole of Scripture occurs in this chapter, in the record of Christ's raising from death the widow's son at Nain. We learn not whether the bereaved mother were a disciple, but from the vicinity of Nain to Capernaum, where our Lord had already performed many miracles, it is probable that she was not unacquainted with the fame of Jesus ; while, from her being accompanied by much people of the city, we may learn that she was worthy for whom He should do this. Even however if she were not a believer, if the Word had not until then been revealed to her, we can imagine no circumstance more likely to summon up the secret sympathies of a nature even merely human (and how much more, then, the mercy of one divine ?) than that of a bereaved parent mourning for an only child.

Now though it is not allotted to us to enjoy the intense feeling of gratitude which must have been experienced by the

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Fc6.24—y«ne 23] FAMILY RKADINGS. [October ^\

bounding heart of the widow, when he that was dead was delivered to her alive again, yet many of us ought at least in some degree to have participated in it, when we have watched with almost expiring

hope by the sick bed of a friend or relative, and have at last seen the one that was dear to us restored to the enjoyment of health. A lamentable experience convinces us that such gratitude is felt among men far less than it ought to be. The hand of God is far less recognized in sickness and recovery than is consistent with professed faith in His continual providence. In words we acknowledge Him; in thoughts and in facts we too often contradict our words.

The raising of this youth is the earliest instance of the great power of restoration to life being exercised by Jesus; and no sooner do we find it exercised, than it is advanced by Himself as a proof of His Messiahship, in answer to the two inquiring disciples of John the Baptist. "The dead heard the voice of the Son of God, and he that heard lived." Let us then bear in mind that our natural state is one of death—that by inheritance of an evil nature we are dead in trespasses and sins—and that we too must hear the voice of the Son of God, if we desire to be partakers of His endless life! If with His word in our hands we persist in despising or even neglecting it, shall we not be like the "Pharisees and Lawyers" of whom we have just read, who rejected the counsel of God against themselves?

When our Lord compared the unteachable spirit of the age in which he lived to the frowardness of children which was averse to every proposal made to them, and would listen to neither one kind of instruction nor another. He held out a warning against the same disposition to cavil in all future time. Austerity is condemned on the one hand, social familiarity on the other: the best will have some fault found with them to

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/U. 25-^MM S£5] FAMILT READINGS. [Octo6«r22

wUch-ever side they may incline. May we not learn a double lesson from hence? First, not to condemn others, when we see that censoriousness is a fault to be avoided: secondly, not to heed the opinions of worldly men as regards ourselves, knowing that if such cavilled at our Master, we ourselves cannot hope to be free from their censure. When Jesus was reviled He reviled not again; when He

suffered. He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously: this example, and not worldly opinion, is that which is to be our guide.

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February 25-^uns 25— October 22.

ST. LUKE, Chap. 8.

The opening of this chapter instructs us as to the progress the Gospel was making among the people of Syria. It was only the first year of our Lord's ministry, but, notwithstanding. His preaching was extended throughout every city and village; while the number and rank of the attendants who followed Him (for one of these was the wife of the Steward of the Royal household) show that the knowledge of Christ was no longer limited to the poor and mean in station.

The healing of the demoniac of Gadara, while it shows the power of Jesus over the agencies of hell, seems intended also to convey a warning against the sin of covetousness. The legion-like spirit that was cast out seems to have anticipated that the time of his final judgment was come, and in trembling belief to have asked for a reprieve. The reprieve however that he sought Involved the destruction of considerable

property which was illegally held ; and though we may (102)

Feb. 25^ - June 25] FAMILY READINGS. [October^

readily acknowledge that the undoubted right of Christ as proprietor of the universe entitled him to destroy this by the exercise of His sovereign will, yet it seems more in accordance with His general dealings to suppose that He allowed the destruction of the herd of swine as a punishment for the covetousness of the Jew, who, for the sake of gain, kept an unclean animal contrary to the injunctions of the law.

The concluding part of the chapter records a double miracle—the one performed by the Lord on His way to perform the other. How admirable encouragements are herein held out to an humble and watchful faith! When the woman who was healed on touching Jesus instantaneously of that calamity that for twelve long years had afflicted her, she was told to "be of good comfort," and to *'go in peace," for that "her FAITH had made her whole:" and while these consoling words were being uttered, and the servant of the ruler (who waited we may well believe in anxious impatience at the delay) came to tell him that the tardy arrival of the Great Physician had made their last hope expire before His coming, he too was taught to hope against hope by the wondrous words, ** Fear not; believe only and she shall be made whole!"

Surely when we read these records, our faith, hope, and love should be alike encouraged. The Saviour whom we have learnt to know through His blessed word, is One who can cast out evil Spirits, control principalities and powers, heal sickness, and raise the dead. Unlike the Prophets of old time, who wrestled in a fearful contest before they could bring back the spirit to re-animate the corpse, the Saviour proves a Sovereignty by the mere utterance of His word of power, which is heard and obeyed amid the world of unseen spirits! And let us not fail to feel that that same Sovereignty exists as (103)

jFc6. 26—Jimtf 26] FAMILY READINGS. [Oc£o6er 23

perfectly now as when He proved its possession to the ruler of the synagogue. Let us walk ever as in the presence of this unseen power; so living, as we know from His revealed will that He would have us live ; and so dying, that our joyful spirits may be prepared to hear the tones of His welcome voice, "I say unto thee, arise!"

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February 26— June 26— October 23.

ST. LUKE, Chap. 9.

Much that is recorded in this chapter has been commented on in reading the previous Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark. It is however from St. Luke alone that we learn the subject of conversation between our Lord and the glorified beings who spoke with Him during the transfiguration. That Moses and Elias spoke with Him is mentioned by both St. Matthew and St. Mark, but that their conversation was of His decease that he should accomplish at Jerusalem, is only recorded in this Gospel. In listening to this revelation of the mystery, the three favoured Apostles seem to have experienced a great advantage over their brethren of the twelve; yet notwithstanding (if we except the fidelity of the loving John) it does not appear to have had the effect of strengthening their faith beyond that of the rest.

The transfiguration however has not been without its uses as a witness for Christ, apart from the spiritual lessons derived from it by those who beheld and by those who read of it. It is used as an evidence by St. Peter in his second epistle, to prove that they had not followed cunningly devised fables in making known the power and coming of the Lord (104)

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F<?6. 26—^an« 26] family READINGS. [October 03

Jesus Christ. He advances his own personal testimony, and quotes that of his brethren as eye-witnesses of the Majesty of Jesus.

There is much to instruct us in the record of our Lord's rejection by the Samaritans. First, as to the system of His own instruction; " He sent messengers before His face : ** teaching us that even spiritual things may be done more successfully, if done in an orderly and methodical manner. Next, in the intolerance and unkindness of the Samaritans, " they would not receive Him because His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem : " and consequently they lost the

heavenly blessings His presence and instruction would have conferred, by the indulgence of a weak and malevolent prejudice. Thirdly, in the equal intolerance and rash vehemence of the apostles James and John; they received a deserved rebuke from our blessed Lord, because they were indulging a feeling of personal indignation, rather than obeying the dictates of a holy self-denial and a universal charity.

May we not profitably ask ourselves, in reading this record, " do we know what manner of spirit we are of? " It is very awful to reflect upon the revelation made by St. Paul, that " if any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of His." Yet how rarely in our daily intercoirse with the world, or even in our domestic relationship with our families, do we find the spirit of Christ bearing the sway it ought! Let these words of Christ, addressed to His indignant disciples, dwell in us richly in every temptation to anger, hatred, malice, or uncharitableness. " I say unto you that ye resist not evil," was shown forth in Christ's life, as well as uttered by His lips ; and as He was, so should we be in this world : called by grace to be His brethren by adoption, we should show forth to

the world a fraternal resemblance between our life and His. (105)

Fed. 27—June 27] FAMILY KB AD INGS. [Ocfoier 24

And how awfully are we stimulated to such perseyerance in well doing by the closing verse of this chapter : " No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God." As we have begun so we must continue ; and if we did but remember more consistently the solemn pledges of our covenant^ whereby we are vowed to a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness^ we should strive more earnestly than most of us now do to adorn our profession^ and to realize the truth of that new life whereto Jesus hath revealed Himself as the only way!

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February 27— ^June 27— October 24.

ST. LUKE, Chap. 10.

The twelve Apostles would seem to Have been insufficient to work the works for which they were sent: the seventy therefore were added, and sent forth more widely through the cities and villages of Syria, to prepare the way of the coming Saviour. Somewhat similar instructions to those given to the twelve were now bestowed upon this more extensive band of Missionaries, and the great increase of means thus brought to bear upon the extension of the Gospel, led our Redeemer to read an awful lesson upon the responsibilities of such as hear the truth without being influenced by it. The woe denounced against the disobedient and rebellious was just in proportion to the amount of privilege they had slighted; and if we apply this to modern times, may we not fear that our towns and villages, possessed of the written word, and all echoing the glad tidings of the preached Gospel, are far

(106)

Feb.27-^Jime^] FAMILY READINGS. [October 24

more laden with responsibility with reference to Chorazin and Bethsaida, than they were with reference to Tjn^e and Sidon of old.

We cannot wonder that the seventy rejoiced in the miraculous powers bestowed upon them by their Lord; but though this is a joy beyond our sympathy, we are enabled to recognize and participate in that greater joy, when Jesus announced to them that their names were written in Heaven. We, like them, have been called to be heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. The Way, the Truth, and the Life have been set before us. The only Name under Heaven whereby man can be saved, is revealed to us as freely as it was to them; and if we, having received it, continue faithful therein, we shall as assuredly as they receive the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls!

And this simple unhesitating reliance that He which hath begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ, seems to be taught in those following words of our Lord, where He thanks the Father who had revealed unto babes those things which were hidden

troxa the wise and prudent. It is not by searching that man can find out God ; and hence the wprldly-wise and the subtle have at all times failed in their search after divine knowledge, because they have sought it merely as a result of philosophical investigation. The knowledge of God and His attributes comes to man by Eevelation. He is too far below God ever to be able to ascend into His holy hill without assistance. He, therefore, who would know the most, must in humble docility look upwfurd for aid, and in faith and patience wait for guidance from above.

When the Lawyer tempted Christ in asking what he should do to inhcfrit eternal life, our Saviour made use of the (107)

Fi*. 27-Jirit* 27] KAMILY READINGS. [October 24

law of Moses to bring out conviction of Ein. " This do and thou shall live," under His searching glance penetrated the inquirer's soul, and convinced him that he had not done that which would entitle him to live. Which of us could answer such a queetion in the affirmative ? Have we always loved God above all things ? Have we always loved our neighbours as ourselves ? Alas! had we done so, selfishness had not been the characteristic of the world, and of each of us, as it is! Thus, in the conviction of his own conscience by the law, came the knowledge of sin, and it assumed the aspect of a schoolmaster to teach him the need of a Saviour.

Still however willing to justify himself, he asked a farther question, and thus elicited that instructive parable of the good Samaritan, which rebukes alike indifference and bigotry, and opens at once the heart and hand to the distressed and needy of every nation and every creed.

But even this lesson fails in importance before the closing instruction of the chapter which the holy Saviour gave to the over-careful Martha. " One thing ie needful." May we have grace to receive from that blessed teaching the lesson that was intended to be conveyed! And if we acquire that pure knowledge—the knowledge of Divine Love —then neither Death nor Life, nor things present nor things to

come, "■" ^" able to separate us &om the love of God which is in
esos GUI Lord t

/«&. 2a—^Tunc 28] FAMILY READINGS. [October 25^

February 28— June 28— October 25.

ST. LUKE, Chap, 11.

It is not enough that we know how to pray: we must also use our knowledge rightly. When our glorious Master had given a perfect form of prayer to His disciples. He taught them also the necessity of earnestness and perseverance in its use. The want of the former would seem to be more prevalent than that of the latter amongst us. Numbers are ready enough to repeat their prayers day by day, but comparatively few of them offer them as realities before the throne of grace. We are here taught to pray as those who will not be denied, while we are encouraged to ask for the very highest gifts, even the gifts of the Holy Spirit, because our Father in Heaven is at least as ready to bestow blessings from above, as our earthly parents are by nature to give us those things whereof we stand in need here below.

We have in this chapter a very striking testimony to the blessedness of those who hear the word of God and keep it, when she who brought the Saviour into the world, and of whom it was revealed that all nations should call her blessed, is not more exalted in her blessedness than these. Her blessedness was not denied by Him in Whom she rejoiced as God her Saviour, but a more important announcement than her blessedness was that of all who heard God's word in faith, and kept it in obedience.

The purity of those who profess and call themselves

Christians, is well indicated by the warning to take heed lest

the light which is in us be not darkness. The kingdom of

God does not depend upon outward profession or anything (109J

i%6. 28—JiiM 28] FAMILT READINGS. [October 25

that is merely external. It is within us. It is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. If these things be in us, and abound, then will our whole life and actions be full of light, having no part dark. But if we be wanting in these, if our inward parts are full of ravening and wickedness, while with a formal Pharisaism we make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, then shall we not merely bring a scandal upon the holy religion which we profess, but become subjects of that fearful wrath and condemnation which was denounced in a series of woes against the hypocrites of former days.

The magnitude of these wretched men is painfully exhibited at the close of the chapter. Scarcely less than satanic seems that miserable pleasure which they experienced in urging and provoking the Holy Jesus to utter His condemnations, in order to lead Him into an indiscreet expression that they might find a ground for some legal accusation against Him. How fearful a lesson does this read to those placed in posts of instruction, when our Lord records of the teachers of that day, that they had "taken away the key of knowledge;" and how solemnly should the warning sink into the heart of every head of a family and master of a household, lest by not living up to the knowledge they possess, and the responsibilities God has laid upon them, they prevent some of those intrusted to their guidance from attaining their promised inheritance of the kingdom of Heaven.

#^^«MWV^>«^^^W^tf^^^A^^^l'^«^^A^^i^^^>^^^AA^

(110)

March 1— June 29— October 26.

ST. LUKE, Chap. 12.

A RENEWED warning against hypocrisy greets us at the commencement of this chapter. The evil genius of the world, under the guise of Pharisaic assumption of holiness as an external cloke, is rebuked by the solemn assurance that the day will come, when men's motives will be made as bare as their actions, and the privacy of the closet be made as public as though its mysteries had" been proclaimed by a herald.

And following upon the revelation of God's omniscience, the Saviour enjoins the duty of reverential fear upon man. He raises a fresh protest against undue fear of his fellow sinner, while He impresses upon His hearers the omniscience of the Father and the certainty of retribution for sin.

It might look like a contradiction to assert in one verse the assurance of condemnation against him that denied the Son of Man, and in the next forgiveness of those that spoke against Him, but condemnation against him who blasphemed the Holy Ghost; did we not bear in mind that the whole object of the teaching of the Scriptures is to make us regard the Son and the Holy Ghost as inseparably One. It must indeed have been an awful and mysterious instruction that was at this time laid before the Apostles. The Holy Ghost was not yet given to them, because that Jesus was not yet glorified; but they were led by the teaching now set before them to recognize both His dignity and power; while they were taught in the first instance, that an offence against Him could not be forgiven, and in the second that He was to teach them aU wisdom.

In our Lord's reply to the dissatisfied brother, we are

led to know the folly and vanity of setting our affections on (111)

March \—June 29] FAMILY RKAI>IXo8. [October 2^

this world's goods, as well as to observe the bounty of God to all His creatures. He who provideth so liberally for the mere embellishments of creation, will never withhold what is right and needful from those who were created in His own image and likeness.

In receiving the injunction to seek the kingdom of God and to be ready for the coming of His Son, the Apostles seem to have apprehended that it was intended peculiarly for themselves. The Lord's reply to Peter informs us that it was intended for all, and that wherever knowledge was imparted it was accompanied by responsibility. No one can receive instruction without being either the better or the worse for it. Receiving it to his profit, he is improved

and benefited. Receiving it heedlessly, he is liable to punishment for the rejection of a means of improvement.

When we read at the close of the chapter our Lord's question as to whether He came to send peace on earth, we are tempted to ask whether it can be possible that division could ever be an evidence of Christian love. The question seems to be answered by another part of our Lord's teaching. "It must needs be that offences come, but woe unto him by whom the offence cometh." It is not that the exercise of Christian love, or the teaching of Christian truth, can ever of itself generate division: but wherever the one is exercised or the other taught, there the agents of Satan will raise an opposition to it. When families are divided because of Christ's word, it is a proof that Satan has sown the tares to grow up in the same field with the wheat. In such case, we must not rudely attempt by an act of coercion to separate the one from the other—both must grow together until the harvest: but the children of the kingdom will pursue their course in faith and patience, while the children of the wicked one, by violence and evil, will give token of the Master whose work they do, (112)

March 2-^{ify I}] FAMILY READINGS. [OeUther ^

March 2— July 1— October 27.

ST. LUKE, Chap. 13.

The death of the Galileans under the onslaught of Pilate, and of those who suffered under the apparent accident of the fall of the Tower of Siloam, is used by our Lord to enforce the absolute necessity of repentance on each individual soul. There is perhaps a deficiency in our language, which fails to express the full idea of Repentance, in the word used to signify it. The original language of the New Testament, conveys this much more clearly. It implies an entire change in the tone of mind; an idea that our National Chui'ch has sought to realize in the instruction prepared for her youthful members, wherein repentance is defined as that *'whereby we forsake sin." Solemn, then, should be the scrutiny with which we should examine our own hearts, when we remember, that if we have not been made partakers of this repentance, this grace '^whereby we forsake sin," we too, like the sufferers of old, shall likewise perish!

The parable of the fruitless fig-tree is commonly used as an argument of terror, to alarm the ungodly mind into a sense of its awful danger. It would seem however to be more fitly applicable as an argument of hope to the mind newly convinced of ungodliness. To such a one (and instances of such are to be found in almost every family) led by a new conviction of sin to a state of fear, it would seem to ask the question, '^Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance .^" With some of us, perhaps, the great proprietor hath hitherto looked for fruit in vain : for some of us, perhaps, the eternal Mediator is even

now saying," Lord, let it alone this year also." May the thought (113) I

jtfa^{rc}A3—JWⁱ^2] FIMILT READINGS. [October^

be blessed to us! May we be led by it to strive more earnestly in the strength of His grace^ and in gratitude for His mediation, to devote our coming years to bring forth fruit to His glory!

The defence of our Lord of His good deed on the Sabbath-day is so clear, that it must commend itself to every mind, while the instruction that follows it, is calculated to teach truths that must have been as new as important to those who first heard them. Their importance remains to us, though their novelty has passed away. We too must learn to look for the gradual diffusion of truth, to leaven, by its hidden working, the mass of human kind. We too must strive, under a blessed sense of our Master's call, to enter in at the strait gate. We too must rest upon God's pardoning love and freely-bestowed grace; and not, like the Jews, on inherited privileges and outward profession, for "the hope that is in us" of sitting down in the kingdom of God I

May impenitent Jerusalem be a warning to us! May we, not only as individuals, but as a Church and Nation, wait in patience, faith, and obedience, for the yet future advent of our Head; and then may we unitedly have grace to raise our voices in the joyous song, " Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord."

March 3— ^July 2— October 28.

ST. LUKE, Chap. 14.

The' opening of this chapter renews the argument used in the preceding, whereby the Lord showed that "it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath-day." This being addressed to our higher affections, commands at once our reverential assent:

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but the argument in the following verses, whereby a profession of humiUty is recommended with a view to future exaltation^ might seem to encourage a servile expediency, or formal hypocrisy, which is utterly at variance with our Saviour's general teaching. Now, the solution of this apparent inconsistency would seem to be found in the fact, that the Lord was conveying a truth under the form of an analogy. True, such deference as was recommended might, by low-minded men, be paid as a matter of form, or used as a cloke for hypocrisy. Like every act of will, it might be perverted, or unworthily

exercised. But the humility recommended by the Lord Christ was not to be formal, but real; not the cringing servility of the body, but the hearty devotion of the soul and mind. Let this dedication of self be unreservedly made to the service of God, and so surely as their experience taught them that a modest deference paved the way to exaltation, and added a grace to distinction ; just so surely would their future state witness to Jehovah's recognition of the devotion paid to Him, and testify to the eternal truth that " he that humbleth himself shall be exalted!"

And as if the idea of reward were not to be excluded, but rather elevated to its true position by the Gospel, the following verses seem to corroborate the ideas now laid down. Self-denying beneficence is to be exercised under the hope of glorious and eternal recompense. He that looks to earthly reward looks to man ; but he that looks to heavenly recompense looks to God. And this looking away from earth, this setting the affections on things above, is the whole scope of Christ's teaching. It realizes to immortal man the walking by faith and not by sight; it makes him feel the dignity and blessedness of being an heir of immortality; it quickens him

in his christian race, by setting before him in living truth the (115) 12

March H-^mbi 2] yAMILT READINGS. [October 28

prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus. Apart from this ennobling feeling, man, the redeemed sinner, may indeed be an obedient slave; but knows not, and cannot know, the exalting reality of being a Son of God by adoption.

Were this holy truth more deeply and more generally felt, we should not find so rife in the present day the same worldly, excuses for rejecting the Gospel which were urged of old. But the lower tendencies of man's nature prevail now as then. The merchandise, the farm, yea, even the social and domestic affections, are used as snares of Satan to lure the soul from its eternal home. Earthly prosperity and the shadows of time are substituted in man's mind for the enduring realities of heavenly bliss; and Satan occupies with tares the ground fitted for the reception of the good seed of the Word

of God. Nevertheless, God's word cannot return unto him void. The Jews rejected the Gospel, which, though it began at Jerusalem, scarce ended with barbarian, Scythian, bond, or free. The men that were bidden refused the feast; but the streets and the lanes, the highways and hedges provided guests to enjoy it. Let us then consider. This feast is open to us, but the requisites for its reception (as we learn from the close of the chapter) are self-denial, renunciation of the world, and a faithful bearing of our Master's cross. Let us count the cost in taking up this holy badge; but, once assumed, let us remember that it involves not a temporal but an eternal fidelity. The unfruitful fig-tree will be cut down: the unfaithful servant cast into outer darkness: all things that offend and do iniquity will be cast out of the kingdom; but the good and faithful servant, who shows forth his Master's life in his actions, shall enter into that glorious presence where is fulness of joy and life for evermore!

^^•^'MV^^W^^^V^M^^M^^iM^^^i^M^k^i^tM^tMAMAA^

(116)

March 4^~Jufy S] FAMILY READINGS. [Octofrer 29

March 4— July 3— October 29.

ST. LUKE, Chap. 15.

The contrast so often drawn between the Pharisee and the Publican seems to amount to this, that the one was a secret sinner, the other an open one: while the manner in which the contrast is brought forward by our Lord, implies that there is more hope of the conversion of the latter, than of the former.

The murmuring of the Pharisees and Scribes, at the Saviour's reception of those whom they deemed a degraded class, should warn us against indulging a spirit of exclusion. Their conduct, as set before us in the opening of this chapter, exhibits another phase of that strife constantly going on betwixt Selfishness and Love. Selfishness, the

agent of Satan, repels ; Love, the representative of God, attracts ;
Selfishness divides into many ; Love gathers together into one.

The whole of this chapter is devoted to the illustration of this principle. The parable of the lost sheep; of the piece of silver; and of the prodigal son; are alike intended to realize in us a sense of Divine Love, and to bring out in us that grateful affection, which teacheth us to " love Him who hath first loved us."

The distinction between the sinner that repenteth, and the ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance, may perhaps need explanation to some who know not how to reconcile it with the fact, that *^ all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Repentance, (whereby we forsake sin) which some perhaps would understand better if the term Conversion were used, is necessary to each. They wha have experienced this repentance, or, like the youthful Timothy^ (117)

jlforcA 4-^11^ 8] FAMILY READINGS. [October 29

have from a child known the Holy Scriptures^ and walked as they who are wise unto salvation^ may be spoken of as ^'just/' compared with those who have never yet turned from the vanities of earth, to serve in a spirit of faithful devotion the living and the true God : and though daily sins and shortcomings may keep up in these a sense of humiliation, which makes them abhor themselves and repent in dust and ashes, yet, having their minds subordinated to the spirit of grace and truth, and under the leading of divine love, having abjured Satan and forsaken sin, they need not that repentance, or conversion, which is absolutely necessary to save the un-awakened soul from perishing.

