

# CHRIST'S PROPHETIC TEACHING IN RELATION TO THE DIVINE ORDER OF HIS WORDS AND WORKS

## PART I.

SOME passages of Scripture derive their chief importance from the words which the Holy Spirit employs; some from the solemn *truth* that is conveyed; some from the great secret that is revealed; while others derive their chief importance from the place in which we find them. Why, for example, are the prophetic utterances of Christ recorded in Matt. xxiv., Mark xiii., and Luke xxi. at the close of His ministry? Why not at the beginning? Why not at any earlier or later period?

“The Lord is faithful in all His *words* and holy in all His *works*”, therefore all His words and works were perfect in themselves; and all His words were spoken, and all His works were done, not only in the right way, and at the right time, but *in the right order*. There must, therefore, be not only the meaning of His words to be considered, but the reason why they were spoken at a particular moment and recorded in a particular place; and there must also be a lesson arising from the *time* when the words were spoken, the *place* where they are written, and the *order* in which they were uttered. How frequently do we read such words as these: “Mine hour is not yet come”. (John ii. 4; vii. 30; viii. 20.) “I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” (John xvi, 12.) He spake “as they were able to bear it”. (Mark iv. 33.) “My time is not yet come, but your time is always ready. . . . Go ye up unto this feast; I go not up yet unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come.” (John vii. 6–8.) These expressions show us that Christ’s words were all spoken, and His works were all done with Divine perfection, both as to time and order.

Indeed, we have notes of time which show us that His ministry was divided into four great periods, in each of which He was occupied with a particular subject. We do not say that these are in each case absolutely marked off, or that they do not overlap, but they are sufficiently marked so as to leave us in no doubt whatever that His ministry was occupied with four great

subjects,—distinct, definite, and Divine. *The First Subject* was

### 1. *The Kingdom of Heaven: Its Character and Requirements*

No sooner was Christ baptized, and by the pronouncement of the Divine formula—"This is my beloved Son", inaugurated for His office of PROPHET (Matt. iii. 17), than we read (Matt. iv. 17) "FROM THAT TIME Jesus began to preach and to say Repent: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand". So that there was a moment from which Jesus "began" to announce this Coming Kingdom, and to set forth the necessary conditions for entering it; and there was a period during which He spoke of this subject, as He did not speak in any subsequent period.

In the Synagogue at Nazareth He opened the Scripture and read the portion of the Prophets (the "Haphtorah") appointed for the day, which in God's providence happened to be Isaiah lxi., and which set forth the glorious fact that when that Kingdom should come, broken hearts would be bound up, the captives delivered, the blind restored to sight, and the acceptable year of the Lord proclaimed.

To enter this Kingdom He showed the condition which God had declared by all His holy prophets, viz. a new heart, a right spirit, a new nature, and a new birth. Nicodemus, "a man of the Pharisees, a Ruler of the Jews" (John iii. 1) and "a master of Israel", came to Him. Jesus answered the thought of his heart, and the question implied at the end of verse 2. We may supply the Ellipsis thus: "Rabbi, we know that Thou art a Teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles (ii. 23) which Thou doest, except God be with him [therefore am I come to Thee that Thou mayest teach me how I may see the Kingdom of God.] Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again (i.e. anew, or from above) he cannot see the Kingdom of God . . . Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God". Nicodemus asked "How can these things be?" Jesus answered and said unto him, "Art thou a master of Israel (one of the teachers of Israel) and knowest not these things. . . . If I have told you EARTHLY THINGS and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?"—(iii. 9-12). This shows us that the new birth is *Kingdom* truth rather than *Church* truth, and belongs to

“Earthly things”. Nicodemus, as one of the teachers of Israel ought to have known that this new birth was the fundamental condition of entering the kingdom of God. The prophets had spoken of this great pre-requisite, and Nicodemus ought to have known it. Jehovah had promised “I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you unto your own land, THEN will I sprinkle clean WATER upon you, and ye shall be clean. . . . A new SPIRIT will I put within you”. Ezek. xxxvii. 24–27. By other Prophets God had spoken of this condition for entering the Kingdom. See Ezek. xi. 19, xxxvii. 14, xviii. 31; Jer. xxxi. 33, xxxii. 39, etc. And yet Nicodemus did not know these “earthly things”. Thus Jesus had to enforce this great condition “Ye MUST be born again.”

Then in the next chapter (John iv.) we have another “MUST”, showing the nature of the worship which shall characterize the coming Kingdom, and the coming “hour” (which we, in the hour that “now is”, also know as the only worship which God will accept). “God is a spirit, and they that worship Him MUST worship Him in spirit and in truth” (i.e. by the figure of *Hendiadys* “truly in spirit”).

In the next chapter (John v.) he shows the impotent man, the impotence of all means short of God’s omnipotence for healing the sins and sicknesses of this world. When the King reigns, “then shall the lame man leap as a hart”. Hence Jesus shows by His almighty power how he can accomplish, simply by His word, that which, apart from Him, required such cumbrous means. This brings us to the fact that all His miracles wrought during this first period were for the same end. The first miracle in Cana showed man’s incompetence to provide joy, even where he might be expected to provide it—at a marriage feast; and how He, where man failed, could and would “make glad the heart of man”. Other miracles had reference to the Sabbath day, showing its true nature and significance—that it was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. This is seen, not only at the Pool of Bethesda, but in the case of the man with the withered hand. The same question arises over the disciples plucking the ears of corn (Mark ii. 23–28). The Sabbath was made for man, and as a blessed foretaste of that Sabbath-keeping to come, when this groaning creation shall find rest, and the Lord of the Sabbath shall give rest to a restless world.

