

SEASONS  
OF  
COMFORT

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# SEASONS OF COMFORT

SUITABLE FOR

MOMENTS OF MEDITATION

AND

EXHORTATIONS

AT THE

TABLE OF THE LORD



By ROBERT ROBERTS

VOLUME TWO



## PREFACE TO THIS SECOND VOLUME

This further compilation of exhortations by Brother Roberts is presented to the Brotherhood, in the hope that his words of wisdom will assist brethren and sisters to prepare for the advent of our beloved Lord. Brother Roberts has, for nearly one and a half centuries, been deeply respected by lovers of the Truth for his mature wisdom and thoughtful exposition of the Word.

We live in an age when little attention is given to spiritual matters. Even those of the Household of Faith may be involved in a wide variety of activities, giving only limited time to the study and absorption of the Spirit-Word. This is one of the grave dangers of our times. There is a pressing need for all to recognise the importance of thoughtful meditation and prayerful preparation of heart and mind to challenge present-day trials. This age is marked by instability and exposure to "perilous times," which may jeopardize the faith of the unwary and to those who are unprepared to face the dangers. The words of Brother Roberts provide a strength and comfort to this end.

The exhortations have been culled from various sources. Some have not been published in volume form previously. Herein will be found the appeal which comes from a true "Father in Israel." Having experienced many trials during his life, and having served the cause of the Truth with pen and voice through "much tribulation" (Acts 14:22), Brother Roberts is well qualified to encourage all who are prepared to heed his words. Such spiritual fathers from past generations should not be forgotten. Paul despaired that there were "not many fathers" in Corinth, though there was no shortage of "instructors" (1Cor. 4:15). There is a critical difference between mere teaching and the manifestation of a living faith. There is, today, an urgent need to understand and uphold apostolic doctrine and practice with clarity of mind and purpose, as the day of the advent draws closer. As the reader peruses the pages of this volume, enjoying the "deeper things of the Spirit," we pray that the dedication which moved our pioneer brethren will both encourage and enthuse. Herein will be found words of consolation and hope, assurance and faithfulness.

This volume, then, provides further valuable words of exhortation from the pen of Brother Roberts. It is our hope that it shall complement the faithful and reliable expositions of the Word, which we are blessed to possess, "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17).

G. E. Mansfield, 1996.

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Let Christ be our example. He was not afraid to make the Truth a stumbling block if truth required it. He was not afraid in a single discourse to do more harm (that is to alienate more friends) than all the good he had done (that is, than all the disciples he had made) in all his previous labors throughout the cities and villages in Galilee. When his Capernaum audience broke up (consisting largely of professed disciples), the bulk of them left the scene with wiseacre head shakings and regrets that the Son of Man should present the Truth in such an impracticable and offensive form.

Where is now the audience? Vanished from the universe. Where is now the Son of Man? In the presence of eternal glory and power. The facts point the lesson. Follow the Truth in the teeth of unpopularity, and the weak wisdom of dim-eyed friends.

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He is essentially a man-pleaser who holds men's persons in admiration for the sake of advantage; and therefore cannot be the servant of Christ.

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Social or political liberty is a small matter in view of what men are called, or invited to, by the Gospel of the Kingdom.

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Humble service one of another is the characteristic of all who conform to the mind of Christ. It will be found on closest reflection to be the most reasonable and the most beautiful deportment on the part of a human being. A man appears at his best when he is sincerely and unaffectedly humble — the greatness of any gift he may have will only add to the beauty of modesty, and will certainly not detract from the reasonableness of it, for what can a man have that he has not received? Even the power of perseverance and application by which he may attain results is a gift: he did not create it.



# SEASONS OF COMFORT

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## Life in True Perspective

*Vanity — vexation and sorrow — pleasure and mourning — Adam and Christ — Bible history — facts which cannot be ignored — present darkness and the light of Truth.*

WHEREVER we have our reading in the Bible, we get the Word of Wisdom. It may differ in shape or hue, but it is intrinsically the same in the sense of being an element of the same system of truth. As light is composed of differently colored blending rays, and as food is made up of different essential constituents, so divine truth has many ingredients, and they are all necessary to the completeness of the whole.

The book of Ecclesiastes is before us this morning in our first reading, and the work of the apostles in the second. They may not appear to be much connected. We shall find the fact different from the appearance. That there should be such a book in the Bible as Ecclesiastes surprises some. Its absence would be more surprising. The Bible would not be complete without a picture of the present life as it appears in itself from the divine point of view. In Ecclesiastes we have this picture. It is a picture that experience finds to be true. It is unlike human presentments of the subject. Books and men of all sorts glorify human nature and paint human life in bright colors. Men take more naturally to the words of men than to the words of God. Consequently, they all indulge the most pleasing views and ideals, and go forth hopefully to find good. But one after another, they all come to experience the truth of the Word of God, that as human life now is, "all is vanity and vexation of spirit." The pleasing views dissolve as life advances and the grim nature of current facts is slowly realized, though never finally discerned or clearly understood by those who receive not the teaching of Bible wisdom. Illusion more or less prevails to the last, for if a man find not good in his own case, he at least imagines his neighbor has found it — his neighbor all the while thinking perhaps the same of him.

The personal experience of Solomon is made use of by the Spirit of God as the divine limner in the case. "What can the man do that cometh after the King?" A man requires to see all to form a correct judgment. Men in a small sphere have always a higher sphere above them on which their imagination acts illusively. They find not good in their own sphere, but they fancy it exists in those others which become to them an object of desire and effort, in the very exercise of which they find a certain satisfaction. In this case, those who have the most happiness are the lowest down, and who have the most contracted knowledge of human life. In this sense Solomon's words are true: "In much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth

sorrow." The men of the largest experience are the least sanguine in all human matters. There would seem in this to be a denial of the other utterance of wisdom: "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting, get understanding." But seeming and reality are not always the same. It does not follow because increased knowledge of this evil state brings increased sorrow, that therefore, in ultimate and future relations, wisdom is not a tree of life to them that lay hold on her; and that unhappy is every one that retaineth her. It still remains true that in higher application, wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. But, one thing at a time. Human life divorced from God, as it now is upon the earth, is the unhappy thing depicted in this book, and not the beautiful and noble thing represented in all sorts of human philosophies. Therefore, enlarged knowledge is enlarged sadness. This was Solomon's case; and it is written that we may learn the truth of the matter, and verify it in our actual experience.

There is a great advantage in knowing the truth of the matter because we adjust ourselves to fact all the way along, and find ourselves not disappointed, but enabled rather to turn the days of our vanity to the best account. Those who work upon a false theory of the human situation are like people who, in the dark, should think the path flat when it is downhill with ruts and humps. They stumble and jolt at every step, while those who know the path is downwards and rough, though equally in the dark, they walk carefully, and prepare their steps for downward direction, and consequently get along with comparative comfort. Facts will constantly contradict what are called "optimistic" views of life, and crush enthusiasm and hope at the last. The other view — the Ecclesiastes view — being the true view, works the other way. You give it up at the start, and look beyond, to that "beyond" which is even visible at several parts of even this gloomy book. Thus he says, "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting." And again, "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, and the heart of fools in the house of mirth." Why? If there were no "beyond," the argument would turn the other way, surely. If our only spell of life lies in these "three score years and ten", the merrier we make it, the better. But this is not so. At the end of the book, Solomon states the "conclusion of the whole matter" — that to "fear God and keep His commandments," is "the whole duty of man;" "for God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." Here is a view of matters which the house of mourning helps; which the house of mirth hinders. Who ever was helped by the "song of fools" to "fear God and keep His commandments?" Experience speaks here with no uncertain voice. "Pleasure" deadens all moral perceptions and inclinations, and leads its votaries downward in the path that leads to death. No one is ever helped to the Kingdom of God by theatre going or novel reading. By these the present life, which is a shadow is stamped on the imagination as the reality; and the purpose of God, which is a reality, is made to appear a myth. Solomon deprecates another illusion

which has its roots in the general disease from which we suffer: "Say not thou, what is the cause that the former days were better than these, for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this." It seems it is an old habit to consider past times the best. The cause of it is obvious on reflection. It does not lie in the nature of the times; for in this there is no change. There is the same sky all the time, the same shining sun, the beneficent sequence of the seasons, the same beautiful earth with all its bounteous store for man and beast. Yet as a matter of experience, it does seem after a while with every one as if things were not quite so nice as they used to be. Why is this? There is a change somewhere. Where is it? Not in the things around us, but in ourselves. In the youthful days there is greater vigor of faculty, greater intensity of feeling, greater clearness of physical perception of all kinds; therefore greater susceptibility to joy or sorrow. As we get older, ardor dulls down, and nothing has the zest it had to our young faculties. The times seem to change; the "former" days begin to look in the retrospect as if they were better than the present. But it is a mere appearance. To take the appearance for the reality is not a wise conclusion. To "enquire wisely concerning this" is to direct attention to ourselves: look within: note the fact that we are as the flowers: we have a seed time, a budding time, a blooming time, a withering time, ending in decay and death. The true enquiry is as to the cause of this, and the bearing of the facts on the future. Why are we as we are, and what prospects have we? The answer will show us Adam and Christ. There is no answer apart from them, though the answer is almost universally refused in our day. "By man (Adam) came death; by man (Christ) came also the resurrection of the dead" (1Cor. 15:21). Here are instructions and hope by which this oppressive dispensation of "vanity of vanities" is lightened and made comparatively easy to bear. We know the reason why the highest form of life on earth should be the unhappiest, and how release is to come, and the double knowledge ends the terrible problem of life. There are unhappily, thousands upon thousands to whom this knowledge is legendary, and who esteem it an intellectual degradation to rest on what it is a sufficient condemnation with them to call a "theological dogma." A sufficiently searching investigation will reveal their repugnance to be unreasonable. If God has spoken, what He has said must be true.

It comes to this: what is the meaning of Jewish history? Let any man thoroughly study the Bible in connection with all the facts connected with Palestine and the Jews (including the origin of Christianity in their midst), and he will not be able, in the full exercise of the judicial faculty, which takes every fact into account and assigns to it a harmonious place in the theory of things adopted, to escape the conclusion that God is in that history and in that Bible. This will be best manifest by attempting to frame an account of the matter on any other supposition. Give us a theory of Bible facts and peculiarities that shall harmonize with the idea that Jewish nationality was of human origination, that Jewish institutions were of human contrivance, and that Jewish literature, as it exists in the Bible, was written with human

objects. Most men are content to leave this alone. They see one or two prominent facts in the unfavorable light in which hostile writing makes them to appear; they make up their minds and commit themselves to a conclusion which is so perfectly welcome to the natural mind, that they are rather in haste to embrace it; leaving neglected the utterly insoluble problem which the Bible presents in many details on their hypothesis. The problem exists whether they tackle it or not. It is a problem that no wise man would leave unsettled in view of what it involves. There is only one view of the subject that explains all — and that is, that the case stands as the Bible represents it, that God revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and brought their posterity out of Egypt by the employment of miracle; gave them their law direct from heaven, led them by heaven-helped judges and kings, spoke to them by inspired prophets, generation after generation, and last of all sent to them His son, and laid the basis of the world's reconciliation and hope in his life, death and resurrection. The facts are such as a child can receive, and they are not in nature more incredible than the thousand facts of daily experience. The only difference is that they are not of ordinary occurrence. They happened for a special purpose, and having served that purpose, ceased. They have not been seen by us, but they have been testified to us on grounds sufficient to cause conviction in the class of mind that Jesus says is alone eligible for God's highest favors; the humble minded, docile and believing.

Being received, they supply the key of life. They explain why human existence upon earth is evil, and how it is to be redeemed. The agnostic may say they do not reduce the mystery at the root of all phenomena. Granted: nothing can do this. But it is something to know facts whether we understand them or not. In fact, to know facts, in their relation one with another, is the highest point to which human intellect can reach in any department. The metaphysical conception of their 'modus in esse' is an intellectual impossibility. The absurdity of agnosticism, which is becoming so prevalent in our age — (but the fashion is sure to change) lies in refusing to accept facts on the ground of impossibility of understanding them in the ultra-philosophical sense. Agnostics are not so foolish in other things. Does our agnostic understand how the thought is formed in his brain that enables him to know his own friends or his own property? He is obliged to own ignorance here. But does he therefore refuse to have any friends or property? Not he. He would say, "Bother your philosophy," if you attempted to dissuade him from accepting a dinner invitation or the legacy of a dead friend on the account that it was impossible for him to understand how he knew about them. Why then should he raise an objection to the higher things to which we are practically related to in God through His message to us in the Scriptures? Does he say "I cannot understand eternity: I cannot understand endless space; I cannot understand my own existence?" What has that to do with it? If we cannot understand these things, they are facts, and it is with facts we have to do with. We are here in a boundless universe. We are at the conflux

of two endless times. We have appeared now and we did not appear before, and in the ordinary course, we shall shortly disappear. These are the facts we have to deal with. It is the part of a mooning fool to stand still and do nothing because of the inability to grasp the mighty fact. It is the part of common sense to note them, accept them, adjust itself to them, rejoice in them. And it is not the part of common sense to exclude any part of them, and especially when that omission deranges the rest. It is the part of common sense to see that the Bible is part of the facts, as well as Homer's Iliad; that Christ is as much part of the world's history as Julius Caesar; that God is as much a demonstrated reality in the career of the human race upon the earth as the existence of gravitation in the motion of the heavenly bodies. Ignore them, and human life is much more of a riddle than before. They cannot be ignored. They are there. They are truth and the kernel of all truth, having this importance for us that they give light to the darkness of the present life and invest the terrible universe with the glory and comfort of the Father's wisdom and care, and kindle the terrifying future with the radiance of gladsome hope.

Ecclesiastes does not deal with the cure of the vanity that is on the earth so much as with its present reality. And its portraiture does not attenuate or extenuate the blackness. You have it just as it is. "Behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter. Wherefore I praised the dead that were already dead more than the living that were yet alive." Human philosophies mix in ameliorating notions. Where they do not deny God altogether, they deny that His face is averted, and speak of His "moral government", and of "compensations" and of "Nemesis" and all the rest; by which they mean that things are pretty right at the bottom, however rough they may be on the surface; that injustices are avenged in the working out of things in the long run, and the tears of the oppressed are wiped away somehow; that, take it all in all, it is a good sort of a world in which all things come to a level; that in brief, all is not vanity and futility, but all is conducive to ultimate good in some way or other. Such a view will be found thoroughly artificial. Experience will contradict it at every step and in every phase. It will be found at the last, and in the solitude of every man's actual individual experience if his range of knowledge be sufficiently wide, that Solomon's picture is the true one; that life as it now is among the fourteen hundred million human inhabitants of the earth is a welter and a turmoil with no issue and no incentive that adequately appeals to the aspirations that slumber dimly in the human breast. It remains for us but to ask "why?" and "how long?" These questions we ask in vain at every source but one. The Bible only tells us that "the misery of man which is great upon him" is the result of a break in his relations with God. Man is made for the glory of God. At the very start he refused his mission; and the refusal has been perpetuated in all the lines of his generation. In such a state of things it cannot be that God should openly manifest Himself to man and guide his affairs for him. The law of Moses is an elaborate inculcation of this in all its ritual. Man is cast off and left to take care of himself. God has "suffered all nations to walk in their own

ways” (Acts 14:16). They are dreadful ways, as all history shows, where no light from God has come to bear. The spectacle may distress; the theory may appal; but such are the facts, and such is their Bible explanation. What other is there?

Hope comes with this explanation; for if there is a “why,” there is a “how long.” The Spirit of God that tells us God’s reason for subjecting the human race to this vanity tells us also of a purpose in the case which is described as “the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will.” This purpose God himself announced in the beginning to Moses: “As truly as I live, the whole earth shall be filled with my glory” (Num. 14:21). He could therefore say concerning His creation of the earth: “He made it not in vain; He formed it to be inhabited” (Isaiah 45:18). The details of this purpose are exhibited in the covenants of promise, and expounded in the Gospel of the Kingdom. They are briefly comprehended in the declaration that He will “gather together in one all things under Christ” (Eph. 1:10). Paul says God will do this “in the dispensation of the fulness of times” — that is, in the era when the appointed times shall have reached their maturity — styled by Peter “the times of the restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:21). This purpose is not to be confounded with ‘universalism.’ While it will embrace all the earth, it will be limited to a selected class only of the countless millions that have passed across the scene during the Adamite era. This we know from the teaching of the Scriptures, and it is brought to a focus in the closing scenes of the Apocalypse wherein we are shown, “the tabernacle of God with men,” but are also carefully informed in the very context that “there shall in no wise enter anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, but they who are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 21:27). It is “He that overcometh” that shall inherit all things. Ecclesiastes is a divine presentment of the darkness which now enshrouds human life; the apostolic narrative is a divine exhibition of the way out of the darkness into light. The two are connected and have to be read together. They are both true and necessary elements of instruction. It remains for us to realise their present personal bearing. It is the voice of God that says “Come out from among them and be ye separate...” Shall we hesitate to respond to the invitation because of the present inconvenience it entails? That same voice says “give diligence to make your calling and election sure... Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong... To him that overcometh will I give power over the nations.” Shall we refuse the earnest service required, and slacken off and grow supine to suit the easy notions of the natural man? Nay, nay. Wise men will join with Joshua when he said: “Choose ye this day whom ye will serve; as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

## “Without Faith it is Impossible to Please God”

*The consolation of existence — suffering brings challenges — activity develops character — the example of Joseph — living faith is built upon intelligent understanding — God is seeking faithful followers.*

“WITHOUT faith it is impossible to please God.” We may be very thankful that we have come to a recognition of this great fact, especially at a time when it is almost universally denied. Our assembling this morning is a token of admission on our part that “without faith it is impossible to please God” and that “he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” We accept the great fact upon the authority of Christ; for though written by Paul, it has the force of a statement by Christ himself, on the principle laid down by Christ, that whosoever hears the apostles hears him, (Luke 10:16). The statement that “without faith it is impossible to please God,” is also in complete accord with all that Christ himself said.

As to what is meant by this God-pleasing faith, it is defined in the first verse as something having reference to the future — the substance of things HOPED FOR; the evidence of things not seen (as yet). Belief in God who promises, and belief of the things promised, embraces all that is affirmable of faith. This is the faith without which no man can be well-pleasing to the Creator. We are assembled this morning on that footing, believing and testifying to others — that if men will please God, they must have faith in what He has said; “they must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.”

There is very great comfort in that double belief; it is the only sterling consolation of existence. When we realise the fact that God is — that all things are in the hands of an Almighty Being, whose unerring wisdom is slowly guiding things to a pre-determined issue of good, we are enabled to put up with much that is grievous in the experience of men and women whose thoughts are not of God. There is no difficulty, philosophically speaking, in accepting the proposition that God is. We see that it must be so; because things are, and because things have not always been.

Things could never have made themselves. If ever there was a time when there was nothing, there could never have come a time when there could be anything; for it is impossible that something could come out of nothing. Hence an eternal antecedent is a philosophical necessity; and that eternal antecedent must have had the quality of intelligence as well as force, for all the developments of the universe are characterized by wisdom. It is therefore

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an easy effort of the mind to grasp the fact that God exists, and that fact once realized, is inexpressibly consolatory.

There is a sense in which we may say we are not. But a few years ago, there were no such persons as ourselves in existence, and in a short time to come (apart from the coming of the Lord), there will again be no such persons to be found. We have no power of self-continuance; we depend entirely upon those relations of life that God has established. We are just like a flower — indeed the Bible compares us to a flower — which is the mere product of forces behind it, over which it has no control. We also are mere products of forces antecedent to ourselves, and have no power in ourselves; we can only glide along in the channel marked out for us.

In such an ephemeral condition, how comforting to feel that there is a Great Power for ever, the primary energy out of which all things come; and that to that power, “with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning,” we sustain the relation of children. How comforting to know the truth of what David says, that “like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him;” and that “no good thing will He withhold from them that please Him;” that there is no error or caprice with Him; for He is long-suffering, patient and benevolent to a degree beyond our knowledge; that kindness is the first quality of His being — that God is love. When we feel all that, we are solaced in the midst of life’s uncertain experiences. We come to realise by the meditation that comes with the daily reading of the Word — that things will go right; that however wrong they appear to be, they will go right in the end, if we do those things that are well-pleasing in His sight. “All things work together for good to those who are the called according to the purpose of God.” Though things may seem to shape adversely, Eternal Goodness guides the current to a beneficent end, even when the beneficence is not realized in the present state.

