

## LANDMARKS OF GRACE

### IN LUKE'S GOSPEL

#### (1) Luke 7: 31–50

I want to bring before you the passage which the soul has to take in the things of God. It is a moral and spiritual passage, and therefore not what can be seen; yet it is very real. It may be spoken of in different ways; it may be spoken of as the passage from the world to the Father, from Adam to Christ, or from the flesh to the Spirit. It may be looked at in these different ways—as from the world, Adam, or the flesh; but these are all bound up together as one; as also the Father, Christ, and the Spirit. Faith may apprehend God's mind, but cannot go beyond that. People remain where they are, but for progress the passage must be taken, and the point in Christianity is, that the passage may be taken now. It is a passage, as I have said, which the soul takes from the world to the Father; from Adam to Christ; and from the flesh to the Spirit. I want to take up a few important landmarks which will help to show how this passage is taken.

You get one in this chapter, also another in chapter 10, the parable of the good Samaritan; and another in chapter 15, the parable of the prodigal; and lastly in the thief on the cross you get the climax. Each one of them presents what is completely new for man: that which had nothing to say to what man was as God created him. A prophet of a new order has arisen. The prophet here is Christ Himself—the truth. No prophet in old times ever pretended to be the truth; they expressed it so far as moved by the Spirit of God, and they might have been in accord with their prophecies; but we get here, and in John 4, a prophet who Himself is the truth, and for that reason He becomes the standard of everything. The truth must be the standard. The world is artificial and goes on by appearances; if it were divested of appearances the effect would be you could not live in it; it would be intolerable if it were all naked and revealed as it is, it would be like hell. Here we get the prophet, who is the truth, and when you get the truth absolutely, you get a standard for everything. In chapter 10, the Lord comes out as a new neighbour. The law

could not assist. A neighbour is an expression of grace. In chapter 7, it is more truth. In chapter 15, man finds a new home in the knowledge of the Father—all is new; and in the thief on the cross you get new companionship.

These two incidents and two parables show that you are brought into the presence of all that is new, and the new things are intended to act upon us so that our souls may take this passage. I have indicated briefly that Christianity refers to the present, and the passage of which I have been speaking is a transition which is to be taken now, i.e., from Adam to Christ, from the world to the Father, from the flesh to the Spirit.

Tonight I want to speak of the apprehension of Christ as the truth. Wisdom and truth are very intimately connected; but until man finds truth, he can never find a pathway here, see verses 28, 30, 35. Wisdom is justified of all her children—wisdom is here; it comes out all through the incident which follows. Christ was wisdom; He is the wisdom of God, and wisdom is here. Wisdom is the resource of God when all has failed on the part of man. In every crisis you find the resource of God coming in; in no sense is God baffled. You see it at the beginning. When sin came in, you get the seed of the woman brought in who was to bruise the serpent's head. Then again at Babel; when God scattered the people, you find He had a resource; in Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. Then again, when man crucified Christ, God raised Him from the dead; all failed on the part of man. John the baptist had come in the way of righteousness, and they did not care for him; the Son of man came in the way of grace, and they said, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber. In whatever way God sees fit to present Himself to man, it will evoke no response on the part of man; appeals to repentance, as in John the baptist, or a ministry of grace in the Lord Himself, evoked nothing; the case of man is hopeless, nothing is to be expected, and therefore God sets aside man and brings in His resource.

Now there are the children of wisdom; the Pharisees and lawyers were not wisdom's

children, nor was Simon. Wisdom's children discern the truth. Simon was lacking in discernment; he misjudged Christ and the woman; but on the other hand you get the woman proving herself as one of wisdom's children, for she discerned the truth—the wisdom of God.

