

Matthew, Chapter 15

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1 Then scribes and Pharisees came to Jesus, who were of Jerusalem, saying, 2 "Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." 3 But he answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? 4 For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and mother,' and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him die the death.' 5 But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or his mother, "Whatever you might be profited by me is an offering to God," 6 He shall not honor his father or his mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. 7 You hypocrites, Isaiah well prophesied of you, saying,

8 'This people draws near to me with their mouth, and honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

9 But they worship me in vain, teaching the commandments of men for doctrines."

10 And he called the multitude, and said to them, "Hear, and understand. 11 That which goes into the mouth does not defile a man, but that which comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man."

12 Then his disciples came, and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended after they heard this saying?" 13 But he answered and said, "Every plant, which my heavenly Father has not planted, shall be extirpated. 14 Leave them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into the ditch."

15 Then Peter answered and said to him, "Declare to us this parable." 16 And Jesus said, "Are you also yet without understanding? 17 Do you not yet understand, that whatever enters in at the mouth goes into the belly, and is cast out into the latrine? 18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man. 19 For out of the heart evil thoughts proceed: murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies. 20 These are the things which defile a man. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

21 Then Jesus went from there, and departed into the territories of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same territories, and cried to him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, son of David. My daughter is grievously afflicted with a demon." 23 But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and implored him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries after us." 24 But he answered and said, "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 25 Then she came and worshiped him, saying, "Lord, help me." 26 But he answered and said, "It is not proper to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." 27 And she said, "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." 28 Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, your faith is great. It shall be to you even as you wish." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

29 And Jesus departed from there, came near to the sea of Galilee, and ascended a mountain and sat down there. 30 And great multitudes came to him, having with them those who were lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet, and he healed them, 31 So that the multitude wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.

32 Then Jesus called his disciples to him, and said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat. I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way." 33 And his disciples say to him, "Where should we get so much bread in the wilderness, as to satisfy so great a multitude?" 34 And Jesus says to them, "How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven, and a few little fish." 35 And he commanded the multitude to sit on the ground. 36 And he took the seven loaves and the fish, gave thanks, broke them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. 37 And they all ate and were filled. And they took up seven baskets full of the fragments that were left. 38 And those who had eaten were four thousand men, besides women and children.

39 And he sent the multitude away, and took a boat, and came into the borders of Magdala.

Commentary

In this chapter, we have our Lord Jesus, as the great Prophet teaching, as the great Physician healing, and as the great Shepherd of the sheep feeding; as the Father of spirits instructing them; as the Conqueror of Satan dispossessing him; and as concerned for the bodies of his people, providing for them. Here is, I. Christ's discourse with the scribes and Pharisees about human traditions and injunctions (v. 1-9). II. His discourse with the multitude, and with his disciples, concerning the things that defile a man (v. 10-20). III. His casting of the devil out of the woman of Canaan's daughter (v. 21-28). IV. His healing of all that were brought to him (v. 29-31). V. His feeding of four thousand men, with seven loaves and a few little fishes (v. 32-30).

Verses 1-9

Evil manners, we say, beget good laws. The intemperate heat of the Jewish teachers for the support of their hierarchy, occasioned many excellent discourses of our Saviour's for the settling

of the truth, as here.

I. Here, is the cavil of the scribes and Pharisees at Christ's disciples, for eating with unwashen hands. The scribes and Pharisees were the great men of the Jewish church, men whose gain was godliness, great enemies to the gospel of Christ, but colouring their opposition with a pretence of zeal for the law of Moses, when really nothing was intended but the support of their own tyranny over the consciences of men. They were men of learning and men of business. These scribes and Pharisees here introduced were of Jerusalem, the holy city, the head city, whither the tribes went up, and where were set the thrones of judgment; they should therefore have been better than others, but they were worse. Note, External privileges, if they be not duly improved, commonly swell men up the more with pride and malignity. Jerusalem, which should have been a pure spring, was now become a poisoned sink. How is the faithful city become a harlot!

Now if these great men be the accusers, pray what is the accusation? What articles do they exhibit against the disciples of Christ? Why, truly, the thing laid to their charge, is, nonconformity to the canons of their church (v. 2); Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? This charge they make good in a particular instance; They wash not their hands when they eat bread. A very high misdemeanor! It was a sign that Christ's disciples conducted themselves inoffensively, when this was the worst thing they could charge them with.

Observe, 1. What was the tradition of the elders-That people should often wash their hands, and always at meat. This they placed a great deal of religion in, supposing that the meat they touched with unwashen hands would be defiling to them. The Pharisees practiced this themselves, and with a great deal of strictness imposed it upon others, not under civil penalties, but as matter of conscience, and making it a sin against God if they did not do it. Rabbi Joses determined, "that to eat with unwashen hands is as great a sin as adultery." And Rabbi Akiba being kept a close prisoner, having water sent him both to wash his hands with, and to drink with his meat, the greatest part being accidentally shed, he washed his hands with the remainder, though he left himself none to drink, saying he would rather die than transgress the tradition of the elders. Nay, they would not eat meat with one that did not wash before meat. This mighty zeal in so small a matter would appear very strange, if we did not still see it incident to church-oppressors, not only to be fond of practising their own inventions, but to be furious in pressing their own impositions.

2. What was the transgression of this tradition or injunction by the disciples; it seems, they did not wash their hands when they ate bread, which was the more offensive to the Pharisees, because they were men who in other things were strict and conscientious. The custom was innocent enough, and had a decency in its civil use. We read of the water for purifying at the marriage where Christ was present (Jn. 2:6), though Christ turned it into wine, and so put an end to that use of it. But when it came to be practised and imposed as a religious rite and ceremony, and such a stress laid upon it, the disciples, though weak in knowledge, yet were so well taught as not to comply with it, or observe it; no not when the scribes and Pharisees had their eye upon them. They had already learned St. Paul's lesson, All things are lawful for me; no

doubt, it is lawful to wash before meat; but I will not be brought under the power of any; especially not those who said to their souls, Bow down, that we may go over. 1 Co. 6:12.

3. What was the complaint of the scribes and Pharisees against them. They quarrel with Christ about it, supposing that he allowed them in it, as he did, no doubt, by his own example; "Why do thy disciples transgress the canons of the church? And why dost thou suffer them to do it?" It was well that the complaint was made to Christ; for the disciples themselves, though they knew their duty in this case, were perhaps not so well able to give a reason for what they did as were to be wished.

II. Here is Christ's answer to this cavil, and his justification of the disciples in that which was charged upon them as a transgression. Note, While we stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, he will be sure to bear us out in it.

Two ways Christ replies upon them;

1. By way of recrimination, v. 3-6. They were spying motes in the eyes of his disciples, but Christ shows them a beam in their own. But that which he charges upon them is not barely a recrimination, for it will be no vindication of ourselves to condemn our reprovers; but it is such a censure of their tradition (and the authority of that was what they built their charge upon) as makes not only a non-compliance lawful, but an opposition a duty. That human authority must never be submitted to, which sets up in competition with divine authority.

(1.) The charge in general is, You transgress the commandment of God by your tradition. They called it the tradition of the elders, laying stress upon the antiquity of the usage, and the authority of them that imposed it, as the church of Rome does upon fathers and councils; but Christ calls it their tradition. Note, Illegal impositions will be laid to the charge of those who support and maintain them, and keep them up, as well of those who first invented and enjoined them; Mic. 4:16. You transgress the commandment of God. Note, Those who are most zealous of their own impositions, are commonly most careless of God's commands; which is a good reason why Christ's disciples should stand upon their guard against such impositions, lest, though at first they seem only to infringe the liberty of Christians, they come at length to confront the authority of Christ. Though the Pharisees, in this command of washing before meat, did not entrench upon any command of God; yet, because in other instances they did, he justifies his disciples' disobedience to this.

(2.) The proof of this charge is in particular instance, that of their transgressing the fifth commandment.

[1.] Let us see what the command of God is (v. 4), what the precept, and what the sanction of the law is.

The precept is, Honour thy father and thy mother; this is enjoined by the common Father of mankind, and by paying respect to them whom Providence has made the instruments of our being, we give honour to him who is the Author of it, who has thereby, as to us, put some of his

image upon them. The whole of children's duty to their parents is included in this of honouring them, which is the spring and foundation of all the rest, If I be a father, where is my honour? Our Saviour here supposes it to mean the duty of children's maintaining their parents, and ministering to their wants, if there be occasion, and being every way serviceable to their comfort. Honour widows, that is, maintain them, 1 Tim. 5:3.