The sufferer may imagine that God is not in his lot, and he is liable to become disheartened. With as much reason might the prophets have come to that conclusion regarding themselves; for Paul testifies in this very chapter concerning them, that they wandered about in sheepskins and goat skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented. The kind of affliction they were occasionally subject to, is exemplified in the case of Jeremiah, who was let down by cords into a dismal pit of mire at the bottom of which he sank up to the armpits in mud.

Might not Jeremiah have supposed at such a time that God had forsaken him? Especially considering that the cause of his horrid imprisonment was his faithfulness in adhering to the divine Word. Had he thought so, he would have made the mistake which some short-sighted people fall into with regard to the incidents of ordinary life.

The fact is, God’s dealings with the prophets had regard to the prophets themselves as well as those to whom He sent them. God accomplishes many



ends with simple means. In sending the prophets, He not only reprov'd the generation addressed, but brought out His Word for the enlightenment of subsequent generations, and at the same time developed circumstances for trying, purifying and disciplining the prophets themselves. Jesus testifies that the prophets are to be in the Kingdom of God — "Ye shall see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the prophets in the Kingdom of God." We also read in Revelation that the time is come for God "to give reward unto His servants the prophets." It was therefore needful that they should be tried by adversity.

A man is unfit for use — even in the human sphere — till he is tried. A character is without value till it has gone through the fire in some way or other. A person who is all the time in agreeable circumstances cannot have that hearty appreciation of the Truth which adversity engenders; neither is it possible that his character can be brought out distinctly. Development depends upon activity. "Pleasure" does not tend to spiritual activity, but rather to spiritual lassitude and death. It blunts the perception of the need for the truth. It makes the mind contented with the present. It brings mental rust and moral sluggishness. It hides the spiritual man. When he is tried you see him, and get to know what he is made of, and he knows himself as he never can with a pleasant breeze on all sides. The man who has come through trial and suffering is a more complete and a more precious man in every sense than one who does not know what trouble is. He is qualified to judge justly of other men, and to sympathize with the erring; and we must remember that the object of God's operations towards us in the Gospel, is to develop an order of men who will be qualified to be the associates of Jesus in the administration of the Divine law in the earth, in the day of the Messiah's glory.

When you consider this, it throws considerable light upon many things that would otherwise be dark. It enables us to understand how it is that the sons coming to the Father receive chastisement. It helps us to respond to the words of Paul — "If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers even the prophets themselves, and the apostles; and Jesus himself, the highest of all — then are ye bastards and not sons." No one will ever come to any perfection of divine development without chastisement. Chastisement fits a man for future exaltation.

You can see that in the case of Joseph. He was the best of twelve sons, and was loved the most by his father. At seventeen years of age, you know what happened. Sent on a hospitable errand to his brothers whose envy had been excited by the preferential attention of his father, and fed by the naturally superior carriage of Joseph himself, he was put by them into a pit. And there, although there is nothing in the narrative about it, we may imagine he abandoned himself to the utmost extravagance of grief. As much is implied in the words of his brethren, when in the austere presence of Joseph (ignorant that he understood them), they said, "We are verily guilty concerning our

## SEASONS OF COMFORT

brother in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us and we would not hear.”

Joseph is let down into the pit, and by-and-by, a gang of Ishmaelites come along and his brethren change their minds and sell him to them, doubtless glad to get rid of him without putting him to death. Imagine a fate more truly heartless than to be taken away from a fond and affectionate father, in comfortable circumstances, and given into the hands of traders as a slave. This was Joseph's desolate position, and what he must have suffered we cannot easily realise, for at this period there was no indication of the purpose to be served in his slavery. The surroundings were those of blackest night. We see the light that afterwards broke upon the scene. We look from the throne on which Joseph sat in Egypt, and are enabled to view his enslavement with composure; but if we try to put ourselves in the position of Joseph at the moment he was sold by his brethren, we can realize that it must have been a position of utter desolation; and it was a long time before his path began to brighten. Taken to Egypt he was sold as a slave menial into the house of one of Pharaoh's officers, and you know that after serving for a time, through the power of slander he was thrown into prison, and there he lay in the lowest depths of adversity, apparently abandoned by God and man. Now, in such a position Joseph might well have reasoned, if he had been of the faithless sort, and had not endured as seeing Him who is invisible — if he had not as it were, a hand grasping the invisible hand of God — that God was taking no cognizance of his position; whereas He was guiding Joseph to a splendid destiny and preparing him for the high position he was to occupy. Adversity gave a robustness of character he could not otherwise have possessed. His afflictions were spread over thirteen years; and they were thirteen years of utter blackness, pure adversity, unmitigated evil, in which to the eye of sense there was no token of divine regard, and yet in which God was at the helm all the way through.

Now, here we are, so many Josephs; we have been called to be the sons of God; we have been called to be the seed of Abraham, the children of Israel and the brethren of Joseph; and like him, we are going through a training for a throne. We are being put through the fire, like ore, that the precious metal may come out at last, tried and refined, for the Royal use. Let us think of this, and endure evil with composure. Let us avoid the mistake of thinking that God has forsaken us, because it may be we are placed in circumstances in which there appears to be no evidence of right guidance. God knows what is needful for our development, if we do not. Let us commit our way to Him, and roll our burden on Him, knowing that He careth for us.

What a blessed thing then, to believe that God is. Few practically believe it. Outside the truth there is a perfect desert in this respect. With the exception of a few misguided orthodox people who have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge, the great mass of people around us are without

faith of any sort. God is not in all their thoughts. Such as attend upon “public worship” do so because it is a “respectable” custom, to neglect which, is to incur social odium, and because it affords scope for display under the pleasing and self-deceptive guise of sanctity. A great body of the people pay no regard whatever to religion in any shape, but serve the flesh out and out, without pretence of anything better.

It is to be feared that faith is a scarce article even amongst those who have embraced the Truth. The sort of method by which we have to get at the Truth in these days, is unfavorable to some extent to the development of this kind of thing. It is a process of intellectual sifting, by which venerable fables are put to the test and rejected, and the truth ascertained in its theoretical features. The process is conducted in the face of opposition, and followed up by argumentative contention. The consequence is that the mind is liable to become so absorbed in the mere process of finding out what the Truth is, as to fall short in the apprehension of the purpose for which it exists, and to fail in those moral developments in which alone it has its lasting and valuable fruit.

In this respect, there is great danger connected with the modern phase of apostolic truth. In its primitive phase, there was no need for the amount of argument and investigation which in our times are indispensable. A certain authoritative testimony was presented and confirmed by sign, and believers had but to receive it and at once surrender to the moral power connected with it. All they had to do was to believe the truth infallibly presented, and make use of that truth in the purification of the inner man in preparation for the Lord Jesus. We have to get at the same result by a different process. The process is a matter of indifference so long as the result is secured. The danger is we may come short of the result. This ought to be an anxious point. Let us not devote all our time to mere intellectual exertion. Having attained the Truth, let us realize the use of it in the formation of the character Christ will approve.

One often sees lamentable cases in which interest in the Truth is kept up so long as the excitement of polemic encounter is maintained, but disappears when that calm region is reached, in which the Truth has to work out the fruits of righteousness and true holiness. Argument and contention for the Faith are not worth the trouble if they are to end in the mere establishment of a theory. The object of all work in the Truth is to develop real, loving, warm-hearted, intelligent and consecrated disciples of Christ, who personally feel that they are not their own, but the property of him who died that he might purchase a people with his own blood. Therefore, as Paul says, leaving the first principles, let us go on unto perfection, rising with increasing strength to the great fact that God is, and that He has all things in His hands, that He doeth according to His will in the earth as well as in the armies of heaven.

Give us a man or woman of this sort, with living faith based upon an

intelligent understanding of the testimony — who have the faith of God in their hearts as the result of the Truth comprehended — and you give us a man or woman who will act of their own accord in the things pertaining to the divine service. Having the light “within” themselves, they are not dependent upon external stimulus. They will be found in the way of duty, because it is their duty so to be found, and not because it is pleasant. It may be unpleasant. It is oftener unpleasant than not, but the children of light are not children of pleasure. Finding themselves in a probationary state of evil, they accept their lot with that resignation which is the only attitude of wisdom, and bend their energies to that high calling of God in Christ Jesus, working out their salvation with fear and trembling. They will always present a contrast to the class who can only be brought to the meetings by special attractions, and get soon out of the way and tired, if they are not the objects of personal attention.

The latter class are to be met with at the interesting meetings, when there is a lot of people and warmth, and music, and everything that is agreeable and pleasant in the surroundings. You look in vain for them when there is work to be done in the cold, with few people present, and no attraction. They have the Truth as a theory: they have not realized the idea of being its servants. “They are not all Israel that are of Israel.” Those only will be approved by Christ who are given up to him entirely — in whom he is the power and motive of their lives, and the highest object of their desires. The other class are useful as scaffolding, which is useful to a building. Their presence contributes somewhat to that warmth which is favorable to the implanting of the seed in the minds of the good and honest-hearted. They are not altogether useless; only their usefulness, like that of a scaffolding, is limited to the preliminary stage. When the building is finished, they will be dispensed with.

Now we seek a higher place in the work of God than this. We labor to get beyond the mere scaffolding of the flesh period; we aim to become living stones in the glorious living temple, that will be reared in the earth when the Master Builder arrives. This is a destiny all-glorious. The community of the saints in the resurrection is a city of Life and Light most precious. It will consist of the very cream of the human race — men of excellent spirit — of divine knowledge — of tried faith — who in their several generations served God in the face of disadvantage, endured the trial for a long and wearying period of time. Abraham himself for an example, was tried more than a hundred years; Isaac and Jacob likewise; Joseph lived one hundred and ten years; and so with most of the holy men of old. Faithful lifetimes did they all lay on the altar; and still their number is not complete.

At the eleventh hour of our own dispensation, the Master is hiring servants. The existence of the Word in our midst, is evidence of this. What infatuation to disregard or treat coolly the call. We may be of the number of

that glorious company that will spring into being at "the manifestation of the sons of God;" but we must be like them. We must be men of faith, men of service, men of benevolent hearts; for those who are not of living hearts are not of God; and men and women of good consciences, who would not do wrong to save their lives. Persevering in this line of character during our brief struggle with evil, realize the joy of being made one of a multitude of that description, whom no man can number, and whose former ills and frailties are all swallowed up in the glorious and deathless nature of the spirit in which there is no more sorrow or sighing. Look at that multitude, filled with everlasting joy; think that the Lamb dwells in the midst of them — the central sun that lighteneth every man of them that entereth that bright world. Behold them come to Zion and plant themselves in the seat of honor and power. Consider that they constitute the ruling brotherhood of the world, in whose righteous hands all the property and the power and the law, and the honor and glory of the world will be vested, for the promotion of glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and goodwill to men!

Is a place in that illustrious body not worth any trial? What infatuated creatures those men and women must be, who, having put their hands to the plough, look back, and allow their hearts to be taken and their hands weakened by the ephemeral interests of this life, which, at its best, supposing we could do all that we wished, are "vanity," ending ultimately in the grave. How perfectly suicidal for those who have such a glorious destiny before them, to slacken their hands and become lukewarm in relation to the duties they owe to their Lord and Master. Let us beware. The bright side is pleasant to contemplate, but we must accept the dark side in present duty and reproach. We must carry the cross if we mean to wear the crown.

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## Comfort from the Word

*Scripture-founded hope as much fact as present experience of evil — no comfort in world — but future "comfort" for "My people" — contemplate power and wisdom of the Eternal — read His Word, rest on His promises — "out of tribulation" soon.*

THE Psalm we have just been singing (Hymn 19) touches a point of common experience which is very present to us when we come together after a week of toil to have our memory of divine things refreshed. It speaks of thirst and weariness in a dry parched land. This is the reverse of a pleasant experience, and unless we treat it in an enlightened manner, it is liable to be hurtful to us. It is somewhat of an incessant experience, and we are liable, almost unconsciously sometimes, to wonder at

the fact, and to think that all is not right with us. The fact is that this experience of vanity belongs inherently to the present state of things. It is here, that the apostolic message comes in with such reason, and such power, and such comfort. This is a message founded upon a dispensation of power, that, namely, which Paul refers to in speaking of the first-fruits of the Spirit. He said they had these first-fruits, and yet groaned within themselves, waiting for the adoption. What these first-fruits were is disclosed to us in a way that enables us to see that the apostolic hope is not an affair of philosophy or opinion, but as much an affair of fact as our present perception of evil. On the Day of Pentecost the Spirit came with power, causing illiterate men to speak with tongues, and feeble men to heal multitudes of the sick. It enabled Paul "through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, to fully preach the Gospel of Christ from Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum (Rom. 15:19). It dwelt with the communities developed by his labors, in harmony with the promise of Christ, that he would send the Spirit to be with them as a comforter and a guide. There were diversities of gifts, he informs us in 1Cor. 12, but the same Spirit, and these gifts were one and all of that real and substantial character that left no room for mistake as to the real and actual character of the phenomena.

Take, for example, verse 10, "To another by the same Spirit the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discerning of spirits, to another divers kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues." What human power can work miracles, or prophesy, or speak languages without learning them, or interpret tongues with which one is not acquainted? This indicates the kind of basis upon which the apostolic hope stands, a basis as real as the experiences we have of present actual existence. We can therefore listen with open hearts, free from all reserve or doubt, to the words of comfort that came both by prophet and apostle. The apostles speak to us most directly, bringing the prophets with them. The apostles say that we are saved by hope, and that all things meanwhile work together for good to those who are the holders of this hope. Connected with it is every good thing. Paul breaks out into a kind of ecstasy on the subject: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

It is impossible to emphasize too strongly the contrast between this way of looking at life, and the way common to the wise of this world. There is none of the warmth of love in their system. They of course recognize love between human beings, but even this not very strongly, and at its strongest,

what is it compared with the love of God to human beings? Their philosophy is like the coldness of empty space, in which we are told the temperature is at about 200 degrees below zero, whereas the gospel of Christ glows with the warmth of divine sunshine. For the lack of this the world is perishing, and we ourselves are liable to faint and fail for lack of its full realization. This lack is part of the weakness of present faculty; our strength is soon spent, and our feeble minds are easily overpowered by the conditions of the moment, which conditions are the reverse of all the aspects in which God is exhibited to us. We live in a world lying in wickedness. We live in a world sitting in darkness. We live in a world in which God is silent, except in so far as He speaks with the quiet voice of His manifest wisdom in creation. The Bible is the only institution at present in which we come into touch with Him. It may be regarded as a temple in the wilderness, in which we hear His voice and feel His hand.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,” saith He, in our reading from the prophets. Let us dwell for a moment in the presence of this comforting voice, and endeavor to take out of it all that there is in it. It is addressed to “My people.” By whatever method of interpretation we understand these words, we may find ourselves included. They are addressed primarily to Jerusalem, “Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem.” Proximately, this is the Jewish capital and the Jewish race, but are we not included in either? The Jewish race has numbered countless millions, only a very small proportion of which is of interest to God. A whole generation fell in the wilderness, because of their unbelief and disobedience. Who, in all their generations, are interesting to Him? This is plainly revealed, “The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him.” They are not all Israel that are of Israel, neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children. They must have Abraham’s faith as well as Abraham’s blood. It may be said that we have not Abraham’s blood; this is true, but we know that by the hand of the apostles God visited the Gentiles to take out from amongst them a class who should be adopted into Abraham’s family, on the principle of faith. We have been included in the operation of this principle through the knowledge and belief and obedience of the gospel, so that, as Paul says, “Ye are grafted upon the good olive tree, and are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the household of God.” If, then, we are objects of God’s favor, we are included in His eyes in the phrase, “My people,” and “Jerusalem.” As the brethren of Christ, we stand directly related to Jerusalem, for he is its king, and we are its children. We are comprehended in the words of Isaiah 66, “Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her; rejoice ye for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her.” To call upon people that mourn to rejoice may seem strange, but the strangeness vanishes before the reason. “Ye shall be delighted with the abundance of her glory, for thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a

flowing stream. As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you, and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem."

Let us open our minds, then, to the sweet adjuration of Isa. 40, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." The present time is evil and troublous, but the future is bright with glory. "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Or, as it is more definitely said, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but Yahweh shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising."

In the presence of these glorious outlinings of the future, we are apt to feel the present to be a languishing and dispiriting affair. No wonder, for it is so in itself, and nothing else; but in this it is not strange; it is in the programme. It is the very background of the picture of glory shown to us in Isa. 40, for what is the proclamation there made as the adjunct of its exhibition? "All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth." While groaning under the vanity, let us not despair, nor give in to its oppressiveness. The word of our God shall stand for ever. This confidence is rooted in our confidence in God Himself. God Himself is exhibited before us in this chapter as the ground and rock of our hope. "To whom will ye liken Me?" He asks. He asks this after appealing to the underived wisdom and power that have organized heaven and earth. "Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being His councillor hath taught Him? With whom took He counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of judgment, or showed unto Him the way of understanding?" He carries the appeal to a still higher altitude. "Lift up your eyes on high and behold; who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number, not one of which faileth, because He is strong in power." He then declares Himself, "The everlasting God who fainteth not, neither is weary, and there is no searching of His understanding;" and upon this ground the inspiriting declaration that they who wait upon Him will renew their strength when all human power fails. "They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and walk and not faint."

What hinders our perfect rest on those great and precious promises? Is it not an evil heart of unbelief, against which Paul puts us on our guard? This evil heart of unbelief is a piece of native barbarism. Ignorance belongs to uninstructed human brains. A baby is born without knowledge, and will continue without knowledge up to manhood and hoar hairs if it come not within range of its enlightening touch. This is true of natural things; how much more of spiritual? Spiritual things are based on knowledge as much as natural; hence it is that we find John in our New Testament reading introducing the gospel which he and his fellow apostles had to preach as "That



which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life." Again he says, "which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." This you see, is a matter of actual knowledge, the truth of which is beyond all question when the facts are considered. First of all are the words of John, as proved by the fact that they have been in the hands of Christians from the very day they were written. There has always been a numerous community, true or false, since the day the apostles went out as Christ's witnesses, in obedience to Christ's command. This community has always from that time been a numerous body. There has therefore been from the very beginning a multitude of witnesses to the fact of these words being John's words. It might seem as if the mention of a false church weakened the argument, but in truth it makes it stronger, for these false churches in various parts of the world have been jealous of each other, and have watched each other in the quotation of apostolic words, in defence of their several crotchets, and have therefore been a check upon each other, as regards the preservation of the actual words written by John and the other apostles, from which it has come to pass that whether you look at the New Testament in the Nestorian Church, or the Greek Church, or the Armenian Church, or the Roman Catholic Church, it is the same.

Being John's words, the next question is, "Are they true?" "Did he see and hear and handle Christ?" If he had been alone in the matter, there might have been some room to doubt, but he was only one of many who said and wrote the same thing, most of whom gave to subsequent generations the indubitable pledge of their sincerity in the matter by submitting to death. It did not require this to prove the sincerity of their words, for the enterprise to which they devoted their lives was pledge enough in itself. This enterprise was to turn men from darkness to light, from sin to righteousness, in hope of the manifestation of the glory of God, at the coming of Christ. None but sincere men could take part in such an enterprise, and therefore there is every pledge of which the case is susceptible, that we are in the presence of the simple truth, when we read that "God was manifest in Christ," by whom God performed many signs and wonders, concluding with the crowning one of raising him from the dead after his crucifixion.

Thus we go back to Isaiah 40, and open our eager mouths to drink the refreshing water of life in the thirsty desert, waters of comfort and strength. "Comfort ye my people." There is nothing that comforts so much as good tidings, and here it is nothing but good tidings poured into our ears. "O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain. O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, and be not afraid. Behold the Lord God will come with a strong hand. His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. He shall feed His flock like a shepherd. He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and gather them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."

Are we faint and weary and desolate? Often, no doubt most of us are, but let us never give in to the feeling that this experience is strange or unnatural or out of place. We may sometimes chide ourselves by reason of our misery, as it were; this is only needlessly adding to our affliction. All the children of God have been oppressed by the insufficiency of fainting, failing human nature. Even David, whose voice we know embodies the voice of Christ, had to rally himself in God in the midst of his distress. "Whom have I in Heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." We are not the first whose feelings could only be expressed by the powerful expletive: "O wretched man that I am." The very prince of the apostles had to confess that he groaned within himself under the weary burden of imperfect human nature. But in the midst of his misery he rejoiced because of its spiritual pressure forcing him to rest on the only consolation that truly exists for man, the consolation associated with the prospect so beautifully painted in these words, "These are they that have come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple, and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more; neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them unto living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Rev. 7:14-17).

