

The Signs of the Times.

"Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Rev. 22: 12.

VOLUME 3.

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA, FIFTH-DAY, APRIL 19, 1877.

NUMBER 16.

The Signs of the Times

IS ISSUED WEEKLY BY THE

Pacific Seventh-Day Adventist Publishing Association,

ELD. JAMES WHITE, PRESIDENT.

TERMS: Two DOLLARS a year in advance for a volume of 48 numbers. When paid by Tract Societies, or by individuals for their friends, \$1.50.

Office, 1059 Castro St. bet. 11th & 12th.
Address, SIGNS OF THE TIMES, Oakland, Cal.

The Talents.

HAVE you read of the servant who hid in the earth
The talent his master had given?
When by diligent use to redouble its worth
He ought to have faithfully striven?

My friend, you have talents—God gave them to you
And will surely require them again,
Take care not to waste them, if ever so few,
Let them not have been given in vain.

You have *Speech*; then remember to watch your words
well,
And let them be gentle and kind.

It may seem a small matter, but no one can tell
The comfort a word leaves behind.

You have *Time*: Every minute and hour of the day,
Is lent by your Father in Heaven,
Make haste to improve ere it passes away,
The talent so graciously given.

You have *Influence*, too, though it seems very small;
Yet in greater or less degree,

You affect the improvement and comfort of all
With whom you may happen to be.

You have talents of *Gold* which by Heaven were lent
Every want of the poor to relieve,
Oh, use them as blessings so graciously sent,
Be more blessed to give, than receive.

And the man who in earnest endeavors to live
As an heir of eternity ought,

By his silent *Example* a lesson may give,
Which by words he would never have taught.

Then consider the talents entrusted to you,
And may they be duly improved,

Let your service be hearty and free, as is due
From children so greatly beloved.

General Articles.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

BY MRS. E. O. WHITE.

THE Redeemer of the world sought to make his lessons so simple that all could understand who heard them. It was not his choice to teach within walls or temples. True, he often did so in order to reach a class whom he would not be likely to meet while speaking in the open air, but Jesus preferred the fields, the groves, and the lake-sides for his temples. There were also his favorite resorts for meditation and prayer.

He had special reasons for choosing these natural sanctuaries in which to give instruction to the people. The landscape lay before him, rich in scenes and objects familiar alike to the lofty and the humble. From these he drew illustrations that simplified his teachings, and impressed them firmly upon the minds of his hearers. The birds caroling in the leafy branches, the glowing flowers of the valley, the spotless lily resting on the bosom of the lake, the lofty trees, the fruitful lands, the waving grain, the barren soil, the tree that bore no fruit, the mighty hills, the bubbling brooks, the setting sun that tinted and gilded the heavens, all served as means of instruction, or as emblems by which he taught the beauties of divine truth. He connected the visible works of the Creator with the words of life which he spoke, and thus led the mind from the contemplation of Nature unto Nature's God.

The malice of the Jews was so great in consequence of the miracle of Jesus in healing the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath day, that he with his disciples withdrew to a more favorable field of labor. They went to the sea-side of Galilee, and great multitudes followed him, for this new miracle wrought upon the Sabbath day was noised abroad through all that region. As Jesus taught, many of the sick, and those possessed with demons, were brought to him,

and he made them whole. His great heart of love was filled with divine pity for the poor sufferers, many of whom sought only to draw near enough to touch him, believing that in so doing they would be healed, and in this they were not disappointed, for the touch of faith brought healing power from the great Physician, and their distress and gloom were changed to joy and thanksgiving. He also cast out many demons, who, in leaving their victims, acknowledged Christ, saying, "Thou art the Son of God."

