

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

TEACHING FOR THE OUTER AND INNER CIRCLES.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 16TH, 1882, BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples."—Mark iv. 33, 34.

OUR blessed Lord had two great objects before him in his ministry. The first was to preach the word to the outlying masses, that out of them he might gather a people to himself who should be his disciples. This part of his work he carried on with great assiduity and perseverance, traversing the Holy Land from end to end and finding here one and there another, but never ceasing to preach the gospel to the crowds that flocked to him. His second object was to train those who became his disciples, that having gathered them to himself he might educate them in the truth. He taught them concerning the Father and his love; concerning himself, his work, his death, and his resurrection; and concerning the divine Comforter and his indwelling, and all else that would make for their progress and profit. While our Lord was here he gathered the men together who should carry on the work after he was gone. He did not think it enough to make converts: he wished to make disciples. He did not think it enough even to make beginners in discipleship; but he would have them advance in knowledge and in holiness, learning till they were able to teach others also. To this day this same double work is carried on by the divine Spirit through the ministers and servants of God. We are to preach to the multitude who make up the outer ring; for our Lord has said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." We are bound to evangelize all, making no distinction of rank or character: to every person with whom we may come in contact we are to proclaim the kingdom of God. That being done, however, the minister's work is only begun; for he is now to go on to expound the mystery, to open up the higher doctrine, to lead the disciplined ones into the deep things of God, that there may be in the church fathers, instructors, and leaders, and that the church may in all the generations yet to come, until the Lord himself appeareth, carry out the glorious purposes of God for the upbuilding of a spiritual house and the conquest of the world.

I want this morning to call your special attention to the way in which the Lord spake to the outside gathering, and then afterwards to the way in which he spake to the inner circle of his own disciples. From his conduct we may learn our own. Soul-winners and soul-helpers may here see their double work set before them in pattern. We shall see how Jesus first fetched home the prodigal sons, and then made music and dancing inside the house for them: how he went after the lost sheep and brought them back upon his shoulders, and how he afterwards folded and fed the sheep which he had saved. There must be much in all this to instruct those of us who work for Jesus.

I. First, let us study our Lord's conduct towards THE OUTSIDE GATHERINGS. Kindly read these verses: "And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them." First, when our divine Lord preached to the outside multitude, *he evermore spake "the word" to them*. You see here what he preached: he spake "the word" unto them. This is a very short description, but it is intensely full of meaning: it has much more of fulness in it than I can show to you just now. He always spake "the word,"—that is to say, whatever sort of congregation gathered to Jesus he had only one grand system of truth to set before them. He preached "the word," which of old was prophesied by men of God, and was written upon the roll of inspiration. The term "the word" shuts up into a small compass the glorious revelation of God which he has shown to us by Christ Jesus. "The word"—here is *unity*: he preached not two gospels, but one. His word was not yea and nay. It was *a special message*; not *a word*, but *the word*—the special speech of the Father. Jesus had received one weighty, all-important message from God, and this he delivered whenever he had opportunity. It was never his object when he was addressing the people to speak to them upon subjects of merely temporal interest: he preached the eternal word. He did not come to instruct them in geology, or astronomy, or jurisprudence, or politics: his one business was to win their souls by proclaiming the love and mercy of the Father. He did not even come to open up a fresh system of morals, though of necessity a system of morals grew out of his central teaching. He came to preach the gospel, and he preached nothing else. He spoke it in various ways, yet he always spoke the one thing: "the word." "He spake the word *unto them*"; to publicans and harlots, or to Pharisees and Sadducees. He declares to the blinded Jews, "I speak that which I have seen with my Father." "He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God." What a lesson this is to all of us who try to do good in the world by teaching. We have only to preach "the word." Some fancy that they have to preach the thought, the deep thought, the wonderful thought of modern times. I have heard that expression, "modern thought," till I am sick of it; it is a cant phrase smelling strongly of self-conceit. There is no command given in Scripture for us to go and preach our own thoughts, but we are always commanded to preach "Christ," and to publish his word. "The word" is the summary of God's thoughts, or rather of such of God's thoughts as he chooses to reveal to men: such as he regards it important for them to know. The Lord has spoken already all that we have to speak: our message is prescribed, our

testimony is written. As to the saving truth, we have no room for invention; we have no scope for discovery: our range is specified, our course is mapped out. We have to go and preach "the word" which is laid down by the Holy Spirit in this book, and has been taught to us personally by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Our Lord's mind was thoughtful, his genius profound, and yet he kept to "the word," even as he said, "He that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him." If he had pleased, he might have told us many things hidden from before the foundation of the world: he might have opened up deep mysteries and profound secrets which he knew as the Son of God; for he is the wisdom of God: but instead of that he concentrated his ministry upon that which God had revealed, and he preached only "the word."