This doctrine seems farther and more powerfrdly illustrated in the beautifrd parable of the repentant prodigal, which is contained in the conclusion of the chapter. The Son who did the will of his Father, and was certainly *'just," as compared with his prodigal brother, was yet not free from Bin, when, in a spirit of jealousy and anger, he refused to sympathize with his father's love on the recovery of the lost and the spiritually dead.

May we not also learn additional lessons from this interesting parable ? May we not be led from the consideration of the sons of the man to that of the children of the covenant? Does not the jealousy even of the "just" teach us to feel that the sin of exclusion and selfishness clings to the regenerate ? And may we not anticipate a renewal of the jealousy, exhibited by the Jew, when the grace of God was freely offered to the Gentile, as likely to be repeated by the Gentile Church, on the future restoration of repentant Israel ? The just son was angry, and would not go in, when his erring brother was received home with joy. The son of Abi^aham was angry and

would not go in, when he heard that the partition-wall between (lis;

March S^-Jufy 4] FAMILY READINGS. [October 20

himself and the Gentile was broken down^ and that the love of a forgiving Father was extended to his despised brother^ so long dead in trespasses and sins. Will not the same exclusive-ness be manifested—^yea, is it not even now traceable—^in the Gentile Charch» when the song of hopeful joy is raised to welcome to the homestead of Christ our long-erring brother of the family of Abraham ?

%MA^I^^»A^M«MMMMMMM»W«MAM«W«M#WW«M««^«^I
^^IM

March 6 — July 4— October 30.

ST. LUKE, Chap. 16.

The lesson intended to be conveyed by this chapter seems capable of being summed up in the single word. Stewardship.

The opening portion sets forth the parable of the unjust steward, whose worldly wisdom was commended as beins: an example to those who, with higher objects in view, yet took not equal pains to obtain the ends they professed to desire. It was not intended to commend injustice; but to exhibit the greater prudence, forethought, and caution of the children of thia world in worldly relations, than of the sons of God and heirs of immortality in their eternal relations.

The middle part ^ of the chapter rebukes the Pharisees, who were hypocritical stewards: who professed' externally to serve Almighty God, but in their hearts were devoted to Mammon.

The concluding part sets forth the instance of Dives, as of one who denied the fact of stewardship altogether^who lavished on personal and present indulgences those gifts of GrOD, which had been committed to him for-the nobler pur-(119)

March 5—Jiikf 4] FAMILY READINGS. [October 20

pose of devoting them to his Maker's glory^ and promoting the advantage of his fellow-men.

Thus, then, one and the same lesson is taught us in three different ways. We are stewards for God. It is laid down as one of the axioms of the self-denying Gospel of Christ, that whatever we possess is not our own, but held in trust for God. The Eternal Father, as Creator, is also imiversal proprietor of the world and all that it contains: the Bedeeming Son, as Saviour, is Lord of the dead and the living, and has a right over the souls and bodies of men, as having redeemed them (bought them back from Satan) by His precious blood: the Sanctifying Spirit, as Lord and giver of life, has a right to the life that He has given, the souls He has regenerated.

Our stewardship then affects ourselves and our possessions. Are we unjust in its exercise ? Let us take a warning from the unjust steward, lest the "houses" we seek for ourselves prove without foundations, and not the " building of God, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." If we are not faithfril in the unrighteous mammon of this world, GoD will never commit to our trust the true riches of His eternal kingdom.

Are we hypocritical in its exercise? Let us take warning from the covetous Pharisees, who, though highly esteemed among men, were abomination in the sight of God.

Do we deny the fact of its existence ? Do we live as though we were our own and not bought with a price ? Let us take warning from the godless Dives, whose luxuries on earth were fearftilly paralleled by the sufferings of hell, and whose torment was aggravated by the awfril apprehension that they whom he loved, but whom he had failed to influence for good, might be made partakers of those dreadful

agonies under which he was writhing, (lao)

March 6^ -Jufy 5] FAMILY READINGS. [October 3\

A wholesome warning may also be deduced from the last two verses of the chapter, containing the condemned suflFerer's final appeal and Abraham's final reply. The law came by Moses, and Dives was condemned for not receiving it: the Prophets sang of a salvation not yet revealed, and Dives was condemned for not giving heed to that whereof they spake. But grace and truth have come by Jesus Christ: the knowledge of salvation has been freely offered to all men (and to us among them) in His Gospel: and how much sorer punishment; shall not we deserve, if we turn a deaf ear, and obey not the teaching of Him, who has done for us .that for which Dives pleaded in vain on behalf of his brethren,—who has risen from the dead to call us to repentance ?

March 6— July 6 — October 31.

ST. LUKE, Chap. 17.

The commencement of this chapter seems to refer to the instruction contained in the last. The responsibility laid upon us, is not merely to be recognized for our own sake. That which we do has an effect upon others, as well as an influence on our own moral being. Selfishness, against which we are so often warned, is a rock of offence and a stone of stumbling, which we place in the way of others. Wherever this is indulged, it causes offence to come, and brings down a woe upon us, through whom the offence cometh.

The observations made by our Lord, in reply to the

Apostle's petition for an increase of faith, teach us the close and intimate connexion that exists between faith and duty.

The greater our faith is, the more clearly shall we perceive (121)

JforA 6—Jii^ 5] FAMILY READINGS. [Oefofref 31

our constant deficiencies. The duty that we owe to our Creator^ Redeemer^ and Sanctifier^ ought to lead us to perfect obedience; and the conviction that each must have on severe self-scrutiny^ that his obedience is not perfect, should keep him humble in the midst of his exalted privileges. If he that hctd done all that was commanded him^ was bound still to acknowledge himself an unprofitable servant^ where is any ground for boasting to be found amongst us, who have not done all that has been commanded us ?

The history of the cleansing the ten lepers is recorded only by, St. Luke. The law of leprosy is laid down in full in the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of Leviticus, whence it appears, that all who were afflicted with that loathsome disease were separated from their brethren, obliged to dwell alone, and without the camp, and in a dress which betokened their humiliation, to pronounce themselves unclean. Of the ten cleansed by our Lord in the chapter before us, only one, and he an sHen, returned after his cleansing to give glory to God. This would seem to teach us, that a mere partial or imperfect faith is insufficient to enable man to receive the fuU revelation of God. He must have a full, reasonable, and holy faith, if he would walk by it, and not by sight. The nine would seem to have had faith enough to be cleansed, but only the one to have had gratitude enough to walk by faith.

The distinction thus drawn, and apparently intended by our Saviour's teaching should lead us to examine into the quality and amoimt of that faith we possess; and to scrutinize whether it be the dead faith, that produces only a form of obedience, or that living principle which, beyond obedience, exhibits a grateful alBfection to the person of Christ. Assuredly the record should teach us to echo the Apostles' petition

to our Saviour, " Lord, increase our faith." The latter half of (122)

JlforA 7—Jui⁶] FAMILY READINGS. [November 2

the chapter is fraught with warnings and encouragements to watchfulness. The floods the destruction of the cities of the plain[^] the judgment on the half-saved wife of Lot, are all pointed out, as lessons to the disciple of Christ, to hold himself in constant preparation for the final advent of the Son of Man. Type and anti-type were probably mingled together, in the prophetic teaching of our Lord. The destruction of the Jewish City, and the abolition of their National polity in that generation, seem used as representations of the more aw[^] consummation, when the earth, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up, and all that remains of mortality be consumed; when the heavens shrivel together as a parched scroll. But as surely as the Roman eagles gathered together, to prey upon the spoil of the Jewish Nation, so surely will the more awful ministers of GoD's justice, His angelic hosts, execute His sentence of condemnation upon a sin-deified world, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven, with His mighty Angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those that know not God, and obey not the Gospel of our-Lord Jesus Christ.

March 7— July 6— November 2.

ST. LTJKE, Chap. 18.

The argument by which our blessed Lord encourages to earnest and continued prayer[^] may perhaps be misapprehended by the cursory reader of Scripture. Even an un/iist judge, saith he, listens to the importunate supplications of one that will not be denied. Much more shall the righteous

Judge of all the earth hear and answer the prayers of His (128) . >

Jlfarcft 7—Jv⁶] FAMILY READINGS. [NoveMber 2

saints[^] even though for the purpose of fulfilling designs beyond their comprehension, that answer be for a time delayed.

In the instructive parable of the Pharisee and Publican we are commonly ready enough to condemn the arrogance of the one, and to acknowledge the true humiliation of the other; but we do not commonly perceive how generally the same fault is committed now which was censured by our Lord. Such a one as the Pharisee is described, would not only gain his own respect but the respect of all the world in the present day. His fasting would be coupled with self-denial, his tithe-offerings with liberality, his justice and morality with benevolence and religion. And yet, such a one, claiming and receiving all this public respect, would be in a worse condition before God than an acknowledged sinner, to whom the grace of penitence had been vouchsafed. Surely this is calculated to bring an awakening thought to every breast. '* The Publican went down to his house justified rather than the Pharisee." Let us then ask of ourselves, what is the ground of our justification? Are we still resting our hopes upon an external obedience, or have we been made partakers of that repentance, which causes joy in the presence of the angels of God? Are we building a vain expectation upon the sandy foundation of our own works, or are we in holy faith built into Christ as the Lord our righteousness ?

It was against this idea of earning life by meritorious service, that our Lord protested in his conversation with the wealthy ruler. He convicted him by his discourse of want of faith in God; and that want poisoned the root of all the actions he deemed so meritorious.

Yet, though no man could work out his own salvation,

or claim by right the inheritance of eternal life, there is in (124)

March 5—JvfyT] FAMILY READINGS. [November 5

our Lord's reply to Peter a blessed assurance of reward to faithful and loving obedience. All who follow Christ, forsaking all for His sake, may look for this reward; not indeed as achieved by themselves, but as pledges to them of free grace by Almighty God for His dear Son's sake, whose they are and whom they serve.

In this, as in the preceding chapter, our Lord foretold His coming death. Their want of apprehension of the truth of what He revealed, seems to have arisen from their inability to reconcile what He said with their views of that temporal, kingdom, which they supposed Him about to establish. Much as they had seen and heard, they were still in a state of darkness as to the spiritual character of the kingdom of Christ: and possibly, it was with a view of teaching them their own blindness, and the necessity of His power to remove it, that He wrought that miracle of restoration of sight to the blind, whereby he, who had hitherto walked in blindness, was blest with the light of this world, as well as enabled in heart to recognise the glories of the Sun of Righteousness.

March 8— ^July 7— November 3.

ST. LUKE, Chap. 19.

We are taught by our Lord in this chapter to lose no opportunity of doing good. His general object of preaching the Gospel to the poor was not lost sight of, while He found means by the way to preach it to one who was rich. Poor, however, in one sense, the wealthy Publican was, for he was among those lost sheep of the house of Israel, whom the Son of Man came to seek and to save. The expression used (125)

Afarca S-Jii^ 7J FAMILY RBADINOS. [November S

to explain Zaccheus' curiosity is somewhat peculiar: '^he sought to see Jesus^ who he was." It was evident from this that he was not thoroughly prepared to recognize in Him the Anointed of God, at the same time that he was prepared to regard Him with a certain amount of reverence and respect. This seems to indicate a frame of mind very common amongst ourselves. We hear of the wondrous history, the miraculous power, and the infinite love of Jesus, and we are ready to

yield Him the respect due to an extraordinary and marvellous being, at the same time that we have not yet realised to our minds " who He is," nor acknowledged Him as the Son of God, as our Redeemer from sin, as our Guide to glory, yea^ as Him in whom our everlasting life is hid.

Let not the history of Zaccheus be lost upon us: let us, like him, go out of our way to find a place where we may more fully acquaint ourselves who this Jesus is, and we, too, may be blessed with the gracious knowledge, that salvation is come to our house, for so much as we also are children of the covenant.

In the parable of the ten pieces of money, which

is given more frdly than the similar one recorded by St.

Matthew, and which seems to have reference to the manner

in which Herod, Archelaus, and other princes went to Rome,

to receive their title from Caesar, we are taught beyond the

lessons of watchfrdness and diligence, that of a patient labour

for God's glory. It is observable in this, bs in other ca^es,

that Christ does not shun to declare the right He possesses

over our labour, as well as over our property. Whatever

we possess, whether of wealth or ability, we are taught to

recognise as of God's free gift and bounty: and hence, even

in the case of an austere master, it would be the duty of the

servant to use whatever he possessed for his master's benefit. (126)

But if this be, as it is, undeniable, how much is the argument strengthened, when the Master whom we serve is shown to be one

full of grace and love. The stimulant of gratitude is thrown into the scale to add weight to that of duty; and if we fail of exercising our gifts to our Master's glory, we shall be doubly worthy of the condemnation that befel the undutiful subject of the austere lord.

The historical part of this chapter has been noticed in reading St. Matthew's Gospel, but the tears of our Lord shed over impenitent Jerusalem are herein revealed to us for the first time. The sorrowful language that accompanied those tears announce to us the solemn truth, that there is a point to which the mercy of an all-merciful God cannot reach, and that man, devoted to self, and wilfully neglecting and resisting God's sanctifying grace, places himself in a position beyond the sphere that is actuated by the Spirit of the Most High.

Let then the lesson gathered from the sorrows of our Lord over impenitent Jerusalem, be applied to our own souls. May not this be our day, and we as yet know it not? May not Christ be mourning over some of us, because we will not come unto Him that we may have life? May there not be amongst ourselves some who have never yet known the things that belong unto their peace, the rich promises of glory held out to them in the Gospel, and who are even now in danger lest those things be hidden for ever from their eyes?

How consoling is the reflection, when such suggestions as these arise in the mind, that God 'desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live.'

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(127)

Afarca 9—«/«£y 8] FAMILY READINGS. [November i

March 9— July 8— Noyembbr 4.

ST. LUKE, Chap. 20.

It would seem to teach us that the aid of human wisdom was not to be rejected even in divine things, when we find our Lord

condescending to use it in order to repel the attacks of the chief priests and elders. The dilemma by which Christ silenced His opponents was not indeed an answer to their question, but it taught them that fair dealing between man and man which requires men to give when they expect to receive. When these had been silenced and repulsed, our Lord proceeded to exercise that authority He avouched, by giving fresh instruction in the parable of the vineyard, which has been already noticed in the parallel chapter of St. Mark's Gospel.

The design of His enemies against the life of Jesus is clearly stated in the twentieth verse of this chapter, where we learn that they laid wait to take hold of His words, that so they might deliver Him to the power and authority of the governor, that is, of the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, in whom alone the judicial power of life and death was vested. Had their conspiracy extended to anything short of life, they might have effected their design by their own power; for we find in the case of Saul, a short time subsequently, that the High Priest had authority to issue letters adjudging bonds and imprisonment to those who offended against the Sanhedrim.

The succession of attacks made upon our Lord as recorded in this chapter, by the chief priests, the scribes, the elders, and the Sadducees, shows us with what bitterness the

spirit of man wages incessant warfare against the spirit of (128)

3farca 9—Ju/y 8] FAMILY READINGS. [Xovmber4

Christ. Finding that the attempt to bring Him under the authority of the Sanhedrim had failed, they then sought to bring Him into collision with the civil power, and ensnare Him into a declaration of rebellion against the state. When this attempt was silenced, a new endeavour was raised, on pretended religious grounds, to bring Him into a contradiction of the truth; and the Sadducees, confident in their ignorance, thought to expose Him before the multitude by a vain argument, which they imagined sufficiently powerful to overthrow the doctrine of the resurrection.

These varied contests teach us to look back in sorrowful humiliation on the painful life our Lord endured for us: a life so painful, that even the fearful passage of an agonizing death must have been a relief, and the moral agony of which must have been a continued crucifixion to His suffering spirit. Did we but more realise to ourselves the protracted miseries of His earthly state, the perpetual crosses of His enduring martyrdom, and remember always that it was "for us He suffered, leaving us an example that we should follow His steps," we should be more ready to bear in cheerful submission our lighter trials, and more earnest in showing forth to the world around the power of His spirit within us!

And that the reality of the Christian life may be more impressed upon us, let us reflect wholesomely on the severe condemnation against the hypocrisy of the scribes, uttered by our Lord in the closing verses of this chapter—"They who for a show make long prayers," while their hearts are not right with God, "receive a greater damnation." Let it then be our part, according to the solemn language of the Liturgy, "to show forth God's praise not only with our lips but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to His service, and by walking before Him in holiness and righteousness all our days."

(129)

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March 10th 9] 7AMILT READINGS. lNovmh€r5

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March 10— July 9— November 5.

ST. LUKE, Chap. 21.

That an offering made to God is not valued according to its worldly amount, but rather according to the intention of the giver, is taught in a simple and affecting manner by our Lord's commendation of the poor widow, of which we have read in the commencement of this chapter. The offering of abundance from the stores of wealth may

gain the approbation of man: the offering of self-denial and of faith, be it from rich or poor, is sure to meet with the praise of God.

In reflecting on our Lord's announcement of coming events, we may perhaps understand them better if we observe that His prophecy was uttered in reply to a definite question of His disciples. They had pointed out to Him the beauty and durability of the Temple which Herod had rebuilt, and He had shown them that its apparent strength was no safeguard against impending destruction. Then it was that they asked Him when shall these things be, and what sign there should be when these things should come to pass. Hence we are instructed that the events foretold in the verses following, apply not to the final advent, but to the coming of Christ in the destruction of Jerusalem.

The instruction of the fourteenth and fifteenth verses, though probably intended as a direct guidance to the disciples of that age, contains a useful direction for us all in times of opposition, persecution, or difficulty. It cultivates that dependent spirit of the heart, without which man is disposed to rest solely on mental power, and fails to recognize a spiritual communion with the Holy Ghost, the Comforter. The rejection of this divine light, the (180)

denial of every aid but that which is visible or external, the resting solely upon outward forms and ceremonial observances, has been one of the most frequent signs of infidelity in all ages^ and under all dispensations. The true disciple of Christ should bear in mind, that the law of obedience is intended not to supplant but to develop the law of spiritual guidance and internal holiness. If this were recognised, the formalist and the fanatic would alike stand rebuked; for form is dead, if there be not spirit to animate it; and spirit is vague and erratic, if there be no form to exhibit its proportions.

Whether the concluding part of this chapter was intended to enforce the duty of preparation on the Jews, previous to the destruction of their church and polity; or whether it is written more particularly for our lesirning upon whom the ends of the world are come; we cannot fail to deduce from it the necessity both of watchfulness and prayer. Watchfulness—our external duty as soldiers of the cross, who have to fight a good fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil, that are constantly seeking to ensnare us in their toils. Prayer—our internal duty as members of Christ's body, whereby perpetual communication is kept up between ourselves and our invisible Head. " Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.*'

March 11— July 10— November 6.

ST. LUKE, Chap. 22.

Interesting as is the accoimt of the Passover, instituted under Moses, it fails in interest to the christian world before that which the Lord Jesus Christ "desired with great desire" (131) K 2 to commemorate with His disciples before He suffered. In the first case^ the Lamb of God was indeed typified, and preservation by the hand of God assured to the faithful and obedient child of the covenant: but all this was through the medium of a *' servant," while, in the instance before us, the commemoration, retrospective as regarded the delivery of Egypt, was prospective of that greater delivery which the true Lamb, therein typified,— "the Son" of God, — was just about to complete in His own person for themselves, and for all those who should thereafter "believe in His name!"

Do we ask what was it that implanted this '^great desire" in the affectionate heart of the Saviour? Surely no answer so satisfactory can be found as that which tells us that it was because He was founding therein the lasting ordinance of that sacrament, which was to bring refreshment and blessing to the faithful in all subsequent

ages: the sacrament of "The Lord's Supper," of which St. Paul tells us, that they who "eat that bread and drink that cup do show the Lord's death till He come."

The mode in which the fall of Judas is revealed to us through St. Luke, seems to illustrate that great problem which all find it so difficult to solve, that the determination of events is certain in God's counsel, while freedom of will is reserved to the agents who work them out. A single instance is not indeed enough to prove any general fact, nor would the twenty-second verse of the chapter before us prove the doctrine here assumed; but they who receive, and they who reject it, must alike be content to wait for a higher state of existence, before the mode in which this problem is solved is made clear to the intellect. If difference of opinion exists (as there has existed in all ages of the church) as to the facts

of the case, much greater must be the difference as to the (132)

mode in which those facts which are apparently incongruous are developed. Let then patience and faith characterise the believer; and whether he doubts or believes the freedom of his own and others* will, let him at least believe that the justice and the love of God will be vindicated to the uttermost in the great hereafter.

The kingdom appointed to the Apostles seems at least as much involved in mystery as the doctrine of free-will. That it influences the House of Israel is clear from the express words of our Lord: in what way the judgment they are to exercise will be exhibited, remains to be seen. But assuredly, the fact of such mysteries existing ought to have an influence upon every member of the body of Christ. It should make us feel that we are denizens of eternity, and not to be absorbed by the fleeting interests of our shadowy life on earth. The relationships of earth, as far as regards our external life, are temporary and uncertain: those of our hidden and internal life, that affect our union with God in Christ by His Spirit, and with the nearest and dearest of those with whom we are bound up by ties which the world knows not of (or cares not for, beyond their answering its own conventional purposes,)—these are formed for

eternal purposes, and should be regarded by us as the truest and most real associations of our existence.

The appeal to the sword in the cause of religion is alluded to with an apparent vagueness in the chapter before us. Is it not intimated hereby that the influence of the sword is not wanted, and must not be used, to propagate the faith of Christ; but that it may be admissible, under extreme necessity, to defend it? Peter was not rebuked for his use of it, though endurance was enjoined upon him to correct his (133) reliance on the arm of flesh, and the wound that he inflicted was in mercy healed.

With the conclusion of the chapter we are familiar through the earlier Gospels. May we have grace to profit by the lesson of bitter suffering our Redeemer has bequeathed to us!

March 12— July 11— November 7.

ST. LUKE, Chap. 23.

There can scarcely be found in the world's history a more emphatic illustration of the truth, subsequently revealed through St. Paul, that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God," than that recorded in the restored amity of Pilate and Herod (Antipas), who were "made friends together"* by their union in persecuting the Lord Jesus! This circumstance is mentioned only by St. Luke, who is also the only Evangelist who records the double testimony of Jew and Heathen to the innocence of Him, whom Heathen and Jew imited to condemn. The prevailing power of the popular shout in procuring the death of Jesus, seems to refrite also another favourite idea, that the voice of the people is as the voice of God : an elevation of self—here wofidly exhibited— was in this, as in all other instances since the fall, directly

opposed to divine justice; and proved the sin, as well as the essential arrogance, of self-will apart from the guidance of the Holy Ghost.

And some such idea seems to have been passing in the mind of the Holy Saviour Himself, when we find Him exhorting the sympathizing matrons of the ruthless city to lay aside the mere human emotions that led them to feel a sorrow

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Afarca 12—Jif/y 11] FAMILY READINGS. [NovimberJ

whose root was selfish, though amiably exhibited, and fix their sorrows upon the true ground that should excite them—to weep for that Sin which was ruining themselves and their children, and bringing a woe upon future generations on earth, as well as planting a harvest of condemnation for miserable souls throughout eternity.

In the chapter before us, we have that beautiful account of Christ's love for the penitente sinner at the eleventh hour, on which it has been well remarked, ^'that one such revelation has been made that no one may despair,—but only one, lest any one should presume.'* Herein is taught us that consoling doctrine of the rest that remaineth for the people of God in paradise; which leads us to look forward with hopeful joy to the period of our own release, that we, with that forgiven one, may enter at once into the joys of that hallowed state where Christ reigns in bliss, until the awful day when He shall claim the kingdom for His own and the final judgment shall be consummated.

After the holy piety of Joseph of Arimathea had laid the body of the crucified Lord in an unpolluted sepulchre, we find that the faithful watchers "rested the sabbath-day, according to the commandment." Was this the only rest of that wondrous day? Was there not then the true analogy of the first great sabbath realised? The work of redemption being complete, did not the Son "rest from His work," even as the Father had done from His? Yea, was there not then, in the solemn quiet of that awful day, the true law of the sabbath fulfilled, which during so many centuries had been typified? and

having been fulfilled by Him whom it behoved to fulfil all righteousness, so that not one jot or tittle remained incomplete, was it not thus that the new law of the Lord's Day came into operation with the rising dawn, when with (135)

the morning light the resurrection of Jesus formed the theme of angelic song ?