I want to say a word in regard to the truth. It comes out in the parable, see verses 40–42. The Lord speaks here in a parable, which unfolded the truth, but He was the truth. The woman in John said, Sir, I perceive that Thou art a prophet. He was a prophet; but He was more; He was the truth; He was the expression of things as they are. Simon had the thought that Christ was a prophet; afterwards he began to doubt it, but he went no further. The Lord was more than a prophet; John the baptist was the greatest among prophets; and one now may have their loins girt about with truth, but that is not being the truth. The Spirit is the truth, and nothing else in the world, except what is the expression of the Spirit is truth. The Lord when here was the truth, so now the Spirit is the truth. When Christ was here, the truth of the moment was that He was here giving living water. Then He strips the woman of Samaria of appearances, for the truth was there—God was there—that was the peculiarity of the moment; God was there giving living water. So here in Luke 7 you get what was peculiar to the moment; the creditor was there, but, God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, (2 Corinthians 5, verse 19) hence He could be in the house of Simon and accept, too, the attention of the woman. If it had not been that He was not imputing trespasses, He would not have been there. The truth for the moment was that God was here in grace. At the present time the Spirit is the truth, that is to bring man into correspondence with what is in heaven. What is expressed in the saints down here by the Spirit is the truth, and truth is substance, and truth finds its expression down here in what the Spirit has wrought in saints.

The great mistake that Simon made was that he judged according to appearances; to do so is a mistake. No one judges aright save as he gets into the sanctuary, then he comes to a sound judgment of things here, i.e., according to truth, according to the sanctuary.

The psalmist spoke of having been as a beast, so foolish was he in his judgment of things—unintelligent; but when he gets into the sanctuary, he sees things as they are, Simon judged according to appearances, and said the woman was a sinner. Simon did not apprehend that Christ was God revealed, but still God; that He was the truth, the expression of things as they were at that moment. The woman discerned things aright. The Lord discerned and exposed what was in Simon's heart; He discerned, too, that the woman was a child of wisdom, and the woman for that reason, i.e., being wisdom's child, discerned the truth. Christ discerned both Simon and the woman; Simon misjudged both Christ and the woman, but the woman discerned Christ, see verses 44-50. The woman discerned truth, that God was in Christ, not imputing trespasses, and therefore she was prepared to accept at the hand of the Lord the forgiveness of sins. All arose from the fact that she was a child of wisdom, and discerned the truth; Simon did not discern that only Christ was the truth. The Jew was there with his religion, the Greek with his philosophy; but there was no truth in either. In Christ you get the expression of things as they were there and then. The woman, being a child of wisdom, was prepared to accept the forgiveness of sins. If we apprehended Christ as the One in whom God is revealed, it must attach us to the One in whom the revelation is made—in whom God is presented.

We see it in this woman; she is attached to the One in whom the revelation is made, the One in whom God was revealed. How could it be otherwise? If God has come close to us in grace, not imputing trespasses, not even calling attention to them, one could not but be attached to the One in whom the truth is set forth. What the Lord said to the woman was, Thy faith hath saved thee. Do you think she went out without attachment to Christ? She loved much.

You get the same in the woman of Samaria; she appreciated Christ, and went to the men of the city and said, Come, see a Man, which told me all things that ever I did.

Simon and all the world outside were in darkness, but the woman discerned the truth. Wisdom on the part of God is resource; for the Christian wisdom is a way, and so there was a

way for this woman. The Lord said, Go in peace; but I do not believe she was far from Christ in spirit. There is a way for the children of wisdom down here, and that way is the will of God. How are you going to take that way? It is brought about by the practical appreciation of Christ. All depends on what the heart is governed by. If my heart is simply governed by my principles I shall be turned aside from the way; all depends for us upon the heart being governed by Christ. Christ is made wisdom to us, so that we may have a way down here. Christ is made to us wisdom; Christ, too, is made righteousness to us. He is sanctification also; He is redemption too. Christ is all to us. He is at the right hand of God, and we are set apart to Him; we are sanctified for the service of God as vessels for the Master's use; but the moment He is in movement He will be redemption for us. All hangs for us upon our appreciation of Christ. This woman loved much, and I have no doubt she found her way through this world. The Lord did not always keep people about Him; the demoniac wanted to be with Him, but the word of Christ to him was, Return to thine own house, etc. But as absent from Him He holds us in the way by the principle of attraction—the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Nothing could be more important than that we should take the passage from Adam to Christ. Christ is going to fill all things, and if He is great enough to fill all things morally for God, do you not think He is great enough to fill you and me? It is in the appreciation of Christ that we make the passage from Adam to Christ. He is the righteous One, and the Holy One, and He is eternal life. He is all and in all.