This first period culminates in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. v., vi., vii.), where the Lord announces the laws of the kingdom: not any law such as was given on Mount Sinai, but a spiritual, fiery law, which only the newly-created heart, and God's own spirit put within man, could delight in and obey. We have here no laws for the Church of God! The members of the body of Christ are "not under law, but under grace" (Romans vi. 14). The interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, as relating to Christians in this present dispensation, has been the prolific source of error of all kinds. It has put saints under a yoke, given a handle to the infidel, and created difficulties by referring these precious laws to a world which lieth in the power of the wicked one, whereas they can be interpreted only with reference to "the Kingdom of Heaven" when "a king shall reign in righteousness". There are many of these laws which enunciate eternal principles and truths, which may have a powerful application to God's people at all times and in all dispensations, but the application is one thing and the interpretation is another.

Here, then, in this first period, Christ is occupied in proclaiming and teaching concerning the kingdom of Heaven, showing how it is to be entered by the new birth and repentance; exhibiting the nature of its worship and of its laws, and setting forth its Heavenly character as opposed to all that is of this world, making good His saying, My kingdom is "not from hence". The Second Subject was

## 2. *Christ's Person*

In view of the rejection of the kingdom thus proclaimed, and of the King Himself—Jesus in this second period occupies Himself with His person, showing that He is God, and that, therefore, His word cannot fall to the ground, and that His work cannot fail of its purpose. Hence, at the outset, the moment He comes down from the Mount, He is met by the leper who came "and worshipped Him", owning Him as "LORD" (Matt. viii. 2).

The Centurion (Matt. viii. 8) also owns him as "LORD", and argues from this, His divine power:—"I say to this man go, and he goeth; and to another come, and he cometh; and to my servant do this, and he doeth it. (How much more canst thou 'speak' with a word only and my servant shall be healed.)"

In Matt. viii. 26, as the great Creator, "He rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm".

In verse 29 the devils own Him as God, saying "What have we to do with Thee Thou Son of God?"

In Matt. ix. 6 they bring to Him the man sick of the palsy; and, as God, He says "Son be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee". The people realized this as a claim to Deity, for they reasoned in their hearts, "Why doth this man speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God only?" (Mark ii. 7. Luke v. 21.)

His miracles wrought during this second period were in perfect keeping with this object. They were all miracles which only Deity could work. He raised two from the dead. The daughter of Jairus from her bed (Matt. ix. 18-26). And the widow's son from his bier (Luke vii. 11-17). Miracles which only Deity could perform. He claimed to be the Lord of the Sabbath, i.e. equal to Him who at the first ordained it. "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath day" (Matt. xii. 8). He cast out devils "by the Spirit of God", and thus proved Himself to be stronger than "the strong man", "and able to bind him and spoil his goods" (Matt. xii. 28, 29). In the same chapter He declared that He was "greater than Jonah" (v. 41) and "greater than Solomon" (v. 42). He walked upon the sea, and again caused the wind to cease (Matt. xiv. 25, 32), drawing forth the confession "of a truth Thou art the son of God" (v. 33). He wrought two miracles of creation in the feeding of the "five thousand men, beside women and children" (Matt. xiv. 15-21), and the "four thousand men, beside women and children" (xv. 32-38). In John v., vi., vii., viii., ix., x., we have a long series of claims to Deity, and to equality with the Father. He declares that He is the great "I AM" (viii. 58). He reveals himself to the man born blind as "the Son of God" (ix. 35-37). He is "the bread of life", "the good shepherd"; in fact the Jews would stone Him because He made Himself "God" (x. 33). This period culminates "in the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi", where He brings it to a crisis by asking "Whom do men say that I—the Son of man—am?" And they said, "Some say that Thou art John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets". He saith unto them, "But whom say YE that I am?" And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ (the Messiah) THE SON OF THE

LIVING GOD". And Jesus answered and said unto him, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona (son of Jona), for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in Heaven. And I say unto thee, that thou art Petros (*πέτρος, a rolling, movable stone*), and upon this Petra (*πέτρα, a rock or immovable foundation*) will I build my church, i.e. I will build it not upon any unstable mortal, but upon the Son of God.—"The stone which the builders refused"—Christ crucified and risen—the foundation laid by Jehovah in Zion (Matt. xvi. 13–18; 1 Peter ii. 4–6; Acts iv. 10–12; Isaiah xxviii. 16).

Thus ends the second period, and now we have as The Third Subject:—

### 3. *Christ's Sufferings*

No longer the person of Christ, but the work which He came to do—His sufferings and death. The declaration of his person comes first; for apart from this His death would be valueless. He is first shown to be "very God of very God" in order to lay the foundation of that work which he wrought and suffered as perfect man.