The sanction of this law in the fifth commandment, is, a promise, that thy days may be long; but our Saviour waives that, lest any should thence infer it to be only a thing commendable and profitable, and insists upon the penalty annexed to the breach of this commandment in another scripture, which denotes the duty to be highly and indispensably necessary; He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death: this law we have, Ex. 21:17. The sin of cursing parents is here opposed to the duty of honouring them. Those who speak ill of their parents, or wish ill to them, who mock at them, or give them taunting and opprobrious language, break this law. If to call a brother Raca be so penal, what is it to call a father so? By our Saviour's application of this law, it appears, that denying service or relief to parents is included in cursing them. Though the language be respectful enough, and nothing abusive in it, yet what will that avail, if the deeds be not agreeable? it is but like him that said, I go, Sir, and went not, ch. 21:30.

[2.] Let us see what was the contradiction which the tradition of the elders gave to this command. It was not direct and downright, but implicit; their casuists gave them such rules as furnished them with an easy evasion from the obligation of this command, v. 5, 6. You hear what God saith, but ye say so and so. Note, That which men say, even great men, and learned men, and men in authority, must be examined by that which God saith; and if it be found either contrary or inconsistent, it may and must be rejected, Acts 4:19. Observe,

First, What their tradition was; That a man could not in any case bestow his worldly estate better than to give it to the priests, and devote it to the service of the temple: and that when anything was so devoted, it was not only unlawful to alienate it, but all other obligations, though ever so just and sacred, were thereby superseded, and a man was thereby discharged from them. And this proceeded partly from their ceremoniousness, and the superstitious regard they had to the temple, and partly from their covetousness, and love of money: for what was given to the temple they were gainers by. The former was, in pretence, the latter was, in truth, at the bottom of this tradition.

Secondly, How they allowed the application of this to the case of children. When their parents' necessities called for their assistance, they pleaded, that all they could spare from themselves and their children, they had devoted to the treasury of the temple; It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me, and therefore their parents must expect nothing from them; suggesting withal, that the spiritual advantage of what was so devoted, would redound to the parents, who must live upon that air. This, they taught, was a good and valid plea, and many undutiful, unnatural children made use of it, and they justified them in it, and said, He shall be free; so we supply the sense. Some go further, and supply it thus, "He doth well, his days shall be long in the land, and he shall be looked upon as having duly observed the fifth commandment." The pretence of religion would make his refusal to provide for his parents not

only passable but plausible. But the absurdity and impiety of this tradition were very evident: for revealed religion was intended to improve, not to overthrow, natural religion; one of the fundamental laws of which is this of honouring our parents; and had they known what that meant, I will have justice, and mercy, and not sacrifice, they had not thus made the most arbitrary rituals destructive of the most necessary morals. This was making the command of God of no effect. Note, Whatever leads to, or countenances, disobedience, does, in effect, make void the command; and they that take upon them to dispense with God's law, do, in Christ's account, repeal and disannul it. To break the law is bad, but to teach men so, as the scribes and Pharisees did, is much worse, ch. 5:19. To what purpose is the command given, if it be not obeyed? The rule is, as to us, of none effect, if we be not ruled by it. It is time for thee, Lord, to work; high time for the great Reformer, the great Refiner, to appear; for they have made void thy law (Ps. 119:126); not only sinned against the commandment, but, as far as in them lay, sinned away the commandment. But, thanks be to God, in spite of them and all their traditions, the command stands in full force, power, and virtue.

2. The other part of Christ's answer is by way of reprehension; and that which he here charges them with, is hypocrisy; Ye hypocrites, v. 7. Note, It is the prerogative of him who searcheth the heart, and knows what is in man, to pronounce who are hypocrites. The eye of man can perceive open profaneness, but it is only the eye of Christ that can discern hypocrisy, Lu. 16:15. And as it is a sin which his eye discovers, so it is a sin which of all others his soul hates.

Now Christ fetches his reproof from Isa. 29:13. Well did Esaias prophesy of you. Isaiah spoke it of the men of that generation to which he prophesied, yet Christ applies it to these scribes and Pharisees. Note, The reproofs of sin and sinners, which we find in scripture, were designed to reach the like persons and practices to the end of the world; for they are not of private interpretation, 2 Pt. 1:20. The sinners of the latter days are prophesied of, 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1; 2 Pt. 3:3. Threatenings directed against others, belong to us, if we be guilty of the same sins. Isaiah prophesied not of them only, but of all other hypocrites, against whom that word of his is still levelled, and stands in force. The prophecies of scripture are every day in the fulfilling.

This prophecy exactly deciphers a hypocritical nation, Isa. 9:17; 10:6. Here is,

(1.) The description of hypocrites, in two things.

[1.] In their own performances of religious worship, v. 8, when they draw nigh to God with their mouth, and honour him with their lips, their heart is far from him. Observe,

First, How far a hypocrite goes; he draws nigh to God, and honours him; he is, in profession, a worshipper of God. The Pharisee went up to the temple, to pray; he does not stand at that distance which those are at, who live without God in the world, but has a name among the people near unto him. They honour him; that is, they take on them to honour God, they join with those that do so. Some honour God has even from the services of hypocrites, as they help to keep up the face and form of godliness in the world, whence God fetches honour to himself, though they intend it not to him. When God's enemies submit themselves but feignedly, when they lie unto him, so the word is (Ps. 66:3), it redounds to his honour, and he gets himself a

name.

Secondly, Where he rests and takes up; this is done gut with his mouth and with his lips. It is piety but from the teeth outwards; he shows much love, and that is all, there is in his heart no true love; they make their voices to be heard (Isa. 58:4), mention the name of the Lord, Isa. 48:1. Hypocrites are those that only make a lip-labour of religion and religious worship. In word and tongue, the worst hypocrites may do as well as the best saints, and speak as fair with Jacob's voice.

Thirdly, What that is wherein he comes short; it is in the main matter; Their heart is far from me, habitually alienated and estranged (Eph. 4:18), actually wandering and dwelling upon something else; no serious thoughts of God, no pious affections toward him, no concern about the soul and eternity, no thoughts agreeable to the service. God is near in their mouth, but far from their reins, Jer. 12:2; Eze. 33:31. The heart, with the fool's eyes, is in the ends of the earth. It is a silly dove that is without a heart, and so it is a silly duty, Hos. 7:11. A hypocrite says one thing, but thinks another. The great thing that God looks at and requires is the heart (Prov. 23:26); if that be far from him, it is not a reasonable service and therefore not an acceptable one; it is the sacrifice of fools, Eccl. 5:1.

[2.] In their prescriptions to others. This is an instance of their hypocrisy, that they teach for doctrines the commandments of men. The Jews then, as the papists since, paid the same respect to oral tradition that they did to the word of God, receiving it *pari pietatis affectu ac reverentiâ*-with the same pious affection and reverence. Conc. Trident. Sess. 4. Decr. 1. When men's inventions are tacked to God's institutions, and imposed accordingly, this is hypocrisy, a mere human religion. The commandments of men are properly conversant about the things of men, but God will have his own work done by his own rules, and accepts not that which he did not himself appoint. That only comes to him, that comes from him.

(2.) The doom of hypocrites; it is put in a little compass; In vain do they worship me. Their worship does not attain the end for which it was appointed; it will neither please God, nor profit themselves. If it be not in spirit, it is not in truth, and so it is all nothing. That man who only seems to be religious, but is not so, his religion is vain (James 1:26); and if our religion be a vain oblation, a vain religion, how great is that vanity! How sad is it to live in an age of prayers and sermons, and sabbaths and sacraments, in vain, to beat the air in all these; it is so, if the heart be not with God in them. Lip-labour is lost labour, Isa. 1:11. Hypocrites sow the wind and reap the whirlwind; they trust in vanity, and vanity will be their recompence.

Thus Christ justified his disciples in their disobedience to the traditions of the elders; and this the scribes and Pharisees got by their cavilling. We read not of any reply they made; if they were not satisfied, yet they were silenced, and could not resist the power wherewith Christ spake.