The woman had a path a million times better than Simon's. Simon had no way, he had no attachment to Christ; he was not one of wisdom's children, and therefore he had no way. It is a great thing if God works in a man, and thus instead of walking in a vain show and disquieting himself, he appreciates the truth of what God is. God has come out in love. The creditor is here and not imputing trespasses. When we apprehend this grace it is what forms us according to truth, and we find a way here. I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of

judgment: that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance. May the Lord lead us into the appreciation of Christ, not only as a prophet, but as a prophet of a new order, and who is the truth, the expression of things as they are on the part of God.

There are only two Persons spoken of as the truth. At the present time the Spirit is the truth. If saints have the love of God shed abroad in their hearts, and live in the light of divine love, they become the witness here; the Spirit in that way is the truth.

## (2) Luke 10: 23–42

I gave an idea last week of the line that was before me in connection with the gospel of Luke. We spoke of chapter 7, and I tried to bring out what was found by the woman in the city, which was a sinner. Now we come to a parable with which we are all familiar. The question is, What did the man who fell among thieves find in the good Samaritan? The answer is, He found a neighbour. The woman of the city found wisdom, and the man who fell among thieves found a neighbour. The prodigal in chapter 15, found a home, and the thief on the cross found company—he was to go to paradise in company with the Lord. The four cases together, all typical cases, typical in the sense that they are representatives of a class, make a remarkable company. A woman of the city; a man who fell among thieves; a prodigal; and then a thief; they are a motley company, and the question might be asked, How are they going to get on together? After the flesh there could be no peace between them, they were such an incongruous company; yet this problem is solved in that Christ is their peace; it is, therefore, possible for them to get on together. The solution of the difficulty is that there is the exclusion of man after the flesh; Christ has come in and He is our peace. If we are each characterised by Christ we shall not find it difficult to go on together, because the principle is, Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good, Romans 12, verse 21. Once you get started on that line there is no difficulty in getting on together. The woman of the city found wisdom, and she proved the value of wisdom

in finding a path of righteousness.

Now I want to come to the effect of finding a neighbour. The point in connection with the woman of Luke 7 is, that she was a child of wisdom, and, as a result, she finds a way—a sinful woman finds a way. Simon did not find one; people, too, who it may be are intelligent in this world, are yet in darkness, and have no way. It is poor work to make research and not, as a result, to find a way.

In the way of righteousness peace is to be found; there is no peace to the wicked. If we have on the breastplate of righteousness, we have, too, our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. I can bless God very abundantly for having enabled me to find a path, and that Christ has been made to me wisdom and righteousness. Piety has promise of the life that now is. It is better to have peace than to have all the riches of the world.

The neighbour is concerned about our state, not about our finding a way. It is important to distinguish the particular point in each. With the neighbour the point is, that he is concerned about our state, see verses 30–37. Notice particularly verse 34: And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, etc.; the man's state is vividly described; he was stripped of his raiment and wounded. All that the neighbour did was to have compassion on his state; it was not a question of finding a way, but of meeting the condition of the man. The priest and the levite had no compassion. The neighbour represents the Mediator, the Man Christ Jesus. There had been a mediator previously, but what marked Moses as a mediator was not compassion. He was the minister of the law. The priest and the levite were the continuation of the mediator. The mediator was taken up with the introduction of the system; but the priest and levite would maintain the system, but neither of them was marked by compassion. The truth is, they were unable to do anything for him.

Now the point of the passage is the transition from law to grace. The neighbour represents the Mediator; but if you want to understand Christ in that light, you must first understand the

mediator of the previous system. All that the priest and the levite could do was to minister the letter and formality of the law; they had nothing to do with the spirit of it. People nowadays like formality and the letter, and they do not care about the spirit, and for this reason they do not like the knowledge of God. Man likes religion, but he wants it without the knowledge of God. But I ask—What can be the value of religion without the knowledge of God? People want religion which is not distasteful to the natural man; but it is religion without God, and that is not pure religion; it is vain, indeed offensive to the eye of God. Any religion not permeated with the knowledge of God must be but sounding brass.