The opening of this third period is very marked, definite, and precise. In Matt. xvi. 20, 21, we read that He formally stopped the preaching of the Kingdom, and the proclamation of Himself as the Messiah: "THEN charged He His disciples that they should tell no man that He was Jesus the Christ (i.e. the Messiah)." And, "FROM THAT TIME FORTH BEGAN Jesus to show unto His disciples how that He must go into Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day". So that there was a moment in Christ's ministry before which He had not spoken concerning His sufferings and death, and there was a moment at which He "began" and from which He continued to do so.

The Kingdom had been first proclaimed as at hand, and its spiritual requirements set forth. Then with its rejection came the declaration and enforcement of the truth that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, and therefore His purpose must stand. The Kingdom thus rejected would yet be established, and the King would yet reign in righteousness. The declaration of the Deity of Christ lays the foundation for the infinite merits of his atoning work, in virtue of which during the interval,

while the Kingdom should be in abeyance—a new Body should be formed—the “Body of Christ”: a new building should be founded upon Jesus Christ crucified and risen (Eph. ii. 20–22). When this “Body” and this “Building” shall have been fitly framed together (Eph. ii. 21, iii. 16), then the members shall “appear with Christ in glory” (Col. iii. 3, 4), and His Kingdom shall be revealed and set up. Hence, soon after the day that Jesus began to speak of His sufferings a great event took place. It is dated “six days” after these sayings concerning the “sufferings of Christ”, and it told of “the glory that should follow”. In fact it “made known the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter i. 16; Matt. xvi. 28; Mark ix. 1; Luke ix. 27), and at the same time inaugurated Him for his high-priestly work upon which the Kingdom was henceforth to be based. Thus, the moment of the revelation of His sufferings, was also the moment for the display of the glory of the Kingdom which should be the result of those sufferings—thus uniting together “the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow”. In the same way, and for the same reason, we find in the Old Testament that the Second Advent is often mentioned without any reference to the First Advent; but the First Advent is never referred to without the Second being mentioned in immediate connection. So that, while the “glory” is often mentioned apart from the “sufferings”, the “sufferings of Christ” are never mentioned apart from “the glory that should follow”. Hence the Transfiguration, which was, as we have said, the official inauguration of Christ for His sufferings, and His office of Priest was also a showing forth of “the glory that should follow”, in order that it might be a witness to the fact that though Christ was to suffer and die, yet He would enter into His glory, and in due time come again with all His saints: those that will be caught up to meet Him in the air without dying (as Elijah was), and those who shall have fallen asleep (as Moses did), and through the grave and gate of death pass to and enjoy a glorious resurrection, and be “they that are Christ’s at His coming”. This is why the Transfiguration occurs here at the opening of this third period of Christ’s ministry, six days after He had first spoken of His sufferings and death, and in immediate connection with that first mention. For, having said “there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Kingdom of God come with

power”, it is immediately added, “and after six days Jesus taketh with Him Peter and James and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain, apart by themselves, and was transfigured before them” (Mark ix. 1, 2; see, also, Matt. xvi. 28, and xvii. 1; Luke ix. 27, 28). The very words “sufferings” and “glory” are thus connected in all the narratives (compare Matt. xvi. 21 with 27; Mark ix. 31 with 38; and Luke ix. 22 with 26). But the evidence is far greater than this. Not only were the sufferings and death mentioned immediately before the Transfiguration, but immediately after it (Matt. xvii. 22, 23; Mark ix. 13; Luke ix. 44). And even during the glorious scene itself these sufferings and death form the only recorded subject of conversation! See Luke ix. 31, they “appeared in glory and spake of His decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem”. The sufferings and the glory are thus indissolubly linked together.

Again, the Holy Spirit tells us by Peter (2 Peter i. 17, 18) that it was “in the holy mount” that Christ “received from God the Father honour and glory”. He tells us of the fact, and of the place, but He does not here tell us the reason. In Heb. ii. 9, however, we are told not of the place or the circumstances, but the reason, viz. that Christ was “FOR THE SUFFERING OF DEATH crowned with glory and honour!”—the very same words as in 2 Peter i. 17, and, what is more, the same words which are written of Aaron (in the Greek Version of Ex. xxviii. 2, 3, τιμῆ and δόξα) when he was officially consecrated and set apart for his office of high priest. He, too, was transfigured—not indeed as Christ was by raiment of heavenly glory—but by special garments made according to the Divine command to Moses (and Moses is present at this consecration of the priest of whom Aaron was only a type). “Thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother for glory (δόξα) and for beauty (τιμῆ) . . . to consecrate him, that he may minister unto me in the priest’s office.” Here is another link in this wondrous connection, showing how at the Transfiguration, Christ was thus clothed and crowned with honour (τιμῆ) and glory (δόξα), that He might “minister to God in the priest’s office”.

But there is further evidence. The verb *to transfigure* (μεταμορφῶ) occurs in only two other passages (Rom. xii. 2, and 2 Cor. iii. 18), and each adds its corroborative testimony. The first passage is Rom. xii. 1, 2, “I beseech you therefore,



brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed (i.e. TRANSFIGURED) by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God". What do these words say to us? What, but this? that when Christ was transfigured, He presented His body as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God—a sweet savour offering indeed; and that there He proved "that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God", saying, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O my God". In like manner are we besought to prove what that perfect will of God is, by presenting our bodies a living sacrifice to God, and thus being transfigured as Christ was. But how are we to do this? How is this wonderful transfiguration—the renewing of our mind—to be accomplished?