The people of Galilee were greatly aroused, and flocked to the presence of the Saviour. At length the crowd so increased that he scarcely had room to stand, and therefore entered a small ship, which was near the shore, and there preached to the crowd that thronged upon the beach. So he labored uninterruptedly in teaching the people and in healing the sick. But when the day was far spent he stole away and hid himself in the solitude of the mountain, to commune with his Father in secret. Jesus spent the entire night in prayer, while his disciples slept at the foot of the mountain. About dawn he came and wakened them. The disciples were now about to receive an office of sacred responsibility, second only to that of Christ himself. They were to be set apart for the gospel work. They were to be linked with Jesus, to be with him, to share his joys and trials, to receive his teachings, and be faithful witnesses of his mighty works, that they might be able to impart the instruction thus gained to the world. They were to be qualified so that Jesus could at times send them forth alone to teach and work even as he taught and worked. Jesus wished his disciples to gain an experience in the gospel labor while he was on earth to comfort and direct them, so that they would be able to successfully continue the work after his death, and lay the foundation of the Christian church.

While Jesus was preparing his disciples for their ordination, and instructing them as to the duties of the great work that lay before them, Judas urged his presence among them. This man made great professions of devotion to Jesus, and proposed to become one of his disciples. Said he, "Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." Jesus did not warmly receive him, neither did he repulse him, but addressed him with these words of mournful pathos, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Judas was selfish, and his main object in seeking a connection with Christ was to obtain temporal advantages through him; but Christ's reference to his own poverty, contrasting his condition with that of the foxes and the birds, was designed to cut off any hope Judas might cherish of securing earthly gain by becoming a follower of Christ. Judas was a man of acknowledged executive ability, and possessed of no small influence. For these reasons the disciples were anxious that he should form one of their number. They commended him in the highest terms to Jesus, as one who would greatly assist him in his work. They were therefore surprised that he received him so coolly; but the Saviour read the heart of Judas, and knew, even then, the part he was to act in his future betrayal and execution. Still, Jesus wished to connect this man with himself, that he might learn his divine mission, and gain moral strength to overcome the defects in his character, and experience an entire change of heart that would ensure his salvation. This it was possible for him to do, through the help of Christ.

Had Jesus repulsed Judas, the disciples, who regarded him with such favor, would have questioned, in their own minds, the wisdom of their Master. In receiving him, Jesus avoided this, and also placed the selfish and avaricious Judas in the most favorable position to develop qualities of mind and heart that would eventually gain for him a place in the kingdom of Heaven. But notwithstanding these precious opportunities Judas chose a course that covered him with everlasting infamy.

Gathering his disciples about him, Jesus bowed himself in prayer, and laying his hands

upon their heads, offered a prayer, dedicating them to his sacred work. Thus were the Lord's disciples ordained to the gospel ministry. This being accomplished, Jesus with his companions returned to the sea-side, where the multitudes were already gathering to hear him. Many of them were there for the purpose of being relieved of various maladies. Here he healed the sick and comforted the sorrowing, until the crowd increased so that there was not room for them upon the narrow beach. Jesus therefore moved up the mountain to a level space where the people could be accommodated. Here Jesus called his disciples near him, that the great truths he uttered might not fail to be indelibly impressed upon their minds, and that nothing might divert their attention from his words.

Though the disciples were close about him, and his words seemed specially addressed to them, yet they were also designed to reach the hearts and consciences of the mixed crowd there assembled. At every large gathering of this kind, the people still expected that Jesus would make some great display of power in regard to the new kingdom of which he had spoken. The believing Jews looked for him to free them from the yoke of bondage and reinstate them in their ancient glory. But in his sermon on the mount Christ disappointed their hopes of earthly glory. He opened his discourse by stating the principles that should govern his kingdom of divine grace, as contained in the several beatitudes.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." The poor in spirit are those who claim no personal merit, and boast of no virtue in themselves. Realizing their utter helplessness, and deeply convicted of sin, they put no faith in mere outward ceremonies, but cast themselves upon Jesus who is all-righteous and all-compassionate. The Christian can only rise through humility. The proud heart strives in vain to earn salvation by good works; for though one cannot be saved without good works, yet these alone will not suffice to win eternal life. After he has done all he can, Christ must impute to him his own righteousness.

In Christ, God has bestowed Heaven's best gift to redeem man, and, as the gift is full and infinite, so is saving grace boundless and all-sufficient. This saying of Christ struck at the very root of the self-righteousness of the Pharisees, who felt themselves already rich in spiritual knowledge, and did not realize their need to learn more. Such characters could have no part in the kingdom of Christ.

"Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted." In pronouncing a blessing upon those who mourn, Jesus did not design to teach that there is any virtue in living under a perpetual cloud, nor that selfish sorrow and repining has any merit of itself to remove a single stain of sin. The mourning spoken of by Christ is a godly sorrow for sin, that works repentance unto eternal life. Many grieve when their guilt is discovered, because the result of their evil course has brought them into disagreeable circumstances. It was thus that Esau mourned the sin of despising and selling his birth-right; but it was the unexpected consequence of that sin which caused his grief. So Pharaoh regretted his stubborn defiance of God, when he cried for the plagues to be removed from him; but his heart was unchanged, and he was ready to repeat his crime when tempted. Such mourning is not unto repentance.

He who is truly convicted of sin feels his whole life to have been one continued scene of ingratitude. He feels that he has robbed his best friend of the time and strength which was bought for him at an infinite price. His whole soul is filled with unutterable sorrow that he has sinned and grieved his compassionate Saviour. Such mourning is precious, for it will yield the peaceful fruits of righteousness. The worldling, from his standpoint, may pronounce this sorrow a weakness; but it is the strength which binds the penitent to the Infinite One with links that cannot be broken. It reveals that the angels of God are bringing back to his soul the graces which were lost through hardness of

heart and transgression. To confess and deplore one's errors evinces an excellence of character capable of discerning and correcting them. The tears of the penitent are only the clouds and the raindrops that precede the sunshine of holiness, the sorrow that heralds a joy that will be a living fountain in the soul. Men are sowing in God's great field with toil and tears, yet with patient expectation; and they will be blessed, for the heavens will open and the rain will fall, insuring a bountiful harvest. Then when the Reaper comes, he will return with joy bringing home his sheaves.

"Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth." The difficulties that the Christian encounters may be very much lessened by that meekness of character which hides itself in Christ. Jesus invites all the weary and heavy laden to come unto him who is meek and lowly in heart, that they may find rest. If the Christian possesses the humility of his Master, he will rise above the slights, the rebuffs, and annoyances to which he is daily exposed, and they will cease to cast a gloom over his spirit. That meekness which Jesus blessed, operates amid the scenes of domestic life; it makes the home happy, it provokes no quarrels, gives back no angry answers, but soothes the irritated temper, and diffuses a gentleness which is felt by all within its charmed circle. It calms the inflammable spirit of retaliation, and mirrors forth the character of Christ.

Far better would it be for Christians to suffer under false accusations than to inflict upon themselves the torture of retaliation against their enemies. Hatred and revenge are instigated by Satan, and bring only remorse to him who cherishes them. Lowliness of heart is the strength that gives victory to the Christian. His reward is an inheritance of glory.

"Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled." As the body feels the necessity for temporal food to supply the waste of the system, and preserve the physical strength, so the soul should long for that spiritual nourishment that increases the moral strength, and satisfies the cravings of the mind and heart. As the body is continually receiving the nutriment that sustains life and vigor, so should the soul constantly receive the heavenly food which gives nerve and muscle to spirituality. As the weary traveler eagerly seeks the spring in the desert, and, finding it, quenches his burning thirst with its cool and sparkling water, so should the Christian thirst for and seek the pure water of life, of which Christ is the fountain. There the soul may be satisfied, there the fever born of worldly strife is allayed, and the spirit is forever refreshed. But a majority of those who listened to Jesus hungered only for worldly advantages and honor. Especially did the self-exaltation of the Pharisees prevent them from longing for any higher attainments than they had already reached, for in their own estimation they were at the very pinnacle of perfect righteousness. However, there were many who heard thankfully the lessons of Jesus, and from that time, shaped their lives according to his teachings.

"Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy." Here Jesus struck a blow at the arrogance and cruel intolerance of the Jews. Both priests and people were, as a rule, overbearing, quarreling with all who opposed them, severely critical and resentful of any reflection cast upon their own acts. Jesus said of the Pharisees, "Ye tithe mint, and rue, and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God." The Saviour desired to teach his followers a lesson of mercy that they should not be wanting in that tender compassion which pities and aids the suffering and erring, and avoids magnifying the faults of others.

(To be Continued.)

One always receiving mercy is like the water in which we ever flows whatever remains.

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