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## The Man of Sorrows

*The exciting times — they began in his sacrifice — the work of the angels — the great example to believers — the coming return of the Master as judge and king.*

**W**E are called upon this morning to consider Jesus in the particular aspect in which he is presented to us in the emblems spread upon the Table. We are invited to look a very long way back, through the dim distance of 1,800 years, to the time when Jesus was in the flesh — when he was a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" — learning obedience by the things which he suffered, submitting to humiliation and death, in order that he might lay the foundation of the glorious state of things which we are now permitted in him to hope for. But it seems highly probable it will not be long before we and the world at large, will have to look upon him in a very different aspect indeed. How remarkable that exactly between 1866 and 1868 the Roman question should be the great question of the day — a

thing that all who have even given any attention to prophecy have been expecting at this period, for hundreds of years, viz. that things should take such a course as would in the present epoch end off the career of the Papacy.

That is just the thing that is now in everybody's mouth — the expectation, prediction of every politician, the prediction of every newspaper editor and correspondent — that the Pope's dominion can no longer last. Of course, the Pope is of no consequence to us; he is the head of a system to which every son of God, is an object of hate and execration. The Papacy is a mockery, a refuge of lies, the hold of every foul spirit. The great fact that makes its history and destiny interesting to us is that the expiration of the period allotted to its dominion, marks the epoch when we may at any time expect the return of this "man of sorrows." About that there is no mistake; for in Dan. 7, where the matter is more strikingly presented than perhaps in any other part of the Bible, we find that the little horn of the fourth beast prevailed until the Ancient of Days came; and the period of his domination is measured by what we know to represent a period of 1,260 years. The end of this period is marked by this, that "the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end; and the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High." This is the thing that makes current events interesting to us, because we see in the present state of Europe the same prognostication of the approach of the time when the prediction of Daniel shall be fulfilled. The particular course that events may take, is not permitted us to know; all that we get in the vision is simply a broad outline. We have the symbols of the four great dominions that have existed on the earth, but there is nothing to represent the details involved in the setting up of one and the casting down of another. You do not, in the vision, see the causes which led to the transitions represented. So in the present, it is enough for us to see the broad course of events. All we do know and expect is that at this time, the Papal supremacy will come to an end, and that afterwards the Ancient of Days will soon be manifested in the person of Jesus.

We have been singing about "the Man of sorrows" in the Garden of Gethsemane. There the work began. In that dark and bitter hour, he laid the foundation of the mighty triumph which he is shortly to effect in the earth. "He bowed beneath the sins of men" even to the grave; but he rose again, and went away to heaven, and has been away all this time; so long that men have forgotten him, except as a worthless tradition. But we, thanks to God's unmerited favor, have had our attention called back to the truth concerning him, and are waiting in silence, in quietness and patience, for his return from heaven. Are we worthy of this position? Are we quite ready to go and meet him, with the account which every one of us will have to render? James indicates the principle of readiness, in the chapter read, James 1. He says, "Be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves; for if

any be a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." Now that is very plain and simple, there is no mistaking the meaning of it. The "perfect law of liberty" is to be found in the Bible. Jesus says, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free;" that is to say, the unfolding of God's mind to us in the various matters made known to us in the Bible constitutes the law of liberty. What we have to do, is to look into it, and not to forget what we read. A great deal depends upon memory, in reference to salvation; in fact, it is true what was once said by Dr. Thomas, "that salvation is very much a matter of good memory." To "orthodox" ears, this would seem a most irreverent remark; but it is exactly true. Proof of it you will find in 1Cor. 15:2, and Heb. 3:6. Both these agree with James when he says, that "the man is blessed who is not a forgetful hearer of the Word." But some may say that some persons have good memories, and some bad ones, by natural constitution. The answer to this is, that everybody has a good memory for what they give their attention to, and what they like. Nobody forgets the house he lives in, no one forgets his friends; no one ever forgets the money that is owing to him. Why? Because these things are continually under cognizance, seen by the eyes or heard by the ears. Now the reason the majority of people are forgetful hearers of the Word is because they are not constant readers of it. They do not "continue" in this law; they allow themselves to be diverted by the ephemeral things of life, from the important business of making themselves familiar with God's Word, by reading. They are without excuse. They plead bad memories, but they forget they have the power of making a good one. They have a good memory for what they continually busy themselves about. This is a universal rule. Do you think anybody would have a good memory for Greek or Algebra if they did not apply themselves with diligence? People dive into musty and intricate studies to qualify themselves for a good position in society. In this way they make a memory for learning and gain their object. So it must be with us. We must qualify ourselves for the great future, by studying day and night those disclosures of the divine mind which have been preserved in the record for our benefit. We must be diligent readers of the Bible, and thus we shall gain a good and serviceable memory of all that God would have us to remember, viz., the truth concerning Christ and His will concerning us. In this way we shall stand ready for the summons which may at any time come forth. When Christ sends for us, very likely the message will come by the hands of an angelic visitor. The angels have always been used in times past in the furtherance of divine arrangements. They had much to do with the first advent of Christ, with his birth, his sufferings, and his resurrection. And we know that at his Second Appearing, he will be accompanied by a multitude of them. Now this may happen any day. Suppose you are sitting quietly by the fireside at night, the labors of the day completed, and you think of going to

bed, how shall you feel if all of a sudden, a beautiful and dignified visitor presents himself with the intimation "he is come and calleth for thee?" It will all depend upon the disposal you have been making of your time, your money and your strength. What sort of a day have you been spending? You have been exceedingly troubled, and taken up with the business of the hour. You have been in a ferment of discontent. You have been very angry with somebody. You have neglected your reading. You thought something else more important than the meeting. You have not been thinking about Christ at all; have not been doing anything for him — how shall you feel? Very much abashed, very much frightened, paralyzed with consternation.

But let us suppose the case stands the other way. You are depressed with sorrow. You have had a hard fight. You have been harassed in a variety of ways; but you have done your duty. You have snatched your reading in the midst of the pressure of life's duties; you have given your countenance to the work done for Christ. You have preferred his assemblies to private or worldly pleasure. You have done what you could to promote his service in the proclamation of the Truth, the visitation and comfort of the lambs of his flock, and in the relief of his poor... You are grieved at the triumph of Christ's enemies, the faithlessness and unconcern of those who profess his name, and it may be at your own shortcomings hindering you in the race. The pressure of individual circumstances bow you down. Your pocket may be empty, because of what you considered it your duty to do. In tears you pour out your complaint before God, and that messenger comes to you. How shall you feel? You shall feel as no language can express; you will not be filled with ecstasy, because the judgment has to pass before you know your lot; but you will feel a calm relief from the knowledge that there is nothing in the present state worth living for and that your inmost desires and highest aspirations are towards the things that are of God. Joy, mixed with fear, will fill your heart, to know that God has taken the work in hand Himself. You go to the Judgment Seat, and whom do you meet there? Why, the man who, above all others, has been for a lifetime the cherished ideal of your heart — an ideal implanted there by the Truth, and which has been growing sharper in outline, dearer to the affections, more real to the assurance and consciousness as years roll by. You see him after whom your soul longs, in whom you have confided all your hope, and for whom you have risked all your interests. Shall you be afraid now? You will tremble, because a righteous man has a deep sense of the greatness and the holiness of God. You will feel in that presence like Daniel in the presence of the angel. But listen, "O man greatly beloved, be strong, and be of good courage." Who would not labor for such a result? It is not too late for us to mend, to become devoted, to throw our soul into the things that belong to Christ.

## "I Believe God that it shall be even as it was told Me"

*The angel's message to the apostle Paul — the danger of the voyage — hearing the voice of God — the imminence of death — the absolute certainty of divine protection.*

A FEW weeks back we looked at the account of Paul's shipwreck, as recorded in Acts, and found some profitable reflections arising to us from the mere existence of such a record. Like the extruding vein of ore on the mountain side, we found when we followed it up that it led us into a whole mine of treasure. Paul's shipwreck led us to Paul's Master in glory, and gave us fortifying conviction of the truth of the proclamation which John heard in Patmos; "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for ever more." Leading us to Paul's Master it leads us to Paul's motives, aims and principles. The interval of time that separates us from Paul himself has in no way altered the power or bearing of these.

In the course of the storm, an incident occurred that yields a principle we may profitably apply. We are told that when "neither sun nor stars for many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away." We may suppose that Paul himself shared in this hopelessness. He had no certain knowledge of the mode in which his apostolic labors would end. So far as he was concerned, a watery grave would have been as acceptable and appropriate, as the executioner's block; and to this he may have supposed he had now come, unless he inferred from the Lord's intimation to him at Jerusalem that he must testify at Rome (Acts 23:11), that he must survive the voyage. At all events, whatever his fears and feelings may have been, they received a perfect quietus from an angelic visit towards the end of the disastrous voyage. The angel stood by him during the night and said, "Fear not, Paul, thou must be brought before Caesar, and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee."

This may help us to realise the potency of Spirit power. If ever there is a time when spiritual things seem unreal, it is during a storm at sea; amid the howl of the tempest; the rage of the waters; the reel and lurch of the helpless vessel; the cold and wet and confusion among those on board, who, with chattering teeth and failing heart, await with prayer and patience the subsidence of the elements. At such a time our poor, weak faith is liable to fall like a lifeless bird to the bottom of its cage. But here, an angel stands by Paul in the midst of it all; the storm no impediment to his arrival at the vessel. A storm is but air in motion, though impressing frail mortals so much; and there is something more subtle and powerful than air. The rushing waters and flying

foam are no distraction to his mind or message; the perilous position of the ship no discouragement to his clear sight and confidence. The Spirit of God underlies all elements and all phenomena, and this messenger is Spirit, and can even make the storm his chariot to bear him onward on his journey. It is but at any time a question of the will of the Almighty Father, who is Spirit, and at whose command are legions of these His angels who excel in strength. Our lot falling in an age when God's open work is momentarily suspended (as declared beforehand), leaves us a prey to the impressions and fears of feeble sense. But let understanding have the sway. God can take care of us in the darkness and the storm without appearing to do so. And His purpose will come gloriously forth to a triumphant issue at last, whatever darkneses and inefficiencies and aberrations may afflict human experiences in this age of sin.

Having received the message, Paul presents himself before the ship's company, with cheerful look, and after a pardonable allusion to their blindness in not seeing the wisdom of the advice he had given them against undertaking the voyage some fortnight before, he says, "Now I exhort you to be of good cheer for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you but of the ship; for there stood by me this night the angel of God whose I am and whom I serve, saying" (and he repeated the message). "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me." Now here is confidence in spite of appearances. The storm had in no degree abated. The heavens were still a mass of ominous grey; the gale still roared at its height; the sea still raged like a caldron, with unbroken fury; the vessel still creaked and groaned and labored among the breaching waves. In spite of it all, Paul is confident and tranquil; on what ground? "I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me."

It requires no particular ingenuity to apply this to our own situation. Here we are in the midst of an evil state, in which, so far as what is actually going on in the earth is concerned, there is no ray of promise in the darkness. The nations are walking after their own ways without any apparent regulation of their proceedings from above, and without any natural prospect that there will ever be anything different than the chaotic collision of "mights" evolving artificial and scarcely definable "rights." Generation follows generation to the grave without the apparent indication of any coming adjudication and discrimination of the righteous from the wicked. Life all over the earth is a weary tale of early hopes blighted, youthful aspirations disappointed, philosophic theories mocked, poetic ideals quenched in bitterness and gloom. Bright youth dulls into sober manhood, which, in its turn withers into the impotence and decay of old age. Ineffective life made a thousandfold more a failure by bad social and political arrangements, is harried with care, and clouded with disappointments, till a quiet grave in the cemetery or in the depths of the sea, ends the scene, and bears witness to the truth of the Preacher's verdict, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

This is life as it actually is before our eyes. Yet here are we with tranquil hearts, and on the whole, gladsome faces. What is the secret of our serenity? It is to be found in the words of Paul, which every earnest man and woman here present can utter as their own — “I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.” None of us has had a message personal to himself; but we have had a message that is personal to all who choose to listen to it. That message is as much a fact as any of the facts to which I have referred. The Bible is as much an element of the human situation as death itself. It can no more be obliterated from human history than pain, or the Pope, or Mahomet. It is coeval in its present form with all the turmoils of the last 1,800 years. It is a great public institution which has had powerful public modifying effects in the national and racial evolutions of eighteen centuries past. It is its own witness to everyone acquainted with it, and able to discern between things that differ, that it is of God. Its literary fabrication alone is inexplicable on any hypothesis of its being due to human motives, designs or conceptions. Its character defies classification with human productions, Jewish or Gentile. It is of a piece with the grandeur and perfection of nature. It stands immovable, like the primeval rocks, offering a passive but indomitable resistance to the fretful waves of hostility that dash over it from age to age.

Even if we were ignorant of all external confirmations, we have in itself an all-sufficient evidence of the divinity of its voice. But the external confirmations are complete, and leave no room for uncertainty in the convictions of those who are able to discern the bearings of evidence. The establishment of the Christ faith in the earth, the existence and position of the Jews, the history of the world in its correspondence with Bible prophecy, the character of Christ as drawn by men confessedly illiterate (and the most learned of men could not have conceived of such a character, still less depicted it with such simple, majestic power), the nature of Christian doctrine and precepts, are all so many powerful witnesses to the same fact — not only in their cumulative force, but taking them one by one, there is not one of them capable of a rational solution, apart from the divinity of the events and influences leading up to the production of the Bible.

Discerning this, then, the Bible is to each of us the voice of God as much as was the angel's voice to Paul that stormy night, and because of this we are able, like him, to be cheerful in the storm, and to ask our fellow-voyagers to be of good cheer also. The sky is dark and the sea is rough, but we are full of confidence as to the issue of the voyage, because we can say, “I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me.” We see mankind sunk in ill-being through their vain attempts to manage their own affairs. We see history one long futile struggle continuing to the present hour, and threatening, by all present appearances, to be interminable. We say, “This will not last.” We say, “This age of human failure will come to a close.” We say, “God will interfere;



God will destroy the kingdoms of men all over the world; God will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed; God will give laws that no parliament will be asked to sanction; God will set up institutions that will owe no part of their existence of human legislation. God will send Christ to do this, and Christ will associate with himself in the work tried and righteous men of all ages past; made immortal and efficient for the work like himself. Under their righteous and irresistible reign, all nations will be blessed; war and poverty will cease; righteousness and universal joy will take the place of the vast clouds of despondency and misery that cover all the earth." We are enabled to indulge this glorious prospect, and to endure with calmness the present evil world because we can say — "I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me."

We see death reign with indiscriminating power. The man who fears God sickens and dies, and is buried, equally with the man who neither fears God nor regards man. The man whose mind is rich with the golden sunshine of faith, and whose life is beautiful with the many variegated compliances with the beautiful commandments of God, descends to sheol equally with the man all blighted and frost-bitten with unbelief, and whose life is hideous with selfishness and unmercy. The man who is a blessing in the midst of his kind, with kindly word cheering the desolate, and more kindly act alleviating the sufferings of weakness and misfortune, who sheds some light in the gloom, and causes some soothing in the affliction so far as it is in the power of mortal man — such a man at last becomes food for worms as well as the human monster who increases bitterness among men by his churlish speeches and merciless ways. We say "There will be an end to this; things will wear a very different complexion by-and-by. There will be an hour upon earth when the grave will give up its dead; when a divine tribunal will be erected; when men shall receive in body according to what they have done." "Then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not." God will cause every man present on that occasion to find according to the way he has followed in this evil state. You will see shame, fear, dismay, suffering, rejection and disgrace judicially dealt out in terrible tribulation and anguish. Those who have followed wickedness — sent away to ultimate death from the presence of the glorious Judge. You will see joy and confidence, glory and honor, beauty and immortality conferred by the same smiling and glorious hand on the beaming multitude of the righteous to whom the earth and the future, yes, heaven and all things, belong. You will then see the meaning of the present trial, lowliness, absence of all apparent difference between the righteous and the wicked. Discerning this now we are able to endure with patience and good cheer. Our happiness is due to the promises of God. We are blessed in being able to say — "We believe God, that it shall be even as it hath been told us."

We see life a doleful failure in all important respects at present. Youth rejoices; folly makes loud mirth; but age groans, and in much wisdom is much grief. The whole multitude of the living unite at last in a common verdict — “There is nothing in it, I would not live always.” The depressing picture loses its dreariness in the light of the truth. We are able to say to friends around (though we speak in the ears of the deaf), “There will yet be upon earth a life that will be worth living; youth that will not fade; joy that will not wither; strength that will not diminish; pleasures that will not pall on the appetite; personal comeliness, intellectual nobility, and moral loveliness on which the lapse of endless ages will produce no impression. When this gladsome vision is established in all the earth, there will be multitudes to rejoice in the perpetual feast; and you will find nowhere upon earth the present dreary spectacle of sad, blighted and ineffective forms of life.” “No more curse, no more death means the disappearance of wan cheeks, lustreless eyes, empty minds, despairing hearts and their causative accompaniments of empty pockets, squalid homes, unclean persons, and mal-development of body and mind. “The former things will have passed away, and all things will have become new.” We are able to proclaim the joyful news, because we can say — “We believe God, and it shall be as it hath been told us.”

Finally we look into our own hearts and lives, and find there many aches and voids and disfigurements. This body of death is a heavy load to carry about. Our souls cleave to the dust. A murky atmosphere often obscures the sun. Our desires are towards the remembrance of the high and lofty One, in whose hand our breath is and whose are all our ways. We yearn to bless, and see blessed, the blighted population of our fellowmen. We aspire to moral heights and to intellectual brilliances, which we can only now and then see afar off, in the rifts of heavy laden clouds. In this we groan, being every way burdened and held down. But we are able to indulge in right good cheer in the midst of the gloom. We are able to say confidently, “This afflicted state is but for a moment; the moment of deliverance will come.” The Lord Jesus, who is our life, will return to the scene, and in the twinkling of an eye, we shall roll up the burden of corruption and death. This mortal shall put on immortality. The day of cloud will then pass for ever away. The fogs, mists and damps, and chills, of this dark night will roll away before the powerful sunrise, and we shall bathe and rejoice in the clear blue of heaven, over-arching the scene with gladness, to the utmost encircling horizon. Our dim eyes will see; our longing hearts will swell with pure delight in God; our fellowship all cramped and long restrained in this terrible night, will burst forth in mighty gladness, on the right hand and on the left, to all the sons of God. “O, glorious day! Hasten thy tardy light hitherward.” “We believe God, that it shall be even as it hath been told us.”

## "Take unto you the Whole Armor of God"

*Spiritual armor — recognizing the enemy — the danger of Sin — fortifying against the world — the power of sacrifice — the things that strengthen faith — putting on the whole armor — the day of deliverance.*

WE are all acquainted with Paul's exhortation, "Take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day." There are several things suggested by this upon which it may be profitable to rest for a few moments. It is, of course, a figure, but none the less clear in its application — perhaps more clear than if the lesson had been expressed plainly, especially as Paul lets us into his meaning by speaking of the armor in detail. He speaks of loins girt about with truth, of a breast plated with righteousness, feet sandalled with the Gospel, also of a shield of faith, an helmet of salvation, and a sword of the Spirit.

We need not engage ourselves with these details. It might be interesting to follow the various analogies to these weapons in the accoutrement of the spiritual man. It is sufficient for the present purpose that we recognize the general meaning of the armed state used thus in figure. It means a fortified state of the mind, as to which there are two leading ideas to lay hold of, of a very vital bearing. This exhortation presupposes that we need to be armed. The experience of us all must convince us of the truth of this. The absence of mental armor means certain death in the battle we are fighting. It is a very real and earnest battle. It's not a fancy or a talk. It is not a dream, but a life and death conflict with foes, whereof the end is fatally sure with those who do not overcome. Our foes are of different shapes and sizes, but they all work to the same tragic end, they all aim to edge us over the fearful precipice, at the bottom of which lie the splintered bones and bespattered blood of millions.

There is first the sentence of death in ourselves, which we bring into the world with us, and which is slowly but surely working out its appointed end with us every hour of the day. If this constitutional bent is left to itself, it will as surely in the long run consign us to eternal oblivion as the boat floating down Niagara's tide will go over the falls at last. If it is not fought it will infallibly prevail against us, and send us away. It is a dragon monster waiting with jaws outstretched ready to devour, and it will certainly have its prey if it is not conquered. There is a way of fighting it. It has a weak spot on the head, and a certain royal weapon can find this out. In Christ only can we overcome the death that has passed on all men by Adam's disobedience; compliance with his directions only — submission to the Gospel alone — will give us the victory here.