The second passage gives the answer to this vital, all-important question. We have it in 2 Cor. iii. 18. "We all with open (unveiled) face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed (i.e. TRANSFIGURED) into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit" (i.e. the Spirit of which He had been speaking in v. 6). Here is no anxious toiling! Here is no restless labour! Here is no "act of consecration!" No "act of faith!" No "rules for holy living!" No rushing hither and thither! No trying to be changed! But we beholding . . . beholding . . . BEHOLDING . . . BEHOLDING, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, ARE TRANSFIGURED—into the self-same image! Just as the ancient mirror, which was made of polished metal, reflected its own brightness upon the face of one who beheld himself in it, so will occupation with Christ reflect His image and glory upon him who constantly with the eye of faith beholds Him; like as Moses' face reflected the glory of God (Exodus xxxiv. 29–35). In other words, occupation with a heavenly object will make us heavenly without any effort on our part to become heavenly. This is God's own divinely-appointed method for our transfiguration. This is the Divine provision for "the renewing of our mind". All other methods proposed by man, whether the methods of Thomas à Kempis or the more modern methods of this nineteenth century, all dishonour God and deceive men. Because, on the one hand, those who adopt them practically assert that a better method

has been found than the one which God had prescribed; and, on the other, they lead men to self-occupation, which ends in self-deception (2 Cor. x. 12). They aim at the end, but neglect the only means which can secure it! They try to be "changed" or transfigured, but fail in the attempt, inasmuch as they ignore the Divinely appointed way. They seek the "blessing", forgetting that God has conditioned the blessing upon "beholding" **THE BLESSER**, and that if we fulfil His condition, He has pledged Himself to give us the blessing—a blessing so great that those who are vainly seeking it in other ways have never yet dreamed of.

This is growth—growth in grace. But we must remember that growth is a Divine act and a constant miracle. No one can grow by trying to grow. "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" "Consider the lilies of the field how they grow; they toil not" (Matt. vi. 27). No! they lift up their heads to heaven, and drink in heaven's light, and heaven's heat, and heaven's air, and heaven's showers, and they grow without an effort. "Therefore, take no thought", is the Saviour's word, i.e. be not occupied with your spiritual growth. Let us then look up, look away, look off from ourselves unto Jesus. Let us occupy ourselves with Him, and we shall grow up into His image without a thought, and without an effort.

Thus we have shown that the Transfiguration of Christ commences this third period of His ministry, because of its important connection with His sufferings and death, which form the great subject of His teaching during this period. We have seen how in Matt. xvi. 21 He "began"; and now, having begun, he continues thus to teach. In Matt. xvii. 22, 23 He again introduces this subject and gives additional details as to the nature of His sufferings: "The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men; and they shall kill Him, and the third day He shall be raised again". Here the fact of His betrayal is added. In Matt. xx. 17-19 further details are given: "The Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify Him: and the third day He shall rise again". Then in Matt. xx. 28, we have the great **PURPOSE** of these sufferings and this death: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many".

In other passages we have references to the blessing of giving up life for Christ. "Whosoever shall lose his life for My sake shall find it" (Matt. xvi. 25; John xii. 25). The forsaking all for His sake is compensated by the gift of "everlasting life" (Matt. xix. 29). He speaks of being baptized with His baptism and drinking of His cup of suffering (Matt. xx. 22, 23; compare xxvi. 39-42).

Finally, in John xii. 32, we have the additional testimony as to the great RESULT of His death. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me: this, He said, signifying what death He should die", viz. the Roman death of crucifixion on a high stake or tree (John iii. 14; viii. 28). These words were uttered when "certain Greeks" desired to see Jesus (John xii. 20) and Jesus said (v. 24) "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground AND DIE, it abideth alone; but if IT DIE it bringeth forth much fruit". The "much fruit" consisted in this, that no longer from one nation, but from Jew and Gentile, from all peoples and nations, He would draw men, without any such distinctions, unto Himself. This He has done. But He has not drawn all without exception. This is the great result of His sufferings and death. We come now to the last, the Fourth Subject:

#### 4. *Christ's Second Advent*

The fourth period is the shortest in time, though not in matter.

All the Lord's parables and discourses, His words and works, during this last period, have reference to His coming again, and to the events connected with the future. His parables referred to the rejection of Israel (for a time) and to the calling of the Gentiles. It opens with the fulfilment of the prophetic message of Zech. ix. 9. "Tell ye the daughter of Zion behold thy King cometh into thee" (Matt. xxi. 5), and the shout of the multitude is "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord" (v. 9 and Ps. cxviii. 26). The Lord's comment on this was the first of the only two miracles which were wrought during this last period, viz. the withering of the fig tree. All this rejoicing was only in appearance. Like this fig tree, which had "only leaves", there was no real fruit—no reality, as was shown by the fact that the same voices which now cried "Hosanna! Hosanna!" would in a few brief days cry "Away

with Him! Crucify Him!” Like that fig tree, therefore, the nation would fall under His curse.

All the parables of this period are dispensational. The parable of the Two Sons, which followed, exhibits them as saying “I go, sir, and went not” (Matt. xxi. 30).

The parable of the Vineyard let out to husbandmen (v. 33-41) shows how “When the Lord of the vineyard cometh . . . He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons”.