The priest and the levite had the letter and the form; and they ministered both, but could not minister the spirit of the truth. Their ministry was defective because they could not tell you the secret which lay behind the law. The lawyer says, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself, Luke 10, verse 27. He answered right. The lawyer was an expositor of the law, and the answer he gave was extremely good; he gave the principle of the ten commandments, but he could not give an answer as to the secret which lay underneath it. So the priest and the levite could not touch the man, because they were unacquainted with the secret which lay behind the law, see verses 33–36. We get the truth covered up in a parabolic way; the Lord concealed, as it were, the truth in that way; but the Spirit is here to give the exposition of the parable. The true Mediator, the Man of God's purpose, has come to light. There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, 1 Timothy 2, verse 5. The law was not the exposition of the heart of God to man, and the priest and levite could not discern it, and it did not make known to them the great secret of the love of God. The Mediator has come out, and made known that the secret which lay behind the law was the love of God. The right of God is to claim the affections of every man, and such commands as, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, which were given specifically to Israel, still in principle apply to all men, and

not merely to the Jew, assert this right. The truth has now come out that God loved man, that God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, John 3, verse 16. That, the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Titus 3: 4. It is the revelation of God in Christ, in all His love and compassion, that bows the heart of man to God. The law was ineffective to this end, and if men are bowed now, it is by the light of the revelation of God which has come out in Christ. The wonderful thing is, a Man has come, and that on the part of God. He is really the Son of God, but He is a Man come in compassion to men, and to where man was. You can recall what marked the Lord when here, He was full of compassion; men claimed His compassion, and they had His compassion. Came where he was, means that the Son of God came down to death, where man was; He comes in testimony into the place of death to bring to light the love of God, death being annulled for man, so that man might live in the love which was revealed in the death of Christ.

Pouring in oil and wine, that is, the making known, not demand, but the secret of the demand, which is the love of God. Why should God command man to love Him with all his heart? Now the love has come to light, God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. The secret of the law has come to light in the death of Christ, and that is the testimony that bows man to God. The death of Christ is the great declaration of divine love, and if people are not affected by that, they are incapable of being moved by anything. God Himself, in the Person of Christ, has come into the place of man's distance, that man may live in the love of God. God has no further testimony to address to man, beyond the death of Christ; Christ came here that He might make known the secret of the law. He Himself bore the curse, and was hanged on a tree; but the object of it was not simply that the curse might be borne, but that the great secret of the law might be brought to light. Christ gave Himself a ransom for all, to make known the love of God; it is the pouring in of the wine and oil, which, in the service of the Mediator, makes known the love of

God, which affects man's state. It is the testimony of divine love which forms us in divine love; it could not be apart from the Spirit, but it is by that testimony that the Spirit of God works.

The new man is created after God, but he is created by the testimony of God, and by divine love affecting us in our moral being. It is only as we are made effectually acquainted with the love of God, which is declared in the death of Christ, that we are formed after God. Then he sets him on his own beast. He sets him on that which was peculiarly his own, not borrowed. It is a new spring for man; we are carried by a power which is peculiar to the Spirit of God. It may be an allusion to the Spirit as the Spirit of life; but the point is, we are carried by a power which was peculiarly His own. He brought him to an inn, and took care of him. An inn is not a hotel where you can have every luxury; it is a mere resting-place, and where you need to be taken care of. The whole passage is intended to convey what the neighbour concerns himself about, in regard to the man. The man was stripped, was naked and wounded. Man does not like his self-esteem stripped, nor does he like a death-blow struck at his pride. God brings man to the sense of all that, and takes care that man shall be brought to this, and what such a one wants is a new state, and that is what the neighbour gives him. The work of God is to form a new state, and all the testimony presented to us in regard of God is presented in view of forming us in a new state. When a man is converted, he has not a word to say, he cannot mend himself, and all depends on what is presented to him. The ministry of the new covenant does not simply expound the terms of the new covenant, but these terms have to become effective in us by forming us by the testimony which is presented to us.

