

SUNDAY MORNING NO. 330

How impressive are the words that come to us this morning from this twenty-first chapter of Luke. To see it in its real power we must disengage ourselves from the present surroundings. These always press heavily on us, continually challenging our attention, and standing, as it were, between us and things eternal. The things brought before us in this reading are therefore liable to appear far off—not perhaps unreal, but not powerful enough. The things of this life are, to the Kingdom of God, as the fog that hides the mountains. The business of this morning is to blow the fog away, that we may see things as they are, and be encouraged to hold fast the hope of eternal life in well doing.

The present is a transient affair, transient as the clouds overhead, which are changing their shapes continually. All human fashions and ways change similarly, as the Bible says, and in a larger sense. The next generation that comes will be different from the last. We can see it clearly enough if we give our minds to it. Go back a generation, say in a file of old newspapers. Our affairs are different from theirs. Our forefathers had different aims, interests, and difficulties to discuss, and all these are now quite obsolete—it is all in the limbo of forgetfulness now. What we stand related to is similar:

“What is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little while and then vanisheth away.”

And what we read in this chapter is, to the ordinary run of mankind, just like that and nothing more. The fog obscures their vision.

But blow the fog away and we see things differently. We see Christ who is “alive for evermore.” We see how he spoke, and his words apply now, for he spoke not for those persons only, nor for that generation only, but for all time. You see it in his prayer (John 17:20):

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for all them also that shall believe on me through their word.”

Let us realise it then as a fact, that, for all these 1,860 years and more that divide that time from this, Christ has been speaking to his people. They have not been the sport of mere adverse chance in all these ages. Far otherwise. You see the start in this chapter. He said to the apostles:

“I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor to resist” (v. 15).

And so it came to pass, though the adversary prevailed for a time as Christ had said he would. Later we have the Revelation:

“I, Jesus, have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches.”

Let us make the effort, then, to go back these 1,860 years. We can all personally go back some time—10, 20, 30, 40 years. Exercise the mind more strongly in the same direction and we get back into the presence of Christ. What interest surrounds the scene. He said,

“The time will come when ye will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and ye shall not see it.”

And the prophecy is fulfilled, for one day with Christ is what we should all like. It would be to us a power for all the rest of our lives. We cannot see it; but we can go back in

imagination and stand by him in the temple, watching the crowds coming and going, just as it will be in the Ezekiel Temple, only on a far grander scale, and in a far happier time. A seemingly trivial incident illustrating a great divine principle, is seized upon by Christ and made a matter of world-wide fame for ever—for who has not heard of “*the widow’s mite*.” A woman, very likely an obscure woman—we do not know even her name—struggles forward and puts two mites into the offertory box. Others—well-to-do people—put in of their abundance—gold and silver, and perhaps very ostentatiously, as much as to say, “How liberal to God are we!” Christ said,

“Of a truth I say unto you that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all. For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God; but she, of her penury, hath cast in all the living that she had.”

They gave a little of what they had. She gave **all**, and in the spirit of giving it all.

This appeals to us in our lowly position. We feel exactly as we read in Isaiah 26:18:

“We have not wrought any deliverance in the earth.”

The truth is among men very small. We are so feeble that we feel as if we could do nothing worthy of God’s attention. Well, this never-to-be-forgotten incident teaches us that if we do what we can, it is accepted with God. And what we can do is measured by **the spirit in which we do it**.

“If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, not according to that he hath not.”

Therefore let us not say, “I can’t because I feel weak;” or, “I can’t because I am poor.” Do what you can and it will be accepted by the Lord. This is the lesson of the poor widow’s offering that Christ has made famous for ever.