The prophetic Psalm cxviii. 22 is quoted, “The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner”.

The parable of the Marriage of the King’s Son (Matt. xxii. 1-7) tells how he would “send forth his armies and destroy those murderers, and burn up their city”, and shows how other guests would be bidden to take the place of those who were “not worthy”.

The prophetic Psalm cx. 1 was next quoted, proving that as David’s Son and David’s Lord He would be exalted to God’s right hand, and all enemies eventually made His footstool (Matt. xxii. 41-46).

He next laments over Jerusalem, and prophesies concerning the Temple. “Behold your house is left unto you desolate, for I say unto you, ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

Passing over for a moment the great prophecy of Matt. xxiv., we come to the prophetic parables of “The Ten Virgins” (Matt. xxv. 1-13), which, though it may have an application to us now, can only have its proper interpretation at the time pointed out by the first word “THEN”.

The parable of “The Talents” (v. 16-30) set forth the solemn fact that “after a long time the Lord of those servants cometh and reckoneth with them” (v. 19).

The judgment of the living nations prior to the setting up of His Kingdom is then described: “When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory (Matt. xxv. 31-46).

In the Gospel of Luke we have similar prophetic parables, in The Unjust Judge (Luke xviii. 1-8). The interpretation of this parable is concerning perseverance in prayer; but the application

of it is concerning the fact that His elect nation Israel will one day be avenged of all her adversaries, even though He bears long with them (i.e. with the adversaries of His own elect, v. 3), and be long in interposing (Rev. vi. 10) "I tell you He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find the faith on the earth?"

The parable of the Nobleman who went into a far country "to receive for himself a kingdom and to return", shows that the kingdom would not then "immediately appear", but would assuredly do so in due time, notwithstanding the message sent after him "We will not have this man to reign over us". (Luke xix. 12-14.)

The parable of the Ten Pounds shows what would take place "when He was returned, having received the Kingdom". "Those mine enemies who would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither and slay them before Me" (Luke xix. 15-27).

We have referred above to one of the two miracles wrought during this period; one at the beginning, the other at the close; one of "judgment" the other of "mercy". The latter was the raising of Lazarus from the tomb, which, like the withering of the Fig Tree, was prophetic. It was the occasion which Jesus took for revealing that which can be understood only in the light of the "mystery", i.e. the secret afterwards shown to Paul, and by him to us, that "we shall not all sleep" (1 Cor. xv. 51); that "the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. iv. 16, 17), and both the dead and living who are "in Christ" all "changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. xv. 51, 52). This is the teaching of John xi. 25, 26. "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live (i.e. to him I will be 'the Resurrection'): and whosoever liveth (i.e. shall be 'alive and remain' when I come) shall never die" (to him I will be "the Life" changing him, and taking him up with those thus raised to be for ever with the Lord).

Let us now turn to THE GREAT PROPHECY, or rather to the two great prophecies: for the one recorded in Luke xxi. (though

parts were afterwards repeated) is different both in time and place and subject from that recorded in Matt. xxiv. and Mark xiii. The one recorded in Luke was spoken "on one of those days, as He taught the people in the Temple" (Luke xxi. 1). For the next note of time is in xxi. 1, "and He looked up and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the Treasury". So that He was still in the Temple when He uttered the prophecy recorded in Luke. For the next note of time is in v. 37 "and in the day-time He was teaching in the Temple; and AT NIGHT HE WENT OUT, and abode in the Mount that is called the Mount of Olives". But with regard to the prophecy recorded in Matthew xxiv. we distinctly read (v. 1) "and Jesus went out and departed from the Temple . . . . And as He sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately" (v. 3). So, in Mark xiii. 1 "He went out of the Temple . . . and as He sat upon the Mount of Olives, over against the Temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked Him privately" (v. 3).

So that we have two great prophecies. One (Luke) spoken in the Temple, the other (Matt. and Mark) spoken later upon the Mount of Olives. As parts of the first are repeated on the second occasion, we will give the leading points of the three in parallel columns, so that the object of each, and the difference between them, may be clearly seen. They both open with a summary of events which were to happen in the lifetime and experience of those who heard the words:

#### FROM THE CROSS ONWARDS

MATT. xxiv. 4-6.

"Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet."

MARK xiii. 5-7.

"Take heed lest any man deceive you. For many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet."

LUKE xxi. 8-9.

"Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them. But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by (i.e. immediately so R.V.)."

Then both go forward at once, leaping over the present dispensation, to describe

THE BEGINNING OF "THE GREAT TRIBULATION",  
as set forth in the breaking of the seals in Revelation vi.

First we have the opening of the first and second seals, which denote WAR (national and civil), symbolized by the “white and the red horses”. See Rev. vi. 2, 4.

Then FAMINE, symbolized by the “black horse” (the third seal). Rev. vi. 5, 6.

Then PESTILENCE, symbolized by the “livid horse” (the fourth seal). Rev. vi. 7, 8.

Then the EARTHQUAKE of the sixth seal. Rev. vi. 12.

MATT. xxiv. 7.

“Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.”

MARK xiii. 8.

“Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines, and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows.”

LUKE xxi. 10, 11.

“Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences, and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven.”