The secret of the law has come to light in the gospel, and when the secret has been apprehended we are enabled to comply with the righteous requirements of the law; they are fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. The object of it all is, that the soul may be subdued in the presence of Christ. Mary had come under the influence of Christ, and she had been affected by the One who had come in as neighbour, and she was subdued in

the presence of Christ.

I rejoice in the thought that Christ is wisdom to us, and that in that way there is a way, and that way is God's will; and so instead of being overcome by evil, I can overcome evil with good. But mark, the neighbour comes in, and makes known the love of God, so that we should be subdued in the presence of Christ, and sit at His feet and hear His word; and in that way we, like Mary, would not only do right things, but do them in the right way and in the right spirit.

May the Lord lead us to know what we have gained in Christ as a neighbour; the one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all.

### (3) Luke 15: 1–32

We have already had chapters 7 and 10, and this follows as a kind of sequence. There is a moral connection between them, and a kind of progress marked in them; the same ground is not covered twice in Scripture. You may get an incident, as for instance Saul's conversion, related more than once; but they are all presented in a different light, and two Scriptures never cover the same ground. So what we get here does not cover the same ground as what we get in chapters 7 and 10, although there is much in common between them. In chapter 7 it is wisdom—wisdom which gives a way for man. Christ has come in, He is wisdom, and he who receives Christ is a child of wisdom, and the effect of that is, that we have a way and path down here—I am not shut up. In chapter 10 you get the idea of grace presented: a neighbour comes in, and man finds a neighbour, and in doing so he gets support and care so long as he stands in need of care. In chapter 15 we get another idea. What is prominent in this chapter is not the subjects of mercy, as in chapters 7 and 10 but we get the One who shows mercy. God has come out to act for His own pleasure and satisfaction, and man gets his blessing in that acting of God. In the beginning of the chapter you find the Lord vindicating Himself to His aggressors, who complained that He received sinners; they complained of the company in which Christ was

found, and the parables which follow are a vindication of God in the course He was taking. We get the thought of the fulness of the Godhead in this chapter, and it is in Christ that that fulness is presented. The scribes and Pharisees complained that Christ was found in the company of sinners.

Why should men object to God showing mercy? They were not concerned at the possibility of Christ being contaminated; the point of their complaint was, that there was a recognition of publicans and sinners. If God was here, and He was taking account of sinners, it meant that He passed by the scribes and Pharisees. Now Christ could not be contaminated, He was holy; we should have been contaminated, but He, being the Holy One, could come into any company, but He was not contaminated by the company that He kept. He touched the leper, and the leper was healed. It showed how different Jesus was to any one else on earth; the scribes and the Pharisees did not trouble themselves on the score of His being contaminated. But what they did object to was that the publicans and sinners should be recognised; they were considered a kind of pariah, or outcasts, and after all it was a question of God seeing fit to eat with them. It was no question of the Pharisees, they had no right thought; their thought was not that amends were due to God, but the Lord indicated the course that God was pleased to take.

In no gospel do we get the thought of the fulness of God coming out, as in this gospel of Luke. I want to speak of one point; if there are amends due to God on the part of man, He could see to that, and would see to it; but we must admit the right and prerogative of God to show mercy. He will seek for the lost sheep. We would all admit God's right to show mercy, and if God comes to show mercy, He expects to find those who stand in need of mercy; the scribes and the Pharisees were not on that ground, they had no need of mercy. If God came to show mercy, He did not come to them; He came on a mission of mercy, and the scribes and the Pharisees, therefore were not in accord with His mind, i.e., standing in need of mercy. He came and sought for those who stood in need of mercy. The publicans and sinners could not stand on

the legal ground. It was only in them that you might expect to find repentance and what was in accord with God's mercy. God was here, and He was found to be in associations where there was a possibility of finding those who stood in need of mercy. The gospel comes in on the same ground. God presents Himself to man in grace, but until man is repentant, the gospel holds out nothing that men care for. Suppose an evangelist goes out to preach. What he preaches is for all, it is preached to every creature under heaven, and he looks to find those who are in accord with the mercy of God; the proud and self-righteous do not want mercy, therefore they have to be passed by. The evangelist has to look for repentance, because the self-righteous are not in accord with the attitude in which God presents Himself to man. The Lord vindicates the right of God to show mercy, if He sees fit to do so. Their zeal was not for the preservation of the spotlessness of Christ; they had no such thought.