Verses 10-20

Christ having proved that the disciples, in eating with unwashen hands, were not to be blamed,

as transgressing the traditions and injunctions of the elders, comes here to show that they were not to be blamed, as having done any thing that was in itself evil. In the former part of his discourse he overturned the authority of the law, and in this the reason of it. Observe,

I. The solemn introduction to this discourse (v. 10); He called the multitude. They were withdrawn while Christ discoursed with the scribes and Pharisees; probably those proud men ordered them to withdraw, as not willing to talk with Christ in their hearing; Christ must favour them at their pleasure with a discourse in private. But Christ had a regard to the multitude; he soon despatched the scribes and Pharisees, and then turned them off, invited the mob, the multitude, to be his hearers: thus the poor are evangelized; and the foolish things of the world, and things that are despised hath Christ chosen. The humble Jesus embraced those whom the proud Pharisees looked upon with disdain, and to them he designed it for a mortification. He turns from them as wilful and unteachable, and turns to the multitude, who, though weak, were humble, and willing to be taught. To them he said, Hear and understand. Note, What we hear from the mouth of Christ, we must give all diligence to understand. Not only scholars, but even the multitude, the ordinary people, must apply their minds to understand the words of Christ. He therefore calls upon them to understand, because the lesson he was now about to teach them, was contrary to the notions which they had sucked in with their milk from their teachers; and overturned many of the customs and usages which they were wedded to, and laid stress upon. Note, There is need of a great attention of mind and clearness of understanding to free men from those corrupt principles and practices which they have been bred up in and long accustomed to; for in that case the understanding is commonly bribed and biassed by prejudice.

II. The truth itself laid down (v. 11), in two propositions, which were opposite to the vulgar errors of that time, and were therefore surprising.

1. Not that which goes into the mouth defileth the man. It is not the kind or quality of our food, nor the condition of our hands, that affects the soul with any moral pollution or defilement. The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, Rom. 14:17. That defiles the man, by which guilt is contracted before God, and the man is rendered offensive to him, and disfitted for communion with him; now what we eat, if we do not eat unreasonably and immoderately, does not this; for to the pure all things are pure, Tit. 1:15. The Pharisees carried the ceremonial pollutions, by eating such and such meats, much further than the law intended, and burdened it with additions of their own, which our Saviour witnesses against; intending hereby to pave the way to a repeal of the ceremonial law in that matter. He was now beginning to teach his followers to call nothing common or unclean; and if Peter, when he was bid to kill and eat, had remembered this word, he would not have said, Not so, Lord, Acts 10:13-15, 28.

2. But that which comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man. We are polluted, not by the meat we eat with unwashen hands, but by the words we speak from an unsanctified heart; thus it is that the mouth causeth the flesh to sin, Eccl. 5:6. Christ, in a former discourse, had laid a great stress upon our words (ch. 12:36, 37); and that was intended for reproof and warning to those that cavilled at him; this here is intended for reproof and warning to those that cavilled at the disciples, and censured them. It is not the disciples that defile themselves with what they eat,

but the Pharisees that defile themselves with what they speak spitefully and censoriously of them. Note, Those who charge guilt upon others for transgressing the commandments of men, many times bring greater guilt upon themselves, by transgressing the law of God against rash judging. Those most defile themselves, who are most forward to censure the defilements of others.

III. The offence that was taken at this truth and the account brought to Christ of that offence (v. 12); "The disciples said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, and didst thou not foresee that they would be so, at this saying, and would think the worse of thee and of thy doctrine for it, and be the more enraged at thee?"

1. It was not strange that the Pharisees should be offended at this plain truth, for they were men made up of error and enmity, mistakes and malice. Sore eyes cannot bear clear light; and nothing is more provoking to proud imposers than the undeceiving of those whom they have first blindfolded, and then enslaved. It should seem that the Pharisees, who were strict observers of the traditions, were more offended than the scribes, who were the teachers of them; and perhaps they were as much galled with the latter part of Christ's doctrine, which taught a strictness in the government of our tongue, as with the former part, which taught an indifference about washing our hands; great contenders for the formalities of religion, being commonly as great contemners of the substantials of it.

2. The disciples thought it strange that their Master should say that which he knew would give so much offence; he did not use to do so: surely, they think, if he had considered how provoking it would be, he would not have said it. But he knew what he said, and to whom he said it, and what would be the effect of it; and would teach us, that though in indifferent things we must be tender of giving offence, yet we must not, for fear of that, evade any truth or duty. Truth must be owned, and duty done; and if any be offended, it is his own fault; it is scandal, not given, but taken.

Perhaps the disciples themselves stumbled at the word Christ said, which they thought bold, and scarcely reconcileable with the difference that was put by the law of God between clean and unclean meats; and therefore objected this to Christ, that they might themselves be better informed. They seem likewise to have a concern upon them for the Pharisees, though they had quarrelled with them; which teaches us to forgive, and seek the good, especially the spiritual good, of our enemies, persecutors, and slanderers. They would not have the Pharisees go away displeased at any thing Christ had said; and therefore, though they do not desire him to retract it, they hope he will explain, correct, and modify it. Weak hearers are sometimes more solicitous than they should be not to have wicked hearers offended. But if we please men with the concealment of truth, and the indulgence of their errors and corruptions, we are not the servants of Christ.

IV. The doom passed upon the Pharisees and their corrupt traditions; which comes in as a reason why Christ cared not though he offended them, and therefore why the disciples should not care; because they were a generation of men that hated to be reformed, and were marked

out for destruction. Two things Christ here foretels concerning them.

1. The rooting out of them and their traditions (v. 13); Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Not only the corrupt opinions and superstitious practices of the Pharisees, but their sect, and way, and constitution, were plants not of God's planting. The rules of their profession were no institutions of his, but owed their origin to pride and formality. The people of the Jews were planted a noble vine; but now that they are become the degenerate plant of a strange vine, God disowned them, as not of his planting. Note, (1.) In the visible church, it is no strange thing to find plants that our heavenly Father has not planted. It is implied, that whatever is good in the church is of God's planting, Isa. 41:19. But let the husbandman be ever so careful, his ground will cast forth weeds of itself, more or less, and there is an enemy busy sowing tares. What is corrupt, though of God's permitting, is not of his planting; he sows nothing but good seed in his field. Let us not therefore be deceived, as if all must needs be right that we find in the church, and all those persons and things our Father's plants that we find in our Father's garden. Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits; see Jer. 19:5; 23:31, 32. (2.) Those that are of the spirit of the Pharisees, proud, formal, and imposing, what figure soever they make, and of what denomination soever they be, God will not own them as of his planting. By their fruit you shall know them. (3.) Those plants that are not of God's planting, shall not be of his protecting, but shall undoubtedly be rooted up. What is not of God shall not stand, Acts 5:38. What things are unscriptural, will wither and die of themselves, or be justly exploded by the churches; however in the great day these tares that offend will be bundled for the fire. What is become of the Pharisees and their traditions? They are long since abandoned; but the gospel of truth is great, and will remain. It cannot be rooted up.

2. The ruin of them; and their followers, who had their persons and principles in admiration, v. 14. Where,

(1.) Christ bids his disciples let them alone. "Have no converse with them or concern for them; neither court their favour, nor dread their displeasure; care not though they be offended, they will take their course, and let them take the issue of it. They are wedded to their own fancies, and will have everything their own way; let them alone. Seek not to please a generation of men that please not God (1 Th. 2:15), and will be pleased with nothing less than absolute dominion over your consciences. They are joined to idols, as Ephraim (Hos. 4:17), the idols of their own fancy; let them alone, let them be filthy still," Rev. 22:11. The case of those sinners is sad indeed, whom Christ orders his ministers to let alone.

(2.) He gives them two reasons for it. Let them alone; for,

[1.] They are proud and ignorant; two bad qualities that often meet, and render a man incurable in his folly, Prov. 26:12. They are blind leaders of the blind. They are grossly ignorant in the things of God, and strangers to the spiritual nature of the divine law; and yet so proud, that they think they see better and further than any, and therefore undertake to be leaders of others, to show others the way to heaven, when they themselves know not one step of the way; and, accordingly, they prescribe to all, and proscribe those who will not follow them. Though they

were blind, if they had owned it, and come to Christ for eye-salve, they might have seen, but they disdained the intimation of such a thing (Jn. 9:40); Are we blind also? They were confident that they themselves were guides of the blind (Rom. 2:19, 20), were appointed to be so, and fit to be so; that every thing they said was an oracle and a law; "Therefore let them alone, their case is desperate; do not meddle with them; you may soon provoke them, but never convince them." How miserable was the case of the Jewish Church now when their leaders were blind, so self-conceitedly foolish, as to be peremptory in their conduct, while the people were so sottishly foolish as to follow them with an implicit faith and obedience, and willingly walk after the commandment, Hos. 5:11. Now the prophecy was fulfilled, Isa. 29:10, 14. And it is easy to imagine what will be in the end hereof, when the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means, and the people love to have it so, Jer. 5:31.