The widow went her way, and the disciples fell to admiring the beauty of the Temple interior. It was **very** beautiful. Herod had spared nothing in the shape of wealth and skill in garnishing the temple to ingratiate himself with the Jews, and overcome the detestation with which he was justly regarded by them. The disciples somewhat complacently admired the beautiful interior of the temple. Jesus mournfully contemplated the mental and moral deformity of the heart of the people. The Jews were almost idolatrous in the worship of the temple, as the siege afterwards showed. The disciples therefore naturally felt pride in it, garnished as it was with gold and splendid ornaments. Compare with this St. Peter’s, in Rome, nowadays, which has precious stones embedded even in its walls. Now we stand near Christ, and listen, and get into his spirit in the matter. Patriotic vain glory we see rampant everywhere—“our fleet,” “our galleries,” “our institutions”! We, too, may boast about Britain—“Britons never shall be slaves!” or, on the other side of the water—the United States—“The home of the Brave and the land of the Free”! It was like that in Israel in Christ’s day—“Israel never shall be slaves”! “See what manner of stones are here!”

Christ did not share these sentiments. He admitted the beauty—the impressiveness.

“Seest thou these great buildings? There shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.”

Now, Christ was a man, Christ was a Jew; why did he thus throw cold water on their patriotism? Because his point of view was real, was divine, was eternal—and their’s was shadowy, human, transient. All things were made for the honour of God, and the temple had degenerated into a monument of the glory of man, and worse, into “*a den of thieves*.” Therefore he could not regard it as they did. He hinted at the true inwardness of things when

he spoke to the defilers of the temple on the occasion of his indignant cleansing of it with the scourge of small cords: *"Destroy this temple,"* said he, *"and in three days I will raise it up."* They did so in crucifying Jesus, *"the true tabernacle"* of the Father; and he rose again the third day. The disciples afterwards saw this.

"My meat and drink," said Christ, *"is to do the will of my Father."* Brethren of Christ should speak thus often. The enlightened man gravitates to God, is attracted Godwards, as the needle to the pole. We must not make the Gentile mistake of supposing that Christ's mind is unattainable. The purpose of the meeting is to cultivate that mind. People may come to the meeting and get zealous, but in the street neglect the truth. There they won't have it; they do not mix it up with common life matters. And yet common life matters, all life, everything will at last be holy to the Lord. *"They shall all know Me,"* is the beautiful promise of God. True brethren and sisters are sons and daughters of God all the time. They let their light shine all the time. This breaking of bread is not letting the light shine—except in a small measure. What we do in our daily life, and all the time, is the great thing. If the truth has hold there, the light will shine properly.

The disciples, at the time we are reading of, were crude by comparison with what they afterwards became—they were mere beginners. They had not all the right spirit then. Even at the table they asked, *"Who is to be the first in the kingdom of God?"* We must remember this, and conform to the spirit of Christ, which, whatever they lacked then, they afterwards took on fully. The solemn warning of the destruction of the temple weighed on them as they left Jerusalem, and, crossing the Kedron, wended their way up the pathway on the Mount of Olives. They reached the summit and sat down, a splendid view of the beautiful temple lying before them. They returned to the question of the ruin of the magnificence in which their Master seemed so slightly interested.

"Master, but when shall these things be, and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?"

And Jesus in reply spoke many things that were very valuable to the disciples.

"Take heed that ye be not deceived, for many shall come in my name, saying I am he and the time draweth near."

Christ expected the disciples to exercise discrimination—to have sharp eyes. Here it was about false Christs. All the Jewish nation was expectant about the Messiah at that time. Of John the Baptist we read:

"All men mused in their hearts whether he were the Christ or not."

The Sanhedrin even sent a mission to John with the enquiry whether he were the Christ. They did not send to Jesus; they dogged his steps to kill him. Why were they so hurt at him? There were three reasons. 1. —His extraction. 2. —His relation to public affairs. 3. —His testimony against them. On the first: He was begotten of a lowly virgin, wife of a lowly mechanic. Isaiah said,

"There is nothing in him that we should desire him."

He was a plain homely man, but not insipid, not almost doll-like as Roman Catholic perversions put it. Whatever the Jews thought, he was of the seed of David; but he was not of brilliant enough extraction to suit their taste. Then—second—instead of taking hold of the public affairs of the nation, he stood aloof from them. His part was no joining in agitations of the Zealots against the iniquitous taxation of the Caesars, as they regarded it. His enemies tried to entangle him in this, but he was too skilful for them, and silenced them without satisfying them. His was another kingdom, pertaining to a future time in Jerusalem, as he told

Pilate, and he would not even let his servants fight to deliver him from death. Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, Herodians—none could deflect him from his path. He belonged to another order of things, and passed through life with eyes intent on it, and therefore the children of the flesh hated him.