Now I have said that much as to the chapter generally, indicating the course that God was taking in the presence of self-righteous men. He was light for every man, but He was of necessity looking for those who were in accord with the mind of God, i.e., repentant. The gospel is looking for repentance, because without that, man will not get the good of the gospel.

Now I turn to show what the prodigal found, verse 17, and on. I shall trace in a few words his history, and it depicts and finds its echo in the experience of most Christians. The first movement of the prodigal was repentance; we are not told how it was brought about, but he came to himself. I do not think it was the need of the far country which brought him to that; the simple fact is, it was the beginning, and the goodness of the father came before him. How that might be brought home to a man I cannot tell; it may be in a dream, in a vision of the night, by chastening, or sickness; but the thought of goodness is brought home to a man, and the result is, he came to himself, and in that way he is brought into accord with the mind of the father, and that mind was mercy. The Lord was bringing to light here that God was going to show mercy to the Gentile. We get hints of it in Old Testament times. Nineveh was spared, having been

brought to repentance by the testimony of God's forbearance. The prodigal was brought into accord with the father, as ready to show mercy. The next thing is, he comes back to the father, and he meets a welcome; he turns to God. The commission to the apostle Paul was that he was to go to the Gentiles, we get here the prodigal, who was one of them: Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me, (Acts 26, verses 17, 18), and when the apostle carried out his commission, he preached that men should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. The returning prodigal meets a welcome. A man who turns to God gets the sense of welcome in receiving forgiveness of sins.

The prodigal would have asked to remain on the ground of a humble servant, as not deserving anything. The point of the father is, that the prodigal was to live before him, and I have no doubt that prompted the thought of the clothing. He is to have the best robe, a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, etc., so that he might live before the father. The allusion to Christ in this parable is hidden, but we get it, I think, in the robe. The robe is what characterises, and it means Christ, and we need that to live before the Father. When the Gentiles were brought to God, they found a welcome and received forgiveness; but God's thought was not that the Gentiles were to be here as reformed Gentiles; He intended that they should live by Christ.

Christ has taken the position of a life-giving Spirit, and every one who lives for God does so in virtue of the living water which he receives from Christ. We cannot live save in the appreciation of divine love, and what was revealed of God in Christ, and in the death of Christ. If man is brought to God, in that way he derives from Christ, and lives to God. If man is going to live to God now, it must be in the appreciation of Christ who in grace came out from God that He might bring the light of God to us. Hence it is, If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha, 1 Corinthians 16, verse 22.

Now I come to the portion of the prodigal. The father provided a portion which in no way touched the portion of the elder brother. The Gentile was never on the ground of the Jew. All that I have is thine, is what the father said to the elder brother; but the prodigal's portion was found in the knowledge of the father. God has set us before Him that we might live to Him, and it is only in the intimacy and knowledge of God and His love that we are capable of living to, worshipping, and serving the living and true God. It was the thought of the Father to bring our souls to a blessed place of rest, and that is only known as we know the Father, and know His love and what He will accomplish in us. The prodigal found rest; but the father found rest and satisfaction in what?—in the result of his own work in the prodigal. He could see the best robe on the prodigal, and there was satisfaction. It was mutual satisfaction and mutual merriment, let us eat and be merry. The Gentile has been so brought to God that he may receive a welcome, and live in Christ, and live with God; and my life lies in the knowledge of divine goodness and love. It results in confidence and liberty with God; in the presence of love you can enjoy liberty. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty, (2 Corinthians 3, verse 17); but the father found his satisfaction in the prodigal, and that was in the fruit and result of his own work in the prodigal. One point more: all this was in the house—in the father's house; the father found his satisfaction in the guest who had been brought into his house, in accord with his own mind. A man may have received forgiveness, but he cannot live on that; he may accept it, but if a man has to live, he must live in the knowledge of God's nature, and that is in virtue of having received living water from Christ. God has been brought to light in Christ, also all His blessed purposes of love, and that is the light which we are brought to, and in which we live. We are brought to the Father, and there is mutual merriment. This has been brought into the world for the Gentiles, but it in no way interferes with the portion of the Jew, the elder brother, which God has reserved for him. He will be brought into it when he is brought into accord with the mind of God, which is sovereign mercy. How far are we in liberty, and in confidence in God, in