"The word" is an utterance from the mouth of God, and Jesus was God's mouth to men: all his teaching was the Father's word in one way or other. He confessed, "The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself." He said also, "As my Father hath taught me, I speak these things." "The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." Originality of doctrine finds no sanction in the Saviour's ministry: true ministers repeat what they are told, they do not fabricate for themselves: they are not spiders to spin a web out of their own bowels. Now, beloved brethren, let us remember this whenever we are trying to win a soul for Christ. Souls are won by "the word." It is the word of God that is "quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword": it is "the word" which is "the living and incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever." Therefore we must stick to "the word." "Oh," say some, "there are many that have been sitting under the old-fashioned gospel for years, and they are not converted." What do you propose to do? Do you propose to preach another gospel? Look you, sir; if they were not saved by the truth they will not be saved by a lie. It seems practically to be conceded that during revivals you may get a little beyond the gospel; when there is an excitement upon the people you may say things which are not strictly accurate, and you may set yourself right afterwards, when the desirable effect has been produced. This will never do. Not so the Saviour: he spake "the word" unto them, whoever they might be, and he never altered that word. I know of no condition of the human mind which can justify me in stirring by the breadth of a hair from what God has revealed. The gospel is good at all times, in lukewarm times, or in fanatical times; and blessed is he that moors himself to it, or rather is held fast by it, and has no wish to go beyond it. To deliver "the word" is a plain, simple, and easy process; for when we have a soul to deal with, the medicine is prescribed, and we have only to hand it out. The meat, and drink, and medicine of souls is before us. We have not to excogitate from our own brain a salvation that will fit this sinner or that; God has given us already the salvation, and the doctrine, and the truth which will suit all sinners who will accept it. Your judgment and your careful thought will be wanted to select the fitting portion of truth; your heart will be wanted to pray over that portion that God may bless it; your responsibilities are still great; but happily you are delivered from the more tremendous task of manufacturing a

gospel. I see the modern-thought workmen with their bellows full of wind, and their fire of very small coal. They are puffing away at a great rate. And now they take to hammering! See how the sparks fly; they are fashioning they know not what, neither do their people know what next they may forge upon the anvil. As for us, we invent nothing, but testify what we have seen and tasted and handled of the good word of God. God has promised that his word shall not return unto him void, and therefore we feel sure of a happy issue. We stand upon blessed ground when we determine to speak to the outside world the revealed word and nothing else. Within the circle of "the word" lies life, healing, peace, joy, holiness, heaven; what more do sinners need? Oh that they would "receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save their souls."

Notice next, that our Saviour having no difficulty about his matter, but always speaking "the word," *spoke it simply*. He never affected profundity or obscurity. Our Lord has said many things so deep that they are lower than the abyss, and he has spoken truths so high that they are higher than the highest heaven; but still he aimed at being understood. Some divines are like the cuttle-fish, which, when it descends into the sea, often opens its ink-bags, darkens the water, and hides itself from all observers. It cannot see itself amid the clouds which it purposely creates. Too many preachers are endowed with these darkening ink-bags. When they have simple truth to preach they surround it with an atmosphere of blackness, darkening counsel, and involving simplicity in mystery. They are as the west wind, which bringeth clouds. They must be profound if they are anything. Now, the Lord Jesus Christ had it in his power to be more profound than any man, for he knew all things: yet he never veiled the truth, but set it forth before the people with clear light and overcoming evidence. His speech was ever plain as the sun at noon. See how your children will read the parables of Jesus and remember them. What is the best book to put before a child when it is learning to read? Why, the New Testament; for if there be difficulties in the sense there are none in the words. What a multitude of monosyllables we have in John's gospel! The Lord Jesus did not carry a gold pencil-case with him, that whenever he met with a word of twelve syllables he might figure it down, and say, "That goes into next Sunday's sermon, and so the people will know what a superior person I am." No; but he looked about to find homely similes and instructive emblems, by which to make the truth plain as a pikestaff to those who wished to understand it. Of course the brightest light is lost on blind eyes; but Jesus never withheld that light. He was all simplicity, so that the children gathered around him, clambered to his knees, and loved to listen to the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth. The parable was the most effectual way of conveying truth, and therefore he used it often; and though it did hide the truth from those who were hardened, yet that was their fault, and could not be laid at the door of the parable, which in itself is a right royal method of instruction,—a method which throws the labour upon the teacher, and makes it easy to the learner.