But there are other foes more deadly. Such is the one called the old man. This covers our whole nature in its native propensities. Left to itself, this will draw us to death more certainly than the one which presents at the very start of the journey. "The carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." This carnal mind will lead us to disobedience; and we know that the way of disobedience is the way of death. We all have this carnal mind at the bottom. We know what it is. It is the state of mind which the human faculties left to themselves produce.

In its purest state, we see it in the barbarian, who has been brought up without tutoring and without law, and who is like the beasts that perish. In a slightly diluted state, we see it in half civilized nations, and more or less, in men of all nations among whom a true civilization does not exist anywhere. The natural mind is the fundamental bias even with men who have become subject to the law of God. Its affinities are a great trouble to such, as witness Paul's lamentations of his wretchedness from this very cause, in Rom. 7. Paul labored to keep it at bay (cp. 1Cor. 9:27) and labored successfully, as we know from his last words, but men who are not engaged in this war, a war with themselves, bringing the natural mind into subjection to the law of God — have no chance at all of victory. Instead of overcoming they will assuredly be overcome, and thrown into the ditch.

Then there are enemies in a more concrete form. There is an evil heart of unbelief which stupidly and insultingly insists upon seeing before believing, and is not quite sure then. This is a great enemy. Without faith it is impossible to please God. If a man will not honor God by taking Him at His attested Word, God has no pleasure in him, and He will cast him aside finally as of no use to Him. The pleasure of God is the ultimate standard of existence, a true doctrine but hard to be received in a generation which, above all things, has forgotten that man exists for God, and not God for man; "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor, and power, for Thou hast created all things and for Thy pleasure they are and were created." If God take no delight in a man, a man is undone; and God taketh no delight in men who know and recognize Him not. "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in them that hope in His mercy," "in such as keep His covenant and do His commands."

Then there is the case of ignorance and the pleasantness of folly; a man who lays down his sword in their presence will be taken prisoner to his destruction. Then there is the love of the present world which is natural with all; the love of the praise of men; the love of money; "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life." All these and many other snares and temptations, such as plausible friends of carnal mind, lie in the way as so many robbers and beasts of prey to destroy the unwary. It is no very extravagant figure which speaks of the conflict with these as a battle. A battle sore and fierce it is; and the victory is not easily won, but the victory is possible. It is a question of the

right equipment, and the right use of the weapons. Without equipment, there is no chance at all. Equipment is the first essential. In this conflict, a man with a mind unfortified has no more chance than a man without armor on the field of battle.

In what does this mental fortifiedness consist? Dismissing all circumlocution, it is that state of clear certainty with regard to all the things of God which Paul expresses by the phrase — "the full assurance of faith." "This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith." How true is this. Faith is strength in every matter with which man can have to do. Let a man but have faith in what he is doing, and he will work with a heartiness and an earnestness and a perseverance that will be entirely lacking from the efforts of a man who doubts. Whether it be the sinking of a mine, the working of a commercial concern, the floating of a ship, or the simple earning of wages, if a man's faith is shaken, his mind is in the state described by Solomon "like a city broken down and without walls." His heart will gradually sink, his efforts will flag, and finally work will stop.

It is so in the Truth to which we are called by the Gospel. Let a man have full assurance of faith — let him be quite certain that there is a God in heaven — the God revealed to Israel who has created and upholds all things in heaven and earth; let him be quite certain that Jesus, whom Pontius Pilate crucified, has risen from the dead and is now alive, as Paul affirmed; let him be quite certain that this Jesus is at God's right hand as a mediator between God and man to dispense the forgiveness of sins, and that he is coming anon to be the judge of the living and the dead, to give to every man according as his work shall be — a place in the kingdom of God with glory, honor and immortality, or a shameful rejection from the presence of outraged love to perish miserably in the judgments that will break up the present evil world — let a man be quite certain on all these matters and the many glorious details involved, and he will walk with a firm step through this pilgrimage and fight with a strong arm in the conflict which all have to wage. He will pursue a thorough and a steady and an unflinching course, as Christ's servant, with all the heartiness and resolute enthusiasm of Paul, who said — "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3:8). He will be enabled to accept the consequences without wavering — yes, with glad fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. He will glory in his extrusion from a society that rejects Christ and in his ostracism in the midst of a world walking in the pride of life. "By him (Christ), the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." "The love of Christ constraineth me because I thus judge that if Christ died for all, then all died (with him) that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto him that died and rose again."

But let a man have doubt, it is evident he will be very weak-kneed on all

these things. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" will sound plausible with him. He will hesitate about sacrifice of any kind. He will take zeal for Christ very mildly, and will have far more sympathy for the world and worldly men than for those who go in heartily for the service of Christ. He will be easily led by his own natural mind in all questions and bearings. He will, in fact, be an easy prey to the many adversaries at which we glanced at the beginning. Being unarmed, he is quickly made prisoner, and marched off to the miserable end that waits all the servants of the devil.

It is manifest therefore that an armed state of mind — a fortified state of mind — a state of confidence and assurance in the faith of Christ is the first qualification for a successful conflict with the foes we have to encounter in fighting our way to eternal life. This being so, it is easy to see the wisdom of the exhortation to "put on" this armor. A good deal is implied in this. It shows that much depends upon our own resolute effort. This, indeed, is manifest in all the scriptures, and shown to us by every day's experience. No greater harm has popular theology done than the spiritual lethargy it has brought upon the people by its doctrine that we have to do nothing. The apostolic writings are full of the opposite doctrine. They are full of robust and breezy exhortation to put on, to put off, to beware, to take heed, to endure, to weary not, to fight, to overcome, to grow. The only apparent exception is where Paul says, "It is God that worketh in you to will and to do of His good pleasure;" but it is a misunderstanding that makes this look like an exception. Paul states the fact as a reason why they should "work out their own salvation with fear and trembling."

If the common construction of it were right, it would be a reason tending in the opposite direction; for if God be working in us in the direct sense understood by the popular sentiment, it would be a reason why we should be the less concerned to do the work ourselves. But Paul's aim was to encourage the brethren by the recollection of the fact that the whole work to which they were invited by the Gospel, as the power of God, was of God's own appointment, and could not fail of its results if they faithfully did their part. It was not like the bootless labor of men who put forth their strength in matters of human devising, which could end only in vanity and vexation of spirit.

If, then, we are put on the armor which is to enable us to withstand in the evil day, does it not amount to this, that we are to make it a matter of vigilant policy to follow those things that strengthen faith, and avoid those that have the tendency to weaken it. There cannot be a reasonable demur to this proposition. But there is a great deal of unreasonable demur, and it is because of this that we must be on our guard. A friend may be the worst foe we have, if he give us evil counsel on this head and there are such foes. It is for men in earnest to resist the devil, even if he come in the guise of a friend with spiritual professions. There are things that strengthen faith, and things

which weaken it. Daily reading of the Scriptures strengthens faith; the reading of Scripturally-minded books strengthens faith; attendance at the meetings strengthens faith; faith is also strengthened by works of goodness (i.e. circulating the testimony in some shape or form, comforting the afflicted, succouring the poor), and by prayer. The company of godly men strengthens faith. Meditation in solitude, with the mind well stored in these various ways, has the same effect.

Things that weaken faith are very ready to our hand. Our own inertness is a very fruitful seed-bed of faith-choking tares. Take the Bible in what some people call “moderation,” a dip in when you feel like it, and not at all if you are in no mood; read novels by the hour; leave books on the Truth alone, as a kind of superfluous reading, for you who happen to “know the Truth,” and only fit for handing to the stranger; go to the meetings of the brethren only now and then. As for works of self denial, in the way of blessing uninteresting people at a sacrifice leave that to canting fanatics and morose enthusiasts, take a turn at the theatre instead and mix freely with the gay and intelligent world; receive and reciprocate and encourage the friendship of interesting people, without any reference to their attitude towards the Lord of the universe — in fact take and enjoy your liberty without stint, following habits of all pleasant kinds without reference to apostolic rules of judgment, do all those things and faith will die, and nothing will be left of the new man but his stark and staring skeleton. Following such a course is reversing the apostolic rule of conduct. It is putting off the whole armor of God that ye may certainly fall in that evil day. NO, dear brethren, as you value your acceptable standing with Christ in the day of his coming, shut your ears with invincible determination to all preaching of such a liberty. We have been called to liberty, but not such liberty as this, not a liberty to serve the flesh. If we are free men in our relation to men and systems, we are the Lord’s bondservants, to live for him and in obedience to him in the midst of a crooked, perverse, flesh-serving generation.

Listen only to the voice of Eternal Wisdom which says — “Put on,” array yourselves with, take pains to provide and assume the whole armor of God. Obeying this exhortation, you will stand strong for the battle. With the breastplate of righteous living, the shield of faith — fortified mind, the helmet of Yahweh’s apprehended salvation, and the Spirit sword fittingly wielded in the recollection and right application of Yahweh’s written Word of Truth, you will be enabled to vanquish every foe, and to cut your way through the environing crowds of rebeldom into the glorious and applauding presence of the King — that is, if you use your armor. This is the last of the many beautiful points of truth suggested by Paul’s armor-simile. It is not sufficient that we be armed. The armor is for use. Soldiership in Christ is not a passive attitude; defence is only one of its functions. Its principal part is the

## SEASONS OF COMFORT

part of aggression, to fight, to make war. It is necessary that we have an enlightened eye on this as on all other points. Our case will be a failure if having equipped ourselves thoroughly in the heavenly armor, we stand supinely in the presence of the enemy, watching or parleying with him; still worse, making friends with him.

Our business is to quit ourselves like good soldiers of Christ Jesus, as Paul exhorts; to fight the good fight; to give the enemy no quarter. Now, what does all this mean, but a state of earnest activity in the application of all our spiritual qualifications, to the purpose for which they are designed? It indicates the opposite of an idle, listless, indifferent, passive course. It indicates a spiritual habit the very reverse of those people who take the truth of God very easily, following only that which they "like," neglecting spiritual culture; praying not always, but never, and pouring cold water on all earnest endeavor, whether in reading, exhortation, or seed-sowing, as a matter of superfluity. It indicates a positive and aggressive mood in relation to everything that is obstructive of progress towards the Kingdom of God.

A man in such an attitude, a true soldier of Christ, is first very severe on his own natural man. He will say to himself frequently, as Jesus said to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." He will obey Christ's commands, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." Having thus made war upon and overcome himself, he will make war upon the cloud of Satanism environing him on every hand; a Satanism, in whatever form, to be easily identified by the peculiarity defined by Christ — savoring, sympathizing, not the things that be of God but those that be of men. He will attack the inertia of his surroundings; he will trouble the stagnant waters about him somehow; he will set agoing something that will exercise men's minds in a spiritual direction; and he will make it a habit to do this, at all appropriate times while he lives.

He will never ask — "What is the use?" It is his business, as a soldier under commission, to maintain war in the enemy's country, whether he can perceive or not the bearing of his individual performance on the general plan of the campaign. In this way he will "endure unto the end," without reference to the attitude of a living soul. If he find others of like mind and action, he will thank God for such help on the dreary field of battle; if he find nothing but disaffection and obstruction, he will resign himself to the fact as part of the bitterness of the evil day which is to end in unspeakable victory and joy. For like reasons, he will fight against every foe of righteousness. He will not only contend earnestly for the faith, but, if possible, still more earnestly for the obedience thereof in the observance of all things whatsoever Christ has commanded.

He will not be pugnacious or rude. He will not and must not strive; on the



contrary, he will be gentle unto all men; nevertheless, his deep seated enmity to all things opposed to God will glow like a fire under all the sweetnesses of an amiable deportment. His resolution will be indomitable, his principles invincible; his purpose unconquerable. Nothing will turn him aside from the only course that hath blessing in it for all the world.

Manifestly, such a state of warfare would be undesirable as a permanent condition of things. It is hard on human flesh and blood even for the brief spell of human probation, what would it be if a thing for ever? This cannot be. All things shall at the last be subdued unto the Son. There will be an end to all conflict when his whole work upon earth is finished. Glorious victory and everlasting peace await the end of the matter. It is with an eye on this that the good soldier of Christ Jesus is able to endure, and to persevere in that “patient continuance in well-doing” which God will honor with eternal life. It is the faith of this that enables us to overcome the world. And what a faith, not only glorious in its offered reward, but assured and certain in its truth! It is not a matter of cunningly devised fables. It is authenticated and demonstrated in every way such a matter in our circumstances admits.

Surrender to it! Give yourselves up to it with whole heart and whole soul. What is there apart from it? Does not all the world find the truth of Solomon’s declaration that human life at present is all “Vanity and vexation of spirit”? Does not the highest effort and the most splendid success end in the coffin? Can you keep this life by the most industrious endeavor to save it? Can you, by your utmost skill, eradicate the evil that tarnishes, degrades, and blights universal life? Vain is all human effort at deliverance. The ages roll, and man’s voice is hushed, and the best achievements of his wisdom all tend to decay and oblivion. Even the memory of the pyramid builder and the glory of Solomon vanish from the earth; how much more our petty individualities and our insignificant affairs.

There is deliverance under one banner only. The Captain of Salvation has sent his recruiting officers abroad. He will save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. Aim for a place in the immortal ranks of his glorified friends in the day of the 144,000. Enrol yourselves for the glorious polity of the age to come; and having enrolled yourselves in so glorious a service; having put on the uniform and armed yourselves for the fight, do not reconsider your position at all. Be like the Romans who burned their boats. Make retreat impossible. You have nothing to lose in reality; you have everything to gain. Hold fast your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.

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## A Year in Review

*Retrospection — God's law a true reflection — separation and the fruits thereof, or — in the counsel of the ungodly? — trees flourish near water — distress and mortality a short cut to glory — Sunrise — brightness a climax to wisdom's path.*

**T**HIS is a morning of beginnings, the beginning of a new year: it is the beginning of our system of daily Bible readings; it is a time naturally suggestive of reflection. We naturally look back and look forward; as we look back twelve months, each man and woman may profitably ask themselves whether the twelve months have been twelve months of progress, a twelve months of stagnation or a twelve months of positive going back — in spiritual attainment I mean, for no other attainment, though in its place important, can be placed in the balance with attainment in those qualifications that give peace and righteousness now and unutterable joy and well-being in the endless future that waits, whether we see it or not.

It is an enquiry that can only be conducted for each man by himself; he knows where he is, and how he is getting on; he does not deceive himself with the external appearances that may mislead beholders.

How we are getting on is a question of the measures we adopt, that determine the character of progress. A man of wise measures will become a man of wise attainment. What are wise measures in the case? How ought we to direct our steps so as to make sure that at the end of twelve months, we shall have drawn nearer the divine ideal and left increasingly behind the conditions of the mere natural man? We have a negative answer in the Psalm that has been read, and a positive one too, we will not misspend the time in dwelling for a moment upon these answers. The first answer tells us what we ought not to do, in order to attain to true blessedness. "Blessed is the man that walketh 'not' in the counsel of the ungodly, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful, nor standeth in the way of sinners." Here is walking, sitting, standing, employed to cover the whole attitude of life. The precept is so perfectly simple that the least intelligent can understand it. Everyone knows who the ungodly are — the scornful, the sinners, and everyone knows what it is not to walk in their principles, nor sit in their seat, nor stand in their way. The difficulty never has been in understanding what is meant, but the carrying out of what is meant. The carrying out of it is an inconvenient course of life and it is a course condemned by many plausible extollings of the opposite course. The course enjoined is condemned as uncharitable, narrow-minded; the opposite course is commended as enlightened and liberal; it is therefore a question who we are to obey — the Scriptures or the world — God or man.

Jesus speaks plainly on the necessity of separation. We all know the words which never can be too often repeated while we are in this weak probation: "Ye

are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own, but because ye are not of the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." Have we been chosen out of the world, brethren? If we have not, we are without hope. If we have, we must accept hatred and not yield to the temptation of trimming or concealing the colors, for the sake of being well thought of.

We know also those other words of God by Paul, "Come out from among them and be ye separate and I will receive you and ye shall be my sons and daughters saith the Lord God Almighty." We have heard this invitation, and have accepted it. If we have, we are, "separate" and must bravely accept the position however out of accord it may be with the cultured or uncultured, the scientific or unscientific, the educational or benighted temper of the country and age in which we live.

The positive feature of this class is stated with equal plainness; it is their feature when you find them, but you can scarcely find them. "Whose delight is in the Law of the Lord and in His law doth he meditate day and night." The word "law" has different meanings at different times but there is one meaning common to its use everywhere, namely, the Word of God as uttered for the guidance of man. He uttered one word for Israel's guidance; He has uttered another word for our guidance. Both are the Law of the Lord, and although the Law of Moses is a code not binding upon us, even the law of Moses has an allegorical foreshadowing of Christ, and has an expression of the highest conditions of human well-being. It is a profitable subject of meditation to the servants of God to the present day. Reduced to modern phraseology, the verse would read "Whose delight is in the Bible, and in the Bible doth he meditate day and night." How ill descriptive this is of the mass of professing Christians at least here in Birmingham, we know. We also know something of the actual accomplishment of this wisdom. There are thousands in the world who are reading the Bible with us by the Bible companion, and many, many are the testified cases in which they do so with delight. Has each believer here assembled done himself the honor and justice of adhering closely to this rule of life during the past twelve months? Probably the answer in most cases is an emphatic and hearty yes, but in some cases there may have been a failure; this is the time to look back upon the failure and to resolve that the coming twelve months shall be twelve months of daily Bible reading. By this only is it possible in an age like ours to be preserved from the evil that is in the world. We cannot come into contact with the mind of God in this age except in the Bible, all else is the mind of man, tricked out in much gaudy literary finery and deceptive promise. Nothing but bitterness and death can at last result from walking in the paths of darkness, however picturesque and entertaining they may be. The mind of God alone, accepted and imbibed and assimilated in the daily pondering of His testimonies, can give peace and joy even in this life, and as for the life to come, the argument there fails us altogether from its overpowering strength.

If the course of godliness is an inconvenient course, we have every incentive to pursue it. God never asks any man to do anything without applying an adequate motive in addition to the powerful motive that comes from the admiration and love for the Omnipotent wise and good Father of all. The Psalm refers to the incentive that lies before the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly. "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, which bringeth forth his fruit in his season, his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." This is the language of figure, but its meaning is too obvious to be misunderstood. We have little experience in our own humid country of the difference between a tree planted by a river and one not so. In the East, as travellers report, the difference is very noticeable; a tree planted in the neighborhood of a river is one growing, in a state of continued flourishing vigor, while one otherwise situated is liable to be stunted and sterile. In what sense is the godly man like a tree planted by a river? It has a present application, doubtless, in the continual peace and freshness of life, which belongs alone to those who make God their portion. But its ultimate application must be in the future; it is so placed in the Psalm by the contrast it makes with the ungodly. "They", it says, "Shall not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." It is, therefore, the day of the congregation of the righteous, and the overthrow of the wicked in judgment that is in contemplation. This being so, there is no difficulty in identifying the river, and the flourishing. It is the symbol used in the Apocalypse. A river proceeds from the throne of God in that symbolism. "A pure river 'of water of life,' clear as crystal." The trees planted by this river are the godly, who are in such vital relation to the eternal fountain of being, that they live and remain with the life and strength of God Himself, from whom they draw eternal vigor. Literally, it means that change to the immortal by the Spirit of God, of which we have so plain a promise in the apostolic epistles.

Consider, for a moment, what a desirable contrast such a state of being presents to that of our present experience. It is written, "the heart knoweth its own bitterness." We can truly say that every man is conscious of his mortal weakness and spiritual inefficiency. We all feel life to be an imperfect and a fleeting thing, and we see it so as we look around. There are some not present who were with us twelve months ago; where they are now, the registrar's record at the cemetery can tell; they have disappeared from the land of the living. There will be similar gaps this time next year, unless the Lord come; whose places will be empty, none can tell, it may be any of us, and once gone our little book is closed for ever, till re-opened in the presence of him who is the resurrection and the life.