the blessed sense of that into which we are brought as our own proper portion?

(4) Luke 23: 32–43

We find that wisdom is justified of all her children. This comes in, in a remarkable way, in connection with Christ being here; the publican and the harlot justified wisdom; they were baptised with the baptism of John. So too the thief here, who confessed Christ, justified wisdom. Wisdom is justified oft-times by very strange people. It was the darkest moment when Christ was on the cross, and yet it was a triumph of grace that the thief should at that moment confess Him. What I shall speak of tonight follows in connection with what we have had before us on previous occasions. I have taken up certain landmarks in this gospel. The woman in Luke 7 was one of wisdom's children, and she found righteousness. The Lord said to her, Thy sins are forgiven, and as a result she found a way; this is a way of peace and a way outside the confusion which prevails in this world.

Passing on to chapter 10, the man who fell among thieves found a neighbour, he found support and grace so long as he needed it down here. Christ was man's neighbour, and He came down in mercy to act the neighbour to the man who fell among thieves. We have not lacked care nor support since we believed in Him; I think each Christian would bear testimony to that experience. In chapter 15 the prodigal found a father, a portion, and a home; not so much righteousness, nor a way, nor a neighbour, but he got the revelation of the Father, which is love, and he found a portion, and in connection with the portion he found a home and a feast.

Now tonight we come to chapter 23. The thief was to be a companion of Christ in paradise; he had never been His companion on earth, save on the cross, but he was to be the companion of Christ in paradise. It was a moment of supreme darkness here, and yet God so wrought that not only did Christ go to paradise, but the poor thief went also. The dealings of God are all on the same principle; we may not come to such a position as that in which the thief found himself;

we may have been restrained from gross evils, yet we are privy to what the thief was. I know I am privy to violence if I were excited, and had the power to exercise it; there is that in me which answers to every evil you hear perpetrated. I should attach great value to restraints by teaching and government and training, but everyone's heart is capable of every possible kind of evil. We get the vindication of the Lord, and that on the part of a very unlikely person—one of the thieves. The thief apprehended Christ as the righteous One: this Man hath done nothing amiss—he apprehended Him as entirely singular and exceptional; we indeed justly—he apprehended Christ as the righteous One, and this is very important. Then he says to Him, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom, see chapter 19, verse 12. A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return; the thought of this seems present in the mind of the thief: he says, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom. He apprehended that a kingdom belonged to Christ; if he had not apprehended Him as the righteous One, he could not have said what he did, when Thou comest into Thy kingdom. For the moment Christ had no kingdom; He was hanging on a tree; He was made a curse; but the thief was in the light of the moment; it was evident that divine light had shone into his soul. I cannot tell you how the testimony reached him; I cannot tell how he was enlightened, and enlightened more than anyone else upon earth at that moment; he was in advance of everybody else. The Lord was leaving the world to receive a kingdom and to return. The thief was not only born again, but he was illuminated; and I go a point further; he had in his heart received the kingdom; he saw there was a moment coming when Christ would assert Himself, for that is the kingdom, and the thief had received it in his soul. The kingdom had its own place in the heart of the thief, and the work of God in man is, that he may apprehend the kingdom of God, and receive it; that is, to accept the domination of grace. In accepting Gods testimony a man submits to the rule and reign of grace; in principle this was true in regard to the thief, and the evidence is, he says, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom. I refer to chapter 12,

verses 31, 32, 35, 36: But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom . . . Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.

