

THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED.

There are a few texts in the Bible which some persons say prove the present existence, and the progressive character of the kingdom of God.

"Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; which indeed is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof." Matt. xiii. 31, 32.

We are told the seed represents the smallness of the Church, when it consisted only of the twelve apostles, whom Christ sent forth to evangelize the world; that this little beginning is to eventually in the universal triumph of the church of Christ, and the conversion of the world, and introduction of millennial glory.

But is not the meaning obviously this, that Christ is the mustard seed; that in his death he was planted, and in his resurrection he germinated into new life; and that every soul sowed through his death and resurrection is an additional branch to the tree? The branch of the mustard tree no more literally lives and flourishes, and bears fruit by its union with the stock and root, and the sap it receives from that root, than the Christian his spiritual and eternal life from the indwelling of that quickening spirit which raised up Christ from the dead. It is to the church, the sap of life. The indwelling of the quickening spirit of Christ is the reality, the "mystery of godliness." It is religion; so that each believer can say, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life that I now live in the flesh, is by the faith of the Son of God. It is the resurrection, power, and eternal life. The blood of Adam, which all men derive by natural generation, does not give them second life, or raise them from the dead to eternal life. But the spirit of Him that raised up Christ from the dead, if it dwell in us, will quicken our mortal bodies also. This being the case, it will readily be perceived that the perfection of the tree cannot consist in its universal triumph over all the world in any stage of probationary time. For while there is yet one mortal member to be added to the tree, of which death reigns in the world, the tree must of necessity be in a state of imperfection and immaturity. But in the dispensation of the fullness of the times it shall "gather together in one, all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him" Eph. i. 10. Then there will be a perfection in the tree, and each branch will be in its place, mature and perfect. It cannot be before.

THE JEWISH CHURCH.

In the time of our Saviour, compared with the Church at the present day.

When we read the condition of the Jewish Church, as delineated in the Bible, we cannot but be struck with many points, in which there is a striking similarity with the church of our own times. The Jewish Church was the only church of God on earth, and in many periods of its history, it was humbly devoted to the service of God, but at the time of Christ's first advent, it had become worldly minded, and forms and ceremonies had taken the place of heart-felt devotion. At the present day, the fervent piety which distinguished the religion of our fathers, has in a great measure given way to familiarity and lukewarmness, and professed Christians are as eager in pursuit of this world's goods as are the most indifferent worldlings. Then they were proud and haughty; they loved the chief seats in the synagogue, and the uppermost rooms at feasts, and for a pretence made long prayers; they loved to be called Rabbi, and sought praise of men. Even so are professing Christians now. Then they made great displays of their charities, the rich cast in publicly into the treasury of their abundance, and did their alms before men. Now the charities of the church are blazoned abroad to the world, and many will withhold from creditors their honest debts, that they may have the name of making large donations. Then the people placed great reliance upon the opinions of their spiritual teachers, and had full confidence that they were right. Now, multitudes are pinning their faith upon the views of their ministers with implicit reliance to their opinions. Then the priests were learned, and had unbounded confidence in themselves, and believed that they of all men were alone capable of pointing out the right road to heaven. Now, our ministers seem to think that they are the people, and that when they die, wisdom will die them. Then religion

as it was administered, was popular, and many careless worldlings embraced it. Now the same course draws multitudes into the Church. The line of distinction which marked the professor from the worldling could hardly be perceived. Now, as far as outward acts are manifested, it is almost obliterated, and we hardly know which is which. Then the teachers in Zion gave more deference to the traditions of the elders than they did to the laws of Moses. Now the opinions of our commentators take the precedence of a "thus saith the Lord." Then the priests were ready to despise any truths different from what they taught. Now our ministers are treading in their footsteps. Then the great, the high, and the learned rejected our Saviour. Now they turn a deaf ear to all suggestions respecting his return. Then the common people heard Christ gladly. Now hundreds of the same class are living in the blessed hope of his glorious appearing. Then they disbelieved in the fulfillment of the prophecies respecting Christ's first coming. Now they are equally sceptical with regard to the prophecies and signs of his second. Then they were expecting a temporal prince. Now the Church is expecting a temporal millennium. Then they were disappointed in their expectations. Even so will the church be now. Then Christ came and found them unprepared for his coming. He has assured us that it will be so again. Then the prophets prophesied falsely, the priests bore rule by their means, and the people loved to have it so. Now the people love to hear that the end is not yet. Then they were cast off and rejected by reason of their unbelief; and now what will ye do in the end thereof? for if God spare not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Be not high minded, but fear.