[2.] They are posting to destruction, and will shortly be plunged into it; Both shall fall into the ditch. This must needs be the end of it, if both be so blind, and yet both so bold, venturing forward, and yet not aware of danger. Both will be involved in the general desolation coming upon the Jews, and both drowned in eternal destruction and perdition. The blind leaders and the blind followers will perish together. We find (Rev. 22:15), that hell is the portion of those that make a lie, and of those that love it when it is made. The deceived and the deceiver are obnoxious to the judgment of God, Job 12:16. Note, First, Those that by their cunning craftiness draw others to sin and error, shall not, with all their craft and cunning, escape ruin themselves. If both fall together into the ditch, the blind leaders will fall undermost, and have the worst of it; see Jer. 14:15, 16. The prophets shall be consumed first, and then the people to whom they prophesy, Jer. 20:6; 27:15, 16. Secondly, The sin and ruin of the deceivers will be no security to those that are deceived by them. Though the leaders of this people cause them to err, yet they that are led of them are destroyed (Isa. 9:16), because they shut their eyes against the light which would have rectified their mistake. Seneca, complaining of most people's being led by common opinion and practice (*Unusquisque mavult credere quam judicare*-Things are taken upon trust, and never examined), concludes, *Inde ista tanta coacervatio aliorum super alios ruentium*-Hence crowds fall upon crowds, in vast confusion. *De Vitâ Beatâ*. The falling of both together will aggravate the fall of both; for they that have thus mutually increased each other's sin, will mutually exasperate each other's ruin.

V. Instruction given to the disciples concerning the truth Christ had laid down, v. 10. Though Christ rejects the wilfully ignorant who care not to be taught, he can have compassion on the ignorant who are willing to learn, Heb. 5:2. If the Pharisees, who made void the law, be offended, let them be offended: but this great peace have they who love the law, that nothing shall offend them, but, some way or other, the offence shall be taken off, Ps. 119:165.

Here is, 1. Their desire to be better instructed in this matter (v. 15); in this request as in many others, Peter was their speaker; the rest, it is probable, putting him on to speak, or intimating their concurrence; Declare unto us this parable. What Christ said was plain, but, because it agreed not with the notions they had imbibed, though they would not contradict it, yet they call it a parable, and cannot understand it. Note, (1.) Weak understandings are apt to turn plain truths into parables, and to seek for a knot in a bulrush. The disciples often did so, as Jn. 16:17. Even

the grasshopper is a burthen to a weak stomach, and babes in understanding cannot bear and digest strong meat. (2.) Where a weak head doubts concerning any word of Christ, an upright heart and a willing mind will seek for instruction. The Pharisees were offended, but kept it to themselves; hating to be reformed, they hated to be informed; but the disciples, though offended, sought for satisfaction, imputing the offence, not to the doctrine delivered, but to the shallowness of their own capacity.

2. The reproof Christ gave them for their weakness and ignorance (v. 16); Are ye also yet without understanding? As many as Christ loves and teaches, he thus rebukes. Note, They are very ignorant indeed, who understand not that moral pollutions are abundantly worse and more dangerous than ceremonial ones. Two things aggravate their dulness and darkness.

(1.) That they were the disciples of Christ; "Are ye also without understanding? Ye whom I have admitted into so great a degree of familiarity with me, are ye so unskilful in the word of righteousness?" Note, The ignorance and mistakes of those that profess religion, and enjoy the privileges of church-membership, are justly a grief to the Lord Jesus. "No wonder that the Pharisees understand not this doctrine, who know nothing of the Messiah's kingdom: but ye that have heard of it, and embraced it yourselves, and preached it to others, are ye also such strangers to the spirit and genius of it?"

(2.) That they had been a great while Christ's scholars; "Are ye yet so, after ye have been so long under my teaching?" Had they been but of yesterday in Christ's school, it had been another matter, but to have been for so many months Christ's constant hearers, and yet to be without understanding, was a great reproach to them. Note, Christ expects from us some proportion of knowledge, and grace, and wisdom, according to the time and means we have had. See Jn. 14:9; Heb. 5:12; 2 Tim. 3:7, 8.

3. The explication Christ gave them of this doctrine of pollutions. Though he chid them for their dulness, he did not cast them off, but pitied them, and taught them, as Lu. 24:25-27. He here shows us,

(1.) What little danger we are in of pollution from that which entereth in at the mouth, v. 17. An inordinate appetite, intemperance, and excess in eating, come out of the heart, and are defiling; but meat in itself is not so, as the Pharisees supposed. What there is of dregs and defilement in our meat, nature (or rather God of nature) has provided a way to clear us of it; it goes in at the belly, and is cast out into the draught, and nothing remains to us but pure nourishment. So fearfully and wonderfully are we made and preserved, and our souls held in life. The expulsive faculty is as necessary in the body as any other, for the discharge of that which is superfluous, or noxious; so happily is nature enabled to help itself, and shift for its own good: by this means nothing defiles; if we eat with unwashen hands, and so any thing unclean mix with our food, nature will separate it, and cast it out, and it will be no defilement to us. It may be a piece of cleanliness, but it is not point of conscience, to wash before meat; and we go upon a great mistake if we place religion in it. It is not the practice itself, but the opinion it is built upon, that Christ condemns, as if meat commended us to God (1 Co. 8:8); whereas Christianity stands not

in such observances.

(2.) What great danger we are in of pollution from that which proceeds out of the mouth (v. 18), out of the abundance of the heart: compare ch. 12:34. There is no defilement in the products of God's bounty; the defilement arises from the products of our corruption. Now here we have,

[1.] The corrupt fountain of that which proceeds out of the mouth; it comes from the heart; that is the spring and source of all sin, Jer. 8:7. It is the heart that is so desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9); for there is no sin in a word or deed, which was not first in the heart. There is the root of bitterness, which bears gall and wormwood. It is the inward part of a sinner, that is very wickedness, Ps. 5:9. All evil speakings come forth from the heart, and are defiling; from the corrupt heart comes the corrupt communication.

[2.] Some of the corrupt streams which flow from this fountain, specified; though they do not all come out of the mouth, yet they all come out of the man, and are the fruits of that wickedness which is in the heart, and is wrought there, Ps. 58:2.

First, Evil thoughts, sins against all the commandments. Therefore David puts vain thoughts in opposition to the whole law, Ps. 119:113. These are the first-born of the corrupt nature, the beginning of its strength, and do most resemble it. These, as the son and heir, abide in the house, and lodge within us. There is a great deal of sin that begins and ends in the heart, and goes no further. Carnal fancies and imaginations are evil thoughts, wickedness in the contrivance (*dialogismoï poneproi*), wicked plots, purposes, and devices of mischief to others, Mic. 2:1.

Secondly, Murders, sins against the sixth commandment; these come from a malice in the heart against our brother's life, or a contempt of it. Hence he that hates his brother, is said to be a murderer; he is so at God's bar, 1 Jn. 3:15. War is in the heart, Ps. 4:21; James 4:1

Thirdly, Adulteries and fornications, sins against the seventh commandment; these come from the wanton, unclean, carnal heart; and the lust that reigns there, is conceived there, and brings forth these sins, James 1:15. There is adultery in the heart first, and then in the act, ch. 5:28.

Fourthly, Thefts, sins against the eighth commandment; cheats, wrongs, rapines, and all injurious contracts; the fountain of all these is in the heart, that is it that is exercised in these covetous practices (2 Pt. 2:14), that is set upon riches, Ps. 62:10. Achan coveted, and then took, Joshua 7:20, 21.

Fifthly, False witness, against the ninth commandment; this comes from a complication of falsehood and covetousness, or falsehood and covetousness, or falsehood and malice in the heart. If truth, holiness, and love, which God requires in the inward parts, reigned as they ought, there would be no false witness bearing, Ps. 64:6: Jer. 9:8.

Sixthly, Blasphemies, speaking evil of God, against the third commandment; speaking evil of our neighbour, against the ninth commandment; these come from a contempt and disesteem of both

in the heart; thence the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost proceeds (ch. 12:31, 32); these are the overflowing of the gall within.