Let us learn from our Lord's example, and remember that we must do the work for those whom we would bless; we must make attention an

easy matter for them by clearly setting forth the truths which we teach.

Dear brethren and sisters, when you are teaching others, take care that you yourself understand that which you would communicate. Whenever a man preaches so that you cannot understand him, the secret of it is that he does not understand himself; for if he knew what he meant to say he would, probably, be able to say it, and you would know what he meant by it; but he who is not clear in teaching in all probability does not know what he means. Therein full often lies his pretended wisdom: you, perhaps, look up and wonder at this superior man, when in fact he is an inferior man swollen out with pretence. It must be so. If he were better taught he would teach better. When a man has studied the subject so that he get a grip of it he is able to set it out to others; but when it passes over his head like a bird of the air, he has not seen it and cannot describe it, neither can any others learn from his language. Our Lord and Master taught in plainest words, and if his gospel was hid it was hidden only to the blind in heart.

Our Lord also spake very *suitably*. He adapted his language to the ignorance or knowledge of his audiences. He knew that they would not receive abstract truth, and therefore he seldom dispensed it: he wished to instruct rather than to amaze. On the occasion which Mark here records, "Without a parable spake he not unto them." It would have been unsuitable to have spoken in any other fashion. Do you notice Mark's expression, "With many such parables"? "Parables" and "many" of them: priceless illustrations were abundant with him. But Mark says, "such" parables: that is, simple ones, full of light, for the parables in this chapter are particularly plain. The truth seems to lie upon the surface of them; and "with many such parables spake he the word unto them." He saw that just then the minds of the people were feeble by reason of ignorance: they were as sheep not having a shepherd, and needed careful tending. Though he did sometimes deliver truth without a parable, so that they cried, "Now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no parable"—yet for the general, when dealing with the mass of those whose minds were darkened by the Rabbinical teachers of the period, and by their own indifference to truth, he did continually use the simplest parable that could be found. Let us try to do the same. I heard a gentleman once say that he found it very difficult to bring his mind down to the capacity of children; but the fact was that he had no mind of any consequence. He thought himself great, but this was a clear sign of littleness. He had something which he mistook for a mind, but it was an error on his part to talk of bringing it down: it needed raising up. Those who clearly know the truth of God will find children to be a congenial auditory. They will pick up similes as pigeons pick up seeds, and their little eyes sparkle as they catch your meaning. Therefore, "many such parables" let us speak unto them. If they do not always care for the moral, they are in this like the people to whom our Lord addressed himself; but he put the truth in such a form that even if they did not care for it they cared for the picture in which he set it forth, and listened earnestly to his words, and so the truth was introduced to their minds.

Dear friends, notice again that our Lord spake *considerately*. "With

many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it." What wisdom there is here: "As they were able to hear it." Some of us are not so considerate as we ought to be, and drench those to whom we would give drink. Our Lord was not too long in his discourses: he never wearied the people by a sermon till midnight, as Paul did. It is always better to send a congregation away longing than loathing. Our Lord knew that earnest attention involves effort, and tends to exhaustion. True hearing lays a strain upon the mind which cannot be over long endured. None of us have more than a certain quantity of attention, and when we have used up that certain quantity, it becomes tiresome for us to hear more. We are like narrow-necked vessels, and he who tries to fill such a vessel all in a moment will spill the most of the liquor. The filling must be done gently, the water must be poured in as the vessel is able to receive it. So did the Saviour, with short parables and sententious utterances, pass on from truth to truth, as the people were prepared to receive his instruction. He moderated the quantity, so that they might not be oppressed with too much.