May the thought be hallowed to us! May we more and more seek to glorify Christ in each coming week; and seek in humble piety and holy faith the Lord's presence^ in the Lord's house, on each succeeding Lord's Day!

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V*^o^^^

March 13— ^Jult 12— November 8.

ST. LUKE, Chap. 24.

The interesting record of the journey to Emmaus, though alluded to by St. Mark, is only revealed in its fulness through St. Luke. It is very instructive to reflect that had our Lord at once revealed Himself to Cleopas and his fellow-disciple, the wonder and love that would have been excited in their bosoms would effectually have prevented the free exercise of their reason. The Lord, however, who desires a "reasonable service," chose to convince their minds before He excited their adoring affection: an example that was followed by those to whom it was entrusted to propagate His Gospel, when they ^^ reasoned out of the Scriptures, opening and alledffinff that Christ must needs (according to prophecy) wUced .nd risen .gd. fr<« fle dai." Ll j I are taught by this the true method of confirming our own faith, and confounding the assertions of gainsayers. The written word supplies us with an exhaustless armoury, against which the weapons of Satan are powerless to prevail. Prophecy is thus shown to us to be but history foreshadowed; history, but prophecy fulfilled; for ^' known unto God are all His works from the beginning," and nothing, save the Spirit of God, could reveal before their completion the events that

were thereafter to come to pass, (156)

The succession of evidences of the resurrection is so rapid in this chapter, that we feel encompassed with a great cloud of witnesses, all testifying to the same wondrous truth. But even this respect for the law of evidence, in the mind of Him who was instituting a faith that was to irradiate the the whole world, seems to have been insufficient to answer the great purpose which He had in view. Christ not only poured testimony upon testimony to the then present fact of His resurrection, but He appointed witnesses who should testify to the same truth after His ascension, and transmit that truth in the power of the promised Spirit through all successive ages. As the Father left not Himself without witness to the heathen world, in that He did good and gave them rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, even while He winked at the times of their ignorance; so when the time of knowledge came, the Son left not Himself without more definite witness, that the name of Jesus and the doctrine of the resurrection might be heralded throughout all the world. To us, the descendants of the Gentile family, so long dead in trespasses and sins, and alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that was in them, the blessed tidings of redemption from sin, justification by faith, and salvation by grace "have been freely and fully revealed. Let us not read in vain the sacred record, which contains these hallowed doctrines; but, as we believe the only begotten Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens, so let us seek in the power of the Holy Spirit in heart and mind thither to ascend, and with Him continually to dwell. Whom truly to know is life eternal!

END OF THE COMMENTARY

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GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. LUKE. (137)

COMMENTARY

ON TBI

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT JOHN.

March 14— July 13— November 9.

ST. JOHN, Chap. 1.

So marked is the difference between the style of the Gospel according to St. John and that of the other Evangelists, that the title of "The Spiritual," in contradistinction from the three that were "Bodily," was applied to it in ancient times. And this difference is as marked in the first chapter as in all other portions of the book. While the other Evangelists commence their writings with the human genealogy or earthly relationships of Jesus of Nazareth, the beloved disciple leads us at once to contemplate the mystery of His eternal being, in language that strikingly reminds us of the first words of inspiration, and bids us look upon the Word employed in the exercise of creative and vivifying power!

So rapt in the contemplation of the glory of the Word

does the Evangelist seem, that he finds it difficult to restrain

the expression of his admiring love, and lower his tone to the (188)

March \4~^uly IS] FAMILT READINGS. [November 9

language even of inspired history. His soul's communion was with his spiritual Head; and he loves to speak of the hidden things and interior relationships of Christ and His members^ rather than waste his power of revelation upon that which was merely visible and external.

Thus^ amid the few words that he bestows upon the external testimony of his namesake^ the Baptist^ he lays down authoritatively the great doctrine of the pre-existence and eternity of the Word; of His being the sole source of light and life to man; of faith in^ and a true reception of Him being by the will of God the instrument of man's adoption and sonship; of the temporary character of the legal dispensation^ and its inferiority to the grace and truth of Jesus Christ; and of that often-forgotten truth) that there is and has been no revelation, no knowledge of the power, the

attributes, and the will of God, apart from that declaration of Him which we have received from the only begotten Son.

The historical portion of St. John's narrative commences, like that of St. Mark, with our Lord's baptism and subsequent entry upon the office of a public teacher. It is probable that he himself was the companion of Andrew, the first called disciple, and thus had an earlier introduction to Jesus than the scarcely less favoured Peter. Among the several Apostles whose call is related in the chapter before us, the one whose conversation with our Lord seems fraught with most interest is Nathanael, generally supposed to be the same with Bartholomew. The guilelessness and simplicity of this holy man point him out to us as highly deserving of respect; while the language used by our Lord, in reference to his being seen under the fig-tree, leads us to imagine that he was one of those whose piety led him to pray for the restoration of Israel in the coming of the Messias, and that it was the direct

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answer to such a prayer that at once confirmed his faith in Jesus as the Son of God.

Our Lord's remark to him moreover in the closing verse of the chapter^ brings with it much matter for reflection. In encouraging a newly-awakened faith. He sought to confirm it by fixing its apprehensions upon things past and upon things yet to come. He pointed back to the vision of Jacob's ladder, the base of which was set up on the earth while its top reached to heaven: He pointed forward to the coming interpretation of that vision, when, at the Ascension of Jesus, angelic witnesses should testify to the disciples that the true communication was established between earth and heaven: He fixed the love of the faithful Israelite upon Himself, the true union of the shadow and the substance of that mysterious vision: He established his belief by reference to the past: He kindled his love by the facts of the present; and He encouraged his hope by revelation of the future.

And thus does this great Being—the Son of God—deal also with us, who, like Nathanael, are called to be His disciples. Past, present, and future unite to fix upon Christ our adoring love. His sympathy with us is established in the fact of His humanity, the base of that mysterious ladder which is set up on the earth. His power to save us is revealed in His divinity, the top of it which reacheth unto heaven. His will to save us is made known in the voice of the Lord God heard from above it, inviting the sinners of the ransomed universe in tones of love, 'Look unto me, and be ye saved all the ends of the earth!'

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March 15— July 14— November 10.

ST. JOHN, Chap. 2.

One of the most essential distinctions between the previous systems of teaching and that adopted by Christ; is to be found in the fact of our Lord mingling freely amid the social life of those He came to teach. Moses as a lawgiver, and the founders of various sects of human philosophy, had taught above or apart from the people they were to leaven with their doctrine. But the Son of God, when He took upon Himself the form of a servant, moved in the midst of the people He came to regenerate as one of themselves, recognised their social relationships, and, for the most part, submitted to their conventional laws.

Thus it was that we find Him introduced to us by St. John as a guest at the social festivities of Cana. There would seem to be no doubt but that the mother of Jesus knew beforehand that He was about to manifest His glory on this occasion. This is sufficiently indicated by the natural anxiety she displays in the remark first addressed to Himself, and the injunction subsequently given by her to the servants. But though His mother was acquainted with His intention, there seems no reason to suppose that He was invited to the marriage festival as a teacher, but simply as a guest.

The great lesson to be learned from the miracle of turning water into wine, by subsequent generations, would seem to be of a different character from that it was calculated to teach to those in whose presence it was wrought. "Wonder at the power exhibited, would doubtless be their prevailing feeling at such a beginning of miracles, and belief in His divine mission would be kindled in some and confirmed in

others. But to us, being only one of many equal instances of (141)

Jf«rdll5-^a^ 14] FAMILT READINGS. iNovemberlO

power, it teaches a lesson of love rather than of faith; it leads us to recognise the hallowing influence of Christ's presence in the midst of our social and domestic happiness, and to feel that that festive board alone is truly blessed where His presence is sought, welcomed, and recognised.

The first purging of the Temple by our Lord of those who came to that sacred place for profane purposes, is interesting for many reasons. First, in the expression, *^ My Father's house,** we are taught to recognise Christ's distinct assertion of His own Sonship. Next, it serves as a testimony to the holiness of the law, as well as exhibits the reverence He thought necessary to be paid to the house dedicated to His Father's honour. Next, it guided his disciples' minds to the testimony of prophecy, and taught them to trace in His actions the fulfilment of the ancient scriptures. And lastly, it brought out, in reply to the complaining Jews, that prophecy of the resurrection which, though obscure at the time, was made clear to His disciples in its result. They understood not then that He spake of the temple of His body; but the experience of increased revelation taught them subsequently that great truth, that in Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

At the end of the chapter, we find even at this early period of His ministry, that *' many believed in His name, when they saw the miracles which He did." Should we not reflect how such, with but an imperfect knowledge of His person and revelation, will rise in judgment against professing christians of later ages, who, with Christ

fully revealed in His Holy Gospel, fail to pay the honour and reverence due unto His name, or to obey the plain injunction, that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven

and things in earth, and things under the earth." (142)

to our Father in Heaven, Amen

March 15th \5] FAMILY READINGS. [November 11th

March 16th— July 15th— November 11th.

ST. JOHN, Chap. 3.

The chapter we have just read seems to develop what St. Paul subsequently termed the doctrine of baptisms. The covenant of circumcision, the baptism unto repentance of John, (which St. Chrysostom speaks of as the bridge connecting the initiatory sacraments of the Mosaic and Christian schemes,) and the baptism of water and the spirit under Christ's law, are all here treated of.

The inquiring and subsequently faithful Nicodemus came in the privacy of the night to seek information from the Lord Jesus Christ. With how solemn feelings should we approach the contemplation of the instruction he received! First, our Lord lays down the necessity of institution into the kingdom of God, which He came to establish: institution by an act requiring God's grace and man's apprehension to make it effectual. Man requires to be born from above, ere he can see the kingdom of God. The illumination of the Spirit is needed to awaken him. How or why the operation of water should be needed to develop the Spirit's grace it would be scarcely wise for man to inquire. Let it suffice that such is the seal which Christ's word hath enjoined, to render visible that which otherwise would remain an unseen mystery. Faith and obedience are the best instruments by which we can receive and apply the words, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." In the words which follow this solemn announcement, we are taught to recognise the Grace exhibited in a religious life, as the work of God,

just as much as we recognise the growth of the body to be the effect of the physical law which (143)

God has stamped upon His creation. The influence of grace is, moreover, represented to us under the analogy of the most subtle element; so that we are taught by every breath of heaven the unseen, mysterious, and powerful agency of the Spirit of God.

And in our Lord's assertion of the spiritual character of the birth of water and of the Spirit, we should not fail to mark how the doctrine is corroborated by reference to the spiritual character of the inferior ordinance of circumcision. We can scarcely wonder at our Lord's rebuke of Nicodemus contained in the tenth verse, when we remember that the law of Moses had more than once spoken of a circumcision of the heart, that the Psalms had taught the doctrine of the renewal of a right spirit, and that the Prophets had taught the Jews to look to the Lord to have His law put in their inward parts and written in their hearts.

Nor were the types of the law left unnoticed in this remarkable conversation. The spiritual character, if one may so speak, the sacramental power, of the brazen serpent looked upon in faith is set forth, while it is shown that the mystery of the crucifixion was therein represented. In the sixteenth and seventeenth verses, the great object of Christ's coming, and the power of the cross as bearing the atonement of the world's sin is laid down, while, in the four following verses, the blessing upon faith is revealed, and the necessity of good works, if we would avoid condemnation, enjoined.

In regarding the arrangement of this chapter, it would seem as though it were specially to confirm the doctrine of baptisms, that it is here related that Jesus and His disciples tarried in Judea and there baptized.

But the doctrine of baptisms was not yet completely

elucidated. It remained to show the imperfection and com-(144)

Hfmrck 17—A/^ 16] family readings. [AbMnier 12

parative feebleness of the baptism of John, for to this there seems no doubt but that the question of purifying alludes. In the words of the Baptist, a difference between the office and power of himself as a herald, and Christ as the person heralded, is distinctly laid down This humble and holy man, in language sublimely beautiful, bears testimony to the dignity, exaltation, and truth of the Eternal Bridegroom, who alone speaketh the word of God, and hath the Spirit without measure. He shows how the Son's power is derived through the Father's love, and how the union of believers with Him, through the instrumentality of Faith, ensures to them a common life with the ever-living Jesus. And, alas for the unbelieving, he announces also in the language of inspiration that sorrowful truth, that "he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

March 17— July 16— November 12.

ST. JOHN, Chap. 4.

The actual personal life of our great Example is by none of the Evangelists so brought out to view, as it is by St. John; and perhaps no more powerful exhibition is given of it, even in his writings, than in this chapter. It was at an early period of his ministry, probably soon after the first passover that He attended and at which He taught as the Messiah, that on his return from Judea into Galilee through Samaria, He met with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. Here we find Him teaching us to break through the usual forms of society, when a worthy purpose is to be gained by it: though the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, yet He, a Jew, held communication with her, a Samaritan, for the

purpose of leading her^ and those whom she would interest and influence, to the knowledge of the Truth!

It is observable also, in this most interesting conversation, that though the Lord began by exciting the sympathies of the woman by seeking her aid to relieve His own physical wants, yet that He immediately gives the conversation a spiritual turn, and leads her to feel the luxury it would be to know that all her wants would be at

once supplied for ever! As in the case of all sinners, the spiritual language used by the Lord is interpreted in a low and carnal sense by the Samaritan; but allowances are made for even this, by the compassionate Saviour; and she is led on from one point to another, till, after revealing His knowledge of her own life to herself. He proceeds to open up to her, in definite and most clear language, the wondrous truth of Himself being that Messiah, to Whose coming the true-minded of the Samaritans as well as of the Jews looked forward.

And even in the midst of these high subjects, it may be useful to pause for an instant, to observe the perfect sympathy of the mind of Christ with that of His most zealous servants of all ages, when the pressure of spiritual contemplation overcomes the natural desire of offered temporal refreshment. When He said to His attentive and affectionate followers, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of," He clearly did not mean to assert an inherent power of miraculous sustenance; His object rather was to lead them to apprehend that mental and heartfelt interest in the well-being of others, which superseded the desire of animal support. The mind triumphed over the body in Him, when "doing the will of Him that sent Him," just as it does in His disciples of all time* Let us seek in faithful prayer '* the mind of Christ," and we too shall find ourselves similarly sustained I

(14C)

Neither should we fail to observe in the record of the Samaritan woman, how the testimony of one leads many others to enquire and believe! Her natural and true impression that Jesus was the Messiah brought numbers out of the city to come to Him; and when they had come, and had heard the words of Him who spake as never man sj)ake, these too believed, not because of her saying, but because they had heard Him themselves, and knew that this was the Christ! Might not our testimony to the experienced blessings of Christ's Church, and the experienced comforts of the written Word, be productive of similar effects on those of our acquaintance who do not yet know the truth as it is in Jesus ?

The latter part of this chapter informs us more clearly than any other portion of Scripture of the cause of the fame that accompanied Jesus

into Galilee, on his removal from Judea, after the first passover. St. Luke had indeed implied it, (iv. 14.) but it is only from hence that we learn it absolutely (t>. 45): and from this, as from many other grounds, we are led to infer that one great object St. John had in view in the the composition of his Gospel, was the supply of these deficiencies which one like him could trace in the earlier Evangelists.

The first miracle of healing is recorded at the close of the chapter before us. The nobleman of Capernaum (who has been suggested, not improbably, to have been Chuza, Herod's Steward) was no less an object of care to Christ than the water-drawer of Samaria. May we learn from hence, whatever be our rank in life, to look in all our difficulties with faith to Him, who is our great Physician, and has power to heal the body as well as to save the soul I

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March 18— Jclt 17— Novb bbx 13, ST. JOHN, Chap. 5.

It waa during the feast of the Passover, the second that He had publicly attended, that our Lord performed the miracle of healing at the pool of Bethesda. That this work of mercy, being perfonned on the Sabbath, should have excited the anger of the formal Israelite causes no surprise: but their objection was of peculiar value in this instance, as it brought out &om our Lord a declaration of His own unity with the Father. And not only this; but the assertion of that identity is followed up in the sacred record with the proof that it was taken in that sense by the Jews themselves: thus neutralizing the afterthought of later days, that the Jews sought the condemnation of Jesus for rebellion, but not for blasphemy. Had they not understood Him to assert His sonship and one-ness with The Father, whereon the Doctrines of the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Eternal Mediation, and even of the Trinity rest; they would not have accused Him, as they did, of making Himself equal with God.

But while this awfiil fact, that the Son should be honoured even as the Father, was to the Jews a stumbling-block, how gratefully should

we receive it, accompanied as it is by a knowledge of His quickening power, and the assurance that they that hear His word, and believe on Him that sent Him, shall never come into condemnation! The comforting verse containing this assurance is selected by our National Church as the Gospel for the Communion 5ick, Holy and blessed words are they, uttered Physician of souls, and applied by His Church to >rt and renewal of her sick members

The Revelation of the twenty-seventh verse, that the sympathy of the Man Christ Jesus is the ground of His being appointed the Judge of the whole human race, sets strikingly before us the condescension and compassion of our Heavenly Father. We shall be judged by a standard which we can all, at least in the abstract, recognize; the standard of perfect humanity. In living as our Example, Christ has most eminently qualified Himself for becoming our Judge: and while He has acquired by His Incarnation an experimental knowledge of the passions, the tendencies, and the temptations of humanity. He has shewn by His undeviating holiness the lofty moral standard to which the human nature may attain. By his Passion, He has taught us what we ought to do and to sufier for each other. By His Atoning Death, and the offering of His own perfect Sacrifice, He has paid the penalty of the wages of sin, and blotted out the hand-writing of ordinances against us. By his Resurrection, He has proved that mortality is swallowed up of life, and that the grave has no lasting power over the sons of God. By His Ascension, He has proved that the glorified bodies of the holy ones of God shall not return to corruption (which might otherwise have been asserted.) By His bestowal of the Holy Ghost, according to His promise. He has shewn the illuminating and quickening power whereby he governs in the Church everlastingly.

And by what evidence do we believe these great truths? If His own unsupported testimony, as He asserts, would have been insufiicient, what shall we say when we find it corroborated, first by His herald, John the Baptist; secondly, by the Father Himself; thirdly, by the works that He did; fourthly, by the scriptures that He inspired! If the writings of Moses and the other ancient scriptural authors who wrote of Christ yet to come, were sufficient to condemn (149)

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the Jews who received Him not when He came, what excuse shall be found for the unbeliever of modern times, who has the testimony of the New Testament superadded to the prophecies of the Old ?

ST. JOHN, Chap. 6.

The subjects of the earlier portion of this chapter have been brought under notice in the perusal of the Gospel according to St. Matthew: the remainder is peculiar to St. John.

The hope of seeing another miracle, or the still lower desire of being filled with the unwonted supply of food, led many of the Jews who had witnessed the wondrous multiplication of the loaves and fishes to follow Jesus on His return across the lake. This caused our Lord to administer a deserved rebuke in the synagogue at Capernaum, and to instruct His hearers on the value of the meat which endureth to everlasting life. In the disputation that followed, Jesus revealed Himself as the Bread of Life, sent down from Heaven by the Father to be the sustenance of the world: He declared that to Him was entrusted the then mysterious power of the Resurrection, whereof all that came to Him and believed on Him should be made "■■-*"^"" "but that men here are not to trust presumptuously

in strength, but look upward for the guidance and the Father, which had been promised of old by

in they professed to revere.

it to be wondered at that the carnal heart of the

able to appreciate this spiritual teaching. Receive-

ing His words in their literal sense, they thought His sayings "hard to hear," and apprehended not the "spirit and life" they were intended to convey. Let it not be so with us, lest, at the Judgment, we be found less excusable than they! Much that was mysterious to them has been made clear to us. The Doctrine of the Resurrection, of

which at that time they could have formed but an imperfect conception, has been exemplified to us in our Risen Head! The Doctrine of His Flesh being given for the life of the world, then equally obscure, has been elucidated to us by the offering of the very Paschal Lamb! The Doctrine of eating His Flesh and drinking His Blood as a means of Communion with Himself, has been made clear by His own gracious ordinance of the Memorial Supper, when He said at its institution " Take, eat; this is my body. Drink ye all of this :• this cup is the New Testament in my blood: do this in remembrance of me; " — in which sacred ordinance, the faithful recipients are made one in Christ and Christ in them! The Doctrine of " the Son of Man ascending up where He was before," has been exhibited before angels and men in that glorious Ascension, when Christ took captivity captive, and received, on His offered Intercession, the gifts of the Holy Spirit for man, that the Lord God might dwell among them! Thus, in all these leading points of Doctrine, the duty of belief is made so much more clear to us than to them, that if they were condemned for want of Faith, what ground can remain for the faithless amongst us to hope for forgiveness ?

Let us take a lesson, in conclusion, from the earnest declaration of the zealous Peter, ^' To whom shall we go ? Thou, O Jesus, hast the words of Eternal Life." Let us only in faith cling to this confession—" We believe and

are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living (151)

JVarci 90—Ja^ 19] PAHILT READING*. [November iS

God ;" and we need not fear that He in whom we trust will allow us to make shipwreck of out salvation!

March 20— July 19— Notembkr Ifi. ST. JOHN, Chap. 7. Even the common sympathies of humanity seem to have been denied to our redeeming Lord. The comfort and blessing of fraternal affection must have been withdrawn from Jesus, when, after his kinsmen having once sought to ky hands on him as beside Himself, His brethren now taunted Him with His prudent conduct in withdrawing Himself from the fierce persecution of the people of Judea. How

much of bitter sorrow do these facts infuse into our Lord's remark; "who is my mother and my brethren!" and yet how much of joy and privilege do they reveal to us!

The divisions among the people at the feast of Tabernacles, intimate the great notoriety which our Lord had attained throughout His whole nation: but He had no sooner shewn Himself among them, than His appearance was made the subject of sneering rebuke, and a conspiracy to seize Him was immediately set on foot. His reverent obedience to His Father, His sound reasoning, and His boldness in declaring the truth, are specially evidenced in the disputation recorded about the midst of the feast.

The institution of our Lord on the eighth day of the feast seems to call for more particular notice and explanation. On that day, the most solemn of the whole, it was the custom to draw water from the Pool of Siloam, and to use it as a drink-offering to God in the Temple, with solemnity and the sound of various voices and in-

B. This was done partly in commemoration of the miraculous relief of water produced from the stony

rock by Moses, but principally to solicit the blessing of rain for the approaching seed-time. As the people therefore were performing this ceremony, Jesus, with that appropriate oratory which was so distinguished a feature in His teaching, put them in mind, that these waters were but types and signs of that Spiritual Water which had been prophesied of old by Isaiah and Joel, and which He came to give them; and alluding to the effusion of the Spirit after His death and glorification. He compared it to rivers of living water, which they who believed in Him should receive, and be enabled to dispense.

The parenthetical remark of the Evangelist (v. 39) has a very important prospective, as well as retrospective reference. While it looks back to the prophecies of the Old Testament, and especially to that striking one of David (Ps. lxxviii. 18.) where the gifts of the Spirit are promised at Messias' Intercession, it looks forward to its fulfilment as recorded in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles: and thus teaches us to connect in the work of Redemption the whole series of events in the History of Christ, shewing us how the Incarnation, Life, Teaching, Atonement, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus were but preparatory to that Eternal Mediation, which restored to the world the forfeited Spirit of God, and caused "The Lord God to dwell among men" even among *^the rebellious also;" and which, first evidenced in its fruits at the richly-blest feast of Pentecost, is even now going on at the right-hand of the Father for us!

There is a striking verification of the claims of Jesus to be received as Messias, to be found by a collation of the twenty-seventh, forty-first, forty-second, and fifty-second verses of this chapter: "When Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence He is," said the Jews ; and in saying (158)

March 2\^jMfy 2of] TAMILT RBADINo8. [November 16

that He " came out of Galilee/* they proved this very ignorance, which was declared to be one of the signs of His coming! While at the same time, their admission of the Scripture verity, that " Christ should come of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem," corroborated His claim from the other side of the question.

By many ways is Jesus of Nazareth proved to be the Anointed of God. Let us then ever look unto Him, Who is the author and finisher of our faith I

March 21— July 20— November 16.

ST. JOHN, Chap. 8.