Now these are the things which defile a man, v. 20. Note, Sin is defiling to the soul, renders it unlovely and abominable in the eyes of a pure and holy God; unfit for communion with him, and for the enjoyment of him in the new Jerusalem, into which nothing shall enter that defileth or worketh iniquity. The mind and conscience are defiled by sin, and that makes every thing else so, Tit. 1:15. This defilement by sin was signified by the ceremonial pollutions which the Jewish doctors added to, but understood not. See Heb. 9:13, 14; 1 Jn. 1:7.

These therefore are the things we must carefully avoid, and all approaches toward them, and not lay stress upon the washing of the hands. Christ doth not yet repeal the law of the distinction of meats (that was not done till Acts 10), but the tradition of the elders, which was tacked to that law; and therefore he concludes, To eat with unwashen hands (which was the matter now in question), this defileth not a man. If he wash, he is not the better before God; if he wash not, he is not the worse.

Verses 21-28

We have here that famous story of Christ's casting the devil out of the woman of Canaan's daughter; it has something in it singular and very surprising, and which looks favourably upon the poor Gentiles, and is an earnest of the mercy which Christ had in store for them. Here is a gleam of that light which was to lighten the Gentiles, Lu. 2:32. Christ came to his own, and his own received him not; but many of them quarrelled with him, and were offended in him; and observe what follows, v. 21.

I. Jesus went thence. Note, Justly is the light taken from those that either play by it, or rebel against it. When Christ and his disciples could not be quiet among them, he left them, and so left an example to his own rule (ch. 10:14), Shake off the dust of your feet. Though Christ endure long, he will not always endure, the contradiction of sinners against himself. He had said (v. 14), Let them alone, and he did so. Note, Wilful prejudices against the gospel, and cavils at it, often provoke Christ to withdraw, and to remove the candlestick out of its place. Acts 13:46, 51.

II. When he went thence, he departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon; not to those cities (they were excluded from any share in Christ's mighty works, ch. 11:21, 22), but into that part of the land of Israel which lay that way: thither he went, as Elias to Sarepta, a city of Sidon (Lu. 4:26); thither he went to look after this poor woman, whom he had mercy in reserve for. While he went about doing good, he was never out of his way. The dark corners of the country, which lay most remote, shall have their share of his benign influences; and as now the ends of the land, so afterward the ends of the earth, shall see his salvation, Isa. 49:6. Here it was, that this miracle was wrought, in the story of which we may observe,

1. The address of the woman of Canaan to Christ, v. 22. She was a Gentile, a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel; probably one of the posterity of those accursed nations that were

devoted by that word, Cursed be Canaan. Note, The doom of political bodies doth not always reach every individual member of them. God will have his remnant out of all nations, chosen vessels in all coasts, even the most unlikely: she came out of the same coasts. If Christ had not now made a visit to these coasts, though the mercy was worth travelling far for, it is probable that she had never come to him. Note, It is often an excitement to a dormant faith and zeal, to have opportunities of acquaintance with Christ brought to our doors, to have the word nigh us.

Her address was very importunate, she cried to Christ, as one in earnest; cried, as being at some distance from him, not daring to approach too near, being a Canaanite, lest she should give offence. In her address,

(1.) She relates her misery; My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil, kakous daimonizetai-She is ill-bewitched, or possessed. There were degrees of that misery, and this was the worst sort. It was common case at that time, and very calamitous. Note, The vexations of children are the trouble of parents, and nothing should be more so than their being under the power of Satan. Tender parents very sensibly feel the miseries of those that are pieces of themselves. "Though vexed with the devil, yet she is my daughter still." The greatest afflictions of our relations do not dissolve our obligations to them, and therefore ought not to alienate our affections from them. It was the distress and trouble of her family, that now brought her to Christ; she came to him, not for teaching, but for healing; yet, because she came in faith, he did not reject her. Though it is need that drives us to Christ, yet we shall not therefore be driven from him. It was the affliction of her daughter, that gave her this occasion of applying to Christ. It is good to make the afflictions of others our own, in sense and sympathy, that we may make them our own, in improvement and advantage.

(2.) She requests for mercy; Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David, she owns him to be the Messiah: that is the great thing which faith should fasten upon, and fetch comfort from. From the Lord we may expect acts of power: he can command deliverances; from the Son of David we may expect all the mercy and grace which were foretold concerning him. Though a Gentile, she owns the promise made to the fathers of the Jews, and the honour of the house of David. The Gentiles must receive Christianity, not only as an improvement of natural religion, but as the perfection of the Jewish religion, with an eye to the Old Testament.

Her petition is, Have mercy on me. She does not limit Christ to this or that particular instance of mercy, but mercy, mercy is the thing she begs: she pleads not merit, but depends upon mercy; Have mercy upon me. Mercies to the children are mercies to the parents; favours to ours are favours to us, and are so to be accounted. Note, It is the duty of parents to pray for their children, and to be earnest in prayer for them, especially for their souls; "I have a son, a daughter, grievously vexed with a proud will, an unclean devil, a malicious devil, led captive by him at his will; Lord, help them." This is a case more deplorable than that of a bodily possession. Bring them to Christ by faith and prayer, who alone is able to heal them. Parents should look upon it as a great mercy to themselves, to have Satan's power broken in the souls of their children.

2. The discouragement she met with in this address; in all the story of Christ's ministry we do not meet with the like. He was wont to countenance and encourage all that came to him, and either to answer before they called, or to hear while they were yet speaking; but here was one otherwise treated: and what could be the reason of it? (1.) Some think that Christ showed himself backward to gratify this poor woman, because he would not give offence to the Jews, by being as free and forward in his favour to the Gentiles as to them. He had bid his disciples not go into the way of the Gentiles (ch. 10:5), and therefore would not himself seem so inclinable to them as to others, but rather more shy. Or rather, (2.) Christ treated her thus, to try her; he knows what is in the heart, knew the strength of her faith, and how well able she was, by his grace, to break through such discouragements; he therefore met her with them, that the trial of her faith might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, 1 Pt. 1:6, 7. This was like God's tempting Abraham (Gen. 22:1), like the angel's wrestling with Jacob, only to put him upon wrestling, Gen. 32:24. Many of the methods of Christ's providence, and especially of his grace, in dealing with his people, which are dark and perplexing, may be explained with the key of this story, which is for that end left upon record, to teach us that there may be love in his face, and to encourage us, therefore, though he slay us, yet to trust in him.

Observe the particular discouragements given her:

[1.] When she cried after him, he answered her not a word, v. 23. His ear was wont to be always open and attentive to the cries of poor supplicants, and his lips, which dropped as the honeycomb, always ready to give an answer of peace; but to this poor woman he turned a deaf ear, and she could get neither an alms nor an answer. It was a wonder that she did not fly off in a fret, and say, "Is this he that is so famed for clemency and tenderness? Have so many been heard and answered by him, as they talk, and must I be the first rejected suitor? Why so distant to me, if it be true that he hath stooped to so many?" But Christ knew what he did, and therefore did not answer, that she might be the more earnest in prayer. He heard her, and was pleased with her, and strengthened her with strength in her soul to prosecute her request (Ps. 138:3; Job 23:6), though he did not immediately give her the answer she expected. By seeming to draw away the desired mercy from her, he drew her on to be so much the more importunate for it. Note, Every accepted prayer is not immediately an answered prayer. Sometimes God seems not to regard his people's prayers, like a man asleep or astonished (Ps. 44:23; Jer. 14:9; Ps. 22:1, 2); nay, to be angry at them (Ps. 80:4; Lam. 3:8, 44); but it is to prove, and so to improve, their faith, and to make his after-appearances for them the more glorious to himself, and the more welcome to them; for the vision, at the end, shall speak, and shall not lie, Heb. 2:3. See Job 35:14

[2.] When the disciples spake a good word for her, he gave a reason why he refused her, which was yet more discouraging.

First, It was some little relief, that the disciples interposed on her behalf; they said, Send her away, for she crieth after us. It is desirable to have an interest in the prayers of good people, and we should be desirous of it. But the disciples, though wishing she might have what she came for, yet therein consulted rather their own ease than the poor woman's satisfaction; "Send

her away with a cure, for she cries, and is in good earnest; she cries after us, and is troublesome to us, and shames us." Continued importunity may be uneasy to men, even to good men; but Christ loves to be cried after.