He taught "as they were able to hear it;" that is to say, he did not puzzle them with deep doctrine when he wished to save them; for it is poor work to confound a man when you want to convert him. This Master Teacher gave forth such a quantity of truth as his auditors' hearts could take in, and the matter was so chosen as to be on the level of their comprehension.

As for his style, it was so pleasing that they who did not believe in him nevertheless confessed that "Never man spake like this man." They were held as with golden chains by his enchanting manner; for he spake with an evident love to them, and with an anxious desire that they should receive the truth and should be saved by it. Oh, dear friends, if you want to be useful be careful to speak considerately. If you go into a sick chamber and the person says, "Would you read me the twenty-third Psalm?" do not bawl it out, but read in gentle tones suitable to the poor pained ear and weary brain. If you have to speak a word for Christ, let it drop like the gentle dew from heaven, and do not hurl it out like a hard driving hailstorm. You cannot bully a man to Christ; you will be wise never to attempt it. Load the camel as he is able to carry, and the mind as it is able to bear. Hearts are drawn, not driven. We are not to teach as *we* are able to speak, but as the people are able to hear. We must not exhaust the hearer by our attempt to exhaust the subject. Never overdo a good thing, lest it be spoiled and rendered of none effect.

To conclude this matter: our Lord's address to the outside world was such that *if they did not receive the truth the fault lay with themselves*. It is true the mass of his hearers never saw beneath the surface, for they had no heart towards the truth, and so the parable did tend to their blindness; yet this was not the natural effect of his parable, but the misuse of it by slothful and carnal minds. Their foolish hearts were darkened. Jesus made truth so clear that their blear-eyes could not bear the light. The difficulty with them was that there were so few difficulties: the truth was hard because they were proud. Had they been taught of the Father they would have come to Jesus and delighted in the

condescension which made all so plain ; but their pride blinded them, even as he said, "How can ye believe that receive honour one of another?" They rebelled against the light, and this was their condemnation. They were indignant at being forced to see what they did not wish to see, and so they resolved to stop in the outward letter of the parable, and go no further. Let us imitate the Lord Jesus in his endeavour to win souls, by speaking in such style that if they are lost it shall be no fault of ours. Dear Mr. Whitefield sometimes cried out, "O sinners, if you are lost it is not for want of being prayed for, nor for want of being wept over, nor for want of an earnest anxiety on my part to bring you to the feet of Jesus." Make a point of being able to say the same. In your class-teaching, in your private talks with individuals, so speak that you can say: "I am clear of your blood: if you do not receive 'the word' it is because you wilfully refuse it. I have not concealed the word of God, neither have I embellished it so as to confound your minds." Oh that every worker here might say, "I have striven to commend the truth to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Let it be so plain that he may run that readeth it. It is better to speak five words which are understood than a thousand which merely dazzle the eye of the mind. Use earnest, hearty, entreating words. You cannot chill a man into grace. I do not believe that anybody ever rode to Christ on an iceberg; frost and winter play but little part in opening the flowers in the King's garden. If icicles hang from our lips we shall not melt men's hearts. Cold hearts must be thawed by the warm, genial influence of a sunlit soul. May heaven's light of love rest upon us. It will if we are truly taught of the Saviour.

And now, you that are outsiders, see what trouble the Saviour takes with you; for what he did for men of his age he does for men of every age: he longs that you should come to him; he puts the truth so that you may see it, and he preaches it persuasively and affectionately. Alas, that men should require such trouble to be taken with them! If anyone were giving away gold and silver he would not need to go down on his knees and entreat men to accept the precious metals; but when we have to preach "the word," how must we entreat, implore, beseech men to come, or else they will not come at all; nor even when we have implored and besought will they lend a listening ear and a believing heart unless the arm of the Lord be revealed. See you this, ye outsiders; let the reflection of this make you ashamed, and cause you to resolve that now henceforth, having ears to hear, you will hear, and when Jesus pleads you will bow to him. May God the Holy Spirit make it so. Thus have we set forth the manner in which our Lord spake with the outer circle.

II. Secondly, let us see how Jesus dealt with THE INNER CIRCLE when he addressed himself to his own disciples:—"And when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples." A most precious text. I wish I had the whole time for a sermon upon it.