To some people, this line of reflection seem lugubrious. To wisdom it ought not, and will not seem so. On the contrary, it imparts the only true cheer which can be thrown over our vain life. It takes away the gloom that otherwise belongs to mortal existence; it disperses the darkness that rests on

the whole human horizon apart from Christ; it gives us the power of sustaining the present evil with a subdued and steady and lasting cheer, and imparts to futurity a beckoning incentive which it totally lacks without God. It does in fact what Paul says concerning the mission of Christ, "delivers them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." It not only takes away the fear of death, but imparts to it a degree of desirability; for whatever reason a man may have for loving life is intensified a thousandfold by the prospect which death introduces to his consciousness with apparent instantaneity. Some people say they would like to live till the Lord comes. The spirituality of this sentiment would be more apparent if the sentiment were limited to a desire for the Lord to come. Analyse the feeling and you will find it has its root in the fear of death. Where faith and hope are strong, this fear is conquered, and replaced by a willingness for death at any time it may be the Lord will allow it. A cheerful willingness for it means an earlier realization of faith and hope than living till the Lord comes. It means the blotting out of the interval of which in death there is not a moment's consciousness. Let reason act here, and there will be but one verdict. It is because reason has so weak a hold on the mass of the people that most countenances fall blank and irresponsive when the idea is expressed. Living till the Lord comes means waiting in this dreariness for it; dying in the Lord means going to it without waiting. Who that is expecting a good thing, would not rather have it sooner than later? Who that is expecting to be called into a bright and joyous mansion among happy assembled guests, would not rather be called at once than left to stand out in the cold and the rain until the moment for their name to be mentioned? No man who realizes the absolute nonentity of death and the certainty of the glory to be revealed at the return of Christ can hesitate in the least about what heathenish men talk of as the leap in the dark. A leap into the darkness in a sense it certainly is, but only the darkness of a sound, dreamless sleep that is gone before we are aware, to be broken by the glorious sunrise.

Our New Testament reading shows us the nature of this sunrise. As in nature, so in the scheme of human redemption. God first made the sun to rule the day. He made the sun by His own power, that is, He made it out of His own strength or essence, as we might say. The sun is no product of magic — nothing is; it is popular theology that has taught that God made all things out of nothing — He made them out of Himself, and He is infinite. All things are the condensations, to use a plain term, of His own eternal invisible force, formed and guided by His wisdom. The Spiritual Sun we know is the Lord Jesus and in a higher sense his introduction is according to the same analogy of things. God has made him, and given us God Himself in him as we have read: "He shall be called Immanuel which is, being interpreted, God with us." The emphasis and definiteness and intensity of this truth are forced home upon us, time after time, in the sayings of Jesus and the expressions of all the Apostles. Jesus constantly besought his contemporaries to recognize the

Father in him and not to make the mistake of supposing that the power he manifested was his own. The apostles always exhibit him as possessing a name above every name, to which every knee must bow that God in Christ may be glorified. The sun that has risen therefore upon the night of our darkness is God Himself incorporate in His Son begotten of Mary. But the full glory of the sunrise is not yet revealed to our sight. The natural earth was enveloped in mist and darkness long after the natural sun was made; and the sun though in the heavens was not visible in the earth. "Darkness was on the face of the deep," so though the Sun of Righteousness has been planted in the heavens "darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the people." Not till Christ reappears will this darkness fly away. His appearing is the bright morning that will end the sleep of the saints — their short sweet sleep in every age and country which once ended, will end for ever. The morning's dawn will introduce the day of Christ, the day of the Lord, the day of salvation. David says, this is the day that the Lord hath made, the day in which he says "The righteous shall be glad." "I will pay my vows" saith he, "now, in the presence of all his people." This is the joyful feature — "in the presence of all his people." They will all be there of all time, of every state and country, not one wanting. There shall not enter in anything that defileth or that worketh abomination or that loveth or maketh falsehood. Brethren, shall we be there? We may hope for it; we are invited; the terms are not exclusive; they are not impossible; though involving present self-denial. The way is not impossible to walk in though 'tis narrow and thinly frequented. All the conditions are most reasonable, most beautiful and most sweet. God asks us to believe in Him, to have faith in His promises, to love Him, to glorify Him, to be reverently submissive to His appointments, to be obedient to His commandments and to be steadfast to the last in compliance with all these particulars. It is written "great peace have they that love Thy law." Can we not appeal to every man who answers to this description for confirmation? Nothing but peace and sweetness in the inner man comes from compliance with the ways of godliness. The perturbances toward men are the mere superficial sensations of the passing moment. "Godliness is profitable to the life that now is" in this respect as well as that which is to come.

Who would not then choose to walk in the way of blessedness sketched for us this opening day of the year, in this first of David's Psalms, and who having chosen this way, would not feel emboldened to persevere in it to the end, and who having once entered it and diverged through weakness or worldly pressure would not recover themselves from the folly of a way that leads to death, and resume the path that leads to the Holy City?

Wisdom can have but one answer to these questions and as those who are striving to be the children of wisdom, it is our part to be guided by her answer.

# The Blessedness of Forgiven Sin

*Emancipation — the foundation in God — realization of sin — immunity a matter of divine mercy and grace — let your light shine.*

**P**ORTION read: Psalm 32 — “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.” This is quoted by Paul in Rom. 4 as applicable to believers. Wherein consists the blessedness of forgiven sin? We must be able to answer this question to ourselves before we can enter into the sentiment. No man can count it to be a happy thing to be delivered from that which does not cause him distress. No one thinks it well to be delivered from that which does not trouble him. “Blessed is he whose sin is covered.” Sin — what is that? Disobedience to God. But have we attained to the state of feeling that disobedience to God is a source of unhappiness and trouble? It is manifest that no one can attain to this who has not attained to the knowledge of God. Paul says, “He that cometh unto God ‘must believe that He is,’ and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6).

Those to whom God is not a reality will never feel the distressfulness of sin. Here is the very foundation: that God is. We have been reminded this morning that we are “Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:20). But the statement points to another foundation — underneath? What is underneath the apostles, the prophets and Christ? This is a matter requiring the exercise of the understanding. Let us not be deterred from the exercise of the understanding in connection with spiritual things. Many people are so deterred by the systems of superstition from which we have been emancipated. God Himself commands us, “Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding.” Paul prays that the brethren might be filled with understanding (Col. 1:9). So let us exercise our understanding. In this exercise we look at the apostles, the prophets and Christ. We are enabled to look at them, because they have left us a monument that nothing can remove or conceal. They have left us the Scriptures. Impossible it is that anyone could have written these Scriptures except the apostles and prophets. How came they to write? How came they to speak? How came they to do the things that they did, which brought no gain to them at all? Whether we look at Christ, or John the Baptist, or any of the prophets, it is always the same: they suffered. We ask — Why? There is only one answer; and that brings us down to the foundation which is underneath them. Moses did not go to Egypt of his own accord. He did not want to go. God sent him. Jeremiah did not

want to prophesy. He said, "Ah, Lord God! behold I cannot speak, for I am a child." He was made a butt of ridicule — "The word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me and a derision daily," But he could not restrain the fire that impelled him — "His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." So with them all; there is a cause for their visible appearance upon the stage of time. There is a cause for all their work; and the application of the understanding will show there was only one cause. As soon as a man tries to explain the matter by another cause, the matter is beyond all understanding. The cause is that God sent them; God inspired them; God commanded them. As it is written — "God at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets." Let us look at God then; He is the Alpha — the beginning of all. Not only the beginning of the work of prophets and apostles, but the beginning of creation — the beginning of life — the beginning of all, in a most absolute sense. No man can be said to have hold of the truth who has not hold of that, because that is the foundation — "God from everlasting — Our Father." Let us get at that. We come to see it by the exercise of our mind. There is no other way. Are we tired of exercising our mind thus? Do we begin to feel apathy with regard to understanding? What then? Well, what happens to any man who tires on any road? Suppose he be a traveller in the snowy wastes of Russia; he tires, lies down, is frozen to death or eaten by wolves. Or suppose he be in the arid deserts of Africa; he tires, lies down, dies, and the vultures devour his flesh. Or suppose a man be in business, and tires in the direction of his affairs. He has splendid prospects, but he tires. What comes of it but failure and ruin? Now then, are we going to tire here? Are we going to cease the exercise of the understanding on matters which are of the supremest importance of all? If so, what is before us? Nothing but present misery and future perdition. 'Present' misery, for where can we get satisfaction and joy if not in the way of godliness. There is no satisfaction in folly. Oh, no; it is "out of the frying pan into the fire" if we forsake the Truth. Well, that is not a right comparison, for the Truth is not a frying pan in this sense. It is a place of comfort and peace. Whatever else we do, let us not weary in the way of understanding. It is a spring of life even now, and a source of glory inconceivable in time to come. Let us open our eyes. Let us look at God. He comes to be a fact to us at last. Understanding sees He must be, and the whole mind and feeling at last sets in the conviction that He is.

When we get thus far, we can feel the truth of this psalm. We learn what sin is, and understand the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. The greatness of God and the dreadfulfulness of sin are ideas that go together. Practically, we see what sin means in the case of Adam. One sin — not a great sin as men would reckon — brought death, and the countless evils that have since afflicted the human race. Sin is the non-conformity to God's will as expressed in His commands. Why it should



be esteemed so dreadful a thing we realise when we think what it is in relation to ourselves. It is the misuse of the highest prerogative God can confer upon a created being. He has given us the possession of an independent will, a free volition. It is a sharp instrument, a high privilege, but a dreadful responsibility. God hedges it by this proviso that it must not be exercised against Him. So stringent is this proviso that it is enforced by death. The will used against Him will be withdrawn.

“The wages of sin is death.” Now we are all sinners, for “there is not a man that hath not sinned.” If we understand this in the sense of feeling it to be true then we can understand this psalm. Though so very deep, it is so simple that a child can understand it, for what is forgiveness? It is the consent of God not to impute the sin that has been sinned — to let it pass. He offers to do this — to justify us, to consider us righteous on condition of our compliance with the conditions provided in the case. Surely the man is blessed — happy — who is in this relation to God. But, here we must consider again. Many people are happy that are not forgiven. They mistake the nature of forgiveness. Theology has taught them to regard it as an affair of feeling, they ‘feel’ they are forgiven; therefore they are forgiven. This is dangerous logic. Forgiveness is God’s act, not ours. It is something that takes place in God’s mind, and if He does not forgive, it matters not how we may feel. It may be illustrated in human affairs: suppose you have been offended, and you do not forgive the offender, because of his non-compliance with what you require, and suppose he is under the idea that you have forgiven him, does his idea alter the fact? The forgiveness to be a fact must be a something in your mind, not in his feelings. So forgiveness to be real must be in God’s mind. It is in this aspect of the matter that the tremendous importance of God’s conditions appears. It is no matter how we may stand with men in the matter, if we are not right with God. Look at the Roman Catholics. Their priests claim the power of forgiveness; and they exercise the power for a consideration in cash. Nay, they will go further, and sell you liberty beforehand, to sin for 12 months or any other period. Now, the poor Roman Catholic, knowing no better, says to himself: “If the priest forgives me I am all right,” and he pays his shilling and feels comfortable. Does that make God forgive him? Every one will say, “Of course not.” But then they will say “But we are not Roman Catholics.” Well, suppose they are not Roman Catholics but Episcopalians, is their case better? Episcopalianism is but a branch of the same thing modified, a daughter of the great Roman mother. “We have been baptised” say they, by which they mean water sprinkled and signed with the sign of the cross in babyhood. “We have been confirmed”, say they; that is, the bishop has laid his hands upon their heads. Or, “we go to the confessional,” for even this abomination is finding a place in the country again. The clergyman says that Christ has given him power to forgive sins, and the Episcopalian may say “I have confessed to my clergyman,” or, “I have confessed to my bishop and he says I am all right.” Well, supposing 700 clergymen say you

are all right, does that make God forgive if He choose not to forgive because of conditions totally disregarded? If God forgives not, what is the use of forgiveness at the hands of Episcopalian clergymen? If every soul in the church consider you forgiven, what is that to God if He sees fit not to forgive? But, you say, "I am not an Episcopalian; I am an Independent, or, I am a Baptist, or I am a Methodist (worse and worse)." Well, where is the difference if these systems are not in harmony with the apostolic system of righteousness? The same principle applies to all. If God forgives not, the approval of earth's total inhabitants is unavailing. There is but one safe test. It is the simple question whether we have complied with God's conditions, God's terms, God's requirements. Peter said to Christ, "Lord, to whom shall we go but to thee? Thou hast the words of eternal life." So we may say: "To whom shall we go?" The apostles are not in the land of the living. They are dead; but there is a living Christ with the Father. We cannot go to this living Christ as they went; but we become related to him by their testimony and invitation. They are in their graves, but their testimony lives, and this was the essential part — the treasure in earthen vessels. God has taken care that the treasure should not perish with the earthen vessel that contained it. He has caused as it were an immense many-chambered casket to be formed, into which it was placed for all to receive who sought for it. The Bible is this many-chambered casket. Reading therein we become built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. We become enlightened and justified by the faith we receive by hearing them.

The consequence, though glorious, is painful in one direction. We become despised and hated of men. The world detests what it calls the exclusiveness and bigotry of this position. This we must endure. No one buys a thing of any value without paying a good price for it. Justification, leading to salvation, is the most precious thing upon earth. Therefore you pay a heavy price for it towards man, though as regards God, it is cheap, "without money and without price." It demands the sacrifice of what is sweet to all men; the friendship of the world. No man can be a friend of the world and the friend of God at the same time. There is only one way in which a man professing the Truth can be a friend of the world, and that is by hiding what he is. As soon as you begin to let it be known that you believe in the forgiveness of sins by God's way alone, you are looked upon as a soft-brained fanatic, fit only for the society of women and children. What does Christ say about hiding the Truth? "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid." This is Christ's cue for us. This is the position for his servants to take. There must be no mistaking you — what you are, where your affections are, what you are living for. That is what Christ says. It is the devil who says, "You need not let it be known who you are." We have all got the devil to deal with. He is in us and around us. He says, "It will not pay." We answer, "It will pay splendidly by-and-by," for what does Christ say, "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven. But

whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." It seems a poor affair, and worse at present; but see it out. Let life close as it will, let Christ come as he will. It will then be seen that Christ's affairs are the only affairs of ultimate consequence. Wisdom consists of sincerely and steadily looking the facts in the face, and conforming to the logic of them, refusing to be blinded by any of the many forms of dust-throwing.

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## Following After Righteousness

*Remembrance — God the central figure — children of God — doing the will of God — jewels hid for the moment — Holy or Laodicean — judges — or to be judged — servants not greater than their Master — smoking.*

Portion read: Psalm 32 — "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom Yahweh imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile."

WE have met to remember Christ; but there is something underneath that. We cannot remember Christ scripturally or acceptably without remembering God, for it is written, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." It was that God might be manifest that he appeared. It was that the world might be reconciled to God that he came and died, and rose again. There is a great tendency in our age, where Christ is remembered at all, to remember Christ without remembering God. What praise there is of Christ is mostly fixed upon him alone. God is not seen. This is not according to Christ. Christ directs our attention to God. He came that we might be reconciled to God. So also Paul: he says, "We pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." All the Scriptures exhibit God. God is their subject altogether. If they give us history, it is that God's part in it may be seen, and His ways illustrated as in the disobedience and afflictions of the house of Israel. It was not that a story might be written. There are no "stories" in the Bible in the proper sense of that term. There is narrative of incident, and some the most thrilling ever put on record, but it always has to do with God in some way. If the Bible gives us poetry, it is all about God, as in the Psalms — never about the mere beauties of nature or the charms of human feeling, as in human poetry. I need not say that if it gives us prophecy, it is about God, because we know that the ultimate exhibition of prophecy is the exaltation of God in all the earth.

What are we ourselves? If we are not deceiving ourselves, if we are not wasting our time, if we are not coming to this Table in a mistaken character, we are children of God. If we are not the children of God it would be better

that we should not come here. To come here in any other character is to come here unworthily; and Paul says that anyone eating and drinking unworthily incurs condemnation.

Now, here is one important matter to consider: What makes us children of God? What entitles us to that description? There will be less difficulty in answering that question than in coming up to the answer. We must answer the question; and we must try and come up to it. That is the business we have in hand, as brethren and sisters of Christ, to grow up into the "fulness of the stature of Christ." Well, let us have the answer first. Children of God are those who know Him, and who love Him, and who obey Him, and who, therefore, have been adopted by Him, in the operation of His institutions provided for that purpose.

If a man know God, God is before his eyes all the time; because God exists all the time, and therefore such a man is not a mere theologian. A theologian, in the ordinary sense, is a man who has a theory about God; a son of God is a man whose theory of God has become the root of warm and ever-present conviction. To such a man, God, though unseen, is a real being — as real as his everyday friend. God is not only a real being to him, but, in a sense, the only real being, for he realizes that God is the only inherently real being. All other beings are but incorporate reflections of His being. Man seems real, but he is not permanently so. "There is none abiding." "All the glory of man," says the Scripture, "is as the flower of the field" (1Pet. 1:24). It withers and vanishes. All flesh is grass. The Scriptures say this, and we know it to be true by experience. We all perish. A son of God does not lean on grass. He leans on the only rock, the power and life that in God are, from everlasting to everlasting — God. The world leans on man. The world is full of abominations just now, as the Apocalypse reveals. The world either openly blasphemes God or cants about Him. It is hard to say which is the worse. They are both odious. Of the two, perhaps the cant is the better; for in it there is at least a recognition of God, in however corrupt a form. In open blasphemy there is the denial of Him, out of which no good can come. But 10,000 times better than cant is sincere knowledge. The man who knows God does not 'cant;' he speaks about God as he speaks about his friend. You can tell by the very tone where the matter stands in a man's feelings. If he is a very honest man and knows not God, he can scarcely pronounce His name. If he is not an honest man, he speaks of Him in a tone and manner that tell you infallibly that God is a nonentity with him, and that he is merely anxious to be credited by man with a fear of God that he does not possess. The man to whom God is a reality does not tone about it; he speaks about God with reverence, truly, but with the sincerity with which most men speak of a matter of common reality.

Consider some of the consequences. If a man know God, that man is purified and sanctified. "Gravity and sincerity", become habit of speech with

him. The truth has brought us out of a world not only of cant and ignorance, but of levity and corruption. Light talk and foul is the order of the day. From this the truth calls upon us to purify ourselves. Even “jesting and foolish talking” are among the things which Paul says are not to be “named among the brethren as becometh saints.” We are in a little danger of missing this point from a special cause. Getting away from the cant about God, we are liable to drift into that barrenness of talk that has no odor of Him at all. This is as bad as cant. The love of God will be sure to make His presence manifest in our speech. Coming out of the fanatical sects, we are liable to go to just the other extreme, and to forget God. It is just as bad to know God and not to love Him as not to know Him at all. Nothing in the universe is more powerful than love, though we are to allowed to know much of it just now. A man will do anything for love, abstain from anything for love. The man who loves God will show it by what he does and what he does not do. For God has made known His will to us, and those who love God delight to do His will. It is written of Christ, “I delight to do Thy will, O my God” (Psa. 40:8; Heb. 10:9); and we are remembering Christ acceptably if we do the same, for so Christ hath said, “He that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother.” These quiet words will remain the stern and everlasting measure of our final attainments, whether we forget them or not. A man who loves God will do His will, whether anybody know of it or not. Nay, he will prefer that other should not know. He remembers Christ’s commandment, “When thou doest thine alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth, that thine alms may be in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret, Himself shall reward thee openly.” The man who loves God will be found doing the right thing for God’s sake — not man’s. Such men are noble men. There will yet be a multitude of them in the earth, a noble multitude. We shall see them by-and-by. God has not forgotten the earth, though it may seem so to a superficial view. The finish will show that He has remembered all the time, and had His eye all the time upon those who fear Him, and hope in His mercy. He will at last make up His jewels. They must be produced first. I suppose there are some kinds of precious stones that require darkness for their production, and the bowels of the earth for the workshop, and extreme pressure of heavy weight, and the fire of intense heat to develop them. After a long time, men dig down and find them and bring them to the light, and show their sparkling colors. Tried and chosen men are compared to precious stones. They require days of evil and darkness for their preparation. The darkness does not prove forgetfulness but the reverse. It is part of the work. When the days of darkness have fulfilled their mission, the multitude of God’s chosen will stand revealed, and they will prove to be those who have done the will of God for God’s sake.

Such a character may seem to some to savor of cold independence. It has independence certainly, but not a cold one. A man of God is a warm man,

but he certainly is an independent one. Surely this is necessary. We must not be influenced by man, but look straight to God. This is the independence. You may be influenced by human praise or censure to go off the right path. If you look to God, you will consider His will only.

The man who knows God is as unlike a merely natural man as this psalm is unlike a human poem. What is the theme of human poems? Merely human impression. It may be a fair maid — a lovely form of life no doubt, but a perishing, fleeting thing. Or perhaps it is some smiling landscape; or some passing aspect of nature, such as a beautiful sunset. Bible poems, the Psalms for example, deal with nothing so limited as this. They are all about God; they recognize God as the Root, the Rock, the Upholder, the Guide of all things.

