

"Jesus the very thought of Thee,  
With gladness fills my breast,  
But sweeter far Thy face to see,  
And in Thy presence rest."

Dec. 22.—The Saviour's Last Words—  
Luke xxiv: 44-53.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Amen. Matt. xxv: 20.

Time.—Verses 44-49 were probably spoken at least in part, Monday evening, April 9, A.D. 30, i.e. the evening of the day after which He arose. "The ascension etc., (verses 50-53.) Thursday, May 17, 40 days after the resurrection."  
—*Peloubet*.

Place.—Verses 44-49 at Jerusalem. "Alford (and he is probably correct) makes these verses a summary of what Jesus said during the 40 days."  
—*Peloubet*.—The ascension took place from the Mount of Olives, near Bethany.

CONNECTION WITH LAST LESSON.

The two disciples that had journeyed to Emmaus with Christ hastened to Jerusalem after that event, (Luke xxiv: 33) to inform the eleven of what had happened. The disciples were partaking together of their evening meal, and even while the two from Emmaus were discoursing, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them and greeted them with the customary salutation. "Peace be unto you." But the disciples who had listened to the account of that wonderful journey to Emmaus without being sure that the two relating it were not deceived, could scarcely now credit even their own senses, and actually thought that it was a ghost and not Christ Himself, that they saw before them. Our Saviour however soon convinced them that it was He Himself, their risen Lord, bearing still the wound-prints which His body received on the cross, "and He did eat before them," so that at last they believed that this was Christ who had died, but was now alive again. Had this not been clearly proved to them, "the Saviour's Last Words" (verses 47-49) would have been spoken in vain. As it was, the resurrection of Christ fully proved was the key which opened their understandings.

EXPLANATORY.

V. 44. Which I spake unto you. See Matt. xvi: 21; Mark xiii: 31; Luke xviii: 31, etc. The law, the prophets, the psalms. The Jews made those divisions of the O. T. and it is to these Christ refers. (a) The law included the five books of Moses (b) the prophets, the largest of the three divisions, comprehended the books of Joshua, Judges, 1st and 2nd Samuel, 1st and 2nd Kings, (which were called the former prophets), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor prophets from Daniel to Malachi; (c) the psalms here signifying the hagiographa "i. e., sacred writings, including the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel. In each of these divisions there were prophecies concerning Christ which must be fulfilled.

V. 45. Opened their understanding. His resurrection removed their last doubt, and their last prejudice. It solved all those deep problems which His death had made so much deeper and darker,—problems like these, "How could He die who was to be their everlasting King, and their Priest forever? If He was dead what remained? He was everything. His religion was nothing apart from Himself. Every hope centered in Him; He was the whole system of Christianity; the whole promise of Christendom; if He was gone all was gone. His death seemed the blasting of all hope. In the light of His

death what an insoluble riddle prophecy was to them! How could He be the triumphant and everlasting King of whom it spoke, since they had seen Him die on the cross? But now, in the light of His resurrection, His triumph over even death and the grave, with the help of our Saviour's teaching Scripture became plain to them, and hope and exultation took the place of sadness and despair. Notice the regard Christ always showed for the Scriptures. He did not attempt to open their understanding without their aid.

V. 46. Thus it behoved. Christ did not do simply because it was written. He did not do anything simply to fulfill prophecy. It was because He was to do these things that the prophecy was uttered beforehand. In other words Christ and His work were not subservient to prophecy, but prophecy was subservient to Christ and His work. Thus it behoved, etc. If man was to be righteous, Christ must suffer and rise again; if the righteousness and mercy of God were to have their most full and glorious manifestation, Christ must suffer and rise again.

V. 47. The conflict is barely over by which forgiveness was won for us, the agony still fresh in our Saviour's memory; yet now that the price is paid, now freely, how longingly, how eagerly our Redeemer desires 'all nations' into the blood of his kingdom: Repentance and remission of sins. This is the whole of salvation: repentance, the soul turning away from its sin and learning to love what God loves and to hate what God hates; and mourning, because it ever loved what God loved, remission, God overlooking the sins of that sinner and receiving it as if it had never sinned. As well ask, which blade of a pair of scissors cuts first or is more important in cutting, as to ask which is first and which more important to salvation, the remission of sin or the repentance, that is, the forgiveness of His murderers. Wondrous mercy! As if He were still praying, "Father forgive them." From the results of the day of Pentecost we may say that that prayer was not unanswered.