Notice, first, then, that the Lord Jesus Christ *opened up to them the inner meaning of the word*. Never yet did a man desire to learn of Jesus whom Jesus refused to teach. When men did not want to learn he drew back, and did not force himself on them. He kept the exposition of his own teaching for those who were prepared to receive it, and who

really thirsted to obtain it :—" When they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples." Come now, dear friends, do we not wish to learn? Shall the word be to us a mere husk with its kernel gone? Are we not anxious to know the inner meaning of the doctrine? Shall we be content to observe the outside structure of truth in the parabolic form, and not to enter into its secret chambers, and live and dwell in the truth itself?

If you desire to have all things expounded, note well that *those to whom Christ expounded all things were his own disciples*. You must become a disciple of Christ if you are to know Christ's truth. A disciple of Christ is one who accepts Christ as his teacher, and himself becomes a learner. A disciple, however, is more than that : he is one who receives Christ as his leader and Lord. " Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well," said Jesus. Christ the Rabbi, the Master, is also Christ the Lord ; the teacher and leader are one. If we are to be his disciples, we must do what he bids us, as well as believe what he tells us. Except we are willing to tread in his footsteps and follow his example we cannot be his disciples ; and until we are such he will not expound all things unto us.

Do you want to understand the Scriptures? Do you long to understand the deep things of God, and the high mysteries of the Word? Then first become Christ's disciples. " If any man shall do his will, he shall know of the doctrine." The teaching of Christ is spirit and life. The rabbis taught the letter, but Christ teaches the life ; and if we submit ourselves to him to receive his life, and to make him our way, he will then be to us the truth ; but if we refuse him, if we will not yield to him, we shall remain in darkness with all the rest of the outer circle ; hearing, we shall hear and not understand ; seeing, we shall see and not perceive. Oh, my hearer, instead of trying to untie all knots and unravel all difficulties, yield thyself to Christ first of all. If thou wouldest know, believe and obey. Thou must trust Christ first, and yield thyself up wholly to him, and then shall the divine light of the Holy Spirit come streaming into thy soul to open up to thee the things hidden from the carnally wise. First, we must be in very deed the Lord's disciples. Some versions have here the word " own." Tischendorf reads it, " to his own disciples "—to those whom he owned and acknowledged as truly belonging to him. Our Lord will surely teach his own. " When they were alone, he expounded all things to his own disciples."

If we claim to be his disciples *we must cultivate a desire to learn*. No man in holy lore learns more than he is willing to be taught. Certain who call themselves disciples of Christ have no wish to learn, but they have a great wish to teach before they have learned anything. See the many who run away half-hatched, with the shell on their heads, and yet they try to crow. They cannot teach, and they will not learn. If they would wait a little, and be instructed, their time might come ; but they are so hasty to fight that they will neither put on armour nor gird on a sword. Eager to give drink to the thirsty, they cannot spare time to fill the cup. How can they sow if they have no seed in the basket? Can a man have anything which he has not received? And if he has not learned it of the Father, how can he

go with any power to tell it forth unto others? We must be anxious to learn.

Observe how our Lord Jesus prompts his disciples to learn. When he has given them a parable he says, "Have ye understood all these things?" He comes near to them when the crowd has dispersed, and he says to them privately, "Have ye understood all these things? The crowd know nothing, but they are gone. They have been pleased with my parables, but they have not entered into the soul of my teaching. Have ye understood all these things?" Now, at the end of a discourse that is full of Christ, this is exactly what Jesus says to you and to me: "Have ye understood all these things?" Have ye entered into the essential truth, and not been content to lie sleeping on the doorstep of the mere letter of it? The Saviour wishes us to be inquisitive, searching into the meaning of "the word." "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst" to know the meaning of his words, for they shall be instructed; for, as I have said before, never did heart hunger to learn and find the Lord unwilling to teach.