Secondly, Christ's answer to the disciples quite dashed her expectations; "I am not sent, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; you know I am not, she is none of them, and would you have me go beyond by commission?" Importunity seldom conquers the settled reason of a wise man; and those refusals are most silencing, which are so backed. He doth not only not answer her, but he argues against her, and stops her mouth with a reason. It is true, she is a lost sheep, and hath as much need of his care as any, but she is not of the house of Israel, to whom he was first sent (Acts 3:26), and therefore not immediately interested in it, and entitled to it. Christ was a Minister of the circumcision (Rom. 15:8); and though he was intended for a Light to the Gentiles, yet the fulness of time for that was not now come, the veil was not yet rent, nor the partition-wall taken down. Christ's personal ministry was to be the glory of his people Israel; "If I am sent to them, what have I to do with those that are none of them." Note, It is a great trial, when we have occasion given us to question whether we be of those to whom Christ was sent. But, blessed be God, no room is left for that doubt; the distinction between Jew and Gentile is taken away; we are sure that he gave his life a ransom for many, and if for many, why not for me?

Thirdly, When she continued her importunity, he insisted upon the unfitness of the thing, and gave her not only a repulse, but a seeming reproach too (v. 26); It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs. This seems to cut her off from all hope, and might have driven her to despair, if she had not had a very strong faith indeed. Gospel grace and miraculous cures (the appurtenances of it), were children's bread; they belonged to them to whom pertained the adoption (Rom. 9:4), and lay not upon the same level with that rain from heaven, and those fruitful seasons, which God gave to the nations whom he suffered to walk in their own ways (Acts 14:16, 17); no, these were peculiar favours, appropriated to the peculiar people, the garden enclosed. Christ preached to the Samaritans (Jn. 4:41), but we read not of any cures he wrought among them; that salvation was of the Jews: it is not meet therefore to alienate these. The Gentiles were looked upon by the Jews with great contempt, were called and counted dogs; and, in comparison with the house of Israel, who were so dignified and privileged, Christ here seems to allow it, and therefore thinks it not meet that the Gentiles should share in the favours bestowed on the Jews. But see how the tables are turned; after the bringing of the Gentiles into the church, the Jewish zealots for the law are called dogs, Phil. 3:2.

Now this Christ urgeth against this woman of Canaan; "How can she expect to eat of the children's bread, who is not of the family?" Note, 1. Those whom Christ intends most signally to honour, he first humbles and lays low in a sense of their own meanness and unworthiness. We must first see ourselves to be as dogs, less than the least of all God's mercies, before we are fit to be dignified and privileged with them. 2. Christ delights to exercise great faith with great trials, and sometimes reserves the sharpest for the last, that, being tried, we may come forth like gold. This general rule is applicable to other cases for direction, though here used only for trial. Special ordinances and church-privileges are children's bread, and must not be prostituted to

the grossly ignorant and profane. Common charity must be extended to all, but spiritual dignities are appropriated to the household of faith; and therefore promiscuous admission to them, without distinction, wastes the children's bread, and is the giving of that which is holy to the dogs, ch. 7:6. Procul hinc, procul inde, profani-Off, ye profane.

3. Here is the strength of her faith and resolution, in breaking through all these discouragements. Many a one, thus tried, would either have sunk into silence, or broken out into passion. "Here is cold comfort," might she have said, "for a poor distressed creature; as good for me to have staid at home, as come hither to be taunted at and abused at this rate; not only to have a piteous case slighted, but to be called a dog!" A proud, unhumbled heart would not have borne it. The reputation of the house of Israel was not now so great in the world, but that this slight put upon the Gentiles was capable of being retorted, had the poor woman been so minded. It might have occasioned a reflection upon Christ, and might have been a blemish upon his reputation, as well as a shock to the good opinion, she had entertained of him; for we are apt to judge of persons as we ourselves find them; and think that they are what they are to us. "Is this the Son of David?" (might she have said): "Is this he that has such a reputation for kindness, tenderness, and compassion? I am sure I have no reason to give him that character, for I was never treated so roughly in my life; he might have done as much for me as for others; or, if not, he needed not to have set me with the dogs of his flock. I am not a dog, I am a woman, and an honest woman, and a woman in misery; and I am sure it is not meet to call me a dog." No, here is not a word of this. Note, A humble, believing soul, that truly loves Christ, takes everything in good part that he saith and doeth, and puts the best construction upon it.

She breaks through all these discouragements,

(1.) With a holy earnestness of desire in prosecuting her petition. This appeared upon the former repulse (v. 25); Then came she, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. [1.] She continued to pray. What Christ said, silenced the disciples; you hear no more of them; they took the answer, but the woman did not. Note, The more sensibly we feel the burthen, the more resolutely we should pray for the removal of it. And it is the will of God that we should continue instant in prayer, should always pray, and not faint. [2.] She improved in prayer. Instead of blaming Christ, or charging him with unkindness, she seems rather to suspect herself, and lay the fault upon herself. She fears lest, in her first address, she had not been humble and reverent enough, and therefore now she came, and worshipped him, and paid him more respect than she had done; or she fears that she had not been earnest enough, and therefore now she cries, Lord, help me. Note, When the answers of prayer are deferred, God is thereby teaching us to pray more, and pray better. It is then time to enquire wherein we have come short in our former prayers, that what has been amiss may be amended for the future. Disappointments in the success of prayer, must be excitements to the duty of prayer. Christ, in his agony, prayed more earnestly. [3.] She waives the question, whether she was of those to whom Christ was sent or no; she will not argue that with him, though perhaps she might have claimed some kindred to the house of Israel; but, "Whether an Israelite or no, I come to the Son of David for mercy, and I will not let him go, except he bless me." Many weak Christians perplex themselves with questions and doubts about their election, whether they are of the house of Israel or no; such

had better mind their errand to God, and continue instant in prayer for mercy and grace; throw themselves by faith at the feet of Christ, and say, If I perish, I will perish here; and then that matter will by degrees clear itself. If we cannot reason down our unbelief, let us pray it down. A fervent, affectionate Lord, help me, will help us over many of the discouragements which are sometimes ready to bear us down and overwhelm us. [4.] Her prayer is very short, but comprehensive and fervent, Lord, help me. Take this, First, As lamenting her case; "If the Messiah be sent only to the house of Israel, the Lord help me, what will become of me and mine," Note, It is not in vain for broken hearts to bemoan themselves; God looks upon them then, Jer. 31:18. Or, Secondly, As begging grace to insist her in this hour of temptation. She found it hard to keep up her faith when it was thus frowned upon, and therefore prays, "Lord, help me; Lord, strengthen my faith now; Lord, let thy right hand uphold me, while my soul is following hard after thee," Ps. 63:8. Or, Thirdly, As enforcing her original request, "Lord, help me; Lord, give me what I come for." She believed that Christ could and would help her, though she was not of the house of Israel; else she would have dropt her petition. Still she keeps up good thoughts of Christ, and will not quit her hold. Lord, help me, is a good prayer, if well put up; and it is pity that it should be turned into a byword, and that we should take God's name in vain in it.

(2.) With a holy skilfulness of faith, suggesting a very surprising plea. Christ had placed the Jews with the children, as olive-plants round about God's table, and had put the Gentiles with the dogs, under the table; and she doth not deny the aptness of the similitude. Note, There is nothing got by contradicting any word of Christ, though it bear ever so hard upon us. But this poor woman, since she cannot object against it, resolves to make the best of it (v. 27); Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs. Now, here,

[1.] Her acknowledgment was very humble: Truth, Lord. Note, You cannot speak so meanly and slightly of a humble believer, but he is ready to speak as meanly and slightly of himself. Some that seem to dispraise and disparage themselves, will yet take it as an affront if others do so too; but one that is humbled aright, will subscribe to the most abasing challenges, and not call them abusing ones. "Truth, Lord; I cannot deny it; I am a dog, and have no right to the children's bread." David, Thou hast done foolishly, very foolishly; Truth, Lord. Asaph, Thou hast been as a beast before God; Truth, Lord. Agur, Thou art more brutish than any man; Truth, Lord. Paul, Thou hast been the chief of sinners, art less than the least of saints, not meet to be called an apostle; Truth, Lord.