Now, it will be observed in the Lord’s discourse as recorded in Luke, that instead of saying “these are the beginning of sorrows” and going on to continue the account of them, He does not go on. He stops short; He goes back; He introduces a parenthesis detailing and describing something that should take place “BEFORE ALL THESE” beginning of sorrows. He goes back, in v. 12, to describe

### THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

| 12. But before all these

that is to say “BEFORE” the beginning of the great Tribulation, all that is recorded concerning Jerusalem in verses 12–24, should first take place. These are the closing words:

24. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” Note that the word for “fulfilled”, here, is πληρώω, while in verse 32, Matt. xxiv. 34, and Mark xiii. 30, it is quite another word in the Greek, viz., γίνουαι— which means to arise, to begin to be. That is to say, this generation shall not pass away till all these things begin to take place.

Now, in the discourse recorded in Matt. xxiv., instead of going back to speak of the condition of Jerusalem before and until the beginning of the great Tribulation; having said "All these are the beginning of sorrows", He goes on to describe the sorrows, or birth pangs (Matt. xxiv. 9-28; Mark xiii. 9-23), and He continues the prophecy concerning these sorrows up to the moment of His appearing in the clouds of heaven.

While, in the discourse recorded in Luke, having gone back, and described what should take place "before all these" beginning of sorrows, the Lord does not speak further of the great Tribulation, but takes it up at the end, and, as in Matt. and Mark, speaks concerning HIS COMING IN THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN (of course in words slightly different from those in Matt. and Mark):

MATT. xxiv. 29, 30.

"IMMEDIATELY after the Tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heaven shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

MARK xiii. 24-26.

"But in those days, after that Tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken, and then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory."

LUKE xxi. 25-27.

"And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of the heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."

Thus, these two great prophecies are harmonized, and it is manifest that, while they begin and end with the same subjects, the main or central subject in Matt. and Mark is "the great Tribulation"; whereas the main subject in Luke is the destruction of Jerusalem and "the times of the Gentiles" which run their course and come to an end before that Tribulation begins.

The Lord's prophetic teaching, which was interrupted by His sufferings and death (though even before His judges he testified "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. xxvi, 64), was continued after His resurrection (Luke xxiv, 26, 27, 44-47): for He was "seen of them forty days, speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts i. 3); and this last period was concluded by His ascension from Olivet into Heaven, heavenly messengers being sent with



the message "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts i. 11).

These four great periods, if in some respects slightly overlapping, and yet sufficiently marked for us to say that their great distinctive subjects were—

1. The Kingdom of Heaven: its character and requirements.
2. The Person of Christ.
3. The Sufferings and Death of Christ.
4. The Second Advent of Christ.

## PART II.—THE TESTIMONY OF THE CHURCH

Now, it is most remarkable that notwithstanding the early and gross corruption of the Truth by the Church, and in spite of the working of the "Tares" and "the Leaven", in substituting mere "Religion" (which is for men "in the flesh") for true Christianity (which is for men "in Christ"); yet it is remarkable that these same four subjects have been in a very marked and prominent manner, and in the self-same order, the testimony of the church during this present dispensation.

### 1. *The First Period*

Of the Church's testimony had for its subject the Kingdom. Not the "Kingdom of Heaven", but, in a wider sense, "the Kingdom of God". "The Kingdom of Heaven" is an expression which occurs only in the Gospel according to Matthew. It is the Kingdom in its peculiarly Jewish and local aspect. It is the Kingdom which was the special subject of prophecy. As distinguished from "the Kingdom of God", it was objective, Jewish, Prophetic, and Dispensational, i.e. the rule of Heaven over the earth when the time comes for the Saints to possess the Kingdom (Dan. vii.). On the other hand, "the Kingdom of God" is wider in its scope, moral in its sphere, inclusive in its character, and universal in its aspect—embracing the Rule of God with regard to all believers, whether of the old Dispensation or the present, the Jew, the Gentile, or the Church of God, The "Kingdom of Heaven" is distinct from the Church of God. But the "Kingdom of God" embraces the Church and all the spiritual seed of Abraham who were partakers of "the Heavenly calling" (Heb. xi.), in fact "all believers", whether members of

“the Body of Christ” (which was the subject of subsequent revelation) or not. Thus the Kingdom of God includes the Kingdom of Heaven, but the Kingdom of Heaven does not include the Kingdom of God. Hence before the revelation of this Secret of the Body of Christ to Paul (Rom. xvi. 25, 26; Eph. i. 9; iii. 1–11; Col. i. 24–27), it was the “Kingdom of God” that marked the subject of the preaching of the transition period covered by the Acts of the Apostles. It was the fact that Gentiles as such were to be included in the blessing (as Peter was taught in Acts x.), nothing being then said about “the middle wall of partition” being broken down. This change had been foretold by the Lord in Matt. xxi. 43 (in which Gospel alone we read of the Kingdom of Heaven), where in contrast to this we read “The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof”. This bringing of the Gentiles, as such, into blessing, was no secret. Even in Deut. xxxii. 21 it was revealed “I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation”. So Isaiah prophesies of these (lxv. 1, 2) “I am sought of them that asked not for Me; I am found of them that sought Me not; I said Behold Me, behold Me, unto a nation that was not called by My name”. This is quoted in Rom. x. 20, 21.