We are to be his disciples, and anxious to learn; it follows in consequence that we must *confess that we do not know*. Many a man might have known if he had but been aware that he did not know. A sense of ignorance is the doorstep of the palace of wisdom. These men that needed to be instructed by Christ, and to have all things to be expounded to them, were the very pick of the saints: out of them came the apostles and the seventy disciples, and these formed the first course of living stones laid upon the foundation to build up a spiritual house; and yet these admirable persons needed that they should be alone with Jesus to have all things expounded to them. Oh, brothers and sisters, let us not be so wickedly self-conceited as to fancy that we know everything. Are there not some who think that they carry the gospel and all the doctrines of it in their pockets as if it were a five-sided lozenge? They have condensed the infinite into a pentagon. If anyone knows more than they know he is denounced as a heretic, hopelessly unsound. Let it not be so with us, for we dare not boast of such perfect knowledge. What do we know, my brethren? If what we do know and what we do not know were put together there would be such a difference in the size of the volumes that they could not be bound to match. What we know is so little compared with what we do not know that we might safely take up the language of Isaac Newton, the greatest of human intellects probably, when he said that he had been like a child playing on the beach, who had picked up here and there a beautiful shell, while all the great deep of the ocean still remained unexplored. We are of yesterday, and know nothing. Like children, we need teaching: therefore let us be constantly coming to Christ. I do not mean you youngsters only, but the greybeards, the most experienced and most advanced among us. Let us be sitting at his feet with Mary, hearkening to that heavenly voice which alone can expound all things to us.

I beg you to observe carefully that these folk whom Christ instructed in the inner sense had *to be separate from the multitude*. "When they were alone." When they had got together as birds of a feather should; when like sheep they were penned in the fold, then the Great Shepherd

fed them, and not till then. Come ye out from the world if ye would learn the deep things of God. The more conformity to the world the more shall we abide in darkness. It is wonderful what light will come to a man when he learns to walk the separated path. There is a way which is narrow as a razor's edge, along which none can walk but those whom Christ upholds; but if they are willing to walk there in strict integrity, keeping themselves from the temptations of the world, and rising above the customs of society, then shall they know the mind of God. "When they were alone," when they formed themselves as it were into a church, and the rest of the congregation went to their own homes—when they distinctly owned themselves to be Christ's own disciples, then he expounded the truth to them.

More than this, I will go beyond my text: if you and I wish to know the heart of our holy religion, we must get alone, even from the church, with Christ. This is the pith of it,—*they were alone with Christ*. If they had been alone, and Jesus had not been there, they would have learned nothing; but they were alone *with him*. Oh, brothers and sisters, let us practise more meditation. We are none of us as much alone as we ought to be in these busy days. I do not mean merely to pray and read, but to sit still and ponder and consider. More of that blessed silence, "frost of the mouth and thaw of the soul," is what we greatly need. I find it good in devotion occasionally to cease praying, and look up, gazing into the invisible. The heart kindles into admiration of the person of Christ, and the soul begins to speak to him as to a friend, while all the inner man is still. Know you not what it is to say, "I sleep; but my heart waketh"? Then it is that the Lord expounds unto us the Scripture. A good commentary is a great help, but communion with the Lord is better. If you want to understand a book there is nothing like asking the author, "Pray, sir, what do you mean by this?" And if you will hasten away to the Author of Scripture, how often you will understand what he meant, though the words perplex you. I believe you might go the round of all the ministers and divines now alive, and say to them, "What does this mean?" and they could tell you what the letter meant; but after having done that, or without doing it, if you would ask the Lord Jesus, he would more clearly show you the sense of it. Scripture is often like Gideon's fleece, wet through with the heavenly dew, but you want to know how to press out the moisture and preserve it. The Lord Jesus can show you how to wring it till your bucket is filled. We get a precious text sometimes, and hammer away at it, and it does not break up at all; but when we ask the Lord Jesus about it, he puts power into our arm of thought, and the stone flies to shivers the next time we tap it, and we say, "Here is something I never thought to find: here is a mass of gold within this quartz; here is a diamond concealed within this common pebble: how came it there?" Lord, enlighten our darkness; put thy fingers on these eyes, that they may behold wondrous things out of thy law. You know the old Arab story of the dervish who crossed his eyes with a magic ointment, and straightway, instead of the common house in which he lived, he saw a palace sparkling with diamonds, radiant with rubies, adorned with emeralds and gold. After such manner the Lord opens up to us a passage of Scripture, by anointing our eyes with

eye-salve that we may see. What sights have we beheld in the word ! We have been lost in wonder, love, and praise ! But the Lord does this to us when we are alone with him. "When they were alone, he expounded all things unto his disciples."