V. 48. Ye are witnesses. You will notice in the account of the Acts of the Apostles, that as they went about preaching, their entire business was to act as witnesses, i. e., just to tell what they had seen and heard. Paul was the theologian, the great developer of Christian doctrine; those apostles who had been with our Lord so long, laid the historical foundation of Christianity by simply telling again and again what they had heard and seen of Jesus' words and works and sufferings and resurrection. The Gospel (historical) came from them, the Epistles (doctrinal) from Paul (chiefly).

V. 49. I send the promise of my Father. "The promise of the gift of another Comforter contained in Christ's last conversation with the eleven (John xiv: 16-20, 26, etc.) was the promise of the Father, made in the O. T. (Isaiah xlv: 3, Ezekiel xxxvi: 27) or called to the remembrance of the nation by John the Baptist (Matt. iii: 11) and renewed by the Son. Endowed with power. "This includes (1) the power of working miracles; (2) personal, moral, and spiritual power in the conflicts and temptations of life, and especially in braving suffering and persecution for Christ's sake; (3) power in the ministry of the word beyond that which belongs to human eloquence and wisdom, or even to the mere natural adaptation of the truth to human wants."—*Abbot*.

V. 50. There is something very touching in the fact that our Lord's ascension took place close to Bethany. This was a small village bordering on the Mount of Olives, where Mary and Martha and Lazarus lived. It is probable that they were all present when our Lord left the earth. It did not transpire in the darkness of night, Jesus did not tell Himself secretly away. In the light of broad day while their senses were bright and active, as they were conversing together, in the body that He had borne while on earth, bearing the marks of His suffering, before the fastened gaze of His disciples He began to ascend. They saw Him

rise until, in the region of the clouds, He was veiled from their eyes; or perhaps, as on the Mount of Transfiguration, a luminous cloud descended and enveloped Him as He arose. "—*Farrar*. Lifted up his hands and blessed them. This was not an offering of prayer. "As Aaron His type, lifted up His hands towards the people of Israel, and blessed them when he first offered the offerings for them (Lev. ix: 22), so Christ as the great High Priest, having offered Himself a sacrifice for the sins of the people, lifted up His hands towards them and blessed them in an authoritative way."—*Gill*. "A cloud received Him out of their sight," Acts i: 9. "Between us and His visible presence that cloud still rolls. But the eye of faith can pierce it, the incense of true prayer can rise above it, through it the dew of blessing can descend."—*Farrar*.

PRACTICAL.

1. V. 44. Does not the exact fulfillment of prophecy in the past, make certain its exact fulfillment in the future?

2. V. 45. 'How easy it is for us to read God's word without stopping to ask what it means. In dealing with inquirers, and explaining to them e. g., John iii: 16, how often they say, 'I have read and heard that verses a hundred times, but never thought before what it meant.' Let us always ask God's Spirit to help us to understand His word.

3. V. 46. Christ suffered that we might not suffer.

4. Christ's resurrection showed that He had exhausted the penalty of sin, Rom. iv: 25; hence the law cannot touch the believer.

5. V. 47. Never preach repentance, without preaching God's forgiveness through Christ, and never preach the latter without practising the former. Men must turn from sin, and God's forgiveness must be received else there is no salvation.

6. Among all nations. "The late Duke of Wellington once met a young clergyman, who being aware of his Grace's former residence in the East, and of his familiarity with the ignorance and obstinacy of the Hindoos in support of their false religion, gravely proposed the following question: 'Does not your Grace think it almost useless and extravagant to preach the gospel to the Hindoos?' The Duke immediately rejoined, 'That is not your business. Your business is to obey your marching orders.—Preach the gospel to every creature!'

7. V. 48. All who know Christ as a personal Saviour should be ready to testify to His power and willingness to bless and save.

8. V. 52. With great joy. Christianity is a religion of gladness. "Rejoice in the Lord always,"—so says Paul. Then take thy hymns—

"O happy day that fixed my choice;" etc.  
"Sweet the moments, rich in blessing;" etc.  
"His religion that can give  
Sweetest pleasures while we live," etc.  
"Jesus the very thought of Thee  
With gladness fills my breast," etc.

9. Our rejoicing is in Christ, and when we think of Him, His love, what He has done for us, how He triumphed and is now King of the universe, having the keys of death and the grave, and that

"We two are so joined  
He will not live in heaven and leave me behind."  
May we not well rejoice!

"ARE you a Christian?" said Mr. Moody to a man whose appearance did not indicate much seriousness, not to say sobriety. "Oh yes, sir." "Do you believe the Bible?" "Oh, no! no! I don't believe any such stuff as that." "Do you believe Webster's Dictionary?" "Oh, yes." "The Unabridged?" "Oh, yes, I believe that." "Well, my friend,