This is deep, eternal, and true. This is satisfying; it is enlarging; it is purifying. Holiness, says the Scripture, becometh thine house; all the Psalms are holy; all the Scriptures are holy. The Bible is well called "the Holy Bible;" it is a holy book. Everybody is made holy by reading it; that is, everybody who does so with diligence, earnestness, and effect. This is its mission as regards individuals; to make men holy "to purify for Christ a peculiar people, zealous of good works" to whom Christ has left his command, "Be ye holy" and of whom Paul says, "without holiness, no man shall see the Lord." Now, are we holy men? We are trying to be, and perhaps we are to some extent; let us not be satisfied with half measures here. Jesus said to his disciples, "Now are ye clean through the word I have spoken to you" (Jn. 15:3). We can all feel the truth of that to a certain extent. I was made aware of it to a large extent when on board the *Etruria* lately. I felt that the weakest brother I knew was almost an angel compared with the odious creatures of the flesh with whom I was tabled on the return voyage. They were truly the swine, wallowing in the mire. Well we are only washed hogs as yet. There is always a danger of that creature returning. Let us not be like the Laodiceans, and rest content with our attainments. You remember Christ's message to them. They had a high opinion of themselves. The Laodicean ecclesia said "I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing;" but Jesus says "thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." Let us never indulge in self-glorification. We are likely to deceive ourselves; let us always resist the tendency to think well and brag well. Let our estimate be not as to how we look in mortal eyes, but how we look when compared with the "holy angels." We will be safe in comparing ourselves with them. We are not safe in comparing ourselves with human swine. Don't let us look at the unwise mob and say "Well, we are much better than they are." The people that surround the Prince of Wales might say that; are they good enough for God? Goodness as God reckons is goodness towards Him. Goodness towards man is second. We know that the world is not good towards God. It knows Him not: believes Him not; obeys Him not. Are they fit to be promoted to equality with the angels? Those only are who are now "an holy priesthood, a peculiar people."

We can form an opinion of our standing if we imagine ourselves about to enter the presence of Christ, or dying. This is doing what Paul commands, when he says, "Let us judge our own selves." The man who is good enough for God is the man who is covered with God's righteousness in Christ, and who walks after the commandments which require holiness. It is written, "Be ye holy in all manner of conversation," that is, in everything — in behavior, in practice, in habit of life. God himself says, "Be ye holy for I am holy." Do we not instinctively know the meaning? Let us fix our minds on it and ask what does it mean? Is not holiness that which is pure, that which is clean, that which is undefiled? Is it not so? And if we are to be holy "in all manner of" ways, we are not to be so, as some. Are we to be undefiled in some things and not in others? Why is it necessary to be so explicit? Because the world is reeking with unholiness of every kind, and being in the world, we are liable to be infected with its ways. The world is to be judged with terrible judgment when Christ comes. That judgment we are invited to administer, if meanwhile we become what the world is not: what the truth is designed to make us — a purified people, an holy people, "a peculiar people," not a cold people but a zealous people, "zealous of good works." There is perhaps a cold holiness. This is not the sort. A zealous holiness is godly holiness — zeal of good works. Good works consist of doing that which is good according to God's rule. Man is no judge here. Some works are good by divine rule which are bad by the human rule. Preaching the "narrow" way, "contending earnestly for the faith," is bad according to modern man, but good according to the commandments of God. Things are good according to man, which are bad according to God — sparing Agag, to wit, by Saul; holding your tongue about religion in our day, according to etiquette. There are many other examples. We must have God's rule for the estimate of good works, of which we are to be zealous. When people are zealous, their hands don't hang lazily and helplessly down. They are prompt and active and earnest. And as it is an earnestness about which the natural mind has no affinity for, they are considered mad by merely natural men of every kind and variety. Well, this is not nice, especially as there is such a thing as religious madness. Are we going to be scared out of zeal for good works, because there is such a thing as religious madness? No. There is such a thing as that which is holy, and just, and good and true, and the truly sane and enlightened mind will hold on to this with all the heart and mind, and soul and strength — whatever odium it may bring. Remember what Christ says: "What have they said about me? He hath a demon, and is mad, why hear ye him? What have they called me? Beelzebub. If they so speak of me, what are you to expect?" If we are going to be called mad because we strive after holiness, let us count it an honor, as he said, "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more them

of his household. Fear them not therefore" (Mat. 10:24, 26). Let us give this a special application this morning. A brother has asked me to say something about smoking. Surely these principles touch the question. I don't care to go into it particularly, but one or two simple questions seem to me to settle it. Putting it in the mildest way — is it not possible that Christ will consider this practice (only about two or three hundred years old) an unholy thing? Is it not certain that he will have no fault to find with those who do not smoke, so far as that goes? The abstaining from it cannot be wrong; the indulgence in it may be, and by the general rules of apostolic holiness doubtless is. Nature itself teaches us something in the matter, and Paul appeals to nature itself in some matters. Smoking is against nature, for who can smoke for the first time without being sick, and what healthy person can come near a person reeking with narcotism without physical loathing? Let us put it extremely by a way of test; imagine a whole ecclesia sitting in clouds of tobacco smoke! Why not if it is right? An ecclesia can meet for tea or dinner; why not for smoking, if it be a holy thing? There are other arguments against it, but time does not allow. All the world smokes. This is an argument against it: for the world knows not God and is odious to Him and ripening for judgment. It is our part, having come out from among them to be holy in all manner of conversation.

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## Our Fringe of Blue

*Spiritual life — our attitude if Christ were present — consider then his coming — helps to remembrance — trust not thine own heart — look on the blue — remember God — His healing power for the wounded — righteousness in Christ — resurrection and readiness.*

IT is well we have not been left to our own inclination in this matter of assembling together for the weekly memorial of Christ in the breaking of bread. It is well it has been made a matter of command. It is well we are obliged to come. If it were not so, feeling would often lead us to stay away, the frequency would easily increase, until we should cease altogether, with the result of spiritual death. Spiritual life is an affair of remembering spiritual things with the vividness and power that leads to action: and this remembrance is an affair of renewing those impressions that constitute memory, and this renewal of the mental picture of things can only be accomplished by periodical contact with the things that make the picture in the first instance. When memory of truth is excited, motive is powerfully affected: it is forgetfulness or unbelief that leads to spiritual decay.

If we could suppose ourselves with Christ in the day when he was upon the earth, we should be enabled to see many things in a different light from



what they appear in when looked at in circumstances of our ordinary life. Many things that distress us would lose their power to do so: many things we care for would cease to interest; some things we hate would suddenly fall neutral, unless, indeed, they were things hateful to us for divine reasons — as there are such things, as when David says, “Do not I hate them that hate thee: yea, I hate them with a perfect hatred,” or as when Paul tells us to “Abhor that which is evil.” These we would hate with all the more heartiness for being in Christ’s company. But as regards the things of common life, we should certainly have the edge taken off most of our feelings, and our views wonderfully changed in form and complexion.

If this is true with regard to the first coming of Christ, how much more with regard to his second coming, to which we are hastening with every tick of the clock. That second coming will change our relations to everything going to constitute our present life. It will change the nature of that life in so far as it will change the mortal and corruptible. Changing our nature, it will change the nature of our sympathies and appreciations with the certain effect that things human will appear small and valueless, and things divine of overpowering reality and consequence. It will take away business care, family responsibility, and all susceptibility to human opinion. The men we know; the affairs that have vexed or interested us; the town we inhabit, the circle we move in, the age we live in, the books we have read, the politics of the day, the movements that have engrossed public attention will all be annihilated for us by the simple fact that Christ is in the earth to take all power to himself, and remodel human life in harmony with divine principles and laws — destroying the wicked, and glorifying the righteous. Now, whatever helps us to mentally realise this result beforehand helps us to walk through the desert of present life with a lighter step. Both our cares and our pleasures we shall take more easily and more innocuously if we remember Christ in the past and in the future. This double memory is held up to us in the breaking of bread. We look through the windows before and behind. Naturally, our minds are as a chamber without light, walls built up, having no window. Knowledge cuts a window in the wall — history in the back wall, prophecy in the front wall. Through these windows we look and see what was before invisible, and become influenced by what we see. We must take care the windows are not obstructed. We must not build another wall outside the window (this would be to let worldly things conceal what we know). We must not let the trees and shrubs grow too close to the glass (this would be to let business hide the light of God). We must not let the windows get covered with dust and cobwebs (this would be to let the natural sloth of human nature get the upper hand of us). We must keep the windows clean and all things at their proper place and distance. The breaking of bread is to help us to exercise this vigilance. It is not the only means God has given us to this end, as we know, but it has a central place. It acts as the fly wheel that keeps the rest of the machinery in motion. We have His written Word as the

principal agent in keeping the memory true and bright. A little clause in our reading today brings this before us in a specially distinct though not immediately recognizable way. Perhaps you noticed in the chapter of Numbers the directions about a fringe of blue to be placed in the hems of their garments with a special association — (the origin of the phylacteries made so ostentatiously broad in the days of Jesus). The object of it is specially worthy of consideration: “It shall be to you for a fringe that ye may look upon and ‘remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them;’ and that ye ‘seek not after your own heart and your own eyes’.” Always remembering that the law of Moses was a form and pattern of the righteousness with which God is pleased, it is interesting and profitable to follow up the analogies when we can. It seems easy to do so in this case. Blueness is associated in the Scriptures with healthy healing wounds (Pro. 20:30). This is a beautiful suggestion considering we are wounded by sin, and that the memory of Yahweh’s commandments is the cure. The blue fringe was to be on the garments daily worn. This shows that the Bible idea of religion is very different from that which makes it an affair of Sunday or special occasions: or a thing to be hidden away out of sight like a legal document kept in a safe. Bible godliness — the remembrance of God with obedience — is a thing for daily wear — a light to shine always — a fragrance never absent from the “walk and conversation” — Its object was to bring Yahweh’s commandments to memory — constant memory. It is according to the will of God that we be in the fear of God all the day long, and have Him in remembrance in all circumstances — honoring Him always before men, and not denying Him to propitiate ungodly friends, however refined. The remembrance of the commandments excited by the daily worn blue fringe was that they might “do them.” A knowledge that does not lead to action is useless. A man who prates about the commandments of God but does not perform them is an abomination to God and man. The blue fringe in effect tells us this. Finally, it delivers a lesson that may not be so readily discerned and that might not seem needed: “that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes.” How much there is in this, experience tells us. A man’s own heart and own eyes will certainly deceive him in the great questions of duty and final wellbeing. He will incline to ways that will destroy him: he will assume certain suppositions (from the appearance of things) that time will confute too late. The world at large is erring in this way, and by its very magnitude draws more and more into its vortex. The blue fringe was to tell them that man’s reading of life is too superficial to be true; that man’s view of the universe is too limited to afford safe guidance. Heaven and earth and the ages are too great for man to know of himself where he is and how to steer. Man requires to be told the truth by Him who knows it; and his only safety lies in implicitly doing as he is told. The advice is good which says, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding.” Thine own understanding is altogether too small a thing to lean to. Thine own heart and thine own eyes will tell thee lies.

They will say that man only is, that God is not; that the present only is, that the past has never been; that the present only can be, that the future never will come; that thou hast never known a cradle, and wilt never fill a grave; that Moses is a myth; Alexander of Macedon an invention; Constantine a story; Charlemagne a French dream; Napoleon a nightmare fantasy; Gog of the land of Magog, the baseless and impossible conception of fanaticism. "Thine own heart and thine own eyes" left to their unenlightened operation, will tell thee that the affairs of thy bed and board are the only affairs that will ever concern thee; that thy parish is the great reality; that thy lifetime is the focus of all that was ever important upon the earth, or, ever can be. Refuse the foolish guidance of "thine own heart and thine own eyes." Take the larger heart and the more penetrating eyes that belong to the wisdom that has contrived the universe. Open thy mind to what He has to tell thee concerning what has been; what He is aiming at; what will be; and what relation there is between the present on-goings and the fruition of that purpose for thee. Look on the blue and remember the God of Israel and his wondrous dealings with them by Moses and the prophets, reaching even to thee through Christ, to whom all the prophets gave witness. Be not of the fools that cannot see Christ for Gladstone, that cannot see Moses for the British constitution; that cannot see the Bible for their own poor, evanescent, bubble-expanding, though endless pouring, press. These are like the children in the street area to whom the naphtha lamps are much bigger affairs than the moon. The things of God, like the orbs of heaven, are great and bright, but because they are, for the time being, distant, they are liable to be very completely eclipsed by the gewgaws of the Vanity Fair that is going on universally upon the earth. The liability to be deceived by "thine own heart and thine own eyes" is so great that we require the blue fringe in the daily worn garment. "The Scriptures are able to make thee wise unto salvation," and that only in their diligent reading and daily remembrance. Under their inspiration, the heart and eyes are kept in a correct relation to truth, and no longer mislead us by a false interpretation of things.

We may apply this line of reflection in a special manner to the central ordinance of our weekly assembly. We break bread in 'remembrance.' The bread and the wine are a special form of the blue fringe. They have to do with wounds that were healed and that have a healing power for the wounded. "By his stripes we are healed." Body broken, blood shed, for us. As we look on them, we are to distrust "our own heart and our own eyes" as to what is acceptable with God. Our own heart and our own eyes would tell us, what many preachers proclaim, that kindly feeling and neighborly ways and good house management and sound and honest business dealings are the things that constitute righteousness (God forbid they should be in the least underrated in their place). Our own heart and our own eyes would say that the breaking of bread was child's play; that the death of Christ was pure barbarity; that his resurrection was a fable; and that all Bible ways and Bible things are so much

antiquated trash, which it is the best and the most convenient thing for men of sense to discard. We look on the blue fringe before us, and we say to our own heart and our own eyes, "Cease your presumptuous gabble." God has spoken and we will listen. He has commanded and we will obey. He has provided a mode or system of righteousness in Christ which we will joyfully submit to as the highest privilege and honor open to mortal man. We will not be like the Jews of Paul's day, of whom he says, "Being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:2). Of God, Christ is made unto us righteousness (1Cor. 1:30), and we will rejoice in it as his humble servants. We hear him say, "This is my body given for you... Except ye eat of the flesh and drink of the blood of the Son of Man, ye have no life in you." We believe it, and we eat and drink with thanksgiving — spiritually, in the discernment of what he accomplished in his submission to death; literally, in eating the bread and drinking the wine in remembrance of these things. We hear him say, "Till I come." Our own heart and our own eyes would tell us... "He never will come." To our ignorant hearts and undiscerning eyes we oppose the uncontradictable teachings of the fringe of blue. Whence came this institution of the breaking of bread? Let a man trace its history with the acumen that men ordinarily apply to matters of historic investigations, and he will find himself landed in the presence of the apostles, and through them, in the very presence of Christ himself. No other conclusion would he find admissible than this one, that owes its existence to the command of Christ. And when he looks at this conclusion all round in a pondering manner, he will ask, how came Christ to deliver such a command? — with what object did he erect this memorial of his sufferings? — with what object, this memento of his intended return? And he will find no satisfactory answer to these questions, except the one that recognizes that he was what he claimed to be — the Son of God sent into the world to be its Saviour. And when this is recognised, the door is put wide open for his coming again.

For if he was the Son of God, he certainly will perform all he has promised. His coming again cannot, in that case, be denied; it cannot be even doubted by purely logical and truly humble minds. Such, on the contrary, will gladly acknowledge and confess it as the best piece of tidings ever promulgated among men — that this same Jesus, whom the apostles saw depart from the summit of the Mount of Olives, will so come in like manner as they saw him go.

This is a conclusion of perfectly stupendous character. No language can exaggerate it; no imagination can go beyond it. Yet we are so accustomed to it as a doctrine that we rarely rise to the full and terrible import of the fact. Jesus makes our danger in this respect the subject of special exhortation. "As a snare," saith he, "shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth." "Watch ye therefore and pray always." A snare is something unanticipated to the very moment of its action, and final and irretrievable

when once it springs. Christ tells us that this will be the relation of his coming to the whole population of the world. Well may he say, "Watch therefore." The indifference of the whole community to the subject and their absolute sense of security are liable to react upon us by an almost unconscious process, and to infect us with the same spirit. "Blessed are those servants whom their Lord when he cometh shall find watching." To watch is to have the event always in calculation. Some, looking to the slow evolution of the signs of the times, are liable to say, "What is the use? The Jews are not in the land yet. Gog is not mustered yet." This is not wise. May we not die, brethren, at any time? And what then? In one moment, we hurry over the unconscious blank of death, however prolonged, to find Christ here. Resurrection will reinstate us in the land of the living at the point where we broke off. Suppose therefore we fall asleep unwatchful? You see the application of Christ's words; "Be ye always ready." The readiness is a state of mental, moral and practical harmony with the event — desiring it, preparing for it. The dangers to be guarded against were as urgent 1,900 years ago as they will be the very month before Christ returns. They are urgent all the time, and Christ indicated that they are subject to our will and arrangement as to how far we escape them, or come under their power. "Take heed to yourselves," saith he, "lest at any time 'your hearts' be 'overcharged' with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life." "Surfeiting" is too much; "care" is too little; there is danger in both extremes. If we are in either, Jesus says, "take heed;" and this taking heed is a matter of keeping the mind in habitual contact with the lessons of wisdom in the reading of the Scriptures and attendance on that assembly of ourselves together which has been commanded. By-and-by, all need for heed-taking will be at an end. The joyful proclamation will go abroad: "Behold the bridegroom cometh! go ye out to meet him." Happy then will those be who are ready; unhappy, beyond the power of man to endure, those who have allowed their hearts to be overcharged with the transient affairs of this mortal state.

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## God's Supremacy

*Benefit of assembly — Jesus Christ and him crucified — eternal wisdom — God exalted — David's Lord and David's Son — redemption and love — remission and forbearance — the righteousness of God declared.*

IT is good for us to be taken out of ourselves. You sometimes hear the doctors say concerning such and such a patient: "He wants taking out of himself." With this in view, they prescribe change. It expands and tones up the mind to have our attention drawn away from our own sensations and feelings, and fixed on external objects. But much of course, depends upon the nature of the objects to which our attention is transferred. There are objects

which lead us on a false track while perhaps serving the purpose of diversion. There are books and people and things that will only draw us into the universal stream of vanity that is bearing the world downwards to darkness and death.

Our meeting this morning will take us out of ourselves in the right way. It will not only take us away from the oppressiveness of our daily surroundings and cares and fogs of our own frail feelings, but it will occupy our minds in a manner that will confer lasting benefit. It will present to us scenes the looking at which will renew our connection with coming realities while relieving the demoralizing monotony of mortal life. The Table of the Lord is a great centre of objective facts having this power. It is not like a mere class for the learning of moral lessons or the exercise of the philosophic faculties. True, it has a power of moral influence approached by nothing under the sun; but it is more as a focus of practical facts that it appeals to our sympathy. It is not a time to inculcate or exhibit a theory, but a time to remember an event which is the centre of many events. It is always easier to remember events than to digest principles.

The event of events we look at first is the Lord's death. This, Christ has placed in the front of the weekly memorial which he has appointed. It is impossible to break this bread and drink this wine in a scriptural manner without seeing Christ crucified; his body broken, his blood poured out.

It is well that he has thus rescued these facts from the forgetfulness of the fact. They would certainly have dropped out of sight had they not been made the subject of a special and constant memorial. We naturally forget evil when good times prevail. We should have given but small place to the sufferings of Christ, in the presence of the glorious gladness in which he has lived since his resurrection, if Christ himself had not placed those sufferings visibly before us in the only assembly of his brethren which he has made compulsory at their hands.

Why have those sufferings received such a place? Why was Paul made to say, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world?" Why did he determine to know nothing among the Corinthians but "Jesus Christ and him crucified?" Because of the necessity there is for a right apprehension of our position in relation to God in order to be acceptable to His grace. The cross is the symbol of that relation. Our state of mind — our views — are of the first importance here. Do we see God in His true position of sovereignty? Do we understand and recognize our place in the universe as but permitted forms of His power, whom sin has deprived of all title to continuance? If so, it is well. God has revealed that to such He will look; with such He will dwell — those who are "humble and broken in heart, and who tremble at His Word." If we do not, God is patient with us; He is long-suffering, but His view of our position will at last prevail. We shall certainly die out of sight and

memory. His point of view is the governing one. The world forgets this — even the world that considers itself not the wicked world — the moral world — the religious world, the broad-minded, charitable, cultured world. They have invented for themselves a doctrine that is not in the Bible — that God is a universal Father and will save men without reference to their attitude to Him. This doctrine is pleasing and convenient, but it is not true. The cross of Christ contradicts it. Why did Christ die? Because of sin. And why is sin so dreadful as to require such an awful ingredient in the process of remedy! For the very reason that God is so great and terrible a majesty. This is the last thing that men of our generation rise to: yet it is the first lesson in true godliness — the godliness that God will accept (and none else is worth talking about). God is good — God is love: but there is a method in the goodness which is its chiefest glory: This method insists on the indispensable conditions for the effectuality of goodness in wisdom and holiness. Goodness without wisdom and holiness, and the firmness that in 'consuming fire' insists on those conditions would not be goodness. The first of those conditions is God's supremacy: "I will be exalted." "I will be sanctified in them that approach unto me." The second is absolute obedience. On these two points there has and cannot be the shadow of compromise in God's dealings with the earth. They are the two points that men instinctively dislike. Paul's words are not too strong. "The carnal mind — the mind of the flesh — the mind that the brain generates left to itself — is enmity against God: it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." He further says: "They that are in the flesh cannot please God" — that is, men who are animated by the views and principles that the flesh invents for itself, which is the sort of men all the world is composed of, of whatever age, country, or nation.