The design of the Scribes and Pharisees in bringing before Jesus the unhappy sinner of whom we have read in the commencement of this chapter, seems to have been a very crafty one. Had He usurped the functions of a judge and condemned her to death. He would have been rendered obnoxious to the Romans; had He acquitted her, in contradiction to the Law of Moses, He would have been liable to an accusation before the Sanhedrim. While, however, our Lord's evasion of the dilemma in which they sought to place Him confounded His subtle enemies. His mode of treating the accused person strikingly places the benevolence of the Gospel above the severity of the Law. The principle of the Law, suited to the half-civilized character of an early stage of society, seems to have been to weed out sin from the nation by the removal of each proved offender; but that of the Gospel, to elevate the moral character of the people by the reformation of the sinner. A night of sternness was to yield to the genial

influence of a day-spring of love. (164)

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March 2\^Juhf^'] FAMILY READINGS. [November 16

When we read of our Lord foretelling the future lifting up" of Himself, we may well imagine the Jews to have been perplexed at the obscurity of the announcement ; and this is another of the many instances by which the superior advantages that we possess over them are manifested. But even under all this obscurity, the assertion of His unity with The Father came with such power at this time, that "many believed on Him as He spake these words." How will such rise up in judgment against us, if we fail to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father !

Much of the later portion of the chapter is essentially practical, as shewing how the works of man identify him with his true parentage. They that are of God live in honesty and holiness, and do the works, of their Father. They that are of Satan live in selfishness, craft, and

sensuality, and do the works of their father. And this rule of observation is not merely to be applied to others, but may be made useful as a test to ourselves. The natural evil of our own hearts leads us frequently into the intention, if not to the commission, of error : if the intention be checked, it is a sign of our sonship of God : if it be indulged, it is a proof that we are not free from the dominion of Satan. But what saith the Scripture ? " If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed!" Let us then seek to realize to ourselves the high privilege of "being made the children of God, by faith in Chiist Jesus;" and in the strength of Him who was revealed as I AM "before Abraham was," bearing constant and living testimony to the glory of that liberty wherewith He hath made us free!

(155)

JfarC 22—Jii^ 21] FAMILY READINGS. [I^oveotber 17

March 22— July 21— November 17.

ST. JOHN, Chap. 9.

A popular notion was prevalent among the Jews that every affliction endured by man was a special judgment upon a special sin: nor are instances wanting of professing christians adopting the same idea. Our Lord however teaches us in this chapter that God, in permitting affliction, may have other purposes than the immediate punishment of the suffering individual. Himself the Light of the world. He brought physical as well as moral and spiritual light to them that needed it; and in the portion of Scripture before us, gladdened with the blessing of sight one hitherto destitute of that great enjoyment.

The frequent repetition of miracles of healing on the sabbath-day seems to indicate the earnestness of mind with which our Lord sought to eradicate the false notions of that day in which the Jews indulged. As usual, however, it excited angry feelings on the part of the rulers, and a council of the Pharisees seems to have been called with special reference to the matter. The great pains they took to disprove the miracle had precisely the contrary effect from what was intended, and established it as an undeniable fact. Their persecuting

spirit was strikingly exhibited in the course of the examination they held, and vented itself finally in the excommunication of the unoffending person, whose faithful testimony they found it impossible to shake. Boasting themselves the disciples of Moses, and blinded by their own prejudices, they closed their hearts against the reception of any testimony in favour of Him, of Whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets did write: yea, even though the miraculous attestation to His power under their

(156)

March ^2-July 2\] FAMILY READINGS. [November}!

consideration was one of the very signs that Isaiah had predicted of the coining Messias.

But to us even these evidences, however convincing, fail in interest before that revelation which Jesus made to the once blind man of Himself. Recognizing him as a confessor in His cause. He sought out the excommunicated man, and revealed Himself personally to him, not merely as his benefactor but as his Lord! He made Himself known to him, and through him to all who read the record of the Evangelists, as the Son of God, the true object of his adoring worship ! Not only the Revealer of physical light. He made known the brightness of His Father's Glory to that sinful man, who, newly cut off by unrighteous authority from the means of grace in his own Church, must have so much the more strongly felt the need of a Saviour! Thus does a kind Providence ever help most, when man's need is greatest: and, like him, has many a faithful christian been led in times of the deepest depression and seeming desertion to behold the Glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus!

The closing verses of this chapter are of deep importance. Here we find the solemn fact stated, that the doctrine of Christ is intended to make a great separation among men. They whose blindness proceeds from mere ignorance are invited to a knowledge of the truth : but they who see only through the organs of pride and prejudice are left to grope in the blindness of an unconverted heart!

Let us examine ourselves: and ask in a spirit of humility more conscientious than that which the Pharisees professed—Are we blind also ?

(157J)

March 23— July 22— November 18.

ST. JOHN, Chap. 10.

The touching and affectionate character of our Saviour's teaching is strikingly set forward in this chapter, wherein He likens Himself in His care of His own, to the good Shepherd that giveth his life for his sheep.

But after contrasting His own watchfulness and fidelity with the negligence and indifference of the hireling. He passes on by a natural transition to foretel the coming fact that He was to lay down His life for the sheep.

The idea of atonement seems here distinctly implied: but an atonement differing in character from that with which the Jews were familiar; inasmuch as this was free and voluntary, while they were accustomed to see the sacrificial blood of an unwilling victim flow.

Mysterious as this announcement of His intended sacrifice must have been, there were some points in which it would be clearer to the Jews than it can be to us, though we have that full knowledge of the subsequent circumstances which, in the nature of things, was denied to them.

The principal of these points was their familiarity with the idea of sacrificial atonement: they were habituated to the notion of offering life to secure life: so that when our Lord spoke of giving His own life for His sheep that they might have life more abundantly. He was speaking of that which, however strange to us, was to them a matter of daily experience.

But inasmuch as their very familiarity with the doctrine of Atonement had led many of them away from its reference to life

eternal,, our Lord seems specially desirous to prevent any error on this head, and to shew that His

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Jifarca 23—JVfy 22] FAMILY READINGS. [November IS

foretold sacrifice was to have a larger meaning than any mere legal atonement. This seems implied by the unwonted exercise of power He was about to display in taking up again that life which He would lay down. Their Prophets had taught them that the Messiah should make His soul an offering for sin, and yet notwithstanding He should prolong His days: moreover that His flesh should rest in hope, because the Father would not leave His soul in hell, nor suffer Him who was His Holy One to see corruption. And with this teaching of the Prophets the words of Christ in the chapter before us exactly coincided, when He said, "I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again," and "this commandment have I received of My Father."

We cannot then wonder that there was a division among the Jews because of these sayings: for they who were His own and knew His voice, would recognize therein a harmonious consistency with the words of the Prophets, which were read in their ears every sabbath-day; while they, on the other hand, who were of the world and knew Him not, would naturally reject the testimony of God against themselves.

In the latter part of the chapter, is a renewed assertion of the oneness of Jesus with the Father; and an appeal to the testimony that His works exhibited of His divine commission and power. Thus are we taught that profession and practice should ever go hand in hand; and that Man has a right to expect consistency not only in His teachers, but in all who make a profession of serving God. If the life belie the lips, and the conduct and profession be at variance. He must expect the former testimony to be regarded as the most powerful of the two. And just as Jesus might reasonably have been considered an imposter if He had not (150)

done the works of His Father, so must the nominal servant of Jesus be considered as a living lie, when he says Lord, Lord, but does not the things which He commands I

March 24— July 23— November 19.

ST. JOHN, Chap. 11.

The loving disposition of our divine Lord is beautifully exhibited in the account of the raising of Lazarus. The tears of His holy sympathy have cheered many mourners in subsequent ages, and His felt presence by, the bed of death brightened, many hopes, yea assurances, of a blessed resurrection.! His revelation of Himself as the Resurrection and the Life was not intended for Martha's alone, but a ransomed world to be gladdened by the good tidings: and the prophecy of Caiaphas that he should die for that nation was enlarged in the inspired evangelist, that all the children of God, in their dispersion might know that it is by the death and passion of Jesus that they are made heirs, of eternal life;

There is an important lesson to be learned from the connexion of the fourth and fortieth verses, which might escape the cursory reader (though none of us ought to be cursory readers of the Book of God,) if it were not distinctly pointed out. This lesson is, that inattention to the promises of Christ draws down His rebuke even upon those that love Him. The answer returned by the Lord to the message of the sisters, led them to look forward to God being glorified in their brother's recovery. In the sorrow consequent upon his actual death, this seems to have been entirely overlooked by Martha, and when our Lord ordered

(160)

the stone to be removed from the mouth of the sepulchre, she expostulated against the impropriety of such an order: then it was, that in a tone of sternness, unwonted in Him who was embodied Love, He recalled to her memory the blessed assurance He had sent in reply to her first message. O that we were not like her, forgetful of

Christ's cheering offers, yea, promises of salvation to us! How much of faithless despondency would be removed, were but His words of love imprinted on our hearts and minds!

The language of Thomas Didymus, recorded in the sixteenth verse, has been variously interpreted. It would seem to be the expression of a warm, but not believing attachment to the person of Jesus. Our Lord was at this period living in comparative privacy beyond Jordan, on account of the persecution He had experienced at the hands of the Jews: He seemed therefore, to the yet carnal apprehension of Thomas, to thrust Himself into certain but needless danger, by trusting His person again among them; and though his faith in Jesus as the Messiah was not yet confirmed, his affectionate fondness for his Master urged him to share His dangers and to encourage others to do the like. Something similar to this is the conduct of the unconverted follower of Christ in the present day. He is ready to dare and endure much in defence of the principles he professes ; but he has not yet learned to regard them as the realities of his existence-^his power of resurrection and his life !

One more lesson, and an important one, is to be learned from the conclusion of the chapter. The wilful unbeliever has his heart still more hardened by witnessing renewed instances of God's power. Some even of those who witnessed the raising of Lazarus, in defiance of what must have been their own convictions, carried tidings of the event to the Lord's enemies. .How painful a picture does this give us

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ST. JOHX, Chjlp. 1;.*.

\s •.**'- ii»*.;rv ot Lazzir.:^ is recordeil qbIt bv St- John, so al'.'> :..*:
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 souls to Christ; and the pop'liar trlun.ph accorded to the L(xd> on.
 His entry into JeriLsalfjin; are all mentioned as results of that
 crowning miracle which re-anixad.ted a four-days buried corpse.

In this chapter i» to be found one of those indicatioDS which are scattered throughout the early part of the New Testament, of the partition-wall between Jew and Gentile being about to be broken down. Andrew and Philip were anticipating the mission of the great Apostle of the Gentiles^ when they brought to Jesus the Greeks who desired to see Uim; and it would seem to hare been in special reference to His manifestation to these Gentiles that our Lord uttered the words, '^ The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified."

In the verses following these words we find more than one allusion to Christ's coming death, and to His power of resurrection: and words that would otherwise have been obscure—the reference to the '^ lifting-up " of Christ as of

(102)

March 25—July 2i] FAHILT READINGS. [November 2lo

the serpent in the wilderness—are explained by the Jews themselves, who evidently accepted them as alluding to His death when they urged in objection the doctrine of the Prophets, who said that Christ was to be a priest for ever, and that of His kingdom there should be no end!

How. wonderfully were these seeming contradictions united and verified in Him! Of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah, and of the family of David according to the flesh, and made in all things like imto His brethren. He suflfered the common lot of humanity in becoming obedient unto death: but, being at the same time a Priest

for ever after the order of Melchisedec, He prolonged His days; and though He made His grave with the wicked, and was with the rich in His death, yet His soul was not left in the grave, neither was Death potent enough to inflict corruption upon His flesh!

Very important warning is held out to us in the conduct of those Pharisees, who dared not profess Christ on account of the fear of men ! * And ready as we all are in the abstract to condemn their pusillanimity, how many of us in fact are actuated by the very same feeling ! A false sense of shame, a dread of ridicule, a fear of being thought righteous overmuch, keep many back from a bold confession of Christ. Surely such might wholesomely reflect on the awful words He once uttered—Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven: but whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven !

Again in the conclusion of this chapter, the beloved disciple brings forth that truth that was made by revelation so prominent to Himself — the oneness of Christ with the Father. So close is this mysterious union, that he that believeth on Jesus believeth on the Father, without whom (163) m2

H^ ii^d haii no exisence; and tber tint m:w Him saw the Firh*r. Wi» trr^ . •- *he pn?i*eiit dar, walkine bjr fiidi, though n^r br -iiyn*, Bi'i>t iiT h«:M upon tK» pte ci o QS tratlL. Apart fr-.tn C!iri*t J*='^5i'», we have ao knowiedcv of the Fadier: the Old T-*^Mn**:it is a ?4?al*?<l book to as, Ibr dwr who read it with-.t :Iie Xew, Live :o this day the Yafl of Moses upon th^ir hearts: and no other hook in mtX war reseda Him. Bit if we receive *b.^ reveUtioii of this chapter, that Chriat i5 cr,r/.e a l:::Lt ii:^«> the world, that whoaoeTer beliereth <m Him «h«>u!d not abide in darknesa, then nay we, like the Apo-'tl'^ of oM, wiik in the Ksrht, and, in all the joy and peace of b^lievrn:?, beL'^ld the elorr of GoD in the Smx of Christ Jesu? !

MAmcH 26—JcLT 25— ^Notsmbba 21.

ST. JOHN, Chaf. 13-

Hb who was about to shed His blood for the world's redemption, symbolized its cleansing efficacy to His disciples by the act of washing their feet preparatory to the institution of the Last Supper. Shall we not all hence learn to wash our hands in innocency and so to approach His altar ?

The beautiful picture drawn by the Evangelist is full of interest. The lesson of humility; the symbolic purification; the assurance that he that is already washed needs not a regeneration, but only a renovation (for this appears to be the meaning of v. 10;) the duty of the servant to imitate the example of his Master; all should be impressed on our hearts, when we read this chapter. Moreover, we seem to be instructed by the omissions of the beloved disciple, as well as by his direct teaching. The absence of any record of the institution of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper silently (164)

March ^6-^uly 25\ I'AMILT READINGS. [November 21

assures us how perfectly satisfied He was with the previous records of the earlier Evangelists: on that head notiiing more remained to be said; and therefore he was silent: but with reference to the conduct of our Lord to the traitor on that occa:^on> the supply of some farther facts was needed; and therefore he recorded them.

None of the Evangelists was so competent to explain this sad portion of the history of the traitor as St. John. He, favoured with the nearest seat to our Lord, reclining on the same couch, aad leaning on His breast, received from the earnest Peter the signal of inquiry, and sought from the Jiord the knowledge of the betrayer. The reply would seem to have been given privately to John himself— perhaps to be intimated to Peter and to James, the two other most favoured of the twelve — and this would account in a natural manner for the general ignorance that prevailed concerning the Lord's meaning, when He said farther, addressing the traitor, but publicly " That thou doesf, do quicHy."

When we read our Lord's exposition of triumph on the departure of Judas, it would seem to impress the mind with the idea that the glory of God consists in the expulsion of evil. The holy and affectionate tone immediately resumed by Christ, when He was left alone with His faithful ones, implies a relief experienced by Himself at the absence of that only follower whose disposition was essentially evil, and whose downward tendencies were marked. This gentle and beautiful tone marks the whole of the discourses of Christ that are recorded from hence up to the eighteenth chapter. The glory of God and the love of Christ had free course among His loving disciples; but the presence of Judas seems to have been a bar to its utterance, and the stream did not flow freely until the impediment was removed. Alas! for

those who are "hinderers of the word!" How many pure (165)

of the family KINGS. [AbvcmW22

and lovely thoughts are checked, how much utterance of what is true and holy prevented, by the presence of one ungodly person! The joy of a family may be destroyed, or the peace of a society broken, by one unhallowed member! May we have grace to seek the sanctifying Spirit of Christ to keep us all pure in His service, and to enable us to glorify the Father in following His example.

The conclusion of the chapter records a warning against indiscreet zeal. Thus amid disciples of the present age, active profession and personal courage would often usurp the place of passive endurance and meek and prayerful faith. For those especially who are thus led astray, was the narrative of Peter's fall written.

March 27— July 26— November 22.

ST. JOHN, Chap. 14,

The blessed assurance of our Redeemer's love, and His promise to prepare a place in the eternal mansions for them that love him, is fraught with as much comfort to us as to

those to whom it was personally addressed. Our troubled hearts, in the midst of the strifes and vexations of the world, may here find rest and peace. Christ in very deed hēLS gone to prepare a place for us. His perfect atonement for sin has restored to our race the Father's forfeited love; His glorious revelation has ensured to us the fulfilment of the Father's promises; His personal mediation has procured the grace of the eternal and sanctifying Comforter; His living power has called and incorporated us into Himself: so that walking, speaking, and living in Him, who is our way, and truth, and life, we have by Him, in the unity of the Spirit, free access to Him whom we may now address as Our Father which is in heaven! (166)

3ftfr^c 27..-Jif/y 26] FAMILY RSADiyGS. [November[^]

In reflecting on this most comforting portion of Holy Writ, we can well imagine one whose heart has not yet been quickened by the enlivening Spirit of GoDj, looMng upon the words of Christ as an incomprehensible mystery: and many indeed, who have only received a dawning illumination from the day-spring from on high, and are not yet sufficiently experienced in the Word to ga^e undazzled on the Sun of Righteousness, may find therein things hard to be understood. But let not such be discouraged. Like Thomas, they may be in doubt; like Philip, in a paxtial unbelief; but let them only, like those disciples, come to Christ for a solution of their difficulties, and they too shall receive the promise; yea, and the gift of that ^^ other Comforter," whose special office it is to teach all things to the

believing suppliant, and to bring to remembrance the blessed words which Christ hath spoken.

Nor need such experience any hindrance from the revelation—seemingly contradictory—that the Father is greater than He to whom they are exhorted to come for aid. This is in fact one of our greatest comforts. Had Christ only been revealed to us in the omnipotence of His divinity, we should have shrunk in fear from the revelation, even like the Jews around Sinai: but our encouragement is, that we may come ^ to him as an elder brother. Born, living, and dying—acting, suffering, reasoning, and feeling like ourselves, we can come to him in the perfect confidence that He will be touched with our infirmities, and will sympathize with all our yearning desires for more perfect communion with divinity. Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, He alone is competent to mediate on the side of Deity; inferior to the Father as touching His Manhood, He can with equal fitness mediate on the side of humanity : and thus we derive comfort, hope, and assurance in coming to Him for aid, who said with equal truth, (167)

" I and my Father ai-e One/"^ even while He admitted " my Father is greater than I."

Let the repetition of the words, " let not your heart be troubled," bring peace and assurance to every believing heart. Away from Christ, we may and must have tribulation—for the world is full of it, and the servants of the prince of the world have nothing in Christ—but in Him we may have peace from the war which we are now waging with the world, the flesh, and the devil, even the peace of Gop which passeth all understanding!

March 28— July 27— Novembbr 23.

ST. JOHN, Chap. 15.

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OuE blessed Lord's byBtem <xf illustrative teaching seems again exhibited to us in this chapter; The conclusion of the last had led us

to believe th[^] domestic instruction closed: and it was probably while 'paeeing through' the vineyards on His way to the mount of Olives MMi His fdUowers, that he took occasion to impress upon them, from the sensible objects around, the true nature of the relationship that existed between Himself and Hi-s disciples.

The illustration used by our Lord was not unfamiliar. David, Isaiah, and Jeremiah had all spoken of the Jewish Church under the figure of a vine: but Jesus here reveals Himself as the true vino, and His Father as the husbandman. The law had indeed had a shadow of good things to come; but the body was of Christ. The vine of the Israelitish communion was but the shadow cast before of the more comprehensive Christian commonwealth; the communion of saints who were to be gathered together in one in Christ Jesus !

And how true and living an union that was which was to
subsist between Christ and His members, is shewn alike by (168)

March QS[^]July 27] FAMILY HEADINGS. [November 2S

its inseparable closeness as by its consequent fruitfulness.

Love was the cement that was to bind them in one : loving
benefits conferred by the Master; loving service rendered by
the disciple. The power of fruitfulness was bestowed by

Christ; the exhibition of that power was to be shewn

by those who desired to abide in Him. And encouragement

to increased love on the part of the disciple, is held out by

the assurance of friendship to the obedient on the part of the

divine Lord! Christ has made known His will to us as to

them, and we therefore like them are elevated into the rank

of friends of Christ! They who wilfully remain in ignorance of His will, by slighting His word—these are but servants still. "The servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth;" but to those among us who both know His will and do what He commandeth, the gracious words may again be repeated: henceforth I call you not servants; I have called you friends! And this dignity should be so much the more appreciated by those on whom it is bestowed, because it has been not of their own procuring, but derived from Christ's special grace: we have not chosen Him but He has chosen us, that we should bring forth fruit and that our fruit should remain!

But this choosing on the part of Christ must, let it never be forgotten, must place us in a peculiar position with regard to many. In choosing us into Himself, He has chosen us out of the world: and therefore it must expect that the world will hate and persecute us when we faithfully cleave to Him whom the prince of this world most hateth. The antagonism that exists between Messiah and Satan will be shewn forth till the end of time in the followers of each: and we who are, we humbly trust, on the Lord's side, are encouraged to fight the good fight of faith, in the assured promise of the witness of

the Spirit of Truth to our souls, corroborated by the external testimony of those who were with Christ on earth from the beginning of his holy career. (169)

March 09^July OS] FAMILY READINGS. INovember 24

Ma ROB 29— July 28— Novembkr 24.

ST. JOHN, Chap. 16.

If the Apostles were still actuated by carnal feelings and hopes of the earthly kingdom which they supposed Christ was to establish, they must have experienced severe disappointment when persecution, excommunication, and death" were announced as the consequence of their fidelity to Him!

At the first, these announcement? had not been made. Our Lord had rivetted the attachment of His followers before He made known to them the severity of the lot they were to endure for His sake. And so it is commonly now. Our love is confirmed before our faith is severely tried: else how could we endure the bitterness with which the cup of life is sometimes filled ? But love is the stay on which faith is to rest, and even our sorrows at the occasional withdrawal of Christ's presence become turned into joy by the renewed manifestations of the gifts of the Comforter, whom He sends because He has departed for a season from us !

But the passages in this chapter allude to a single and definite withdrawal of Christ from the Apostles—to that "little while " when He was to enter the regions of the grave, and* take captivity captive before ascending to tJie Father. And here He distinctly reveals the fact, that without this departure—without His death—the gift of the Holy Ghost could not have been procured for man ; " if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you."

Moreover some of the oflBces of the Holy Ghost axe here also revealed. It is by Him that the world is convinced of the sin of

unbelief: it is by Him that the doctrine of justification by the death of Christ is made known to man:

(170)

-MarcA 29—Ju/y 28] FAMILY readings. [November 2[^]

it is by Him that an assurance of future judgment and final triumph over the dominion of sin is conveyed to the soul. He too it is Who gives guidance to the faithful; Who, together with the Father and the Son, exercises divine governance over Christ's followers; and Who gives to them that wisdom and prudence whereby they are able to penetrate even into the mysteries of futurity.

In the sorrow of the prospect of Christ's withdrawal, we can all sympathize; whether we look upon Him as a dear friend and guide, or as a covenanted Lord and Head to the disciples: but we ought still more to sympathize with the delight that must have been experienced by them, when they had the promise of Him that could not lie, that He would see them again, and fill them with everlasting peace and joy !

And here we are called on to notice the alteration now first made in the doctrine of prayer. When our Lord, at an early period of His ministry, had taught His disciples how to pray, He had revealed the fact of God's paternity, but had not revealed how that paternity was secured to them. Here He bids them pray to the Father through Himself, and promises to reveal more fully the paternal and filial relationship that existed between them. That promise was continuously fulfilled throughout the remaining revelations of the New Testament: and now both Jew and Gentile may know that it is alone through Him that they both have access by one Spirit to the Father !

The clearer revelation of Christ brought forth not merely

the Apostles' gratitude, but an axdent declaration of their faith.

Alas, for the weakness of man I this very profession was but

a prelude to desertion, read by the unerring knowledge of their Lord as immediately to occur. But what comfort do we derive from the closing remarks of our Lord ! In Him, peace is to be found. The world that strove so bitterly with Him (171)

JlforCA dO—Jti/y 29] FAMILY READINGS. [yot^mber^

was foiled in the contest and overcome. We, then, who have but a minor contest to endure with the same enemy, may now wrestle confidently in the strength of our Master, knowing that He that is for us is mightier than he that is against us; and that where the Son of God has triumphed, the army of the saints may march onward secure of victory I

March 30— July 29— November 25.