[2.] Her improvement of this into a plea was very ingenious; Yet the dogs eat of the crumbs. It was by a singular acumen, and spiritual quickness and sagacity, that she discerned matter of argument in that which looked like a slight. Note, A lively, active faith will make that to be for us, which seems to be against us; will fetch meat out of the eater, and sweetness out of the strong. Unbelief is apt to mistake recruits for enemies, and to draw dismal conclusions even from comfortable premises (Judges 13:22, 23); but faith can find encouragement even in that which is discouraging, and get nearer to God by taking hold on that hand which is stretched out to push it away. So good a thing it is to be of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord, Isa. 11:3.

Her plea is, Yet the dogs eat of the crumbs. It is true, the full and regular provision is intended for the children only, but the small, casual, neglected crumbs are allowed to the dogs, and are not grudged them; that is to the dogs under the table, that attend there expecting them. We poor Gentiles cannot expect the stated ministry and miracles of the Son of David, that belongs to the Jews; but they begin now to be weary of their meat, and to play with it, they find fault with it, and crumble it away; surely then some of the broken meat may fall to a poor Gentile; "I beg a cure by the by, which is but a crumb, though of the same precious bread, yet but a small inconsiderable piece, compared with the loaves which they have." Note, When we are ready to surfeit on the children's bread, we should remember how many there are, that would be glad of the crumbs. Our broken meat in spiritual privileges, would be a feast to many a soul; Acts 13:42. Observe here,

First, Her humility and necessity made her glad of crumbs. Those who are conscious to themselves that they deserve nothing, will be thankful for anything; and then we are prepared for the greatest of God's mercies, when we see ourselves less than the least of them. The least of Christ is precious to a believer, and the very crumbs of the bread of life.

Secondly, Her faith encouraged her to expect these crumbs. Why should it not be at Christ's table as at a great man's, where the dogs are fed as sure as the children? Observe, She calls it their master's table; if she were a dog, she was his dog, and it cannot be ill with us, if we stand but in the meanest relation to Christ; "Though unworthy to be called children, yet make me as one of thy hired servants: nay, rather let me be set with the dogs than turned out of the house; for in my Father's house there is not only bread enough, but to spare," Lu. 15:17-19. It is good lying in God's house, though we lie at the threshold there.

4. The happy issue and success of all this. She came off with credit and comfort from this struggle; and, though a Canaanite, approved herself a true daughter of Israel, who, like a prince, had power with God, and prevailed. Hitherto Christ hid his face from her, but now gathers her with everlasting kindness, v. 28. Then Jesus said, O woman, great is thy faith. This was like Joseph's making himself know to his brethren, I am Joseph; so here, in effect, I am Jesus. Now he begins to speak like himself, and to put on his own countenance. He will not contend for ever.

(1.) He commended her faith. O woman, great is thy faith. Observe, [1.] It is her faith that he commends. There were several other graces that shone bright in her conduct of this affair-wisdom, humility, meekness, patience, perseverance in prayer; but these were the product of her faith, and therefore Christ fastens upon that as most commendable; because of all graces faith honours Christ most, therefore of all graces Christ honours faith most. [2.] It is the greatness of her faith. Note, First, Though the faith of all the saints is alike precious, yet it is not in all alike strong; all believers are not of the same size and stature. Secondly, The greatness of faith consists much in a resolute adherence to Jesus Christ as an all-sufficient Saviour, even in the face of discouragements; to love him, and trust him, as a Friend, even then when he seems to come forth against us as an Enemy. This is great faith! Thirdly, Though weak faith, if true, shall not be rejected, yet great faith shall be commended, and shall appear greatly well-pleasing

to Christ; for in them that thus believe he is most admired. Thus Christ commended the faith of the centurion, and he was a Gentile too, he had a strong faith in the power of Christ, this woman in the good-will of Christ; both were acceptable.

(2.) He cured her daughter; "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt: I can deny thee nothing, take what thou camest for." Note, Great believers may have what they will for the asking. When our will conforms to the will of Christ's precept, his will concurs with the will of our desire. Those that will deny Christ nothing, shall find that he will deny them nothing at last, though for a time he seems to hide his face from them. "Thou wouldst have thy sins pardoned, thy corruptions mortified, thy nature sanctified; be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And what canst thou desire more?" When we come, as this poor woman did, to pray against Satan and his kingdom, we concur with the intercession of Christ, and it shall be accordingly. Though Satan may sift Peter, and buffet Paul, yet, through Christ's prayer and the sufficiency of his grace, we shall be more than conquerors, Lu. 22:31, 32; 2 Co. 12:7-9; Rom. 16:20.

The event was answerable to the word of Christ; Her daughter was made whole from that very hour; from thenceforward was never vexed with the devil any more; the mother's faith prevailed for the daughter's cure. Though the patient was at a distance, that was no hindrance to the efficacy of Christ's word. He spake, and it was done.

Verses 29-39

Here is, I. A general account of Christ's cures, his curing by wholesale. The tokens of Christ's power and goodness are neither scarce nor scanty; for there is in him an overflowing fulness. Now observe,

1. The place where these cures were wrought; it was near the sea of Galilee, a part of the country Christ was much conversant with. We read not of any thing he did in the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, but the casting of the devil out of the woman of Canaan's daughter, as if he took that journey on purpose, with that in prospect. Let not ministers grudge their pains to do good, though but to few. He that knows the worth of souls, would go a great way to help to save one from death and Satan's power.

But Jesus departed thence. Having let fall that crumb under table, he here returns to make a full feast for the children. We may do that occasionally for one, which we may not make a constant practice of. Christ steps into the coast of Tyre and Sidon, but he sits down by the sea of Galilee (v. 29), sits down not on a stately throne, or tribunal of judgment, but on a mountain: so mean and homely were his most solemn appearances in the days of his flesh! He sat down on a mountain, that all might see him, and have free access to him; for he is an open Saviour. He sat down there, as one tired with his journey, and willing to have a little rest; or rather, as one waiting to be gracious. He sat, expecting patients, as Abraham at his tent-door, ready to entertain strangers. He settled himself to this good work.

2. The multitudes and maladies that were healed by him (v. 30); Great multitudes came to him;

that the scripture might be fulfilled, Unto him shall the gathering of the people be, Gen. 49:10. If Christ's ministers could cure bodily diseases as Christ did, there would be more flocking to them than there is; we are soon sensible of bodily pain and sickness, but few are concerned about their souls and their spiritual diseases.

Now, (1.) Such was the goodness of Christ, that he admitted all sorts of people; the poor as well as the rich are welcome to Christ, and with him there is room enough for all comers. He never complained of crowds or throngs of seekers, or looked with contempt upon the vulgar, the herd, as they are called; for the souls of peasants are as precious with him as the souls of princes.

(2.) Such was the power of Christ, that he healed all sorts of diseases; those that came to him, brought their sick relations and friends along with them, and cast them down at Jesus' feet, v. 30. We read not of any thing they said to him, but they laid them down before him as objects of pity, to be looked upon by him. Their calamities spake more for them than the tongue of the most eloquent orator could. David showed before God his trouble, that was enough, he then left it with him, Ps. 142:2. Whatever our case is, the only way to find ease and relief, is, to lay it at Christ's feet, to spread it before him, and refer it to his cognizance, and then submit it to him, and refer it to his disposal. Those that would have spiritual healing from Christ, must lay themselves at his feet, to be ruled and ordered as he pleaseth.

Here were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, brought to Christ. See what work sin has made! It has turned the world into a hospital: what various diseases are human bodies subject to! See what work the Saviour makes! He conquers those hosts of enemies to mankind. Here were such diseases as a flame of fancy could contribute neither to the cause of nor to the cure of; as lying not in the humours, but in the members of the body; and yet these were subject to the commands of Christ. He sent his word, and healed them. Note, All diseases are at the command of Christ, to go and come as he bids them. This is an instance of Christ's power, which may comfort us in all our weaknesses; and of his pity, which may comfort us in all our miseries.

3. The influence that this had upon the people, v. 31.

(1.) They wondered, and well they might. Christ's works should be our wonder. It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous, Ps. 118:23. The spiritual cures that Christ works are wonderful. When blind souls are made to see by faith, the dumb to speak in prayer, the lame to walk in holy obedience, it is to be wondered at. Sing unto the Lord a new song, for thus he has done marvellous things.