We have only to allow reason to rule to see how purely reasonable and good are God's requirements in the matter, and how intrinsically absurd and mischief-working merely natural views are. God is self-subsistently the first. Nothing was before Him or could be. He has contrived all things, and all things subsist in Him. Is it not reasonable, therefore, that His views should prevail? If there is any credit or glory arising out of man, is it not reasonable it should be to God and not to man at all, seeing it is of His hand man holds everything, and man made nothing? Does not common honesty and common gratitude require that all thanks and all praise should be to Him, and that man, while highly gifted, should be humble and thankful? Is it not robbery and barbarism for man to ignore God and take all the glory to himself when in truth none belongs to him? Is it not the programme of the simplest justice that God should aim to fill the earth with His glory?

But there is another side to the question. God's goodness is seen in nothing more than in this insistence on His own glory and supremacy as the first condition of human fellowship with Him: for how stands the fact? That man seeking his own glory fails by the very constitution of things to attain

any good at all. Man living for himself cannot rise to even what possibilities of good lie latent in his organization as a creature formed in the image of the Elohim. He necessarily sinks into all kinds of earth gravitating ignoblenesses: languishes in sluggishness and ennui; spends his fire and his interest, and sinks in a quagmire of vanity and vexation of spirit. For a man to see God and love and worship and serve Him is, on the contrary, to rise to beauties and joys of life even now that are outside the highest experiences or conceptions of the most dashing child of disobedience. How good, then, for God to do that which the poor maudlin, slobbering world of "charitableness" so-called, thinks it is harsh and narrow-minded to think He would do. How good for God to insist that without His exaltation in the way He has appointed there can be no fellowship or wellbeing or life. Then there is another aspect of the case which will commend itself to common sense. Does it not stand to reason for us to believe that the way God appoints must be the best? Even if we could not see the goodness of its exacting character, is it not in this view the most sensible, and in fact only truly sane course for us to be implicitly subject to all He appoints and commands? Reason, if it works correctly, will not only have no fault to find with the cross of Christ, but will rapturously recognize the glory of eternal wisdom in an institution of salvation which exalts God to the highest and abases man to the uttermost, while securing for man a wellbeing that is "unspeakable and full of glory."

We look back then at the sufferings of Christ. They were real and terrible to him. We have known them so long by report that we may not always realise their dreadfulness. It was no performance he went through when he laid down his life for us. We have only to watch him in the garden of Gethsemane to feel this. See him throw himself on his face — on his face — the most abject posture of entreaty it is possible for man to assume. See him do so three times. Harken to the petition he offers: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done!" Mark the tokens of his mental anguish: he sweats as it were great drops of blood. Behold an angel strengthen him. Does it not all tell us of the terrible reality of his sufferings? The cup did not pass. Therefore it could not. As we behold him drink it in the agony of painful, faithful resolution, let us learn the high and ineffable majesty of God who, though full of lovingkindness and tender mercy, cannot forgive and receive sinners unto life eternal except on the basis of His authority vindicated — His righteousness declared — His law upheld in the person of one entirely acceptable to Him, to whom He can confide the dispensation of His love for all who implicitly and unreservedly, and with the humility of little children, accept and identify themselves with all that has been accomplished in him. It is a truly magnificent arrangement of wisdom that has given us such an one in Christ, "who" as Paul with lucid fulness remarks, "of God, is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." At once the Son of God and the Son of Man, David's Lord and David's Son, the partaker of our



common mortality, and yet the vanquisher thereof by the spotlessness of a perfect obedience and submission to the death passed on all men, he is the central meeting point of all sympathies and all greatness. He appeals to our tenderest love in the laying down of his life; he commands our complete homage in the intimacy of his relation to the Father with whom he declared himself one. He engages our highest admiration as the Master who stooped to be a servant: the Heir who voluntarily submitted to poverty: the most honorable King and Lord who humbled himself to keep the company of the lowly, and endure the insults of the base. And through him, as we gaze upon him as our elder brother, the head of the family, we see shining the greatness and the glory, and the holiness, and the love of the Eternal Father, of whom are all things.

It is a due sense of these things that is preparing us to take part in the mighty anthem that will yet roll in majestic measures around the person of Christ in the day of his manifested glory, when before him will be gathered the countless multitude of lovers and worshippers and servants whom God has been preparing for him in all the ages. What is the leading feature of that anthem, as heard by John in vision in Patmos, and recorded in advance for the knowledge of the redeemed? "Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred and tongue, and people and nation." "Thou hast washed us from our sins in thine own blood." How will it be possible for us to take part in this song, and in the everlasting holy service it represents if we are not now in full and living sympathy with the work expressed in the words? It is the work of the Truth to create this full and living sympathy by instructing us in the ways of God. It is the work done now. It is the work of Christ as defined in the language of inspiration, to "purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Let us never forget this zealotry. Some people talk of "zeal" as if it were a peculiarity — a spiritual superfluity. It is far from this. It is the characteristic, the indispensable peculiarity of acceptable believers. It is a zeal having its basis in the forgiveness of sins. As Jesus said of the woman "She is forgiven much, therefore she loveth much." People who have no sense of the dreadfulness of sin have no appreciation of the privilege of forgiveness, and are therefore not likely to be called out in love on its account, or to find any pleasure in praising Christ in its behalf. We must be prepared to say with gladness, "Thou hast washed us from our sins in thine own blood." To say it with gladness, we say it with the understanding, of course. The truth in these words is expressed in figure. There are no robes to be made literally white in the literal blood of the Lamb. There are sin-disfigured characters to be cleansed by the double process of forgiveness and reformation.

"God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you." This is the literal truth as divinely expressed (Eph. 4:32). "For Christ's sake;" that is, for the sake of what has been effected in Christ. What this is, has also been made plain to us in words of the utmost value, as revealing to us God's view of the death of Christ: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his

blood to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God: to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." These words will repay the deepest thought. They deserve — they demand — the utmost consideration. They are a compendium of instructions on the difficult subject of the death of Christ. They hold to the front two features of it which together yield nearly its entire explanation. The first is that it was "for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." "Remission" and "forbearance" exclude the popular idea of "substitution" and "payment of debt." A sin or debt is not remitted that is discharged to the last farthing. There is no forbearance in allowing a debtor to go free whose debts have been paid by another. It is highly important to have clear views of this. It is, in fact, imperative that we hold no view of the case that obscures the kindness and grace of God in the matter. It is forgiveness He proposes: and to forgive, we all know, is to let go: to pass by: to remember no more against, and to do this freely, and not because of satisfaction received. The second point is that the forgiveness is connected with an event by way of condition. It is not inconsistent with the nature of forgiveness to require a condition, such as when an apology is asked for. The event is the shedding of the blood of Christ "to declare His righteousness." We must be able to see a declaration of the righteousness of God in the shedding of the blood of Christ before we can understand the relation of that event to the kindness which God proposes to show in the forgiveness of our sins "for Christ's sake." If we look upon Christ as a being separate from the human race — of angelic or other nature in no way under the power of sin — we cannot see the righteousness of God in his death; but the reverse; for it cannot be righteous that he should die on whom death has no claim. It requires that we see him as he is presented in the apostolic writings — "Of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom. 1:3) "in all things made like unto his brethren" — a partaker of the identical flesh and blood which belong to them in which death works (Heb. 2:17,14). Seeing him thus, we see a fellow sufferer with us of the death that came by Adam, and therefore one who could righteously suffer on our behalf, as our representative, one who, though without sin himself, was a possessor of the nature that had come righteously under the power of death in the beginning of its history upon the earth. We can therefore understand how his crucifixion was divinely intended to declare the righteousness of God "for the remission of sins that are past." We can understand how God in him thus "condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3), publicly, openly, ritually for all time: and thus established a meeting point for "propitiation through faith in his blood." God asks men to look to Jesus crucified as the serpent-bitten Israelites looked at the elevated serpent of brass — that is, to look in faith; that is, to realise that our common nature was thus in him condemned; to recognize that they were crucified with him; to partake of that death and burial in baptism; and

therefore to admit and confess that they are unworthy of approaching to God as sinners of Adam's race: that in themselves they have no hope, yea, that they are unworthy to live; and that the life that God will permit them to live is by His favor alone which He will extend to them "for Christ's sake," with whom He was well pleased, in whom there was no sin, though involved in the mortality of a sinful race, and whom He raised from the dead because of his righteousness, and gave him power to raise all who should come to God by him.

With these contemplations, we can understand Paul's meaning in the words, "God for Christ's sake has forgiven you." We are prepared to see the love of God in the whole matter, however enveloped in cloud and mystery it may appear at first sight. We can understand the part the love of Christ has played in this laying down his life for his friends. We see how he redeems them by his blood without those terrible confusions that come with the idea that in his sacrifice God accepted the punishment of the innocent as a satisfaction to the crimes of the guilty. Love and light shine through all. Reason, wisdom, and beauty take the place of darkness, confusion and bafflement. We are enabled to rejoice that God forgives — truly forgives — our sin. We are enabled to feel with Paul, that love of Christ constrains us, because judging with him that if one died for all, then did all (with him) die, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves but with him who died for them and rose again" 2Cor. 5:15. And realizing that the end of it all will be our own assimilation by him and the incorruptibility of joy and holiness of the Spirit nature which he possesses in everlasting fulness and power, we are compelled to say with John the beloved disciple: "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

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## God's Object in Subjecting Us to Vanity

*Sin and misery — evil as it exists at present — the covenants and hope — distress  
— God regardeth — man at fault — wisdom and relief — a few years compared with eternity — faith a preparation for sight.*

**W**E all know, dear brethren and sisters, that our duty this morning is a duty of remembrance. There are some things that we have to remember that we would rather forget. The remembrance of them brings no pleasure. There are some such things before us in the symbols this morning, though the outcome is good. We have before us death, and we see sin. Neither of these things by themselves are pleasant. But they have their place in the system of life to which we stand related, and must not be ignored.

But for sin and death, this table would never have been spread. It is spread as an ultimate remedy for a sore evil. Sin is not a beautiful thing at all. It may be a little bit of sweetness in the mouth. A man would never sin if it did not happen to be sweet; but after that all is gall. Sin is out of harmony with our whole nature. We are God's workmanship; beautiful workmanship — the finest piece of mechanism under the sun — constructed for a certain purpose. Every part of the machine has its perfect place. The law of God defines the place, when we set aside this law, the machine gets out of gear, and there is derangement and misery. This is what happened at the start. Adam sinned, and everything got out of order and brought death. It is all to be put right by-and-by; but not yet, and therefore we suffer. As we read in Ecclesiastes this morning (chap. 8), "Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him." If for everything there is a time, then there is a time for what we are suffering now, a time for evil and misery, because it is a time of sin — a time when God is disobeyed, and has been so long disobeyed. This is the explanation of what is the deepest and most distressing problem to ordinary minds. By ordinary minds I mean merely philosophical minds, well stored with science and literature, but unbelieving in regard to the purpose of God. To such it is an insoluble problem, that God should be good, and yet that man — God's creature — should suffer evil. They bore away at that problem, but they cannot make anything of it. In whatever way they contemplate it, it will not come out square and right. They cannot settle it on the supposition that there is no wisdom in the universe; or that there is no goodness; for the whole universe bears witness to these attributes of God in all its arrangements. The difficulty is this: being compelled to recognize the manifest wisdom and goodness, how to account for the evil? It is not to be accounted for upon any natural principle. Only in this way can you account for it at all "for everything there is a time." Now is the time for evil. God has a purpose in the earth, and the realization of that purpose requires that the evil now present should be the rule. It is what Paul says in Rom. 8, "The creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but 'by reason of Him who hath subjected the same in hope.'" God has subjected us to misery 'in hope.' That is the explanation, the full explanation, the perfectly satisfactory explanation of the presence of evil and death in the earth. God has done it; 'and there is hope in connection with it.' What is the hope? With reference to what hope is man subject to evil? No man can tell that by studying in the ordinary channels of science and literature. A man can only tell that by studying God's explanation of the matter. It is the hope of Israel that is spoken of, as Paul explains in the same epistle. God has planted a hope in Israel upon a sure foundation. It rests upon the covenants He has made with the fathers, and which He has established to all generations. That is the foundation of all hope for man; and that foundation is universally scouted, by believers and unbelievers alike, that is to say by

those who believe that the Bible is the Word of God, and by those who believe otherwise. By both alike, these covenants, confirmed in the blood of Christ, are regarded as something of no value; a kind of a mere historic glimmer in the ages long past. If we have come to regard the matter in a different light, and to see clearly the outlines of the divine purpose in the midst of the darkness of the past, we will not glory over our generation in that being the case. It is a sad thing that the millions that form the population of the earth should be so out of fit with their God; for He is their God in so far as He is their Maker. All their ways belong to Him. It is a very sad spectacle, in all towns, in all countries, to see so many perishing hopelessly from the fact that they know not God. It is so very sad that if we did not impose limits upon our sadness, our sadness would be liable to become too sad, too utterly distressing. It would be so sad and distressing as to incapacitate a man for a reasonable and joyful attitude in God. We must look all round to get away from this effect. We should never look at anything by itself; that is to say, apart from that to which it is related. Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes have a bearing upon this. He says (ch. 5), "If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and the violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for He that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they." Marvel not; God 'regardeth.' Note the fact and pass on. The earth is God's property, not ours. He has a plan, and He is not heedless, and human perversities and confusions cannot frustrate His plan. Our part is to do our duty; to do His work, and be not too much distressed at our surroundings; to bear all, and keep our eye on God, and pass on to the promised day. If we do not, we shall be overborne. Say we visit a battlefield the day after a battle. Suppose it to be outside Metz, in the Franco-Prussian war, about 17 years ago. The carnage was dreadful. The weapons were so destructive that whole ranks were shot through as they stood. They did not have room to fall. They were just mown down and lay like swathes of grass before the scythe. The country was filled with slain. The spectacle was appalling. Now a man looking on a spectacle like that without reflection might be tempted to exclaim "There cannot be a God!" Oh! no! There would be no true logic in such an exclamation. The man who knows God does not extract such a conclusion as that from a scene of carnage, though feeling the pain of it as much as any. He says, "This does not suggest to me that there is no God. It tells me that there is a God: for how is it that there is such a thing as war at all in the finest race of creatures on the earth? There is a reason for such derangement: and it cannot be found apart from the Creator of the race." Some say, "Can it be from God who is universal power, and goodness, and wisdom and love?" Yes, strange as it may seem — it is because man has usurped God's place upon the earth, that God has allowed man to come into such affliction. Man has forgotten God, and he glorifies himself to the utmost in testimonials, statues, addresses, magnifications, and memorials of all sorts.

At whose shrine is all the incense offered? For whom are all his busy works? For whose benefit, glory, honor, and comfort is all this vast machinery of human life upon the earth? For man and not for God at all. It is the old crime of Belshazzar over again. The crime of Belshazzar is the crime of all mankind. "Thou, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart... and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified" (Dan. 5). And he was slain that night. Man does not humble himself nor glorify God. It is because of this that God leaves him to manage for a time, and that is the result of his management; that men cut each other's throats on the battlefield every now and then. Yes, say some, "but that is only occasionally; we are not always fighting. We are not so badly off as you make out." Well, what are you, between? Why, a state of things so bad that many actually prefer war itself to this slow furnace of "peace" in which men are smelting down into one great muddle of miserable life. People are not aware of how bad their lot is. They take life as it is now as a matter of course. Well, we did so ourselves once; but the Truth came and opened our eyes, and showed us what man is in himself, and how differently he is when God takes him in hand. A man does not know how to appreciate the present state of things until he knows the Truth. "The misery of man is great upon him," and there is no explanation but one, and that is the one the Bible furnishes. The wise of this world do not profess to have an explanation at all. The more intellectual they are, the less disposed they are to have views on the subject, one way or another. They say, "We don't know. We are agnostics. It is a riddle, there might be a God. We don't say there is not; but on the other hand, we don't know that there is." Now in the Truth it is not a question of whether it be this explanation, or some other one. This is the only one — that evil is God's work as well as good. The Bible says so. "I form the light, and create the darkness; I make peace, and create evil: I, the Lord, do all these things" (Isa. 45:7). "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos 3:6). Some may say, "It makes no difference when we have made that discovery. The evil is there all the same." I may safely appeal to all present whether it has not made a great difference to know that evil is of God and is part of His purpose. In my own case it has brought unspeakable relief. It has taken away the dreadfulness of the problem of human life, as it now is upon the earth. It has acted like the removal of a great nightmare. It has abolished the gloom of heaven and earth; has presented the vast universe as a house of glory — a calm, tranquil, majestic temple of infinite wisdom and power and goodness, with earth's misery a mere episode — subject to vanity for only 7,000 years. You say, 'only'! Yes, only. People whose minds are narrowed down to the little circle of present life may think it a tremendous 'only.' That is because they have no learnt to see WHAT IS — endless space and existence; endless time, before and behind — ages infinite in the measureless realms of being. We advisedly say 'only.' It is a great thing to be

able to say 'only.' It helps a man to bear the present roughness of the way. What are 7,000 years? How long has the sun been? How long has the earth existed? Cutting through the crust of the earth as cutting through a cheese, you can read the history of the past (not the history of Adam's race, but the history of the globe), and it shows us a history of countless thousands of years. Where did the earth come from at the beginning of those thousands? It never made itself. We never see anything make itself! Going back to the beginning we are bound to say one very foolish thing, or one thing which is very wise; either that something made the earth that had no power to make it, or that God made it, who had. It is only the fool that hath said in his heart, "There is no God." God made it. How long has God been? He has had no beginning, and can have no end. For ever and ever, backwards and forwards. Think of it. You say the mind cannot grasp it. No. How could you with mortal brains? But those very mortal brains which God has given us tell us that it must be so. How could it be otherwise? There are many things that we cannot grasp. We cannot grasp our own brains. Think of it, sit and think; what is thought? We know it and we feel it, but we cannot grasp it. It is a fact nevertheless. So a beginningless wise power must be a fact, though we cannot grasp it. Now 7,000 years — what is it? A mere watch in the night. God will only afflict this earth 7,000 years, and then He is coming to us Himself, to be manifested upon the earth. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21). Christ himself will be here in glory, and heaven will be opened and the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. God is everywhere; His Spirit fills immensity; and when a sympathetic relation is established between Him and the inhabitants, there will be no gulf between heaven and earth. Let us only be in sympathetic relation with Him, and there is no space to us. Such is the glorious reality. What a cordial it would be to the mind if we could now feel God's attention, and feel the sympathetic reaction of His mind to us as we speak to Him. It is surely coming. We walk by faith; but see how wise a preparation for sight that faith is. How should we be fit to appreciate the glorious coming if we were not prepared by faith! Faith is a splendid thing. It gives us a few mortal years of preparation in what appear as ages of evil, but which are really part of the good in view of the preparation they afford for the perfect Age beyond, when "the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea."