Now, brethren, I leave this part of the subject, and conclude when I notice that, in order to get this precious exposition from Christ, *we must regard him as being the ultimate and final interpreter*. "He expounded all things to his disciples." Those men had settled it in their hearts that they would believe whatever he said : his *ipse dixit* was to stand to them instead of argument : he himself was to them the Word of God, the revelation of the Most High, the mystic glass into which they looked and saw truth in all its glory. When they were willing to have it so, they were instructed. The key of Scripture is Christ. The only infallible interpreter of "the word" is Jesus the word. Him we may follow in every case with the utmost safety. There is more truth in the person of Christ than there is in all the books that have been written. We hear and read of this and that "body of divinity" : there is only one body of divinity, and that is the body of Jesus Christ. Christ Jesus is our divinity. We hear of theology sometimes ; what is it ? Theology, that is the word of God, and what is that but Christ ? Get, then, to be familiar with him as with a friend, and you shall know what he means. I have heard of a wise man of whom they said in his biography, that to be acquainted with him was a liberal education ; that if you went and stayed with him you might put all your books away, for he was a walking cyclopædia. I can hardly think that of any mere man, but I am sure it is true of Jesus. Communion with him is illumination. He is that choicest book in the Christian's library which hath more teaching in it than all besides. The hem of Christ's garment is better than all the robes of philosophy. There is more to be learned from his footprints than from the profoundest reasoning of the most learned men. I commend to you, brethren, and to myself also, that we do continually sit at Jesus' feet. Remember, it was of this that Jesus said, "Mary hath chosen the good part." She chose to be a learner ; she chose to learn from the lips of Christ himself.

May this good part fall to our lot ; for if we are such learners as this, then our *salvation is sure*. He that is taught of God is taught aright and taught savingly. By such teaching our *joy and pleasure will be greatly increased*. There is little joy in the bare externals of truth : the joy lies within. Many a man has come to the truth as poor children in the street on a Christmas night come to a house and look through the window, and see the fire blazing merrily upon the hearth ; but the snow is deep, and their little feet are pinched with cold. If they could enter that cosy parlour they would have warmth and comfort, but in the street all is miserable. O you that are outside the truth, peering through its windows, you get none of the joy of it ! Pass through the door, which is Christ, by a loving faith, and then its entrance shall give you light. The joy and mirth of the truth are with the family of God, who bask in the light of his countenance.

It is for your salvation ; it is for your delight ; *it is for your security too* ; for he that knows the truth will triumph over temptation. He

who has been taught of Christ can meet the objections of the ungodly. There is more argument for the gospel in Christ himself than in all Apologies and Evidences that were ever written. Many defences of the gospel have now been prepared, and we are thankful for them; but if you get to Christ himself you do not need such protections. It is to me a work of supererogation when I read defences of inspiration and of the gospel. Confirmed believers do not require them. I *know* the gospel to be true. I am assured of it in my inmost soul. If anybody were to write a book about the excellences of my mother, and ask me to be a subscriber, I should say, "I know more about it than you do: I do not need to read, or listen to argument, I am quite beyond it, for I know her loving care for me." The love of Christ shed abroad in the heart is its own evidence! Do they tell us there is no Christ? No Christ? Then all life must be a dream, for we know him, and have seen him with the mind's eye. Sometimes they say there is no heaven, as Atheist did in Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress." "What?" says Christian to his companion, "Did not we see it from the top of Mount Clear when the shepherds lent us their optic glass?" Thus the Lord brings eternal things, and especially his dear Son, so vividly before our consciousness that we laugh to scorn the wisdom of the sceptic, which is but folly.

Let us be earnest to get heavenly instruction from Christ, for then *we shall be useful*; and that is the end we aim at. If you do not know the inner truth what good can you do? Here you live in this world among blind men, and they say, "Lead us!" but if the blind lead the blind they shall both fall into the ditch. No, no; you must get your own eyes opened, and must know Christ and be known of him, and then you can help the poor blind sinner, and you can guide him to Jesus. No one knows of what usefulness you will be capable when you have been taught of the Lord. God do so unto you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Mark iv.

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