ST. JOHN, Chap. 17.

We shall have read the Holy Gospels to little profit if we have not learned ere this to feel that truth, which in the chapter before us is specially revealed, that this is life eternal, to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. Our life is hid with Christ in God; and in the Son we have, and can have, no perfect knowledge of the Father.

The beautiful prayer which composes this chapter concentrates as it were into one focus the loving unselfishness of the Saviour's character. It is a kind of spiritual summary of His life on earth, shewing how His entire career was one of undeviating endeavour to glorify the Father in bringing man to salvation. Having loved His own, He loved them unto the end, and offers especial supplication that, in the midst of the world's tribulations they should be preserved from the snares of the wicked one*

And in this holy prayer, there is one peculiar passage that we should be cold and heartless* indeed, if we did not read with comfort and with thanksgiving. Christ prayed not for Apostles and Evangelists

alone; not for those only who had followed Him with self-denying fidelity in His painful course on earth; but "for those also who should believe in Him through the word I" So that we who now read in faith the holy record, and believe and are sure that

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Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, experience the blessed sensation that we too have an interest in the Redeemer's prayer! O that this thought were deeply and abidingly impressed upon our souls! Then should we indeed feel His words to be spirit and life to us, assuring us that He who had begun a good work in us would perform it until the day of His second coming !

And surely nothing less than this; nothing short of an undeviating reliance on God's promises and God's unfailing love, revealed to us by His Spirit for His dear Son's sake, will be sufficient to maintain our fidelity unshaken through the many storms and buffets of this weary world. It is oftentimes its very weariness that drives the bewildered soul to the shelter of that only haven where peace is to be found, the knowledge of the love of Christ. Tossed to and fro amid the storms of life, men learn to *^ pray unto the Lord, and so are at the haven where they would be." But whether we are first led to Christ by the winning encouragement of His endearing sympathy, or driven to seek His all-powerful aid by the extremity of our need, a full and unwavering reliance on His power and Will to save us, is that which alone can bring to our souls that peace of God which passeth all understanding!

Preserving then the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life, let us calmly pursue the allotted duties of our several stations, walking by faith and not by sight: and, strong in our dependence upon Him who is mighty to save, we may fearlessly and hopefully anticipate the answer to that prayer, " Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which Thou hast given me! "

Do not such blessed encouragements thrill the souls of the faithful with a longing aspiration like that of David,

*' When shall I come to appear in the presence of God !" (173)

•^^^N^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^V^^^^^^^^^^^^^^WMS^^

March Q1^July 20] FAMILT READINGS. [November ^

March 31— July 30— November 26.

ST. JOHN, CiiAP. 18.

The dignified submission of the Eedecmer to the force sent to take Him into custody, together with His affectionate care to preserve His

followers from harm, are related more fully in the chapter before us than by any of the other Evangelists. The fact also of heathen soldiers being employed to take Him is here demonstrated, for while St. Luke speaks of the captains of the temple—a title supposed to apply to the Priests who superintended the watches which were set round it—St. John alone describes the chief officer by the title of Chiliarch, which shews that he held a command in the Roman army. Thus the traitor was indebted to the Heathen for executing the plan which the Jew had contrived, and the force of Jew and Gentile were united to crush and destroy the Holy One, who came with a message of salvation both to Gentile and to Jew!

The prophecies of David were remarkably fulfilled in the betrayal and trial of Christ. He that did eat bread with Him lifted up his heel against Him: it was not an enemy that did Him this dishonour, but His own familiar friend whom He trusted: the assembly of the wicked enclosed Him: the Heathen raged: the people imagined vain things: the kings of the earth, Herod and Pontius Pilate, set themselves; and the rulers—Annas, Caiaphas, and the Chief Priests—took counsel together, against the Lord and against His anointed.

Nor were these and other prophecies of David the only ones fulfilled. The marginal reading of the twenty-second verse of this chapter is, that "one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with a rod;^^ and herein we are powerfully reminded of the mysterious announcement of Micah, "They (174)

March S\—^uly 30] FAMILY READINGS. [November^

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shall smite the Judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek. Abundant instances of Prophecy might also be adduced from Isaiah and others, shewing how these "holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," when they shewed the things to come of the rejected Messias.

Wonderfully too was the prophecy of Christ Himself now about to be fulfilled ! (St. Matthew, xx. 19.) The Roman governor would fain have washed his hands of the matter, and left the punishment of the Nazarene to His own nation and the chief priests. But it was not so ordained. The death that He was to die was the death of the cross, to which, being a Roman punishment, the Jews had no power to condemn Him: and Pilate's weakness in signing the death warrant of one whom he thrice declared innocent, became a fresh testimony to the prophetic power, as his writing the title for the cross did to the kingly office of Jesus.

And was there no testimony to His office of a Priest as well as to those of King and Prophet ? The leading characteristics of the priestly office are—Intercession, Oblation, and Atonement. The first of these was illustrated in, the words— " Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." The second, in the oblation of Himself, ' ^ into thy hands I commend my spirit." The third, ' in the pouring out of that atoning blood which was shed for the whole world's redemption, and which, applied to the sinner's heart by faith, cleanseth from all sin !

Let us not leave this chapter without a reference to that question which Pilate uttered, but without waiting for a reply. He whom Pilate condemned was The Truth that Pilate professed to seek, and if we attain to a knowledge of Him, that Truth shall make us free for time and for eternity.

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April ^ July SX] FAMILY READINGS. [November 97

April I— July 31— November 27.

ST. JOHN, Chap. 19.

The fear of Pilate must be ascribed to one of two causes: either he was afraid because, the Jews being exceedingly tenacious of their religious rites, he feared their rising in a seditious movement, if he withheld the condemnation of one accused by them of blasphemy: or

impressed by the awful dignity of our Lord, the idea that " He made Himself the Son of God " struck a sympathetic chord in His own bosom, and led Him to hesitate ere he passed sentence upon one who might, by some mysterious exercise of power, wreak a fearful vengeance upon all who would insult His Majesty.

And from the inquiries that immediately follow the record of his fear, this last would seem to have been the real reason : an idea that meets with corroboration, first, from the subsequent endeavour on the part of Pilate to release Him whom he had newly learned to fear ; and, secondly, from the title which he wrote (probably not so much from derision as from a feeling of hesitating respect), and persisted in retaining after the Jews had protested against its purport.

There is something eminently touching in the simple record of the new fact which St. John alone relates : the charge given to himself to become a son to her whom all nations were to call blessed. Does not this teach us that, even the hour of death is not so to separate us from our holy relationships commenced on earth, but that an affectionate and thoughtful care may be bestowed upon those we leave for a time behind us ? Though death severs the holy ones of God, it does not sever them for ever ; and the departing saint, who is about to enter into his rest, may plead the example of his Head for thinking with gentle and kindly

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April 1--Jvfy SI] t'AMILt RBADINGS. [November 27

solicitude on the social and temporal comforts of those from whom He departs for a season.

The fulfilment of the ancient scriptures, which is recorded in this chapter, failed to affect the mind of the generation in which they occurred : a moral phenomenon which has often been re-produced since that age, and corroborative of the scripture doctrine of the hardness of heart of the natural man, which resists the offered influences of grace and does despite unto the Holy Spirit of God !

But even amid that wicked and adulterous generation, some were found at all times bold enough to bear testimony to the Messiahship of Jesus. Simeon and Anna and the wise Gentiles in His infancy; His Apostles and the longing followers of His teaching in life; the beloved disciple, the watching Marys, and the penitent malefactor on the verge of the grave; Joseph and Nicodemus after His temporary death! In the midst of betrayal, denial, desertion, condemnation. He left not Himself entirely without witness: and these, like the little cloud, small as a man's hand, that rose out of the horizon, were, but the precursors of that great cloud of witnesses to His truth, which have since encompassed and overshadowed the whole moral world.

Let us look then reverently with the eye of faith upon Jesus entombed. As the daughter of Jairus, He is not dead but sleepeth. The body of death is paying the penalty of sin, that they who are grafted into Him who once animated it may live unto righteousness. The wages of sin are now paid. Satan's account against man is discharged. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit!

^ii^^*^*^*^*^>^S^>^^»^^*^*^*^*^*^>^W^^^f^r
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AfHl^^MffUBil] FAMILY BBADING8. [JVbwM&er 28

April 2— August 1— November 28.

ST. JOHN, Chap. 20.

There must have been deeply exciting disputations among the disciples on the morning of the first Lord's Day. John at least would seem to have been convinced of the resurrection (v. 8.); Peter was probably so: but Mary remained still doubtful, until convinced by the voice of her risen Lord: and the other disciples continued unbelieving after they had heard these testimonies, until they were corroborated by Simon Peter and the two disciples on their return from Emmaus. All moreover were affrighted and terrified, and thought they saw a

spirit when the Lord first appeared among them as they were assembled together.

How hard is man to be convinced of the truth 1 And yet the whole history of superstition would seem to demonstrate the truth of the natural rejoinder — how ready is man to believe a falsehood !

Is not this double fact a painful corroboration of the corruption of man's heart? The bias to evil is perpetually manifested, positively; the indisposition to God is as perpetually exhibited, negatively.

Even the gladness of the convinced disciples was not without an exception. One faithless one was still left among the eleven. Thomas Didymus—whether from fear, doubt, indifference, or a reckless despondency—was not with his brethren when Jesus proved His resurrection by His presence among them. The doubter requires sensible evidence; he will only walk by sight! In the case of Thomas, the sensible evidence he demanded was mercifully vouchsafed: but it was accompanied by a solemn encouragement to believers, which itself conveyed by implication a warning against the scepticism

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April 2-^August 1] fAMILT READINGS. [NBvmber^

he had manifested. His confession of faith was indeed received by his forgiving Lord, but a blessedness, by im-plication richer than his own, was pledged to those who should henceforward walk by faith rather than by sight!

There seems also a lesson to be learned from this history of Thomas, which should teach us " not to forget the assembling ourselves together, as the manner of some is." The assembled worship of the faithful was blessed by a revelation of the presence of Jesus. They had previously been taught that He would be present with those who were gathered together in His name, and now that pledge was fulfilled to them. Thomas, however, the absent one, lost this blessing; and his heart was thereby hardened in unbelief. But when on the second Lord's day, led doubtless by the renovating spirit of grace, he

was joined to the sacred assembly of the faithful, then was he too blessed together with them, and led to believe with the heart unto righteousness, and to make confession with the mouth unto salvation!

How much of blessing, then, may they lose, who wilfully neglect the sacred duty of public worship !

Solemnly and impressively does the Evangelist close this chapter. He recites with dignified simplicity the object of his work; the encouragement of faith by the influence of his testimony, and the assurance of everlasting life to them that receive it! Our reason, our interest, and our affections are thus alike enlisted on the side of duty. May we have grace to receive the call which his voice sounds in our ears; to recognize the weight of his testimony, to follow the leading of our advantage, and to respond to that affection which invites our own in return, by believing unto life eternal!

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Afnl^^AngM»t2] fiMILT READINGS. [November 29

April 3— August 2— November 29. ST. JOHN, Chap. 21.

The study of the closing chapter of the latest of the Evangelists seems to afford a fitting opportunity for collecting into one view the appearances of our Lord after His resurrection, which are recorded in the four Gospels which we have now perused. These appear to have been—^first to Mary Magdalene alone, secondly to Mary with the other women, thirdly to the two disciples going to Emmaus, fourthly to Simon Peter, fifthly to the assembled disciples without Thomas; and all these took place on the first Lord's day, or day of the resurrection: sixthly to the disciples assembled with Thomas, seventhly to Peter and the rest at the lake of Tiberias; eighthly to five hundred brethren at once, most probably at mount Tabor, also in Galilee; and ninthly at Jerusalem to the eleven, whom He led out as far as to Bethany previous to His Ascension.

The exact place of our Lord's Ascension is not a matter of revelation. Tradition points out a spot at the top of one of the hills of mount Olivet, as that whence He ascended : but there is nothing at least to forbid the pleasing idea that His Ascension took place from that spot, where, in the tenderest exercise of human sympathy and divine love. He had revealed Himself as the resurrection and the life, and given such prospective proof of His power over Death, at the grave of the buried Lazarus 1

Our Lord's triple charge to Peter, now first recorded, to exercise His own office of a spiritual shepherd, seems like a kindly rebuke of that zealous but inconsistent disciple's triple denial, coupled with a perfect forgiveness of it: but whatever may have been its full meaning, the closing charge to ^' follow Him," may be wholesomely sounded in our ears as well as in his. We are all too apt to busy ourselves in other people's

matters, rather than to fulfil our own duties: like St. Peter, (180)

April S^Augtat Q[] FAMILT READINGS. [iVbvemfter 29

■we wander from the commission bestowed on ourselves to speculate concerning the probable lot of others. Let the repeated commission of our Lord *' follow thou me/' coupled with the rebuke *'what is that to thee ?" keep us henceforward more closely to the discharge of our personal duties !

We have now arrived at the conclusion of the four Gospels. "We have perused the testimony of these holy and inspired men to the truth, the power, and the love of the anointed Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us ask of ourselves, as in His presence, what have we profited by their record ? Have we grown in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ by the perusal; or are we no more learned in the good tidings He has revealed than we were before we commenced our present course of reading ? If this be the case, we are indeed worse than heretofore: for every means of grace (and there are few if any more powerful than the written word,) slighted and unimproved, turns into an accusation stored up for that

fearful day, when we shall have to give account for all things done (and for things left undone) in the body!

Let us then conclude our reflections with a determination under grace, to receive with meekness and obey in humility the precepts of that engrafted word which is able to save our souls: striving in all zeal and love to follow the holy example of Him who died for our sins and rose again for our justification: and testifying to the world around, that we are very members incorporate into His mystical body, and that the life we now live in the flesh we live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us I

END OF THE COMMENTARY ON TBB

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. JOHN[^] (181)

COMMENTARY

ON TBI

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

April 4— August 3— November 30.

THE ACTS, Chap. 1.

As the personal history of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ draws to a conclusion, the history of "the Church which is His body[^], the fulness of Him that filleth all in all/" commences. The good tidings of the grace of God brought to man by Christ having been recorded, the Holy Spirit proceeds next in order to inspire the record of the Acts of the Apostles, which sprang necessarily out of their faith in those good tidings.

St. Luke commences this, his second, book by giving a more succinct and specific account of the Ascension than had been revealed in any of the Gospels. He informs us moreover of an important point of doctrine, when he records that, though the Holy Ghost was not yet given, it was still through that Divine Person that Jesus gave commandments to His chosen Apostles.

In the angelic announcement made by the white-robed messengers of the Lord to the watching Apostles, the great remaining truth of the Gospel was revealed. The second

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April—August] FAMILY BBADINOS. ^November 90

. coming of Christ was now no longer a speculation or a mystery. As they had seen Him go into heaven, so they now knew He would return. His own prophecy to Nathanael, that He should see heaven open, and angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man, was now fulfilled: and they who witnessed the marvellous fact were led to look forward to the fulfilment of that other prophecy of His—"That thereafter they should see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven!"

And their faith in the fulfilment of this prophecy led them immediately to set about the work which their ascended Lord had commissioned them to do. Their business was to prepare the world for the second coming to judgment of Him, whose first coming was for redemption: and accordingly, their first public act was to elect one of their number, who was qualified to act as a witness of that resurrection, which proved the redemption of man from death to have been perfected.

Their mode of action on this occasion is intensely interesting, as calculated to form a precedent in the Christian Church. Their election of the new Apostle was founded upon faith in the prophecies and promises of Holy Scripture (v, 16-22); upon prayer for direction (v. 24,6); and upon trust in God (v, 26). He upon whom the lot fell was received as duly commissioned, and enrolled accordingly among the number of the Apostles: the inward call was confirmed by the outward; and by this a separation was made between Joseph Barsabas and Matthias, such as had not existed before: the latter became a Minister and an Apostle, and the former did not: the one became one of the twelve; the other remained a private member of the Church.

And this distinction is deserving of note, because it
shews us clearly the footing upon which the Christian ministry C183)

April 5[^] Avgtui 4] FAMILY RBADINo8. [Decemher I

stands: that they who are ordained to any holy function are set apart from the laity by an act of God[^] and have a peculiar office and mission to Ailfil in the Church of God. Like the Baptist[^] they are to herald the coming of Christy and announce that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. But at the same time that this distinction is revealed, there is a special testimony recorded to the value of the character of him who was twt ** ordained to be a witness with the Apostles of Christ's resurrection," which seems meant to shew, that there was no disparagement of Joseph in the election of Matthias. The one was holy and blessed in his private, as the other in his public, duties: for, in addition to his patronymic or family name of Bar-Sabas, it is stated that he was sumamed the Just: a distinction that would neither have been accorded by the brethren nor revealed through St. Luke, unless it had been deserved.

May we not hence learn to trace with grateful hearts the providence of God in the midst of private and social, as of public and ministerial life ? It was as much the act of God that Joseph remained a private christian, as that Matthias was numbered among the Apostles. One Will made them each what they were : and so we, whatever be our respective position in the Church, may recognize divine love in calling us at all to His knowledge, and humbly confess, like the holy Paul, that it is by the grace of God we arfe what we are !

April 6— August 4— December I.

THE ACTS, Chap. 2.

The gift of the Holy Ghost was a glorious testimony
that God was reconciled to man through Jesus Christ,

When God was offended with man, He confused their one (184)

^pril d^August 4] FAMILY READINGS. [December I

language and speech so as to divide them: when He was reconciled to them through the atonement of His Son, He sanctified that previous confusion by giving His Apostles one truth to proclaim, and giving them all tongues in which to proclaim it. The former cause of division under His displeasure was made now a means of re-union under His love! It is interesting also to trace how the infant Church took early form and development on its emancipation from its Mosaic Chrysalis. The Jewish Sabbath was fulfilled, when Christ " entered into His rest and ceased from His own works as God did from His," and all belonging to Him *' rested the Sabbath-day, according to the commandment": thence sprang the Lord's Day, a phoenix from its ashes, when the resurrection brought new life to the world, and commenced a new era in its history; a day confirmed to the souls of the disciples as specially the Lord's, by the fulfilment thereon of the promised gift of the Comforter. The Jewish Priesthood was fulfilled, when Christ, the High Priest after the order of Melchisedec, entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us, and then sent forth His own messengers to teach all nations and evangelize the world. The Jewish Passover was fulfilled, when Christ our passover was sacrificed for us, and the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world left to the believing a commemoration, instead of a type, of the one oblation of His Body and Blood. The feast of Pentecost was fulfilled, when the first fruits of the Spirit were waved on high by our great High Priest, as an earnest of an abundant harvest to His glory through time and in eternity.

The first preaching of Christ to the Jewish nation by His Apostle Peter—so late a weak apostate, now, after the effusion of the Holy Ghost, a bold witness for the truth—is in the highest degree instructive as well as interesting. He

commences with an appeal to their faith in prophecy by (185)

AprilS^August 4] FAMILY READINGS. [December I

telling them that this gift was what they were bound in duty to expect^ and should receive with gratitude. He then adduces farther testimony from their ancient scriptures to prove that David had led them to expect the elevation^ not of himself, but of some descendant who was to spring from him: this prophetic testimony he applies to the crucified and risen Jesus of Nazareth, of whose miracles themselves had personal knowledge: and, finally, he calls upon the whole house of Israel, if they needed farther testimony of His Messianism, to examine himself and his fellow Apostles who were the witnesses of the Lord!

Clear, rational, and argumentative, the preaching of the Apostles, of which the first address of St. Peter is no unfit specimen, was calculated to convince the mind as well as to win the affections of Jew and Gentile alike. Even in this instance, where the preaching was meant especially for the former, the latter were not forgotten : they who " were afar off" were not unnoticed, while they that were nigh by the covenant of circumcision were personally addressed! And here we may trace another development of the Church through the Law, when the Abrahamic and Mosaic rite of circumcision, which involved a physical separation of the Jewish from the Gentile family, was to be lost in the moral rite of *^ Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins," which was to embrace within the promised influence of the Holy Ghost both these great branches of the human race.

At the close of the chapter, we have an exhibition of the beautiful harmony of true belief. Were we holy and true, like these primitive brethren, the world around would say of us as they admiringly said of them, " Behold, how these Christians love one another! "

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ApriiA—At^Mtd) V4MILY HEADINGS. IDtcember 2

April 6— Acgcst 5— December 2.

THE ACTS, Chap. 3.

Fervent devotion in holiness should mark the Christian's career. Peter and John did not slack from the privilege of daily public prayer because they were now gifted with plenary inspiration by the Holy Ghost. They seem to teach us by their actions that the more we have received from God the more we are bound to pay. The temple was the nucleus that was to expand itself, under the divine energy of Him who dwelt therein, into the Church; and so long as the Apostles remained at Jerusalem, they "continued daily with one accord in the temple" for the purposes of public prayer and instruction, though they "broke bread," or received the Eucharist "at home," (according to the marginal reading); probably in the "large upper room" of that house where the Last Supper was celebrated; where also subsequently abode the eleven; and where the miraculous effusion of the spirit had been vouchsafed to them.

The time had now arrived when the power of Christ was to be shewn forth in a new and marvellous manner, through His chosen servants. The preaching of the cross of Christ was not to be a barren course of mere instruction. The Apostles were gifted with a living power, which should manifest to the world that "the Lord was working with them, confirming the word with signs following." The previous chapter informed us, that "many wonders and signs were done by the Apostles:" the present tells us, that the specially recorded was wrought "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth."

The second sermon of St. Peter, which we have read, was calculated, like the first, to make a deep impression (187)

AprU 6 ^Augutt 5] family READIKOf. [December^

on the Jewish mind. Twice therein he applies the holy title of the Son of God to Jesus : in his former discourse he had spoken of Him as the descendant of David according to the fleshly and here he preaches Him as the Son of Him who was the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, as well as of David. He alludes moreover to a stream of prophecy (as though it must be well known to them) from the words of Moses, and from the time of Samuel through the later Prophets,

which should have led them to expect those events which had been realised in the history and person of Jesus, the true Messias.

But when the preacher had convinced them of their sin; and probably had seen from the emotions they manifested that they were convinced of it; it is very beautiful to observe how he—a man of zealous and even fiery temperament—at once adopted the holy and loving tone of his glorified Master, and even pleaded their excuse before themselves, that he might win their affections to the cause of holiness. He shewed them at the same time how deep a curse the spirit of Ignorance bears with it, inasmuch as it was thus that they had wrought out those sad events which the prescience of God had foreseen and revealed.

And we should not fail to observe that, in preaching Jesus as a Saviour who had come 'to bless them, in turning away every one of them from his iniquities,' he leads his repentant hearers to look forward with hope and joy to that second advent of Christ, which he characterizes as a time of refreshing and of the restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy Prophets, since the world began. And assuredly that advent must be so regarded by all who truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and love His appearing: but let us not forget that the same coming, which will be so joyous and glorious to the (188)

faithful sons of God by adoption, will be most fearful and terrible to those who neglect and despise it! While "the dead in Christ shall rise first" in bliss, and "they that are alive and remain shall be caught up in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall ever be with the

ixird," the same great Being shall be " revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the Gospel, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Ix>rd and from the glory of His power."

Let us ask of ourselves, among which of these classes do we expect to be enrolled ?

April 7— August 6— Decembe THE ACTS, Chap. 4.

As our Lord's promise of miraculous aid had been fulfilled, Eo were the Apostles to be convinced of His prophetic power in another direction—the arising of persecution because of the "Word. Ofiended as the Jews in general were by the doctrines of the cross, the Sadducees were especially grieved at the resurrection from the dead (which they denied) being preached through Jesus: they accordingly determined to have recourse to the strong arm of authority to restrain the spread of the obnoxious doctrine.

Notwithstanding, howerer, this first imprisonment of Peter and John which is here recorded, the numbc believers was rapidly on the increase, and the hundred twenty had already grown into a multitude of five thous a signal proof of the blessing of GoD on the commi gathered together in His Son's name, and a warning i cases not to despise the day of small things, since, ii (189)

Aprai-^Augutte] FAMILY READIKQ8. [December Z

Lord's hand, ** the little one may become a thousand, and the small one a strong nation ! "

In the address of St. Peter to the Sanhedrim, in defence of himself and his brother Apostles, we find him strengthened by the Holy Ghost to fulfil his office as a witness of the resurrection of Jesus. Again, too, we find him corroborating his statements by reference to the prophecies they acknowledged true; and declaring to the rulers who had crucified Him the solemn doctrine of salvation only by the name of Jesus Christ.