I refer to that passage for this principle. We receive the kingdom in testimony; it is the subject of preaching, but on the other hand it is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. The kingdom means righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. It is the sway of grace in the heart of the believer; but if we have received the kingdom, we know that it is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. We have now the grace of the kingdom, by and by we shall be in the glory of it; we shall have part with Christ in the glory of the kingdom. Hence we get, Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord . . . that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. The coming of the Lord is to bring us into the glory of the kingdom; when Christ reigns we shall reign with Him, and meanwhile we are waiting with Him. The thief did not really know what was involved for him to have received the kingdom; but it meant that he would have part in the glory of it with Christ. If we know anything about the grace of the kingdom established in our hearts, we shall most certainly have part in the glory of the kingdom.

It is a most important exhortation, and we should be looking to it that we have our loins girded, and our lights burning, and to be like unto men who wait for their Lord, that they may open to Him immediately. We want to keep clear of every influence which tends to entangle us here, so that when the Lord comes and knocks we may open to Him immediately; then our part will be glory with Christ in the kingdom. But all that has not come to pass yet: the glory of the kingdom waits; Christ is not yet reigning. God has said to Him, Sit Thou at My right hand, until

I make Thine enemies Thy footstool, (Psalm 110, verse 1); but what fills the interval?—Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.

The thief was right in his thought that Christ would come in His kingdom; but the Lord makes known to him what would fill the interval: Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise, i.e., he was to be a companion of Christ in paradise. It was not wonderful for Christ to go to paradise, and for this reason: that He could go to the cross. He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things, Ephesians 4, verse 10. Then again, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name. The place of Christ above is the proper moral answer to the place He took here; He proved Himself morally suitable for going to the highest place in heaven. His going to the cross proved that a perfect righteousness was fulfilled here. On the ground of law He was entitled to live, for He had kept it; but the path of obedience and the glory of God meant His going into death, and in His having gone into it, it is morally suitable that He should go to the right hand of God. Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God be glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him, John 13, verses 31, 32. Death was the way to paradise—Christ went down to the cross, and according to the will of God it was the way to paradise; that was not wonderful, but the wonder is that the thief should go to paradise. How was the thief fit to go where otherwise he could not have gone? Now Christ took account of the thief according to that fitness; it was the work of God in the man that fitted the man to go with Christ to paradise. But in order to go to paradise with Christ, he must also be cleared of every reproach which attached to him here. He had been identified here with theft and violence; he could not go to paradise with the reproach of that upon him; but Christ had come to the cross, that He might bear the reproach, and so clear the thief of it. It was Christ's death that cleared him of the reproach, not his own death, but it was God's work in him which

fitted him for paradise. It was the work of grace in the man which fitted him to go to paradise; the man was not only born again, but enlightened. He was at that moment the most divinely intelligent one on earth. The little light which had been, seemed to have been quenched, and the disciples had almost given up the thought of the kingdom. But this poor man testified to it, and said, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.

Now turn to 2 Corinthians 12, I knew a man in Christ . . . such an one caught up to the third heaven . . . caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. There is a good deal of difference between the two cases. Here we get a man taken up to paradise on this side of death; this was not the case with the thief, he went to paradise on the other side of death. Now the thief could not have been said to be, in Christ; to be, in Christ, could not be true of anyone until after Christ had died; but it has come to pass now a man in Christ; and what took place in the case of the apostle might be the case in regard of anyone else. In the wisdom of God it is possible that the apostle may have been specially privileged in this way, for a particular purpose in connection with his testimony; but we have to see that now another order of things has come in, in connection with Christ in heaven and the Holy Spirit down here; and we can be of His body here. My body describes myself. So the body of Christ is that which is descriptive of Himself in the very scene from which He has been rejected. Sovereign mercy has met us, and given us a place in that vessel which is descriptive of Christ; the church is, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. It is wonderful that God should take up vessels of mercy, and should form here a vessel which is down here descriptive of His Son. It is a great thing to accept what in the sovereignty of mercy we are called to. God has wrought in us, that we might form part of that vessel in which Christ is set forth down here.

May grace work in us that we may answer to the mind of God, so that we may know something of the mighty power of the Spirit in us, springing up into everlasting life.