In Hosea ii. 23 we read “I will sow her (i.e. Israel) unto Me in the earth; and I will have mercy on her (the Gentile “nation”) that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not My people, Thou art My people; and they shall say, Thou art my God”. This is quoted in Rom. ix. 25, 26.

Notice also how the Holy Spirit shows that this mercy coming upon the Gentiles as such, could be no part of the truth connected with the “Mystery” or Secret which had been “kept secret since the world began” (Rom. xvi. 25), inasmuch as it had been a constant subject of Revelation all through the Old Testament. For example, in Rom. xv. 9–12, to show “that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy”, He quotes Ps. xviii. 49, “as it is written for this cause I will confess to Thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto Thy name”. And again He saith (Deu. xxxii. 43) “Rejoice ye Gentiles with His People” (i.e. His people Israel), and again (Ps. cxvii. 1) “Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud Him all ye people” (i.e. Israel). And again, Isaiah saith (Is. xi. 1) “There shall be a root of Jesse, and

He that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in Him shall the Gentiles trust”.

Thus the first preaching of the Apostles in the New Dispensation was “the Kingdom of God”; not the Jewish, and local “Kingdom of Heaven”, but the wider truth expressed in Rom. xi. 11, “through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles to provoke them (Israel) to jealousy” (compare Acts xiii. 46; xviii. 6; xxii. 18, 21). It was a “Secret” afterwards revealed, that not these Gentiles alone, but a people made up both of Jews and Gentiles, should form a new Body in Christ, and together with saved Israel (the Bride of Christ) make up that which is called “The Kingdom of God”. This was preached, at first, only by Paul, his preaching being overlapped by the other apostles, who, until this Secret had been communicated to them, continued to preach the Kingdom of God”: though even his preaching could be described as “concerning the Kingdom of God”, inasmuch as the larger subject included the lesser, as the whole necessarily includes the part.

Hence in the Acts of the Apostles which covers this transition period, the subject of the preaching is described not merely as “the Kingdom of God”, but “THE THINGS CONCERNING the Kingdom of God” (Acts viii. 12), which “things” embraced all the truth connected with this great subject. So Paul at Corinth “spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the Kingdom of God” (Acts xix. 8). So they visited the Churches “confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and [saying] that we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God” (Acts xiv. 22).

Even to the Elders of Ephesus, at Miletus, to whom Paul had imparted this wonderful Secret, he could say (Acts xx. 25) “I know that ye all among whom I have gone preaching the Kingdom of God shall see my face no more”, i.e. he had preached the Kingdom of God to ALL amongst whom he had gone, and that preaching was now ended; but to these Ephesian Saints to whom he had specially revealed the mystery, he could add (v. 27) “I have not shunned to declare unto YOU, all the counsel of God”, or, as in the R.V. “the whole counsel of God”, which included the “mystery” or Secret of the Church.

The fact is that Pentecost was not (as we are accustomed to regard it) the sharp dividing line between the old and new

dispensations. Repentance and remission of sins were first to be preached at Jerusalem. "It was necessary that the word of God should have been spoken to you", said Paul and Barnabas to the Jews (Acts xiii. 46). Cornelius and his household heard "The word which God sent unto the children of Israel" (Acts x. 36). Indeed, neither the Acts of the Apostles nor the Epistles can be understood if these things are not clearly seen. There are many difficulties which can be explained only by remembering that Millennial blessing was ready to be brought to both Jew and Gentile upon the national repentance of Israel: and for this it still waits. This is clear from Acts iii. 19, R.V., "Repent ye therefore and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send the Christ (i.e. the Messiah) who hath been appointed for you, even Jesus: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restoration (see i. 3) of all things, whereof God spake by the mouth of His holy prophets which have been since the world began". Even up to the end of the Acts Paul "expounded and testified the kingdom of God" (Acts xxviii. 23). But when they did not repent, but rejected this final testimony, then the great dispensational prophecy of Isaiah vi. is quoted for the last time, and the time had come for this blindness to happen to them, for the veil to be put upon their heart, for the olive branches to be cut off—and he concludes (v. 28) "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it".

Thus, the cutting off of the olive branches (Rom. xi.) was not the one act of a moment, but it was a gradual process extending over the whole of the period covered by the Acts of the Apostles. It was a transition period, and with the destruction of Jerusalem, this cutting off of the natural branches ended.

## *2. The Second Period*

takes up the revelation of "the mystery"—the proclamation of the Secret, which was then revealed and explained, i.e. how God would now do a new thing, and take out from both Jews and Gentiles a people making "both one", breaking down the middle wall of partition between them (Eph. ii. 13-22), and making them "One Body" in Christ.

Thus, the subject of this Second Period was concerning Christ Personal, and Christ Mystical. The revelation of this wondrous Secret, of which we have already spoken, was soon followed by controversies which centred round the Person of Christ. Into this second period fall all the great controversies which rent the Church in every direction. These controversies commenced at a very early date, John's Gospel being inspired to meet them. They resulted in the formulation of the three great creeds of the church, called "The Apostles'", "The Nicene", and "The Athanasian" Creeds. Every sentence of each of these Creeds formed a battle ground for the contending parties. This brings us to the end of the fourth century.