And thirdly, he was very disagreeable—not complimentary—in speech (unlike people now, honouring one another with untrue and sleek words). He hesitated not to condemn them all as “*hypocrites*,” and said they shut up the kingdom of heaven against those who would enter. They would not enter themselves, and those that were entering they hindered. They had taken away the key of knowledge, and so men were locked out, as it were. It was not to be expected that they would rejoice in such testimony as this. They did not. They hated him, and at last slew him.

“The world hateth me,” said he, *“because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil.”*

And now he was to be withdrawn, and all the power of public life was to go against the disciples. They were to be hounded out of the synagogues, detested, abhorred, and flouted. His words warned them, and they remembered them when the experience came. “*Be not deceived.*” There did arise false Christs. “Jesus was killed,” said these false Christs, “Follow us; we will show you the way.” And multitudes did follow, and perished in the retribution that the Roman arms brought upon the traitors. But the disciples were not deceived. They tried pretenders by the word, and, finding them wanting, would not follow them. There are no false Christs now; but there is much preaching of “*another Jesus.*” In fact, in the way of preaching, hardly anything else is done. There is plenty of “Jesus” in the hymn books, but not the apostles’ Jesus. For who was He? Philip said:

“He of whom Moses and the prophets did write.”

The things of Mosaic and prophetic testimony to Jesus are not proclaimed from the pulpits of Christendom. There is great danger now of being deceived. Christ’s warning is still applicable. “*Be not deceived.*” There is the Jesus of Trinitarianism, the Jesus of Unitarianism, the Jesus of Salvation Armyism, Pietism, &c. —that is the Jesus of the world, and of respectability; for it brings work and advantage to believe in and proclaim this kind of Jesus.

Then “*Take heed: Be not deceived.*” By reason of use exercise your senses on the Word of God. How much there is in use. A knife is kept sharp if used. The spiritual faculties in most people are blunt for lack of use. Just as in bodily exercise, training makes the muscles strong and efficient, and sloth and neglect leaves them flabby and degenerate; so in affairs spiritual, exercise, mental and moral, upon the Word of God gives a man power to discern, to choose the true course, to avoid deception even against appearances. Read the Bible daily. “*Preserve in its brightness the two-edged sword.*”

“But we all know this.” Certainly, and therefore (and not because we don’t know it) we speak. This is how John puts it:

“I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth; but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.”

There were “many deceivers” in John’s day, and have been ever since. The disciples then “tried the Spirits” by the word, and we must do the same. These documents were in the hands of the first disciples, who walked in the light of them, and many of whom died for the faith. So read the Bible. Do not merely read **about the Bible**. “Doctors of Divinity” write nonsense about it, and, like their medical brethren, often do not agree. We are not beholden to them for the truth about the Bible. It was here before they were; and it has not been left to

them to discover that this, that, and the other is mere romance and legend. On the contrary, the Bible holds up to the light their whole system beforehand in a very uncomplimentary manner. The true magnitude of their presumption, and the puerility of their objections will be fully manifested when once Christ is in the earth again. Meanwhile it is for us to take heed to his warnings, and follow his example. And to do this we look back upon the sad days just before his death, when he approved the devotion of the poor widow with her two mites, sorrowfully regarded the barren magnificence of the temple whence the true worship of God had departed, and warned his disciples of the true character of the end of the age that was coming upon that generation.

He speaks, indeed, of the end of the times of the Gentiles in which we find ourselves. Many deceivers abound. Many temptations to glory in mere vanishing human affairs are current; and “*on earth distress of nations with perplexity,*” and many other signs testify that the end is near.

“Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Taken from “The Christadelphian” of 1901

Sunday Morning Pages 430-433

By Bro. Robert Roberts