Thus in the first three instances that the inspired record gives us of Apostolic preaching, we find the broad principles of the Gospel plainly and impressively set forth; viz.—^the perpetual witness borne by the law and the prophets to the coming of the Messiah; of Jesus of Nazareth being that promised Messiah; and, consequently, the only Author of salvation to man.

And this course of teaching, though intended specially for the Jew, was equally impressive when addressed to the Gentile. The Gospel was to be ^' preached to all the world, beginning at Jerusalem," and consequently the arguments by which the preaching of it was to be enforced, would be drawn from the ancient Scriptures in which the Jews believed. But this answered a double purpose; for while it proved the case to the family of Abraham, it proved also to the Gentile family, on the testimony of that whole race who were keepers of the oracles of God, that the coming of Jesus Christ was no new design or unexpected manifestation of a divine power; but the settled and eternal purpose, and previously revealed will, of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, *Hhe Most Highest," JEHOVAH!

The consultation of the Sanhedrim, related in the chapter before us, exhibits a pitiful picture of the weakness of human strength, when arrayed against divine power. The very (190)

April S^August 1] FAMILY READINGS. [December 4

prisoners under their judgment shewed themselves their superiors. And when these were released, the source of their superiority was at once manifested in their conduct. It was because they were armed with the power of prayer!

How little is this vast engine applied to its right purpose by ourselves! How very few amongst us know the power we possess in our privilege of access by the Spirit to the Father, which, has been purchased for us by the passion of Christ! Let the answer of God to the prayer of the Apostles, in the renovation of the Holy Ghost which he vouchsafed to them, teach, us to whom to have recourse in the

time of tribulation, persecution, or infirmity; yea, and in the lesser trials of an every-day life, no less than in the severer afflictions of adversity. The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him : and whatsoever we ask of Him in Christ's name, he will give it us.

Let the picture of faith, love, and charity, which is contained in the conclusion of the chapter, raise the standard of Christian Life amongst ourselves. The son of consolation stands forth a lasting witness against those who, professing to serve Christ, live merely to themselves. Our worldly sustenance is as much the gift of God as our means of grace. Let us strive to use them alike as instruments to the glory of the Giver!

April 8— August 7— December 4.

THE ACTS, Chap. 6.

We are so familiarised with falsehood in the world, that we are apt to look upon the awful punishment of Ananias and Sapphira as something harsh and extreme. We should rather look upon it as an unmerited mercy and (191)

AprilB-^AuguMt7] FAMIIT READINGS. [December^

grace, if God keeps us in life and gives ns time and opportunity for repentance, if ever we are guilty of a lie. The Lord is a God of truth, and by Him actions are weighed. Christ revealed Himself as the way, the truth, and the life. Every thing that is false and unreal must be repugnant to the nature of God.

Moreover, we should bear in mind the circumstances of the case. There was not merely an offender to be punished but an offence to be exposed, and its repetition to be prevented. They seem to have taken a very imperfect view of the case, who write of the punishment imposed on these wretched sinners as for a particular fraud, the repetition of which would have caused inconvenience in the Church. It would seem to have been the introduction of falsehood at all into

the Christian system against which God, so to speak, protested: not against this particular form of fraud, which would have introduced worldly people into the visible communion of saints for gainful purposes. The wretched pair, who reaped the reward of their evil deeds, thought to deceive God as well as Men: and God vindicated His own omniscience by shewing to them and to the Church at large that all things were open and unconcealed with Him with whom they had to do. They had sold themselves to Satan for a portion of those goods with which God had entrusted them; and God, being not ignorant of his devices, exposed the collusion for the good of His Church, though to their discomfiture.

The rapid progress of the Gospel is again made known to us in this chapter. Multitudes of believers joined the Apostolic band, and the gifts of healing were widely diffused among the people at large. Does not this teach us not to be too exclusive in the distribution of the benefits God permits us to bestow? Though we are clearly bound to provide (192)

April 5th to August 7] FAMILY READINGS. [December 4

for our own, and to do good to them that are of the household of faith, we are still not to be unmindful of the wants of any ; and, so far as we can, we are bound to relieve all who are in need. God sends His rain upon the just and upon the unjust: He giveth the heathen fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness: He commended His love to us, in that, while we were yet sinners and enemies, Christ

died for us: and therefore, in recognition of our Father's universal love, we are bound to shew forth our adoption into His Sonship by a charity diffusive as His own.

The persecution that the Apostles suffered at the hands of the Sadducees is only what the record of their previous conduct will have prepared us to expect: and the mercy of God in miraculously delivering them from their imprisonment seems also naturally to flow from the love He bore to them as witnesses for His Son. Out of these circumstances, however, a most interesting history arose. The bold defence of Peter—in which he recalled the principles that he had laid down in his previous address to them—and the angry and murderous counsel of the Sanhedrim thereon, led to the utterance of the manly, charitable, argumentative, and pious (though not yet Christian) speech of Gamaliel, through which, under God's providence, the Apostles were released from the danger that impended over them.

Their subsequent conduct gives us a lesson of persevering boldness in the cause of truth. Publicly and privately, they continued to raise their testimony in favour of Him, who was made unto them wisdom and righteousness and sanctification

and redemption Let us take home to ourselves the lesson
thus held out for our guidance. Let us be ready and
thankful, even as they, to suffer shame for Christ's sake;
and never flinch from the honest declaration of our faith in
Jesus as the promised Messiah, our Saviour as well as the
Saviour of the world!

April 9-^August 5] FAMILY READINGS. [Decembers

April 9— August 8— December 5.

THE ACTS, Chap. 6.

As the infant church was rapidly expanding itself in form and vigour, the need of some larger machinery for its government and control became manifest. The distribution of the daily allowance to the widows and others dependent on the church; pressed heavily upon the Apostles, as well from the amount of labour it caused as from the hindrance it interposed to their preaching the Gospel. Accordingly, a new institution was introduced, grafted apparently from the Jewish on to the Christian stock. There belonged to every Synagogue three Deacons, to whom the charge and care of the poor belonged; and thus, in the earliest stage of Christianity, the order of the Diaconate was established as a part of the Christian ministry.

When, however, these had been ordained with prayer and imposition of hands from the Apostles, it would seem that they had greater gifts bestowed on them than such as would merely qualify them for overseers of the poor in their temporal concerns: for the sacred record immediately proceeds to state the rapid progress of the Word of God; and the signs and wonders wrought by the faith and power of Stephen, the most distinguished among the newly-ordained seven for the evangelical graces and precious gifts of the Spirit which he displayed.

In the persecution of this holy and devout man, which followed upon his usefulness in the service of Christ, we find a re-production not only of the spirit that dictated the crucifixion, but even of the very charges which were brought against the Lord. He had said prophetically, " If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how (194)

AprU 9—Avgu8t S] FAMILY READINGS. [December 5

much more shall they call them of His household;" and just as the accusation against Him was, that " He said He was able to destroy the Temple of God and build it in three days," so the accusation against His servant was, that he " ceased not to speak blasphemous words against the temple and the law, and to say that Jesus of Nazareth should destroy that place, and change the customs of Moses."

The spirit of persecution brooks neither explanation nor defence. The fact that Christ came " not to destroy but to fulfil the law," could have been urged by Stephen with no more success than by his Master, against the stern bigots who had resolved upon his destruction. Injustice and hate marked their proceedings; and their failure in resisting the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake, only goaded them into more fierce determination to compass his death by any means, however base.

Mournfully but not despairingly must the disciples have recalled the prophetic words of their Lord, when the persecution arose about Stephen, as they watched its course and foresaw its termination: *' I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist: and ye shall be betrayed— and some of you shall they cause to be put to death ! "

Would that, with the same calm and unwavering faith that Stephen and the early Martyrs evidenced, we could face the difficulties, trials,

and dangers with which our great enemy surrounds us! The obligation to exhibit christian principles is equally binding upon us as upon them, though mercifully we are not called in these days to resist unto blood. As, then, the records of their sufferings are written for our admonition, let us seek to apply to ourselves the lesson they were intended to convey !

April 10-'AujfUMt 9] fABIILT READINGS. [December 6

April 10— August 9— December 6.

THE ACTS, Chap. 7, v. 1-29.

When we read the defence of St. Stephen, we should bear in mind the charge which was preferred against him. This was, first, that Jesus of Nazareth should destroy the Temple; and, secondly, that he should change the rites of Moses. It would certainly seem that he designed to admit this latter charge, and not improbably the former also; for he commences his defence by a recital of the leading events of Jewish history from the time of Abraham to that of Solomon. These show that several changes had taken place in the early dealings with God's chosen people. In the first place, Abraham and his descendants had been for four hundred years the elect of God, before the rites of Moses had been delivered at all, and this shews that the laws of Moses could not have been absolutely necessary to the salvation of the people of God. In the second, Moses himself had prophesied of a future lawgiver, to whom they were to hearken; implying that the rites he delivered were not to be of eternal duration. And in the third, by quoting their many rebellions, he proves the insufficiency of the law to retain them within the line of duty ; and this of itself supplies a moral argument of its insufficiency, and indicates at least the probability that the time would come, when a better and more perfect law would be promulgated.

The first suggestion that arises out of the consideration of Stephen's address, is the testimony which this inspired man bore to the verity of the Old Testament; the expression with which he commences his defence, " the God of glory," clearly disproves the accusation of

blasphemy, as it betokens his reverential respect for their common Father. His re-

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April 10 — Avgu9t9'] FAMILY READINGS. [December 6

spectful recital of the Jews' early history, shows also his belief in those facts which were of common historical interest to the follower of Moses without Christ, and of Christ through Moses. His announcement of Abraham's faith sets forth an example of dependence on the promises of God, which could not have come from one who denied His providential government. His testimony to Moses as valorous, faithful, and just, could not have come from a detractor of that prophet. And thus to sum up all, while it seems probable that had he been permitted to complete his defence, he would have gone on to prove that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy that Temple in which they worshipped, and certainly would change the rites vrhich Moses delivered them, he completely vindicates hiinself from the first charge of those suborned against him, " that he spoke blasphemous words against Moses and against God ! "

Clear, uncompromising, and full of just reasoning, the defence we have been reading is the work of neither a sophist nor of an enthusiast. The wisdom and the spirit by which he spake, have been recorded for our instruction and offered for our acquirement. Though not called as Stephen to defend ourselves before those who thirst for our blood, we have still in the midst of an unrighteous world to bear each our several testimony to the Truth of the Old Testament and the New, of Abraham and of Moses, as well as of Christ the Son of God : much may be done by each of us in our domestic circle and private walk of life, without either hypocrisy or ostentation : may we have grace to bear it as firmly and fearlessly as the illustrious proto-martyr in the cause of the gospel!

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April 10— August 9— December 7.

THE ACTS, Chap. 7, v. 80 ad/n.

The spirit of truth is admirably contrasted with, that of bigotry in the portion of Scripture before us: the helpless defender stands in dignified simplicity before his unjust accusers, and proves the superiority of defenceless innocence over unrighteous power.

Before however entering upon the contemplation of Stephen's martyrdom, it may be proper to make a passing observation on the conclusion of his apology, for the purpose of explanation.

In recording the event of the exodus of Israel from

Egypt, and its important consequences, St. Stephen alludes to

the idolatries and misconduct of the church in the wilderness;

and then speaks of the tabernacle of witness being ^^ brought

in with Jesus** into Canaan, the land of the Gentiles. Now,

when we find a few verses later that he speaks of seeing

" Jesus standing on the right-hand of God," we might be led

to suppose that the same name signified the same person:

but this would be a great error, and would lead to great

confusion of ideas. The name Jesus, in the Greek, is the

same with that of Joshua in the Hebrew, both signifying " a

Saviour;" but the first Jesus spoken of in the scripture we

are reading, was that Jesus, or Joshua, the deliverer who

brought in the tabernacle from the wilderness into the

promised land; the second, was that Jesus, the Son of Man and the Son of God, the Saviour of St. Stephen, and our own! We cannot be surprised that, under the influence of the Satanic spirit of persecution, the Jews should have been cut to the heart at the bold and uncompromising condemnation they received from their victim; and when they heard the (198)

AprUll — August 10] FAMILY READINGS. [December 8

holy aspiration of that devout man, on his witnessing the vision revealed to his faith, they would naturally, and in perfect accordance with their previous feelings, consider him guilty of the highest act of blasphemy. No wonder, then, that they should proceed to a tumultuary condemnation of the supposed sinner; and at once drag him to the place of execution, and stone him to death.

And while we learn a solemn lesson of patient endurance from the suffering, and of holy forgiveness from the prayer of the dying Stephen, we must not omit to observe also how signally that last prayer of his seems to have been blessed. His closing petition was for his murderers, " Lord, lay not this sin to their charge! " The young man who stood by, " consenting to his death," and " kept the raiment of them that slew him," was clearly, at least in intention, one of these : and when we find that the following year this same fiery spirit was subdued beneath the hallowing influence of the

Spirit of God marvellously shed upon him, may we not alike reasonably and faithfully trace a connexion between the prayer of the saint and the conversion of the sinner; and believe that the petition of St. Stephen was the seed that sprang up and bore fruit in the faith of Saul ?

Should not such a reflection as this serve as a holy stimulant to us, to increase in intercessory prayer for our enemies, as well as for our friends and for one another ?

April 11— August 10— Decembers.

THE ACTS, Chap. 8.

That is no singular instance which we read in the chapter before us, that God allows to unrighteousness a partial success, in order to bring about more securely its (199)

April 11— August 10— Decembers. [December 6

own discomfort. When the persecutors of the christian faith had silenced one of its teachers by death, and dispersed the rest, they doubtless considered the great end of their persecution to be attained. But the tree of life was not so easily eradicated: wherever a slip of it was set, there it took root downward and bore fruit upward: and the effect of the persecution which dispersed the disciples was practically no less than an edict for the propagation of the gospel!

The success which blessed the teaching of Stephen in the first instance, and of his fellow-deacon Philip in the second, should teach us not to despise the most inferior ministrations in the church of God: but the fact of the Apostles at Jerusalem sending two of their own number to complete the good work which the latter had begun, seems to teach us also that that work was imperfect, without the

sanction and approval of those invested with the highest authority in the Church.

The lesson also to be learnt from the case of Simon is one of awful importance. From this, it would seem that a man may believe; that he may be struck with reverence and admiration at the works of God ; that he may be made a partaker of the covenant of Christ; that he may receive the teaching of an authorized ministry, yea and of Apostles themselves: and yet, notwithstanding all these things, he may be unto every good work reprobate, and have neither part nor lot with the true children of God.

This is a fearful fact to contemplate; and one that, if realized to the mind, should induce a stem self-examination in each one of us.

From the answer of St. Peter to Simon, the root of the evil under which he was labouring is laid bare to our apprehension: " Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter," said the Apostle, "for thy heart is not right in the sight

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AprilW — August 10] FAMILY READINGS. [December Q

of God : " and thus we are taught the solemn and instructive fact, that no external privilege, no visible blessing, is sufficient to ensure a lasting communion between the soul of man and its divine Author, unless a true conversion of the heart, a regeneration of the natural man, has taken place: for with the heart man must believe unto righteousness, before confession can be made with the mouth unto salvation!

But while the Christian mind contemplates with pain and

sorrow the lot of the reprobate Simon, and of those who are like him, it rests with refreshing satisfaction upon the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, and of those who, even as he did, earnestly and affectionately seek after a knowledge of the one true God. It would seem as though these two instances were placed in juxta-position in the holy scripture, to shew the value of a loving heart in the sight of God, as contrasted with the utter worthlessness of a carnal and self-conceited spirit. The mind and understanding of Simon had been enlightened, but this only increased his self-elevation, because his heart remained untouched. The mind and understanding of the Ethiopian treasurer were not yet enlightened; but because his heart was touched, he felt, as it were in the dark, after those great truths which his affections already to a large extent realized; and so God sent to his humble and sincere faith the revelation he so earnestly longed for, and made known to him, by the mouth of Philip, that holy Saviour of whom the Prophets did write, and sent him on his way rejoicing, to herald to his own country that great salvation, which God in mercy had made so precious to his own soul!

Here then we have a warning against a carnal belief
and dead faith in the one case ; an encouragement to a warm
and living faith in the other: may we have grace profitably
to learn the lessons they convey ! (201)

AprU \2^AuguMi \]] FAMILY READINGS. [December 9

April 12— August 11— December 9.

THE ACTS, Chap. 9.

The character of St. Paul before his conversion appears to have been commonly estimated by a very erroneous standard. The natural distinction between the active persecutor and the suffering saint, leads many of us to look upon the former part of his life as being just so sinful as the latter part was holy. But assuredly this is a wrong view of the case. Zeal, intended for God's service, was exhibited in the former as well as in the latter portion of his career: the real difference consisted in the one being the zeal of ignorance, the other, zeal which was according to knowledge. And this distinction teaches us a most useful practical lesson for our own guidance. When we act upon our own wisdom, and according to mere human reasoning, we are constantly liable to mistake the true relationships of life, and to fall into error; but when once the principle is established in our hearts that we do nothing except for God, and as in the sight of God, —then the spirit that dwelleth in us keepeth us from evil, and invests us with the power of divine sympathy and the wisdom of divine knowledge.

The first great change of Saul in his conversion seems to have been the destruction of self-conceit, and the establishment of humility: like the patriarch Job, he could now say, ** I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.'*

The miraculous grace that mutually informed Saul and

Ananias of their mutual relationships in the sight of God, must have confirmed the faith of both in the guidance of that holy Spirit that quickened individual members, as well as illuminated and directed the whole body of the Church of (202) April \2 — August U] FAMILY READINGS. [December 9 Christ. And it may reasonably be doubted whether a less convincing proof of His power and of His love exists in each of our own cases, than that which was manifested in the conversion of Saul. Each who examines into his own spiritual history—which is the history of his true Life — will find that he, too, like the Apostle, has been called through grace out of the darkness and ignorance natural to man, to behold the glory of God revealed in the face of Christ Jesus ! Another important lesson that we learn from the chapter before us is, the immediate effect produced on the-conduct by the conversion of the sinner. No sooner was Saul convinced of the truth of that faith which he once destroyed, than he became a bold and willing witness in its behalf. So should it be with us. If Christ be revealed to us as the Son of God, we must both confess Him with our lips and shew Him forth in our lives!

As the former part of this chapter is devoted to the history of the Apostle of the Gentiles, so is the latter to that of the Apostle of the Circumcision. The vigorous life that Christ had infused into His Church shewed itself forth in acts of mercy upon its covenanted partakers, as well as in attracting new members to partake of its power. The working of the Spirit was as effectual in bringing health to the body of Eneas, and life to the corpse of Dorcas, at the prayers of Peter, as it had been in imparting its hallowing influences to Saul beneath the hands of Ananias. In all alike, the Lord and giver of life was glorified: and when in these last days we read these records of His blessing upon the infant church, let us pray that we may be encouraged by more glorious manifestations of His presence amongst ourselves, that we may have the witness of that Spirit within us, that we are the children of God by faith which is in Christ

Jesus!

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April \3—A^r rs)

Aphil 13—AroDST 12— Dbcbmbek 10.

THE ACTS, Chap. 10.

This chapter opens to us a new volume in the history of the Christian Church. The prejudices which had hitherto obscured the perception of St. Peter were at once removed, and the veil which separated the Jew and the Gentile was rent in twain. The education and habits of this Apostle had made no preparation for such a revelation as that now vouchsafed, but inasmuch as they prevented his acceptance of the truth they rendered such a revelation necessary. All the details of the Law in which he had been educated taught him to consider his nation as a peculiar people, and to look on the Samaritans and Gentiles as unworthy to be admitted to its privileges ; and even though the compassion of His Lord had taught that the Roman centurion, when full of faith, was admissible to share His mercies, and that the Syro-Phoenician woman, who would not be refused, was allowed to eat of the children's crumbs: these special instances only

served to illustrate the condescension of Jesus, and he recognised therein no type of that overflowing love which sought the salvation of the whole world. Even the commission to preach the Gospel to all nations seems to have been absorbed in the direction to tarry at Jerusalem. And when the persecution after the death of Stephen sent the early Christians forth, they searched chiefly at least for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The eunuch of Candace was probably, from his studying Isaiah, a proselyte of the gate; and certainly St. Peter classed the world with things unclean, and was as ready to imals forbidden, as to admit Romans into the covenant ist through the sacrament of Baptism.

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April \3-^Avgiat K] FtHILT keadinos. [Dtctmbtr 10

The strength of his prejudice rendered it necesBary that his mind should he prepared for the duty for which God had designed him. He was accordingly favoured with a vision; and it is well worthy of our notice that, both in his case and in that of CorneHus, who was similarly favoured, the privilege is connected with the fact, that the man so visited was a man of prayer. As we draw nearer to God, and are more earnest to see Him and to know His will. He vouchsafes fuller revelations of Himself, and instructs us more completely in His ways.

The first great lesson then taught by this passage, is simply that which St. Peter himself declares that he perceived from it, tiz. that God is no respecter of persons. We are not to place limits to his mercy, nor to condemn others who have not had all the same privileges with us. The labourer of one hour may be equally faithful with those who have borne the labour and heat of the day, and it may he his misfortune and not his fault that he did not earlier enter the Lord's vineyard. At the same time, if God has revealed one means of salvation, one straight and narrow path, one way, saying, " no man cometh to the Father but by me," let not man imagine that, by working righteousness, he shall prove a Saviour to himself; or that he is fearing God, when he refuses to believe on Him whom He has sent.

The later portion of the chapter exhibits a noble specimen of preaching Jesus Christ and Him crucified; and, in the subsequent conduct of the Apostle, magnifies the importance of Baptism, and exposes at least one not uncommon error of later times. The ordinary method of receiving Christians into the Church was not to be omitted, even though the Spirit of God had manifested their especial call. It still the duty of these converts to fulfil all righteousness by receiving the Baptism of water at the hands of Christ (205)

appointed minister. It would seem then obvious from Scripture that they are in error who reject Baptism with water, under the idea that they are already baptized of the Spirit. In modern cases, we have no actual evidence of these that they are so baptized; whereas, in the case of the former, the extraordinary gift of tongues notified the fact to the astonished company who came with Peter. May we rather avail ourselves of the means which Christ appointed, and when we bring our children to the Baptismal Font, pray with believing hearts that they be also baptized with the Spirit.

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April 14— August 13— December 11.

THE ACTS, Chap. 11.

The government of the Church seems to have been fixed at Jerusalem for at least some period after our blessed Lord's ascension. Seven or eight years had now passed away since that glorious event, when St. Peter had to defend before the Apostles and Elders his conduct in admitting Gentiles into covenant with Christ. A simple recital of the facts of the case proved a sufficient defence. God had spoken His will too plainly for man to gainsay it. They of the circumcision at Jerusalem, as well as the Apostle of the circumcision himself, were compelled to the conclusion, that God had granted repentance unto life to the despised Gentile no less than to themselves.

But notwithstanding this clear development of the will of the Spirit of God at Cesarea and Jerusalem, they that had been scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen preached only to the Jews: the Grecians, to whom the men of Cyprus and Cyrene spoke the word of the Lord, would seem to have been Jews, or at least Jewish proselytes,

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Aprill4—Avgu8i IS] FAMILY KEADINOS. [December U

who spoke the Greek language. The same idea was in the mind of these disciples that, until he was better taught, had occupied the mind of Peter. All alike preached the gospel, "beginning at Jerusalem," viz. to the Jews only. But though the grace of God made Israel the channel that was to conduct the fulfilment of His promises to the world at large, those promises were now no longer to be limited to the favoured but rebellious family of Jacob.

The fact of the men of Cyprus and Cyrene preaching to the Hellenistic Jews in their own language, was a carrying out of the idea of the gift of tongues. It extended the knowledge of Christ, and Him crucified, through the ever-ramifying medium of language; and though the word was preached to Jews and Jewish proselytes, yet doubtless it would through them be extended to those classes of Gentiles among whom they mixed, and from whom their proselytes had been made. The privileges of citizenship which the Jews possessed at Antioch would doubtless have much facilitated the progress of Christianity in that city. It is probable that the Christians were regarded merely as a sect of the Jews, and therefore would be suffered to celebrate their worship without hindrance or molestation. The prejudices of the heathen were chiefly excited against the Christians on account of the absence among them of any symbol of Deity; but the cry of the persecuting Gentile, which afterwards became so popular, "away with the godless," would fall at first with comparatively feeble effect. upon the men of Antioch, who had been familiarized by their Jewish fellow-citizens with the fact of men professing a religion, and yet having no statue or idol to show as the object of their worship.