### 3. *The Third Period*

(which overlapped, on account of its very nature, the other periods). The great subject which occupied the thoughts of the Church during this third period was the sufferings, death, and atonement of Christ. The greater part of the Church soon became absorbed with the means, forgetting the end (as human nature is ever prone to do, and ever has done!), it soon occupied itself with the material sufferings themselves, which led on to the development of pictures and crucifixes, and ended in the blasphemy of the Mass. But there were many who, all along, were occupied with what those sufferings meant, and what they accomplished, who rejoiced in the righteousness which that atoning death procured, notably the Waldenses and others.

Even within the Church of Rome there were some who understood what those suffering procured for lost sinners. Hear the testimony of BERNARD (1091–1153). He beautifully says in his sixty-first sermon on the Song of Solomon, "I will speak of Thy righteousness alone, O Lord, for that also is mine: for verily Thou art made unto me righteousness by God. Have I any reason to fear lest Thy one righteousness should prove insufficient for us both? No! it is not a robe so scanty as not to cover two!"

ANSELM, Archbishop of Canterbury (1093–1109) put forth certain Interrogatories and Exhortations to be addressed by the Priest to the sick man when at the point of death. Amongst the Interrogatories are these:

Q. "Dost thou believe that thou canst come to glory—not by

thine own merits, but by the merits and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ?"

Let the sick man answer "I do so believe".

Q. "Dost thou believe that thou canst not be saved but only by the death of Christ?"

Let the sick man answer, "Even so I believe".

Priest: Go to, therefore, as long as thy soul remaineth in thee, place thy whole confidence in this death alone: have confidence in no other thing: connect thyself to His death: in this cover thyself wholly. Intermingle thyself wholly with His death. Forsake thyself wholly: enwrap thy whole self in His death. And if the Lord desire to judge thee, say:

"O Lord, I oppose the death of our Lord Jesus Christ betwixt me and Thy judgment! not otherwise do I contend with Thee."

And if He say to thee—Thou art a sinner, say:

"O Lord, I put the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between me and my sins".

If He have said to thee—Thou hast merited damnation, say:

"O Lord, I place the death of our Lord Jesus Christ betwixt me and my bad merits; and I offer His merits instead the merit I ought to have and yet have not!"

If He have said that He is angry with thee, say:

"O Lord, I oppose the death of our Lord Jesus Christ betwixt me and thine anger."

Thus has this third period of the Church's testimony been, like that of its Lord and Master, concerning His sufferings and atoning death. And now

#### 4. *The Fourth Period*

During the last sixty years\* its testimony has been concerning Christ's Second Advent. Here, again, there is a slight overlapping, for all through the ages those have not been wanting who have expressed their belief in that article which is contained in all our creeds, and which testifies to the fact that "He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead"; just as ever since the Reformation, the truth as to the atonement, and justification only by faith through grace has been set forth

\* Written 1892.

more and more clearly. But none the less is it true, that during the last sixty years the Lord's return from Heaven has become the great and blessed hope of the Church as it never has been before. When Edward Irving first translated the work of Ben Ezra, from the Spanish, he had reason to believe that there was at that time no other living testimony to that glorious truth. It is within our own knowledge how that testimony has spread, until now we have quite an extensive modern literature on all the departments of truth connected with the Second Advent, such as never existed before; and coming from all parts of the professing church, except Rome and the Romanizers. This glorious hope cannot live in a Romanized or worldly church! It is heavenly in its origin and heavenly in its effects. It has stimulated missionary zeal, quickened the Protestant and Evangelical members of our churches into an ever-increasing desire for unworldliness and purity of life. Looking for Christ necessitates looking to Christ, and this it is that makes it a purifying hope (1 John iii. 1-3).

Advent books, Advent lectures, Advent sermons, Advent conferences, have become quite a mark of our day; and, as our subject shows, they are quite a "sign of the times". For if the Church is to follow its Lord, and if the parallel in their testimony is to continue unbroken, what is the great subject that will next engage the Church's attention? Ah! There is no other subject! This is our final testimony, and it will shortly end, as Christ's did, in ASCENSION! In our Ascension and in His Descension (1 Thess. iv. 16, 17.)

Christ's period of testimony concerning His Second Advent was the shortest of the four. It occupied little more than one week of His whole ministry:—a very small proportion of that ministry. Even so it may be with the Church. Sixty years is not much, but it is already more in proportion. Oh! let us then witness to our Lord's return with increased zeal.

Every book and every sermon on this subject is prophetic. Every Meeting and Conference convened for the consideration of this subject is in itself an evidence that the moment when this testimony will close is drawing near. The corporate testimony of the Church is dead! The veil is being taken from the heart of the Jew, and Oh! solemn fact, it is falling rapidly over the heart of the professing Church. On the eve of the most awful and solemn events which the world has ever seen, the Church (so-

called) is engaged in preaching “Christian Socialism”, and a gospel of sanitation instead of “The Gospel of the Grace of God”. It is diligently occupied in amusing the world instead of warning it of its coming judgment; it is entertaining the “goats” instead of feeding Christ’s sheep. The blind are leading the blind, and both will fall into the ditch. Let us as individuals, as the sands of time run out, as the end draws near, let us be more earnest, more faithful in our testimony, while we, with all our hearts, “wait for God’s Son from Heaven, Whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come”. Let us “comfort one another with these words”. Let us exhort one another, and “so much the more as we see the day approaching”.