O that the church would awake from its death like stupidity, and arouse itself, that souls may not be lost by its lukewarmness. The Jews of old verily thought they were doing God's service, but that did not save them from the wrath of an angry and insulted God. Neither will an overweening confidence in the rectitude of any cause, now prove that it is the cause of God. At the present day the world is too prone to take the opinions of others, without examining for themselves; but remember that each one must answer at the bar of God, and stand or fall for a tree. No man can there plead our cause; we can offer there no private interpretation of scripture, or the opinions of commentators, in extenuation of our sins. We shall be judged in accordance with the plain declarations of that holy word which we attempt to mystify and spiritualize away. Then may we all examine this question, each one for ourselves, and make that preparation of heart by the aid of God's Holy Spirit which is essential to our future well being; and may we realize that seeing all these things must be dissolved, what manner of persons we ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. And seeing that we look for such things, may we be found of him in peace without spot and blameless, that we may receive that crown of righteousness which is laid up for all those who love his appearing.

DOES THE BIBLE SHROUD THE COMING OF CHRIST IN DARKNESS?

It is contended by our opponents that we cannot know the approach of that day; and this we are thus assured by the word of God. The principal texts which are advanced in support of it, are, Matt. xxiv. 36—"But of that day and hour knoweth no man, nor the angels in heaven, but my Father only;" and Acts i. 7—"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power."

These texts, standing alone and unexplained by the context, or by parallel passages, would seem to intimate that it would be in vain to attempt to penetrate the veil with which God in his providence has shrouded that event. But we propose to examine them in such connection, and show that they teach nothing contrary to our full understanding of the question.

In the Book of Daniel there are a series of visions, in which the most important events which were to occur in the history of this world, down to the resurrection, are portrayed. As these events are fulfilled, unless a veil were cast over the minds of men, light would be emitted, and it would be seen by their fulfilment that we were drawing near to the last of those predicted events. There are also prophetic periods given, which, if

not sealed up, would enlighten us respecting the time of the fulfillment of these events.

At the close of the vision in the 8th of Daniel, he is told that "at the time of the end shall be the vision." In the 12th chapter Daniel is told to shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of this end. Daniel afterwards asks:—"O my lord, what shall be the end of these things?" And he said, "Go thy way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end."

Nothing can be more plain and positive than that till the time of the end, the future, revealed in those visions could not be understood, and understood. But he assures us that at the time of the end they will be unsealed, and the obscurity will be removed. Hear the words of "the man clothed in linen,"—"Many shall be purified and made white, and tried; and the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand." When will they understand? At the time of the end, in which the words are closed up and sealed. Who will understand? The wise,—the truly pious, and they alone. What will they understand? "The end of all these things," spoken of in the 12th of Daniel.

It will thus be seen that we have the plain and direct assurance of the angel of God, that knowledge respecting the end of the world was to be closed up and sealed till the time of the end, but that then the seal will be broken: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased; and the wise shall understand, but the wicked shall never understand.

This explains the words of Christ quoted in the commencement of this article. In the 24th of Matt. our Saviour informs us that immediately after the tribulation of those days which were to be while Jerusalem was desolated by the abominations spoken of by Daniel, "shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, &c." and then shall the Son of man come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, &c. He says that a sign shall be in the sky, and says to the disciples, "when ye shall see these things, flee to the mountains, &c." "The generation that see these things, shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled." This he verifies by the affirmation, that "heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away."

Our Saviour then says, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, nor the angels in heaven, but my Father only." Why did no man know the day or the hour? Because it was closed up and sealed till the time of the end, and could not be known till then; nor then, by the wicked. That time had not then arrived, but when ye see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. He therefore commanded his disciples to watch, "for ye know not at what hour your Lord doth come." And he says, in Rev. iii. 3—"If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come upon thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know at what hour I will come upon thee." Thus making their watching the condition of their knowing at what hour he should come. At the close of the 24th of Matthew our Saviour assures us that "But and if that evil servant say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and eat and drink with the drunken; the Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder and appoint him his portion with the hypocrite; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Here, again, their not knowing the day is made the consequence of their saying in their hearts, "My Lord delayeth his coming," &c.—thus implying that such would not be the consequence.