Here then, in this celebrated city, it was that Barnabas

and Saul wrought together the work of the gospel, when (207)

the disciples were first called Christians[^] and shewed forth the fruits of their faith in their works of charity, displayed toward their famine-stricken brethren in Judea.

May the truth and firmness of our faith be shewn forth, like theirs, in the glorious fruits of holiness, and peace, and charity!

April 15— August 14— December 12.

THE ACTS, Chap. 12.

In the opening of the commission of Salvation to mankind, we find a Herod seeking the destruction of the infant Saviour. Now that that commission was being heralded abroad, we find the most potent successor of the same family and name exercising his regal power to scourge the infant Church.

In the murder of James the great, the son of Zebedee, we read the fulfilment of one of the Lord's particular prophecies to him as an individual, who foretold that he should drink of his Master's cup. In the delivery of Peter from his expected death, we find the fulfilment of a general prophecy to the Church at large, when He said, " whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, He will give it you."

Nor should we omit to observe the providence of God in affording the opportunity of prayer to the Church, as well as His power and grace in answering it when offered. James appears to have been seized, and at once put to death; while Peter was imprisoned and reserved for future trial: and thus [^] the opportunity for the 'Sprayers without ceasing of the Church " was afforded in the one case which was not in the other.

The way in which the Christian family availed of this opportunity should teach us the Church's duty in the time of

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trial. The prayer of the afflicted is more powerful than the sword of the persecutor, and if we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, He will exalt us in due time.

In the miraculous restoration of Peter to the afflicted Church, we see a beautiful illustration of the Psalmist's words —*' Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." But not only this: we see also how powerful with God is the intercession of the Saints, even beyond the expectation of the Saints themselves. When he was restored, they could not believe the testimony which assured them that their prayers were answered! They doubted the possibility of the very fact for which they had been engaged in such a strife of prayer! Does not this teach us how faithless are the most faithful hearts amongst us ? How earnestly should we join in the prayer of the disciples, *' Lord, increase our Faith."

In the passing reference to James the Less, in r. 17, we have the earliest indication of the dignity to which this near kinsman of our Lord was elevated as President of the Apostles and Elders of the Church at Jerusalem: look we forward but to the fifteenth chapter, and we shall find him exercising that dignity by giving an authoritative sentence, after having collected the different opinions of his brethren.

At the close of the chapter we find two great lessons taught us. The first of these is the judgment of God upon impiety and arrogance, as manifested in the death of Herod Agrippa. He whose angels encamp around the dwellings of the just for their preservation, has also His ministering Spirits as a flame of fire to bring swift destruction upon the wicked. The second is, that the time of persecution is oftentimes a period of greater triumph to the Church than that of peace. And if we needed an illustration of this fact, we have only to look to this age of luxury and self-indulgence, and see how lamentably short of her high destinies the Church of our land (209) »

April Xe-^Auffutt 15] FAMILY READINGS. IDEemberl^^

fdHs, because an age of ease is a sorer temptation and snare to her than one of trial and of death. It may be that, as we have failed to fulfil our responsibilities under wealth and prosperity, God may send more searching and trying times upon us. May we be ready to meet them in His strength, should they come; and, like the holy Paul, be prepared to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.

April 16— August 15— December 13.

THE ACTS, Chap. IS.

A MARKED change occurs here in the History of the Acts of the Apostles, whereby the revelation of the Lord to Ananias (see ch. ix. v. 15) was to be fulfilled. The church appears now developed in her corporate form, and exercising, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, the powers of a Corporation in sending out Missionaries for the propa^tion of the Gospel among the Heathen. But a solemn lesson is herein read to such as woidd ascribe to the Church any power apart &om the indwelling Spirit that animates it. The Revelation is repeated ailer the Church had sent forth Barnabas and Saul, that it was "by the Holy Ghost" that they were sent forth: and hence we should bear in mind, that though the Holy Ghost may, through His Divine Power, act without the Church, yet that the Church cannot act without the Holy Ghost.

The conversion of Sergius Faulus (in commemoration of which some suppose Saul to have now changed his name to Paul) and the punishment of Elymas, are striking instances of the Grace and the Power of God : but perhaps they may serve also as an illustration of the freedom of will permitted to man, when his eyes are opened, under the revelation of (210)

Christ, to know good and evil. The Roman Governor accepted the proffered grace, and was converted: the Sgrcercr resisted and repelled it, and thus sowing to the flesh reaped corruption. May the recital of these instances teach us to avail ourselves more faithfully of the means and opportunities of grace placed within our own reach!

In the sermon of St. Paul to the Jews and Proselytes at Antiochi, he first briefly recites the history and prophecy down to the time of David, with which his auditory were acquainted; and then proceeds to apply them authoritatively to the person of Jesus as the promised Christ. He then adduces present and prophetic testimonies to the doctrine of the resurrection, and exhorts his hearers to receive, under a solemn sense of the responsibility of rejecting him, that only Saviour who had power to justify sinful man.

The effect of this sermon seems to have been very great upon all who heard it, whether Jews or Gentiles. The arguments used by the Apostle had indeed applied to the former rather than the latter; but the promise of forgiveness of sins to all that believe seems to have sunk deep into the heart of the Gentiles, who glorified the word of the Lord and received the good tidings gladly.

Jealousy between the two races seems to have been one of the main causes of the confirmed prejudice of the Jew; and thus their own evil heart of unbelief hastened the fulfilment of the prophecy recorded against them, that Japhet (the Gentile race) should be enlarged and dwell in the tents of Shem: for by the Jews, the descendants of Shem, putting the word of God from them, the family of the Gentiles received it, and all the glorious privileges by which it was accompanied.

Let us reflect with gratitude upon the wondrous way in which their fall became the riches of the world, and their (211) p2

Apra n^August 16] FAMILY READINGS. [Deemher H

diminishing^ the riches of us, the Gentiles: and if some of the branches of that old stock be broken off, and we grafted in their place, let us not boast against the branches. We bear not the root, but

the root us: and it better befits our condition to pray for the promised restoration of Israel and the wondrous spiritual Resurrection (see Romans xi. 15) that shall accompany it, than to pride ourselves upon those privileges, which, through their fall, have been showered abundantly upon us.

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< » » I

April 17— August 16— December 14.

THE ACTS, Chap. 14.

Notwithstanding the success that attended the disciples at Iconium, opposition and persecution were soon raised against them. The cross is heavier than the world can bear. When its preaching becomes a savour of death unto death, it always excites the violence of those against whose sins it is the testimony. Persecution itself however is made, under God's Providence, a subordinate minister to His Truth: for wherever it drives His Heralds, it also spreads a knowledge of His "Word. Thus, when the disciples were driven from Iconium, Lystra and Derbe received the divine tidings they were commissioned to bear : the lame was made to leap as an hart beneath the power of healing they possessed, and tongues that had hitherto been dumb to God now gratefully sang His praises.

In the protest against the false worship of the ignorant Lycaonians, we are led to observe the caution with which the Apostles delivered their commission to the Heathen. The power of creation and preservation, the oeconomy of government, and the goodness of Providence, are the points brought (212)

forward for the consideration of those who had hitherto received no revelation of the divine natuie and attributes. It is as though they would lead the minds of men to contemplate the being, the benevolence, and the unity of God as the Creator, before they led them on to the knowledge of the more specific relationship that existed between them and Him as their Redeemer and Sanctifier.

The persecution and trials they endured in preaching the Gospel, well prepared them for the duty of confirming the souls of the disciples, and for exhorting them to continue in the faith, and for practically teaching them that they must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. The vanguard of the faithful, they bore the brunt of the battle. They exhorted others to suffer and to dare nothing more than they had suffered and had dared themselves. Alas ! how poor and weak does the easy service of the modern disciple appear, when compared with the hard duty of his fathers in the faith! And yet, though in zeal, and energy, and perseverance, and self-devotion, amid external persecution, we are all immeasurably inferior to them, the service of modern days is not so easy as it may seem on a first view. The world, the flesh, and the devil, are as active with us, though in a different way, as with them. We, like them, must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God : and though the tumult and the stoning affright us not with the show of violence, we have sufficient ground of active spiritual warfare in the temptations of Satan that would allure us from without, and the rebel will that lusteth against the Spirit, which would betray us from within.

We are again reminded of the corporate character of the Church, by the care which the Apostles Barnabas and Paul took to extend its form and government. They did not leave the new

disciples without order or controul, or to any uncertain teaching
(213)

April \8^August }7] f\milt READINGS. [December 15

or mutual instruction which might arise among themselves. They ordained Elders (the word in the original is Presbyters, whence our ministerial title of Priest is derived) in every church, and solemnly commended them to the Lord Jesus, the Church's Head, with prayer and fasting. Thus, when they planted the Gospel, they established also a form and polity in which its truths should be enshrined, and through whose instrumentality its blessings should be yet more widely extended.

April 18— August 17— December 15.

THE ACTS, Chap. 15.

The harmony of the brethren at Antioch was disturbed by the second controversy that agitated the Christian church. The first had apparently been settled by St. Peter's testimony, which satisfied the Hebrew-Christians that God had granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life. But now a second question arose, not unnaturally, out of the ashes of the first. Satisfied as they were that the Gentiles were made capable of Salvation, the Jews for the most part considered that this Salvation could only be conveyed through the channel of their own ordinances, and that the Gospel was ineffectual, except to those who received it through the rites of the Law.

So important was this controversy deemed, that the Apostolic governors of the Church at Antioch, with others, went up to hold conference with the heads of the Mother-Church at Jerusalem: and it is observable that, after the preliminary meeting recorded in v.v. 4, 5, when they were assembled in council, it was mainly by the arguments of the Apostle of the Circumcision that the doctrine of the necessity

for circumcision was overthrown ! (214)

April 18th - August 17th] FAMILY READINGS. [December 15th]

After the address of St. Peter, whose natural predilections, as exhibited both before and after, would certainly have led him to adopt the other side of the question, we must imagine the effect of what he said to have been greatly heightened by the corroboration of Barnabas and Paul, who then declared what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by themselves !

The business of this first council was brought to a conclusion by the judicial decision of St. James, the presiding Apostle, in accordance with whose sentence the whole church wrote that consolatory letter with which Paul and Barnabas, Judas and Silas, were entrusted, and which remains to this day a memorial of the wisdom and spirit by

which the Apostles spake. Freed jGrom the heavy load of ritual observance, which the Pharisees would fain have imposed on them, the Gentiles now were bound only to cultivate abstinence from those things which would have offended the just religious prejudices of the Jews on the one hand, or encouraged the sensual and idolatrous practises of the Heathen on the other. May those who are interested in the controversies of the later Christian times be equally guided by a spirit of moderation and gentleness!

The conclusion of the chapter is of a painful character. It reads us a solemn lesson of the imperfection that clings to the best and holiest of the human race. The Apostle of the Gentiles, in his sharp contention with Barnabas, seems to have formed his judgment somewhat too hastily in consequence of John-Mark's having deserted them in their former journey, but Barnabas knew his character better, and, excusing his former weakness, resolved on giving him a second trial. We are grieved to notice any contention between these holy men: yet even out of this root of bitterness, God raised

some fruit to His own glory and His Church's benefit. The (215)

A}frU l9^Auifu\$t IB] FAMILY RBABlMat. [i>iOMi6ir 16

truth of the Gospel was henceforward difused through two ' channels instead of one : Paul himself preached not the less^ but Barnabas preached the more; and that too in a new direction.

But we are not to suppose that the quarrel of these good men was irreconcilable. The cause of it^ the once-wayering but subsequently consistent Mark, is thrice afterwards mentioned in terls of brotherhood (and once with direct commendation) by St. Paul in the Holy Scriptures : and we cannot conceive^ consistently with our knowledge of their christian character^ that when his fidelity as a servant of Christ was establishedi personal disagreement between the illustrious Apostles could have any longer continued.

The record of the dissension has however been left for our learning. May we be warned by it to avoid all appearance of evil—^to eschew

the vacillation of John-Mark—the apparently over-partial affection of Barnabas—the severity of Paul—and the spirit of opposition displayed by both the latter: and may we strive more earnestly henceforward to keep the uoitj of the Spirit in the bond of peace !

April 19— August 18— December 16.

THE ACTS, Chap. 16.

Thk travels recorded in this chapter were of great importance to the Church. Here first we read of the youthful Timothy, whom the careful domestic training of his female relatives had so well prepared for his subsequent call to the ministry: to him were two of St. Paul's epistles addressed in after years. Here we find the Apostle of the Gentiles passing through Galatia, to the converts of which region he subsequently addressed one of his most interesting and instructive epistles. Here too we find, from the change

(216)

Aprii 19^August \S] FAMILY READINGS. [December }Q

in the Author's language in v.v. 8-10, that Luke the beloved Physician joined the Apostle's company at Troas, and 'became thenceforward his friend and companion in travel, as well as his historian. And here we read of the richly-blest labours and sufferings of St. Paul at Philippi, to the converts of which Roman colony, at a later period, he addressed the most commendatory of his epistles that we possess.

Up to this time, the Gospel seems to have been unknown in Europe : and it is worthy of remark that Paul and Luke, the two most highly educated of the Apostolic band, were of those chosen to fulfil this deeply-important mission. Gentile philosophy was now to be as closely encountered as Jewish prejudice; and the gifts of reason were required to contend with the disciples of the Porch and the Garden, as well as the wisdom of revelation to overcome and direct them.

But while these means were made use of by the God of Providence and Grace as best adapted to the end in view, all *'occasion of boasting" was taken away from man by the way in which the Spirit of

God is recorded to have acted in the hearts of the converted. It was by the Lord that the heart of Lydia was opened, and by a special act of grace that the spirit of divination was cast out of the Priestess of Apollo. It was God's mercy that protected the imprisoned Apostles, and the terrors of the Lord that fell upon the heart of the awakened gaoler. Satan and Man combined their forces against the Saints of God, but the truth of their cause and the guardianship of their Master, sustained and protected them; and so Lydia and her household, and the gaoler " and all his," joined the ranks of the faithful by the initiation of Baptism, and swelled the number of witnesses of Christ, the Saviour of mankind!

Nor was God glorified alone in the spiritual world by

these successes of the heralds of His Truth. The Heathen (217)

April 17th FAMILY READINGS. [December 17

magistrates were compelled to respect those whose doctrine they rejected, when they saw their quiet firmness[^] their cheerful uncomplaining submission to unjust persecution, their dignified exaction of apology from those who had passed an insult on their social rank and civil privileges. True it is, that it was the Roman and not the Divine power that they feared, but these fears were aroused by men acting under divine commission; and God's name was glorified in the respect shewn to His acknowledged servants. We cannot suppose that so paltry a feeling as selfish gratification was sought by such men as Paul and Silas; Luke and Timothy: but their independent and dignified conduct, recorded at the close of the chapter, seems rather to teach us that self-respect is a necessary element in the character of the ministers of God, and that they who consistently exhibit it will be sure to find God, and themselves as His Servants, respected by others as well.

April 20— August 19— December 17.

THE ACTS, Chap. 17.

The contents of this chapter prove to us that St. Paul had not ceased to take an interest in his kinsmen according to the flesh, even though he knew that his special mission was to the great Gentile family. Among the Thessalonians (to whom two of his epistles were subsequently addressed,) and also among the more noble and more just Bereans, he commenced his missionary labours through the lost sheep of the house of Israel: and even after the persecution of his nation had driven him to Athens, he again 'disputed in the Synagogue.'

(218)

AprU 2d—August \9] FAMILY READINGS. [December \7

His behaviour at Athens seems to call for special attention^ as this was the seat of Philosophy and Literature^ and he was the first preacher of divine Truth who had visited it. First let us notice the points chiefly observable in his conduct; and then remark upon the peculiar skill of his oratory.

His active interest in the spiritual circumstances of those among whom he dwelt; his vexation of spirit at their alienation from the living God ; and his threefold endeavours to ameliorate their condition—first, through the medium of God*s chosen people ; secondly, through all the " devout persons," or Jewish proselytes, who showed a respect fctr God's truth; thirdly, through those whom he casually encountered in the fonun : all these hold out a striking model to our too passive Christianity, which allows without emotion or effort to improve them, the ignorant to abide in their ignorance, and the wicked to continue unchecked in their sins !

Again: his willingness to enter into controversy with the leading human Philosophers, to teach them the superiority of the wisdom which is from above, shows that there is a hallowed use in public discussion, when conducted in fairness and honesty: but in the address of the Apostle, while we find great readiness in availing himself of their love of novelty by setting before them the most striking features of God's revelation, we find nothing of that cruel

and condemnatory declamation, or of that unloving bitterness, which are imhappily characteristic of modern controversy.

In commenting on the structure of his oration, we are led first to note, that the Apostle attracts the attention of his auditory by a general compliment, the force of which is lost in our English translation of the Bible. "Ye men of Athens," he commences, *^ I perceive that in all things ye are very much given to religious observances: for as I passed by, and

beheld the several objects of your worship, I found not (219)

April fX^Avguui \9] FAMILY RBADINo8. iDeemher M

merely the ordinary altars^ but one moreover with this inscription—To the Unknown God." And then, having won their favourable regard by an acknowledgment of their piety, and knowing how great a point it is in argument only to argue on principles admitted by the adversary, he avails himself at once of their admitted ignorance to offer them the instruction they required, and which they could not, as a people fond of knowledge, without inconsistency refuse. But when he enters upon the awful subject of revealed truth, he no longer shelters himself under argument. He proceeds to teach with dignity and authority the nature and the attributes of God. In the course of this teaching, however, he does not neglect the graces of elocution; and perhaps we ought to stand on the Areopagus, ere we can fully realize the exquisite skill of his allusion to present objects, when, under the very shadow of the Acropolis, which was thronged at that day with the temples and statues of heathen deities, he speaks of God "dwelling not in temples made with hands;" of "not being worshipped with men's hands as though He needed any thing;" of His being "felt after and feared" as being near, though invisible! Again, there is equal skill shown in his quotation from their poet Aratus, in his comment on which he throws out a brilliant sarcasm on the absurdity of image worship: it seems as though he said. Ye acknowledge yourselves the offspring of God, and yet these painted and jewelled vanities are all ye can shew for a parentage. Ye KNOW they are not, and cannot be, your parents. Act by Him then, whom you acknowledge your God and Father, as ye would by your own

parents; and no longer pay to a living Father a mocking and fanciful reverence, [but a real and a reasonable service!]

And when he has thus led their minds to the contemplation of the living and true God, he winds up his address by (220)

April 21-^August 20] FAMILY READINGS. [December \6

exhortation to repentance, assuring them of the coming judgment, and urging them to faith in Christ, grounded on the sufficient and reasonable evidence of His Resurrection from the dead.

If we are still Gentile in heart, may we be led, like Dionysius and Damaris, to lay hold on the Truth as here revealed by the Apostle to the Athenians.

April 21— August 20— December 18.

THE ACTS, Chap. 18.

Though the success of St. Paul at Athens was comparatively slight, it does not seem to have discouraged him. He pursued a similar course at Corinth, the capital of Achaia, but with greater success; for in this important and voluptuous city he established that flourishing, though sometimes inconsistent church, to which he afterwards addressed two of his epistles. He appears early to have left the Jews to their prejudices, and to have addressed himself specially to the Gentiles ; but not to have gone alone to them; for Justus and Crispus appear to have been the first-fruits of his ministry, and Aquila and Priscilla (who probably were already acquainted with the way of the Lord) swelled the number of the Hebrew-Christians at Corinth.

We cannot wonder at his protracted residence in this capital, when we read that, notwithstanding its effeminacy and luxury, the Lord Himself encouraged him by the information that He had much people therein. May not this teach us not

to be led into an uncharitable condemnation of any given place, because it bears a general stamp of evil upon it?

Beneath the surface of evil, there may be much latent good. (221)

April ^X-^August 70] FAMILY READING?. [December \Q

There may be a sanctifying remnant^ like the seven thousand of oldj who had not bowed the knee to Baal, even amid the multitude of the unrighteous: and a proper encouragement of that which is true and holy may bring out righteousness with triumphant colours, while a habitual depreciation of the whole place might tend to depress, if it did not entirely subdue, what remained of holiness within it.

We are introduced in this chapter to the brother of the Koman Philosopher Seneca, in the person of Gallio, the pro-consul of Achaia. We should scarcely recognize in his conduct here related the character given of him by his brother: " No mortal," he writes, " was ever so mild to any one as he was to all; and in him there was such a natural power of goodness, that there was no semblance of art or dissimulation." But at the same time that his conduct to the tumultuous Jews does not bear out this account of Seneca, it certainly does not warrant the popular impression that exists among cursory readers of the Scripture, that Gallio is the type or representative of those who are indifferent to all matters of spiritual interest.

It was some time after the insurrection here alluded to that St. Paul, having effectually planted the Gospel in Europe, returned into Asia accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Having left them at Ephesus, he sailed to Cesarea, then kept the passover at Jerusalem, then went to Antioch, and from thence made a regular tour of visitation through Galatia and Phrygia.

Aquila and Priscilla were not idle during the Apostle's absence. Apollos, a very giant in scriptural knowledge, but not yet acquainted with the actual history of the Messiah, was instructed by them more perfectly in the way of the Lord; and through him, under their

assistance, was established that spiritual connexion between Asia and Europe (222)

April 22nd—August 21st—December 19th FAMILY READINGS. [December 19th

which the Apostle had commenced[^] when first the vision sent from God summoned him to plant the standard of the cross upon our western shore.

The general lessons to be learned from this chapter appear to be—first, that of perseverance and activity in the cause of the truth, as illustrated in the conduct of the Apostle: secondly, the use of time and means, like Aquila, who was content to work for his livelihood, but neglected not the opportunity of improving others in spiritual knowledge: thirdly, the duty of receiving increased instruction with gratitude and docility, like the learned but humble-minded Alexandrian, Apollos.

April 22— August 21— December 19.

THE ACTS, Chap. 19.

The opening of this chapter is interesting on several accounts. First, it shows how extensive was the influence of John the Baptist, whose doctrine of repentance had established itself at Ephesus, and thus prepared the Jews of Asia Minor for the revelation of Jesus Christ: secondly, it represents a peculiar kind of ignorance, common in the present day, where men professing a belief of the necessity of repentance, yet feel not, nor are willing to admit, the influence of the Holy Ghost Who has wrought this belief in their hearts: and, thirdly it shows us, by example, how readily and thankfully we should avail of increased means of grace, when the Providence of God extends them for our reception.

The laborious and perilous service of twenty years had

neither abated the ardour nor lessened the energy of St. Paul. (228)

April 22—August 21st—December 19th FAMILY READINGS. [December 19th

His daily disputations in the school of Tyrannus at Ephesus, read a striking lesson to the coldness and infrequency with which the Gospel is made known to inquirers in the present day. But when we admit this^ we should examine ourselves at the same time^ as being probably its partial cause^ and ask^ if we were earnest in our prayers for the ministry, and faithful in seeking the word of the Lord at their mouth, might we not materially increase the zeal of those whom God has appointed to "keep knowledge" for His people, (see Mai. ii. 7.)

The success of the Gospel, and the miraculous power of healing bestowed on the Apostles, led to many godless counterfeits. A special instance of one of these is recorded^ apparently with the intention of teaching us how the selfish hypocrisy of the infidel recoils upon himself; glorifying God when he least expects and desires it, and justly defeating the ends for which it was assumed.

We learn also from this chapter, how the revelation of God, under the new dispensation, triumphs over the delusions of Satan, just as it had done under the old. As the enchantments of Balaam faded before God's expressed will; and the Magicians of Egypt failed to stand before Moses and Aaron; so the magical books and curious arts of the Ephesians were counted vain and unprofitable, when exposed beneath the light of the Gospel. Perhaps no more striking triumph of the truth over men's minds is recorded, than that contained in the nineteenth verse of this chapter. Superstition often lingers, even after we think it has departed. The wisdom of man fails to destroy it. But the wisdom of God first exposes its folly, and then man, truly enlightened, voluntarily eradicates it from his heart, as a plant that spreads poison wherever it is allowed to^ grow.