(2.) They glorified the God of Israel, whom the Pharisees, when they saw these things, blasphemed. Miracles, which are the matter of our wonder, must be the matter of our praise; and mercies, which are the matter of our rejoicing, must be the matter of our thanksgiving. Those that were healed, glorified God; if he heal our diseases, all that is within us must bless his holy name; and if we have been graciously preserved from blindness, and lameness, and dumbness, we have as much reason to bless God as if we had been cured of them; nay, and the standers-by glorified God. Note, God must be acknowledged with praise and thankfulness in

the mercies of others as in our own. They glorified him as the God of Israel, his church's God, a God in covenant with his people, who hath sent the Messiah promised; and this is he. See Lu. 1:68. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel. This was done by the power of the God of Israel, and no other could do it.

II. Here is a particular account of his feeding four thousand men with seven loaves, and a few little fishes, as he had lately fed five thousand with five loaves. The guests indeed were now not quite so many as then, and the provision a little more; which does not intimate that Christ's arm was shortened, but that he wrought his miracles as the occasion required, and not for ostentation, and therefore he suited them to the occasion: both then and now he took as many as were to be fed, and made use of all that was at hand to feed them with. When once the utmost powers of nature are exceeded, we must say, This is the finger of God; and it is neither here nor there how far they are outdone; so that this is no less a miracle than the former.

Here is, 1. Christ's pity (v. 32); I have compassion on the multitude. He tells his disciples this, both to try and to excite their compassion. When he was about to work this miracle, he called them to him, and made them acquainted with his purpose, and discoursed with them about it; not because he needed their advice, but because he would give an instance of his condescending love to them. He called them not servants, for the servant knows not what his Lord doeth, but treated them as his friends and counsellors. Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I do? Gen. 18:17. In what he said to them, Observe,

(1.) The case of the multitude; They continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat. This is an instance of their zeal, and the strength of their affection to Christ and his word, that they not only left their callings, to attend upon him on week-days, but underwent a deal of hardship, to continue with him; they wanted their natural rest, and, for aught that appeared, lay like soldiers in the field; they wanted necessary food, and had scarcely enough to keep life and soul together. In those hotter countries they could better bear long fasting than we can in these colder climates: but though it could not but be grievous to the body, and might endanger their health, yet the zeal of God's house thus ate them up, and they esteemed the words of Christ more than their necessary food. We think three hours too much to attend upon public ordinances; but these people stayed together three days, and yet snuffed not at it, nor said, Behold, what a weariness is it! Observe, With what tenderness Christ spoke of it; I have compassion on them. It had become them to have compassion on him, who took so much pains with them for three days together, and was so indefatigable in teaching and healing; so much virtue had gone out of him, and yet for aught that appears he was fasting too: but he prevented them with his compassion. Note, Our Lord Jesus keeps an account how long his followers continue their attendance on him, and takes notice of the difficulty they sustain in it (Rev. 2:2); I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience: and it shall in no wise lose its reward.

Now the exigence the people were reduced to serves to magnify. [1.] The mercy of their supply: he fed them when they were hungry; and then food was doubly welcome. He treated them as he did Israel of old; he suffered them to hunger, and then fed them (Deu. 8:3); for that is sweet to the hungry soul, which the full soul loathes. [2.] The miracle of their supply: having been so long

fasting, their appetites were the more craving. If two hungry meals make the third a glutton, what would three hungry days do? And yet they did all eat and were filled. Note, There are mercy and grace enough with Christ, to give the most earnest and enlarged desire an abundant satisfaction; Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. He replenisheth even the hungry soul.

(2.) The care of our master concerning them; I will not send them away fasting, lest they should faint by the way; which would be a discredit to Christ and his family, and a discouragement both to them and to others. Note, It is the unhappiness of our present state, that when our souls are in some measure elevated and enlarged, our bodies cannot keep pace with them in good duties. The weakness of the flesh is a great grievance to the willingness of the spirit. It will not be so in heaven, where the body shall be made spiritual, where they rest not, day and night, from praising God, and yet faint not; where they hunger no more, nor thirst anymore, Rev. 7:16.

Here is, 2. Christ's power. His pity of their wants sets his power on work for their supply. Now observe,

(1.) How his power was distrusted by his disciples (v. 23); whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness? A proper question, one would think, like that of Moses (Num. 11:22). Shall the flocks and the herds be slain to suffice them? But it was here an improper question, considering not only the general assurance the disciples had of the power of Christ, but the particular experience they lately had of a seasonable and sufficient provision by miracle in a like case; they had been not only the witnesses, but the ministers, of the former miracle; the multiplied bread went through their hands; so that it was an instance of great weakness for them to ask, Whence shall we have bread? Could they be at a loss, while they had their Master with them? Note, Forgetting former experiences leaves us under present doubts.

Christ knew how slender the provision was, but he would know it from them (v. 34); How many loaves have ye? Before he would work, he would have it seen how little he had to work on, that his power might shine the brighter. What they had, they had for themselves, and it was little enough for their own family; but Christ would have them bestow it all upon the multitude, and trust Providence for more. Note, it becomes Christ's disciples to be generous, their Master was so: what we have, we should be free of, as there is occasion; given to hospitality; not like Nabal (1 Sa. 25:11), but like Elisha, 2 Ki. 4:42. Niggardliness to-day, out of thoughtfulness for to-morrow, is a complication of corrupt affection that ought to be mortified. If we be prudently kind and charitable with what we have, we may piously hope that God will send more. Jehovah-jireh, The Lord will provide. The disciples asked, Whence should we have bread? Christ asked, How many loaves have ye? Note, When we cannot have what we would, we must make the best of what we have, and do good with it as far as it will go; we must not think so much of our wants as of our havings. Christ herein went according to the rule he gave to Martha, not to be troubled about many things, nor cumbered about much serving. Nature is content with little, grace with less, but lust with nothing.

(2.) How his power was discovered to the multitude, in the plentiful provision he made for them; the manner of which is much the same as before, ch. 14:18, etc. Observe here,

[1.] The provision that was at hand; seven loaves, and a few fishes: the fish not proportionable to the bread, for bread is the staff of life. It is probable that the fish was such as they had themselves taken; for they were fishers, and were now near the sea. Note, It is comfortable to eat the labour of our hands (Ps. 128:2), and to enjoy that which is any way the product of our own industry, Prov. 12:27. And what we have got by God's blessing on our labour we should be free of; for therefore we must labour, that we may have to give, Eph. 4:28.

[2.] The putting of the people in a posture to receive it (v. 35); He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. They saw but very little provision, yet they must sit down, in faith that they should have a meal's meat out of it. They who would have spiritual food from Christ, must sit down at his feet, to hear his word, and expect it to come in an unseen way.

[3.] The distributing of the provision among them. He first gave thanks-eucharist^{us}as. The word used in the former miracle was euloge^{use}-he blessed. It comes all to one; giving thanks to God is a proper way of craving a blessing from God. And when we come to ask and receive further mercy, we ought to give thanks for the mercies we have received. He then broke the loaves (for it was in the breaking that the bread multiplied) and gave to his disciples, and they to the multitude. Though the disciples had distrusted Christ's power, yet he made use of them now as before; he is not provoked, as he might be, by the weakness and infirmities of his ministers, to lay them aside; but still he gives to them, and they to his people, of the word of life.

[4.] The plenty there was among them (v. 37). They did all eat, and were filled. Note, Those whom Christ feeds, he fills. While we labour for the world, we labour for that which satisfieth not (Isa. 55:2); but those that duly wait on Christ shall be abundantly satisfied with the goodness of his house, Ps. 65:4. Christ thus fed people once and again, to intimate that though he was called Jesus of Nazareth, yet he was of Bethlehem, the house of bread; or rather, that he was himself the Bread of Life.

To show that they had all enough, there was a great deal left-seven baskets full of broken meat; not so much as there was before, because they did not gather after so many eaters, but enough to show that with Christ there is bread enough, and to spare; supplies of grace for more than seek it, and for those that seek more.

[5.] The account taken of the guests; not that they might pay their share (here was no reckoning to be discharged, they were fed gratis), but that they might be witnesses to the power and goodness of Christ, and that this might be some resemblance of that universal providence that gives food to all flesh, Ps. 136:25. Here were four thousand men fed; but what were they to that great family which is provided for by the divine care every day? God is a great Housekeeper, on whom the eyes of all the creatures wait, and he giveth them their food in due season, Ps. 104:27; 145:15.

[6.] The dismissal of the multitude, and Christ's departure to another place (v. 39). He sent away the people. Though he had fed them twice, they must not expect miracles to be their daily bread. Let them now go home to their callings, and to their own tables. And he himself departed by ship to another place; for, being the Light of the world, he must be still in motion, and go

about to do good.