

## LESSONS.

1. In the time of trouble we should believe in the Lord with unshaken confidence.

2. Imperfect or erroneous views of the truth may not only keep much comfort from the christian, but may produce needless sorrow.

3. There remaineth a rest for the people of God; and the hope of entering into that rest to be for ever with the Lord should dry up all tears.

4. Christ is the only ground of hope for the sinner. The general mercy of God will save no one. It is only through the atonement of Christ we can be saved. "No man cometh unto the Father but by me."

5. The dignity and glory of Christ's person. He is one with the Father. He that hath seen Christ hath seen the Father. This could be said of no mere creature however exalted. Let us rejoice that while our Saviour is very man He is also very God.

## FOURTH SABBATH.

SUBJECT:—*The Vine and the Branches*, John xv. : 1-8. Golden Text, Matt. vii. : 20.

The vine is very frequently spoken of in Scripture, particularly in the Old Testament. It grew in Palestine and its fruit was generally used as an article of food. It was indeed the staple of that land. The grape was eaten fresh, dried as raisins, made into syrup or honey, and also made into wine. Hence to those who dwelt in Palestine and lived in large part of the fruit of the vine, Christ's comparison must have been very suggestive and instructive.

It is not however as the food of this people that He here makes Himself known. That idea was developed in the lesson the "Bread of Life." The leading thought of this lesson is the union between Christ and His people. Jesus wished to impress upon His disciples this truth; that they must be in Him and must abide in Him if they would be happy and useful in His service. In a land of vines and vineyards it is not strange that Christ compared Himself to a vine. That which immediately suggested the comparison we do not know. It may have been the juice of the grape which He and His disciples had just been drinking, or it may have been a vineyard on the sides of the valley of the Kedron which they saw as they passed along; it being lit up as vineyards often were with fires by night—fires in which the fruitless branches were burned. From what is said in the lesson of withered branches and their burning it is altogether likely that that part of vineyard work had been seen.

The lesson can perhaps be taught best under three divisions. I. The true vine. II. The fruitless branches. III. The fruitful branches.

I. The true vine. "*I am the true vine, &c.*" It is not easy to give the full meaning of the word translated 'true.' It has no

exact English synonym. Some render it *real*; some, *essential* vine. The idea is that Christ is the full reality of that which is figuratively represented by the natural vine. He is true in distinction from that which is shadowy and imperfect, as well as true in opposition to that which is false. The Father, Christ's Father, is the husbandman of this true vine—owner as well as vine-dresser. It is hardly necessary to say that Christ does not speak of Himself here in His Eternal Divine nature, but in His mediatorial character and work, and in that He is subordinate to the Father.

II. *The fruitless branches.* By these Christ means apostates or formal professors. *In me.* They are in Christ outwardly or in appearance. In some instances it may be difficult to see any difference between them and true, living members. But the husbandman sees the difference. He sees the dry, withered state of the fruitless branches, and he removes others. They are both useless, and injurious to the fruit bearing branches. Hence they are burned up (v. 6). Oh how terrible is the doom of mere professors, or of false professors!

III. *Fruitful branches.* They are in the vine truly - one with the vine—partake of its nourishment. Hence they bear fruit, some of them much fruit. True believers are united to Christ, are one with Him. The union which is spiritual is mysterious, but it is real. Under another figure, Paul says a good deal about it. See Eph. v. 30.; Col. ii. 19; Rom. xii. 4, 5.

Fruitful branches are purged, or pruned, that they may be made more fruitful. Christ's people are tried in various ways that they may be made more sensible of their dependence on Him and more single-minded. Of themselves they can do nothing, not even after they are in Christ. Branches are nothing as branches.

"*Abide in me, &c.*" The idea, is take care that ye abide, &c. Seek to abide, &c. Abiding in Christ is the condition on which depends Christ's abiding in us. Christ will never leave or forsake His people, but if they forsake Him, He will withdraw from them. The fruits of the Christian are given by Paul, Gal. v. 22. Living members should abound in these, and so glorify their Father in Heaven. By our fruits men judge us, and if they see in us love, joy, &c., they are led to honor Christ from whom they all proceed.

## LESSONS.

(1.) The richest products of earth are chosen to symbolise to us the richness and fulness of Christ.

(2.) Believers are one with Christ. They are not without Him, nor He without them.

(3.) Because one with Him or because one in Him they should be fruitful in every good word and work.

(4.) Mere nominal connection with Christ will not benefit any one. Terrible is the end of such as have a name to live while they are dead.