The latter half of this chapter gives a most graphic description of a popular tumult, excited for selfish purposes

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April 23-^August ^] FAMILY READINGS. [December'20

against the heralds of the truth of Christ. The wild and irrational idolatry of the Ephesians appears in striking contrast beside the "reasonable service" rendered to Almighty God by his ransomed children. May we have grace to follow the consistent path of holiness, suffering, and obedience, of which so illustrious example has been set us by the persecuted Apostle and his brethren in the Lord: and may we be enabled to look as it were through them to the Master whom they served, and who is as ready to hear our prayers and to help our infirmities as He was to succour them in their hour of need!

^^>^^.^t^ ^>^^.»-^»^^.^^^t^»y%^>^>^>^i^>^^»^»^>^"

April 23— August 22— December 20.

THE ACTS, Chap. 20.

The wisdom and faith of Paul led him to depart from Ephesus, when he found that his continued presence would be likely to cause increased contention. But though being persecuted in this city he thought it right to flee into another, he did not leave the Church at Ephesus without taking due heed for its orderly government.

Of his visit at this period into Macedonia and the parts lying to the north-west of Greece, and his subsequent brief residence in Greece itself, we learn nothing from the record before us, save that he was again persecuted by the Jews, and was immediately afterwards rejoined by St. Luke, who seems to have remained at Philippi when Paul and Silas were driven thence by persecution.

The seventh verse contains one of the most striking scriptural illustrations of the Lord's Day being adopted as the Christian Sabbath, in place of the seventh day of the week. It is related, as though it were already matter of

(225) Q

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toward God and £iith toward our Lord tUimn Chmt,** which no
&ithful preacher ever loses sight of, tiVim when administering
"strong meat to Aem that are of full ftgij" in the Gospel.

TluJ paiuful prophecy of the Apostle, contained in

V, «♦, Hi), SO, appears to have been afterwards sadly realized (1220)

April^fU — Atiyutia^S] FIUILT READINGS. [Drcnnicr 31

in the Ephesian Church, as we may learn from several passages in St. Paul's first epistle to its first Bishop, the youthful Timothy. Would that when we read of their errors, ■we could be led to think of our own! The same deformities of tyranny, superstition, and falsehood, have characterized the later as well as the earlier Church: but assuredly the condemnation due to us must be greater than theirs, if we neglect or pervert the great salvation revealed to us in the written word. While knowledge was limited to a few, the multitude would be easily led away by its assumption; but we should seem to be without excuse, if, with the Word of God in our hands, and the Church of God proclaiming its truth throughout the length and breadth of our land, we persisted in still clinging to ignorance, and preferring by our own voluntary choice the darkness of nature to the revealed light of the Truth as it is in Jesus.

r 23— December 21.

THE ACTS, Chap. 21.

St. Paul had not long left the sorrowing disciples of Miletus and the Elders of the Church of Ephesus, ere the difficulties of his approaching journey thickened around him. When passing a week (so as to include at least one Lord's Day, as he had done at Troas) with the disciples at Tyre, the mart of nations, the dangers of his visit to Jerusalem were prophesied, and a vain attempt was made to induce him to 'change his plan. Again, after visiting Ptolemais, to T^r Acre, when at Cesarea, partaking of the Christian ^h of the Evangelist and Deacon Philip, the social party was sadly broken in upon by the announ (227) «■

April fl[^]—Augu^{»i*2ai}] YAUILY READINGS. [Deemher 2\

Agabus (whose prophetic powers had already been tested by facts,) that bonds beneath the Gentile power awaited him at Jerusalem.

The conduct of the Apostle on this occasion teaches us the duty of perseverance as well as boldness in the cause of our Master: we must be ready to suffer for Christ, even as He also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps. The threats of danger did not divert St. Paul from the thorny path of duty; and we must be firm and faithful in the midst of present temptation and coming evil, if we do not wish the instruction here recorded to be lost upon us.

In the way the joyful reception of the Apostle at Jerusalem is made known •to us, we have another indication of the dignity of James the Less, as presiding over the Church at that sacred seat of its foundation: and in the advice given to St. Paul, or rather the injunction laid upon him by the Church (which he immediately obeyed), we have a practical lesson taught us as to .the extent and obligation of expediency. "We see from this behaviour of St. Paul," it has been remarked, " that, for the sake of peace, and to avoid giving offence, it is expedient and lawful to conform to established usages and ceremonies, if innocent, though not essential to religion." This is true: but the lesson taught us would seem to go beyond this, and say, that such concessions are not only allowable and lawful but a duty, when thereby we can refresh the conscience of weak brethren, and glorify Gon by biinging them a step forward in the path of salvation.

To understand the tumultuous excitement that prevailed in Jerusalem, as recorded in the latter part of the chapter, we should bear in mind that the Jews were fretting impatiently beneath the yoke of Rome, and that frequent attlittips

at insurrection had been made among them. This made the (228)

April25-Augutt24] FAMILY READINGS. [December 22

garrison of the castle of Antonia watchful and alert: and at this time, the suspicions of Claudius Lysias, the Chief-Captain, seem to have been specially aroused, under the idea that Paul was the false prophet from Egypt, who a short time before had excited a sedition, endeavouring to persuade the people to follow him to mount Olivet to see the walls of the city fall down at his command, and intending to force a passage into the city and master the Roman guards. The

attempt had been frustrated by Felix, but the author of the sedition had made his escape; and the Chief-Captain now seized Paul, under the impression that he was this same malefactor, engaged in a second and similar attempt.

We cannot but admire the extreme self-possession and dignity of the Apostle, who, under all the circumstances of personal violence, suspicion of treason, and popular tumult, yet retained the calmness to explain every thing to the Chief-Officer into whose custody he was delivered, and persuade him to grant licence for him to make a public oration. But the sense of serving God gives dignity and power to the mind that would have been comparatively impotent in mere human affairs!

April 25— August 24— December 22.

THE ACTS, Chap. 22.

No opportunity of usefulness is to be despised. When St. Paul found himself in a position to address his countrymen, he endeavoured to use it to the best advantage. The difference between his addresses to the Jews and to the Heathen is very marked; but in both cases he strives to approach them through their sympathies. He commences the address before us by a double claim of brotherhood:

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April 25—August 24] FAMILY READINGS. [December 2nd

firsts in the words he used; secondly[^] in the language wherein he clothed them. He called them his brethren[^] and he called them so in their own tongue. Even beyond this[^] he acknowledges a sympathy of a more painful character, for he admits that he once participated in those feelings which now animated them, and persecuted to bonds and death the followers of Christ.

With the history of the conversion of this Apostle we are already familiar, from the record of the ninth chapter of this book. The circumstance that prevented his completing the account now before us, is strikingly illustrative of the bigotry of the Jewish character;

directly they had an intimation of divine favour being extended to the despised Gentiles, that moment they refused to hear a word more. Let this misconduct of theirs convey a warning to us; it is not by the indulgence of our prejudices^ that we fit ourselves either for the reception of truth, or for the duty of extending it to others. The graces of Christianity should enlarge our sympathies, not increase our natural fondness for exclusion.

' In the concluding part of the chapter, after being tau^t incidentally the cruel custom of the Romans of extracting by torture a confession from the accused, we are led to a consideration of the value of civil privileges, where possessed. Had not St. Paul been a freeman of Rome, he could not on this occasion have escaped examination by scourging. The assertion however of his civil right, placed him in a position even of superiority over the Chief-Captain: for Claudius Lysias had only acquired by costly pturchase that dignity and privilege of which the Apostle was possessed by inheritance.

*How was the night passed before Paul was brought before the Jewish council ? Doubtless in prayer and supplication that he might fitly discharge the peculiar duties of

his position. It had been foretold that the disciples should (230)

-4^1^26— Augustus] FAMILY readings. lDecember2B

be brouglit before Magistrates and Councils^ and he would be anxious on each occasion to witness a good confession in his Master's cause. May we, each in our several stations, cherish this same desire in our own hearts. In all circumstances of our life recognizing divine providence, and unceasingly striving so to fulfil the duties of our position as to glorify the name of Him who has called us to fill it!

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April 26— August 25— December 23.

THE ACTS, Chap. 23.

When we read of the indignant Apostle quoting the Scripture which shews that he would not voluntarily have spoken evil of any one in authority, we are led to wonder that he should not have known the person of the High-Priest, from the mere fact of seeing him preside over the council. This is accounted for by the history of the period. Ananias had been High-Priest when St. Paul was at Jerusalem before; but he had been subsequently deprived of his office. At this particular epoch, when the Apostle was brought before the Sanhedrim, they were destitute of any duly-appointed High-Priest, and Ananias had boldly assumed that office on his own authority; so that Paul might well plead in excuse that he was ignorant of his dignity, even though he might have known his person. It may be a matter of interest to most readers of the Scripture to know, that the Apostle's prophetic declaration, "God shall smite thee," was fulfilled. "About five years after this," we are informed, "Ananias was dragged from an aqueduct in which he had concealed himself from a tumult, and put to death by

assassins."

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Apr 25, 1925] FAMILY KSAPINOS. [Deemember 23

There was great wisdom as well as justice in St. Paul's conduct before the council when he fixed the question of his imprisonment upon a fact partially recognized, and declared that he ranged himself under the same banner with those among them who contended for the Truth. "The hope, and the resurrection, of the dead," were indeed common ground for the faithful, though not the formal, Pharisee and himself to stand upon; and though the former was not yet awakened to the fact of Jesus being "the Resurrection and the Life," it was clear that there was infinitely greater hope of his being so, than of the reckless and profane Sadducee, who despised the prospect and denied the fact of an eternal inheritance.

The excitement of that turbulent day must have been sweetly stilled by the revelation of the following night. While murderous Jews were maturing their foul conspiracy. He who was mightier for Paul than

they who were against him, was consoling him with the assurance that he should be privileged to carry his testimony to the Truth to the metropolis of the world's empire. So hardened in crime and so bold in its perpetration were the bigoted Jews of that day, that they seem to have affected little concealment of their wicked intention: but however this might be, it was so far revealed, that the nephew of the prisoner was enabled to make it known to the intended victim. The Chief-Captain, who would seem to have been a man of kindly and even affectionate disposition, took the necessary steps to frustrate the conspiracy, and an indication of the fulfilment of the Lord's promise (that Paul should testify to Him at Rome) was forthwith manifested, in his transfer from the power of the Jews to that of the Roman Procurator, who represented at Cesarea the imperial government.

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AprU21 —A«^us<26] FAMILY READINGS. [December^

The most striking lesson for us to learn from this record is, unhesitatingly to rely upon the providence and goodness of our Lord. When danger most threatens, Christ is nearest to us: and just as He supported Paul under trial, and revealed Himself to him in his greatest need, so will He ever be near to hear the cry of them that call upon Him, and to deliver them out of their distress!

April 27— August 26— Dscembbr 24.

THE ACTS, Chap. 24.

We have an interesting contrast before us in the smooth and flattering oration of the hired pleader, Tertullus, and the manly and straightforward address of the imprisoned Apostle. The accusations brought against the latter are simply but decidedly met in his brief defence. He recognizes with gladness the fact of Felix being his judge, because, not only had he now been for several years Procurator of Judea, but had a close and accurate knowledge of Jewish customs, having married Brasilia, the '^daughter of Herod-Agrippa. In his defence, first, he urges the moral impossibility of his

having excited any seditious movement in Jerusalem, inasmuch as only twelve days had now elapsed since he arrived there for the purpose of worship. He then admits the charge of what they call heresy; but asserts that every opinion he does hold is conformable to the doctrines of the Law and the Prophets. Lastly, he states the object of his visit to Jerusalem after a protracted absence, which was, not tumult or sedition, but benevolence—he having been charged to bring to his nation alms and offerings, the benevolent contributions of the Gentile Church to their

necessities.

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Apra2:i^Augu\$t25] FAMILY READINGS. [Z^ecem&er 24

The result of this defence was highly important and beneficial to the cause of Christianity. Felix postponed the question until the testimony of the Chief-Captain could be received: from the letter he had received from him^ and from the defence of the prisoner, it was manifest that it was in mere persecution that the Jews were clamouring for Paulas destruction; and, bad as Felix was, he did not choose to deliver so intrepid a defender of the faith to their malice.

In the comparative liberty, therefore, that St. Paul enjoyed during the two following years in the important city of Cesarea, much opportunity of usefulness must have occurred: externally, he could hold frequent intercourse with the christians of Jerusalem on the one hand, and no little with Antioch on the other: internally, he must have had great means of strengthening the local Church, among the members of which were Philip the Evangelist and his family, and probably Mnason of Cyprus, with Cornelius the centurion and his Gentile friends who believed.

And besides these opportunities of strengthening and refreshing the faithful, we have positive testimony to his zeal in seeking to arouse the hitherto unconvicted of sin to repentance. The rapacious and licentious Felix, with her whom he had seduced from the side of Azizus to his own, t;remble^ before his eloquence, when he reasoned

of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come! O that these solemn thoughts might affect us more deeply and permanently than they did him! That we, knowing that God hath not called us to uncleanness but unto holiness, might truly follow the holy path that has been made known to us 1 That the preaching of the Apostle, and the warning held out by the miserable, the remorseful, but the impenitent Felix, might rouse us to that godly sorrow for sin which worketh repentance unto life,

not to be repented of! C234)

April 2B—August 27] FAMILY READINGS. [December 2S

April 28— August 27— December 28.

THE ACTS, Chap. 25.

We have abundant reason to admire the providence of God in reading this chapter. As the two years comparative freedom which Paul had enjoyed at Cesarea had tended to confirm and spread the Gospel in the east, so now the more straight bondage into which he was to be delivered, was to promote its extension even to the utmost borders of the west.

So soon as Festus had entered upon his duties as governor of the province, the Jews by public accusation and secret conspiracy sought the destruction of the indefatigable Paul. The justice however of one great principle of Roman law, the confronting the accuser and the accused, forbade their intention to be carried into effect.

And surely from this we may learn a lesson profitable to ourselves; if even the heathen would not condemn an accused person without giving him the opportunity of justifying himself, how sore witness shall these raise up in the judgment against professing christians, who encourage evil reports, unkind slanders, or unjust condemnations against absent brethren who are unable to justify themselves : yet how commonly do we find this done in the heart of christian society, and even in the bosom of christian families!

When we read of the Apostle's appeal to Caesar—an

appeal which his civil right as a Roman citizen enabled him to make—we must not forget the vision he had received, wherein it was foretold him that he should testify to Christ at Rome ! His vigorous mind and keen spiritual perception, would doubtless seize upon the point of the revelation given (235)

AprU2»^August ^] FAMILY READINGS. [DecembfT^

to him, and enable him in faith to avail of the opportunity thus afforded, whereby God's revealed intention might be forthwith fulfilled.

Again, we cannot but see the working of the hand of God in bringing the brother of I)rusilla, and the son of that monarch who had last persecuted the christian church, beneath the influence of the Apostle's preaching. While Paul was yet a prisoner in the hands of Festus, the son and daughter of Herod-Agrippa came to salute the Eoman governor. In the hope of ascertaining more definite information as to his supposed offence from one who was himself a Jew, the Roman polytheist mentioned the case of Paul to the King: and he, who must have remembered his father's persecution of the Christians, would not unnaturally desire to hear that distinguished teacher of the doctrine, who now for a period approaching thirty years had continually faced danger and death in the cause of his crucified Master.

Thus, through divine providence working amid the volitions of sinful men, was that distinguished scene brought about when the Gentile, the Jew, and the Christian were thrown together in one party. Paul, "brought before a governor and a King for Christ's sake," noV raised that testimony which was against both. May we who read profit more than they who heard his testimony! May we neither reject the truth, which the Apostle so manfully defeiuded, from the blincbiess of the Roman, or the hardheartedness of the Jew, but rather receive with meekness that engrafted word, which is able to save our souls !

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April ^ ^ August 2!&] FAMILY READINGS. [December 29

April 29— August 28— December 29.

THE ACTS, Chap. 26.

In the defence of St. Paul before the Jewish King, he recapitulates that wondrous scene of his conversion which we have twice previously been called upon to notice. It is no wonder that he himself would bring out all his powers of eloquence on so interesting an occasion; for though probably he would be internally aware that he would fail to convert Agrippa, and that his own captivity at Rome was certain; yet a glorious vision of hope could not fail to expand itself before him, when he thought of the possibility of bringing the Jewish Monarch to the knowledge of Messias, and leading the high-priest (who by the permission of the Roman Emperor was nominated by the King) and multitudes of his brethren to the confession of the true faith!

In accordance with this feeding, he first exhorts the king, as one well acquainted. with the religious controversies of his age, to listen to him with patience ; he then recites his own union with the party of the Pharisees, and states that the cause for which he suffered was the universal belief of all the faithful of the Jews; namely, faith in the promised Messias, and the resurrection of the dead, and the future state of glory. This was his faith always: yet notwithstanding this faith, he had at one time persecuted the Christians, because he believed them not to hold it. But God had shewed him the error of his way, and converted him from his blindness.

Agrippa was more courteous and attentive than the Jewish auditory, whom he had previously addressed from the steps of the castle of Antonia. When he had addressed

himself to them, they refused to listen to the tidings of

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ApraW—Aogial'S] i-amilt RBiDiNOS. {Deetmhtr ^9

Salvation bein;; carried to the Genbles: but the "king allowed him to complete his narratiTe.

Although however the Jewish Monarch coTild receive with respectful attention the doctrine of a risen Saviour, who should preach repentance both to Jew and Gentile, there was one present whom either the novehy of the tidings, or their disagreeable nature, at once offended. The haughty sarcasm burst from the lips of the Gentile Governor—"Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." How impressive is the lesson these words convey! The most sacred truths of God, the hope of immortality, the resurrection of the dead, the promise of forgiveness of sin, all seem but folly—mere madness—to the ignorant and wordly-minded ! Let not this lesson be lost upon us. The record of the Gentile Festus teaches us what we should be, were we without Christ, and aliens from the common-wealth of the true Israel: for " the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God : for they are foolishness to him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

One more fact is deserving of our notice; that is, that the Apostle did not rest content with pressing mere doctrine or opinion upon the Jewish King, he urged also the weight of evidence. He reminds him that the suflering and resurrection of Christ was no obscure fact—not a thing done in a comer; but was now matter of history, and established upon a double testimony that could not be overthrown. First, the testimony of Prophets that these things toould take place j secondly, the testimony of competent witnesses that these things had taken place.

Let not this double testimony be lost upon ant who have to the written Word of God. The acknowledgment of

pa that he was altn^tat persuaded to be a Christian,

mns him in our judgment that he did not become really

^April aO^August 29] FAMILY READINGS. [December dO

one. What will our profession of the religion of Christ do for us at the last day ? Assuredly it will form the ground of the verdict to be passed upon us. Either, having lived according to that holy profession, we shall be "found in Christ,"* (see Phil, iii, 9, 11); or, having denied in practice the profession of our lips, we shall come under the awful sentence, " Depart from me, ye cursed; I never knew you." May the contemplation of this solemn alternative work in us repentance and amendment of life, to the glory of our Lord and Head Christ Jesus !

April 30— August 29^— December 30. . THE ACTS, Chap. 27.

We are reminded by the record of the Apostle's voyages in the merchant ships of Adramyttium and Alexandria, of a peculiar feature in the economy of God's providence. We are for the most part ready enough to recognise the direct intervention of divine power, and to bow before His will as revealed by Himself; but we do not with equal facility perceive His intentions, when they come to us through a series of indications, rather than by direct injunction. Thus it has happened that, of the thousands upon thousands engaged in each generation in the pursuit of Commerce, that pursuit has been by an immeasurable majority devoted to selfish purposes, instead of being reverently recognised as an agent for God in heralding His revealed will throughout the universe.

But if we look to the ancient Scriptures, we shall almost always find that commerce, when recorded, was subservient to some great design of God ; as for instance, in the case of the Ishmaelites who brought Joseph the deliverer of his race down into Egypt; or of the merchant seamen of Tarshish, (239)

AprU90-^AugH9t^\ FAMILY K£ADINUS. IDEemberaO

who took Jonah in his flight from Joppa^ and were thus led to the acknowledgment of the true God ; or of those Tyrians who brought

up the materials of the Temple of Jerusalem, the great testimony to the Lord who had chosen to set His name there!

And thus too in the New Testament, not merely has the Redeemer of the world been introduced to us, in so many striking scenes of His ministry, through the extensive fishing-trade of Tiberias, but, in the chapter before us, we are shown how instrumental commerce was in advancing the success of St. Paul through his various voyages, and bringing him far upon his way to plead the cause of Christ at Rome.

These thoughts (which have elsewhere been more fully expanded*) may wholesomely remind those of our nation who are engaged in commercial life, that they too have a trust reposed in them by God, and a work to do for Him, in hallowing their daily labours and their daily gains to His glory.

But it is not only to the followers of Commerce that a lesson is taught by this chapter. All of us alike may learn to admire the providence and love of GoD, -who so watched over the welfare of his faithful servant, that he not only pre-served him in the time of danger, but also gave to his prayers all them that were with him. How are we taught herein the value of sanctity in the sight of God ! The two hundred three score and sixteen souls were preserved for the sake of the Apostle, even as the cities of the plain, but for their desperate and universal degradation, might have been preserved at the intercession of Abraham in former days !

Let then the power of intercessory prayer—the fact that the effectual fervent prayers of the righteous avail much; the

- See a Sermon entitled " Commerce a Divine Missionary."

London : Smith, Elder, & Co., 18i5.

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Mai^ 2^August 20] FAMILY READINGS. [December 91

necessity of holiness; and the blessedness of having holy men of God amongst us; be impressed upon all of us by the record we have read

to-day !

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Mat 2— August 30— December 31.

THE ACTS, Chap. 28.

The history of the Acts of the Apostles, after giving an account of St. Paul's successful preaching and miraculous healing at Melita, concludes with a brief allusion to his first imprisonment at Rome. About thirty years had elapsed from the time of the crucifixion; and in the course of this single generation, the christian faith had not only been preached with success in Syria, Greece, and Asia-Minor, but had spread throughout almost all parts of the Roman empire, and even, as we have reason to believe, to Parthia and India. At the time of the Apostle's arrival in Italy, he found, apparently without expecting it, brethren at PuteoU: and when on his journey to Rome, he was greeted by a number of brethren, who came out to a considerable distance to receive with honour the christian hero!

All this was clearly the work of God, No human ingenuity, unaided by wealth, station, or the sword, could have effected so wondrous a revolution in the moral history of man. God had manifestly chosen the weak things of the world to overcome them that were mighty: and the meek, patient, suffering spirit of Christianity, now firmly planted in the metropolis of the world, was destined soon to rise in the vigour of that great fifth monarchy, which should triumph over the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them.

In the brief account that is given us of St, Paul at

Rome, we are led to observe his usual custom of first preach-(241)

Ma^ 2^Augu\$t 90} FAMILY READINGS. [December ^\

ing the Gospel to those of his own nation: when this was unhappily proved to have but little effect, he turned with his whole force to

fulfil his mission to the Gentiles.

Nor are we to suppose that preaching and disputation were the sole employments of the Apostle during the time of his imprisonment at Home; we have good reason to believe that four at least of his epistles were written during these two years, namely, those to the Ephesians, to the Colossians, and to Philemon; and lastly, that to the Philip-pians, which was indited at some interval later than the others.

We now close this important history: but let us not fail to observe, that the last thing recorded of St. Paul is the same as that recorded of him at the first, after his conversion. Then, "straightway he, preached Christ, that he is the Son of God." Now too he *^ preached the Kingdom of God, and taught those things which concerned the Lord Jesus Christ." *^ Faithful to the end," might be written as the motto of this great Apostle, and we who read of his fidelity should assume the like motto for ourselves. For us, no less than for him, has Jesus Christ the righteous left his revelation! For our sins, no less than for his, did Jesus die. For our justification, no less than for his, did Jesus rise again 1 For our saactification, no less than for his, did the risen Saviour plead with the Father that the Holy Ghost might be given upon earth!

May that Holy Spirit, who, in mercy to our ignorance, dictated the Holy Gospels and the book of the Acts which we have read; in like mercy to our weakness, bestow on us His grace, that we may faithfully receive and apply to our own souls the blessed knowledge they contain!

THE END.

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