The apostle says, in 1 Thess. v. 1:—"But of the times and seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." This is often quoted in proof that the time of Christ's advent will not be previously known, but the texts which follow make the whole question perfectly plain. "For when they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should come upon you as a thief; ye are the children of the light, and the children of the day; ye are not of the night, nor of the darkness." Thus the apostle furnishes the reason why there was no need of his writing to them of the times and seasons, because "they knew perfectly,"

were the "children of the light, and the children of the day," and were not in darkness, that that day should overtake them as a thief." He also gives them a sign by which they might know when it is near, for, "when they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them;" and we are told, "they shall not escape;" so that the day of the Lord only cometh as a thief upon those who cry peace and safety, not upon the brethren.

Acts i. 7. is often quoted to prove that the righteous will also be in darkness, so that that day will overtake them as a thief. The disciples asked the Saviour if he would "at that time restore again the kingdom to Israel." And he said unto them, it is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." The reason why it was not for them to know, is, however, very obvious. As it was closed up and sealed till the time of the end, and as that time had not arrived, it could not be for them to know, or for any, in any age of the world, to know, previous to the time of the end.

It is worthy of remark that there is not a direct and positive text in the whole Bible which asserts that that day shall overtake the righteous as a thief; and such a position can only be supported by mere implications, which are in direct opposition to plain assertions.

In Matt. xxv. 1-13, Christ assures his disciples that when he comes, then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins; who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom, &c., and at midnight there was a cry made, Behold the bridegroom cometh. As we have our Saviour's assurance that at his coming the kingdom of heaven will be likened unto this parable, and as he has said that notice will be given of the coming of the bridegroom, we need no other assurance that his children will not be in darkness, that that day should overtake them as a thief. The "Midnight Cry" is now being made, as it to fulfil the prediction of our Saviour, and that such a cry will be made previous to his coming, is not only proved by this parable, but also by the fact, that when John saw an eagle flying through the midst of heaven, and proclaiming the hour of his judgment come.

We thus have direct and positive testimony that at the time of the end the veil shall be removed. Chances of prophetic events, reaching down to the time of the end, are also given us, accompanied by prophetic periods, so that the humble inquirer may know how far he is in the chain of events from that period. In opposition to this, it can only be shown that it was not for any to know previous to the time of the end, that none of the wicked will understand, that it will come as a thief upon those who say my Lord delayeth his coming, and will come suddenly upon those who cry peace and safety; while those who will not know shall not know at what hour he will come.

The question is thus rendered so plain, that the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein, and yet individuals sneer at the idea of watching for the coming of the Lord now, assure that he will not come for more than one thousand years, promise us a long period of peace and safety, and admit that they are in darkness with regard to the time of his coming, (thus showing that in themselves the prophecies are fulfilled;) and because they are in darkness, claim that the times and seasons can never be known.

Such reasoners are themselves living witnesses that the wise will understand; for, so long as they remain in darkness respecting these things, it is seen that God is faithful in the fulfilment of that portion of the prophecies; and the inference is, that those who conform to his requirements will be enlightened as he has promised.

CONVERSATION OF THE WORLD.—Some have thought that the heathen world were fast sliding to the light of the gospel. This is a mistake. Let us look at a few statistical facts. There are about 630,000,000 heathen now, 400 millions of the whole race. The present missionary efforts have been in operation about 40 years. What has been done during these 40 years by about 600 missionaries? Why, about thirty thousand have professed the Christian faith. This was a great work in one point of view, but it was making comparatively no head-way in Christianizing the heathen world. There are now actually more heathen than there were forty years ago. The progress made, did not keep pace with the increase of the population of heathen lands. While 30,000 or 40,000 at most, had embraced Christianity abroad, how was it at home? During the same period of time we have made more than one million of heathen at home. How long would it take us at this rate to convert the heathen to God? If we should allow, as we hope it may be, that 50,000 will embrace the gospel during the coming forty years, what shall we show be doing, at this rate, if we should allow the heathen world to Christianity?—Christian