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## A New and Living Way

*History — the Law — shadow and substance — atonement — a body prepared — acceptable obedience — entrance into the holiest — a new and living way — the throne of grace.*

READ Heb. 10. The chapter which has been read this morning from the Epistle to the Hebrews is evidently based upon something which has gone before. With that something we are all familiar. It is the history of the nation of Israel, especially the events connected with the commencement of that history. They were brought out of Egypt by Moses, and carried through the wilderness, where they received from God a law — a law which necessarily recognised that the human race was sinful — sinful at its foundation head, or rather after the partaking of the forbidden fruit, and sinful also in its perpetuation, in that all Adam's descendants were transgressors. God designed that law to fix this on the memory of the children of Israel, and thereby impress them with their dependence on Him in order that He might be recognised, and that they might not forget that forgiveness was to be obtained only in the way appointed by Him. The apostle styles that condition of things "a shadow." We all know what a shadow is; it has form, but no substance, and is therefore useful to present an idea of that which is substantial. So was the law. It is accordingly spoken of by Paul in the second of Romans as "the 'form' of knowledge and of the truth," a definition which we should bear in mind when thinking upon the subject. Do we want to understand more fully the "good things" that God has given us in Christ? They are presented to us in a "shadow" in the Mosaic law, and a study of that shadow will teach us more accurately the things in the New Testament concerning Christ. The "good things" which were to "come" find their substance in him. He is the Head, and it is in consequence of that substance having been given that we find ourselves in the position we occupy this morning. While calling this to mind, we have to mourn the fact that those to whom the shadow was in the first place given do not appreciate the substance. With that perversity which characterized them from the beginning they adhere to that shadow which God has made void. But the Gentiles who are so ready to condemn the Jews, are no better. Take, for example the Romish Church. It pretends to have Christ really present in the bread and wine, which it styles, "the Sacrifice of the Mass." The Gentiles endeavor to transform a symbol into the reality, and the Jews cling to a divine shadow after God has made it of no effect. Let us take care that we do neither. Let us not cling to the shadows. There are more shadows than the law. The world is a shadow; we are shadows. The Psalmist says, "My days are like a shadow that declineth." Let us have our minds fixed upon the substance. Two courses lie before us, and in the end we must reap according to that which we have sown.



The apostle proceeds to elaborate this reference to the shadowy character of the law by reminding his readers of the annual remembrance of sins. According to that law the Jews were required to offer up sacrifice for every class of sin; and in addition, supposing every sin were atoned for, there came a day in each year when it was necessary for the high priest to make atonement in the Most Holy for himself and the nation. Year after year it was repeated, and therefore the apostle reasons, and it is but a logical conclusion — that the yearly remembrance of those sins is in itself evidence that they were not completely taken away by the shadowy offerings.

Having referred to the typical atonement, he calls attention to the substance. "Wherefore when 'he' cometh into the world." Who is the "He"? There is no mention of him in this chapter, but there is in the preceding one. Going back to the closing verses we find reference made to him; "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation." This then is the "he" who "cometh" into the world. He came into the world and fulfilled the prediction of the Psalmist: — "Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sins Thou hast had no pleasure." Well would it have been if the Jew had remembered this.

You know from the record of their doings and God's condemnation of them, that they exalted sacrifice into a place which it was not intended to occupy. An illustration of this is seen in the case of Saul, whose conduct caused Samuel to say: — "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." The same principle is expressed in certain words in the prophecy of Jeremiah (ch. 7:22). "I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices." That sounds strange in view of the fact that God commanded the bringing of burnt offerings and sacrifices. Substitute the words "for the sake of" instead of "concerning" and the meaning is made clear. "I spake not... [for the sake of] burnt offerings or sacrifices, but this thing I commanded them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you." Now in Christ we see one who did that. He never had to offer up an animal sacrifice. True, the Mosaic ceremonies were attended to in connection with him, but that was not on account of personal transgression. Christ's position is represented in the words of the verse "Then said I, lo I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me, to do Thy will, O God." He did that will perfectly; and because he did so, the sacrifice he was able to offer in his own person was an acceptable one, and put the seal to the typical sacrifices. Proceeding further, the apostle connects the doing of that will with believers: "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." That is to say; Christ did God's will; through his doing that will we are

sanctified; separated in the first instance; and made completely holy. It was of sufficient power to give us sanctification in its most exalted and perfect condition, namely, that of receiving glory, honor, and immortality. We need not to offer up from time to time. We come this morning simply to bring to memory Christ's offering. It is not a sacrifice; the Table is not an altar; we are not priests of the Levitical order. In one sense we are priests, to offer spiritual sacrifices of praise and prayer acceptable to our Father in heaven: "By him (Christ), therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But to do good and to distribute forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." The apostle, having thus elaborated his argument, bases upon it this exhortation:—"Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." To realise the meaning of that passage we require to understand something of the shadows which he mentions. The writer was familiar with them, and so were those to whom he wrote. If, therefore, we wish to understand the passage, we must possess the same knowledge. The tabernacle was a structure, the first part of which was for the ordinary priests; but the second part for the high priest alone; and into that, even he only entered on one day in each year. Are we invited to go into a similar place when the apostle exhorts us to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus? Christ has gone into heaven itself; how can we enter there? By faith. We know he is there. We are told that he is our priest. We are told that he mediates for us, and therefore we know it and should act upon it. But in what state of mind are we to enter? "With boldness"—not timidity—not with fear, like that which Israel exhibited when the mount shook. We are to go freely. There is no restriction; we can go at any time—"The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry." The ears of the Lord are always open. But we must approach Him in the right way. There are certain conditions of approach, and those are indicated here. One has been already referred to: "full assurance of faith." There is another: "with a true heart." That implies the existence of a false heart. What is it to have "a true heart"? Is it not to have our affections fixed upon Him, to love what He loves, to hate what He hates, much after the manner indicated in the salutation of Jehu to Jonadab, the son of Rechab (2Kings 10:15)? "Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?" Let us come to God then with this "true heart" and "full assurance of faith," having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." The mention of sprinkling carries us back to the past; it reminds us that when we were immersed we passed through the laver, that our hearts were sprinkled from

the evil conscience which we previously had, that we were invested with a robe of righteousness, after the manner of the Aaronic priests, and that we were thereby placed in a position to approach by the new and living way. The veil of the temple was rent in twain at the death of Christ to signify that it was no longer the way of approach towards God. In drawing near by this new and living way, we are exhorted to "hold fast without wavering." Why should we waver? Flesh and blood is strong, but flesh and blood must be curbed. You say, it is difficult. So it is; the "Truth" is difficult. It is a matter of "overcoming." To whom are the promises made in the second and third of Revelation? "To him that overcometh." "He that overcometh shall inherit all things." Therefore we must set ourselves to work with determination in a practical manner, to overcome the inclination of the flesh in every direction. If we do that we shall not waver. God does not waver. If, therefore, our heart be with Him we shall not waver. We have an illustration of His faithfulness in connection with His planting the nation of Israel in Canaan. "There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel, all came to pass" (Josh. 21:45). So it will be with us. Those "good things" are beyond our perception at the present time. They will operate for our eternal good according to the extent to which the mind is allowed to dwell upon them. We are not simply to read. We are told to meditate; and to meditate not upon what has been only, but on those things which are to be. Where are they given? God presents in His Word a picture of good things in store for those who love and obey Him. Writing in the Romans, the apostle says (ch. 8:28), "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified, them He also glorified. What shall we say then to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" What a power we have on our side! Are we fainthearted? God reveals Himself to us as a God of strength, the God of Israel. Let us go to Him to obtain that strength. The apostle says in the passage we have lately read in the Hebrews: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." A 'throne of grace' is a throne of favor. There are thrones of favor now on the earth. The throne of England is one, and the queen is styled "Her Most Gracious Majesty." The terms 'grace' and 'gracious' are often used in connection with her throne. But how small the grace in comparison with the grace of God. We have already tasted thereof. That should be a reason for relying on Him for the future. Those who have tried it have found it a strong support. His promises have to be tried in order to find that God is a present God, a living God, that He acts now as He did in the past: not as openly, but as really. If we persevere we shall be strengthened. We

shall find that as one difficulty is overcome, we shall proceed in "full assurance of faith," to overcome further difficulties, just as David did. He said on the occasion of his encounter with Goliath, "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of the Philistine." Our difficulties may be to us quite as great as that was to David; but if we look to God we shall be able to overcome, and then we can say with the apostle at the close of the 8th of Romans, "Nay, in all things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor principalities nor powers, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

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## The Offence of the Truth

*God's supremacy — a risen Christ — salvation conditional — first principles — charity — duty to God — the Truth to be contended for in meekness and fear.*

CONSIDER what is involved in the breaking of bread. The broken bread tells of a crucified Christ; but why should he be crucified? Why should the kindness of God require such a tragedy? Why could He not bring His love to bear without pain — without death — in the process? There must be something serious at the root of the matter. There must be some principle of very grave moment underlying the appearance of the Son of God as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. "It pleased Yahweh to bruise him," but not without a reason. It is that reason we would dwell upon this morning. It is a reason evoking reverential admiration in every enlightened mind. It is a reason that strikes no chord of sympathetic response in the natural mind, but which lies deep in the eternal constitution of things, and commands the homage of the highest intellect. It is that God's supremacy is the first law of the universe, and absolute submission to Him the first condition of well-being to the creatures He has made. It is impossible for us to have this too clearly or too constantly in view. It is the great lesson of the law of Moses which was given as a schoolmaster to teach lessons of the Truth. It is the great truth that is less and less recognised by the religious world. Where there is any living recognition of God at all, it is His love, His kindness that is spoken of. This is right in its place, God is love; but He is more. Paul tells us that He is a consuming fire; Daniel, that He is great and dreadful, and terrible; Moses, that He is a jealous God, and will be magnified and sanctified in all that approach to Him. He tells us Himself that He is tenacious of His prerogatives, and will not give His glory to another. This is all according to reason. Is He not great who fills, controls, and has made the universe? Is He not to be honored who has constituted all things in such perfect wisdom? Is He not to

be feared who holds all things in the hollow of His hand, and who could hurl them to destruction in a moment? Is He not naturally and reasonably the Head who knows the workings of all things? Is it not fit and beautiful that His will should be insisted on as the only permissible rule of action where created beings are endowed with the power of rational choice? To all these questions there can only be one answer; and that answer furnishes the key to the enigma of Calvary. Man has sinned: his admission to fellowship and life everlasting with God is impossible, except on the basis of the complete re-assertion of God's supremacy: the perfect vindication of His righteousness; the absolute humiliation and subordination of a man before Him. These conditions are secured in the representative death of him in whom, though standing in the condemned nature of the represented sinning race, God could be well pleased. The will of God perfectly done in a life long enough for the purpose, though brief, was the qualifying preliminary for the suffering of that condemnation of sin in the flesh which was accomplished in the nailing of Adam's mortal nature to the tree. It established the efficient cause of that resurrection to life of which Jesus, although suffering, became the subject on the morning of the third day. We need to keep a strong eye on his life, his death, his resurrection to feel what we ought always to feel concerning the greatness and holiness of God, and the powerless, titleless, and unacceptable condition of man before Him.

Paul tells us that Christ having thus risen from the dead lives to die no more: "Death hath no more dominion over him." But death continues to have dominion over mankind. We have then to realise to ourselves for a moment the relation of Christ to mankind. Are all to receive from him the salvation which he has received from God? A very superficial reading of the testimony is sufficient to settle this point. Two statements of Paul are decisive if there were not hundreds of other statements backed up by the most powerful reason. These are: "He is able to save them to the uttermost 'that come unto God' by him." "He is the author of eternal salvation for 'all them that obey him'." The salvation that is in Christ is to be conferred on a principle that restricts it to a very few. This principle is that of faith and obedience. The shape this principle takes is visible before us in the gospel, otherwise styled 'the Truth.' In this we have things submitted to us for our belief. "He that believeth" is the constant description of the man whom God will save. Let us look also at this. As on other points, so on this. Men are prone to be loose, indifferent, careless. They easily think either that 'it does not matter what we believe,' or that if we are right on one or two points, it is sufficient. Both these positions are positions that will not be taken by such as have attained to a right understanding of the ways of God. Nothing is more certain in the teaching of the Scriptures than that belief of the Truth is the very first condition of acceptance with God. We are all agreed on this, and therefore I need not argue it. It is sufficient at present to say that it is in the

highest degree reasonable, and in accordance with our experience of the relations of rational being. How could even men be in friendship and harmony that did not know and believe in one another? How could men be acceptable with God who were ignorant or unbelieving with reference to Himself and His plans and requirements?

But many agree to this who say it is enough that we know a little. Enlightenment will dispel this impression. The Truth is made up of a number of things necessary to its completeness, as light is made up of a number of different colored rays. Consider how inevitable it is that all have their place. A first element of the Truth is the knowledge of God's existence and character; but would anyone maintain that it is enough that we "believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him?" Would they say it is unnecessary for us to "know Jesus Christ, whom He hath sent"? Surely not. The knowledge of the Father would be insufficient without the knowledge of the Son; for the Son is the way to the Father. And now consider the knowledge of the Son. This is made up of a number of items or details, all of which are necessary in their place. This will quickly appear if we suppose anyone contending that it was sufficient to know that there was, or had been such a being. Would it not be necessary to know that he died as well as that he lived? Would a belief in the life and birth of Jesus be sufficient without a knowledge of his crucifixion and the divine object of that tragedy? Very little thought is needed to answer this question decisively in the negative. Very well. We advance. Would a knowledge of his birth and death be sufficient without a knowledge of his resurrection? On this Paul expressly says that if Christ be not raised, our faith is vain (1Cor. 15:14) and that we must believe with the heart that God raised him from the dead (Rom. 10:9). And thus we may go on through the whole list of the things that constitute 'the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.' The ascension of Christ, the priesthood of Christ, the judgeship of Christ, the kingship of Christ, and, therefore, the kingdom of Christ, on the basis of the covenant made with David and with Abraham: — all these things are vital constituents of "the whole counsel of God," and will be insisted on by faithful men in the basis of fellowship to be accepted and upheld among believers: and there will be a similar insistence on the part of such, on the rejection of all opinions and dogmas that have a tendency to make void any of them.

Why should there be such objection on the part of many to this enlightened and consistent attitude? It is to be suspected that the root lies in the aversion to another truth which lies most plainly on the face of all Bible teachings, but which is most uncongenial to the natural and unenlightened mind, and that is that man is naturally in a state of alienation from God, and incapable by any course of conduct he may pursue of working out a hope for himself. So long as men have a secret sentiment that salvation is an affair of natural quality, such as being kindly, honest, harmless, etc., they naturally

rebel against what necessarily seems to them strait-laced views of salvation and duty. They take pleasure in the thought that it does not matter what you believe, and that all that a man need care for is such a degree of moral excellence as will pass creditable muster with his neighbor. As for the questions of 'doctrine' they scout them as interminable and immaterial, and they are best held in utter abeyance. Well, such a view of matters would be more convenient and pleasing to all men naturally. If it is a true view, no one could wish to do otherwise than act upon it. But is it a true view? That is the question. The answer of God alone can determine this; and in the Bible alone in our age can we have it. The answer is without uncertainty or reserve. It is that condemnation hath passed upon all men (Rom. 5:18), that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), that in His sight no man living can be justified (Psa. 143:2), that in our natural position we have no hope and are without God (Eph. 2:12). Let this truth be once for all truly recognised, and the nature of our position in the world and our relation to futurity is greatly simplified. The way is then clear for the question: What must we do to be saved? And the answer to the question is as clear as the question itself. Our attention is fixed on Christ: "There is none other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved." "Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." "No man can come unto the Father but by me." "Except ye believe on me, ye shall die in your sins." "I am the way, the truth and the life." "He that eateth me, even he shall live by me." "He that believeth on me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." If these things be true, why should we not insist on them? It is the great offence of the Truth to do so. We are called uncharitable and narrow-minded because we re-echo the declarations of a Teacher whom we believe and whom mankind around us profess to regard as a teacher come from God. It is not a question of charity at all. It is a question of truth. It is charitable to declare the truth surely. It is highly uncharitable to withhold it. This question of charity is much misapplied. It is beautiful — indispensable — that we be charitable; but charity must run on legitimate lines. Let us be charitable to the utmost with our own things: we have no right to be charitable with the things of God, His ways, or His words. "He that hath My Word," saith God, "let him speak it faithfully." What would be thought of a revenue officer dispensing alms out of the government funds, or relaxing the claim of dues out of kindly feeling? He must apply to his own purse to meet the claims of charity. People have no right to be charitable with the Truth of God — that is to hide it, or cloak it, or modify it for the sake of the feelings of men. Yet this is where the cry of charity is always raised; and, as a rule, it is raised by those who are not distinguished by charity in the regulation of their own affairs. If a man encroach on their rights, if a man do them an injury, if a man speak evil of them; oh, then, there is flaming zeal "in duty to myself;" but duty to God — well, that is something they are prepared to be

very charitable with. Let us get away from this fog and see that it is not uncharity but the plainest duty and the highest charity to say that men have no hope by nature, and that they can only acquire hope by submission to the institutions apostolically promulgated 1,800 years ago — which consist, in brief, in faith in the apostles' testimony concerning Christ, and obedience to the commandments they delivered in his name. When this ground is clearly taken, there will be more readiness to insist upon the whole truth as the basis of fellowship with the professed believers in the Gospel of Christ, and less disinclination to take the logical issue and all its responsibilities, as the hopeless position of all who are seeking the favor of God in any other way than the way of His own appointment.

But in all things there is a possibility of going to extremes — ugly and hurtful extremes, and this matter is no exception — great and glorious though it is. We have to “contend earnestly for the Faith once delivered to the saints;” but we may possibly do this to the destruction of the very things we are contending for. The same Word that commands us to be valiant for the Truth commands us to “speak the truth in love.” “The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men.” “The fruit of peace is sown in peace of them that make peace.” I have known some element of the beautiful truth contended for with a bitterness and a rancor and a hatred as great and ugly as was ever shown by the most uncircumcised politician of the flesh. Solomon speaks of a “jewel of gold in a swine’s snout.” Such a comparison seems the only fitting one for such a conjunction. Men have nothing to do with the doctrinal distinctions and definitions of divine wisdom who have not learnt the first and the great commandment and its fellow, on which hang all the law and the prophets. It is written that to love God with all the heart and our neighbor as ourselves is more than all burnt offerings and sacrifice. So we may say that such an attainment is more than all points of doctrine that are not held and contended for in the meek and benevolent spirit which is meet in a created being in dealing with the holy and terrible verities of the Eternal. We must never forget the words of Paul, which most of us are well acquainted with, but which is it certain, weigh little with very many. “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels... though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and have all faith so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind. Charity envieth not, charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil.” These words will measure us at the last. The law of love and long-suffering is the law of God. The universe is constructed and worked on this principle in nature and revelation. If we omit it from our spiritual operations, we are out of harmony with the scheme of things, however contentious we may be for points of truth. It is an apostle that hath said: “He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love.” “He



shall have judgment without mercy that showeth no mercy." "He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother, is in darkness even till now." Contentiousness is not faithfulness, though faithfulness has more or less the element of contentiousness, in the sense of contending for the right. Faithfulness is espousing and doing and adhering to the right at all hazard; but in the genuine case, it is always in love and patience. When it is allied with "bitterness and anger, and wrath, and malice and evil-speaking," it is not acceptable to God or any of His children. When men easily and naturally slide into accusation and condemnation of others, especially in their absence, they prove themselves the children of the flesh, whatever their knowledge may be. The angels are models to whom Peter points. He contrasts them with a certain class in his day, whom he describes as "presumptuous and self-willed," and Jude as "murmurers and complainers," "who are not afraid to speak evil of dignities, whereas angels, 'who are greater in power and might,' bring not railing accusations against them (sinners) before the Lord." If angels with such power and penetration and correct reading, indulge in no railing accusations against undoubtedly wicked men, where should the sons of God in this mortal and erring state, be found in the matter? In the very attitude commanded by Christ: "Judge not — condemn not" — contend for the faith, but indulge in no personal railing. Be faithful to the claims, obligations, and injunctions of the Truth, but leave all personal recriminations to the children of the flesh, whose destination is to be taken away in wrath. Wherever men are prone to rancor and severity of personal judgment, you may be sure the Spirit of Christ is not there; and you know what is written: "If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." And how easy would conformity to such lessons of wisdom be if we could have the full view of the latter end. It is there waiting for us, however insensible we may be to it. It is either to lie down and leave all, and be laid away from the land of the living; or it is to be brought suddenly, one of these days, into the solemn presence of God's works, actually begun again upon the earth in the reappearance of Christ on the earth. In either case we part for ever with the circumstances and surroundings of present life, and in both we come at once into relation with living judgment of the Word from which we may hide ourselves in comfort at the present time: for we know that in death there is not a moment to the dead, and that a man dying appears to himself to be ushered at once into the presence of Christ at his coming. Consider and realise now how small will seem the things that vex or interest us now; and how much shall we feel in need of that mercy on which all at last must throw themselves, and how odious to ourselves will at that time appear the rancor and strifes, and hard thoughts and speeches in which we may too easily permit ourselves to indulge in now. Those who are blind to this ultimate bearing of the Truth — who seem incapable of detaching from the relations of the present mortal state — call this sentimentality.

It is a misnomer altogether. It is the presentation of truth that is bound to come at last to every man with a terrible force when he finds himself in the presence of the tribunal, where things will be measured according the divine rule of estimation.

Be it ours in advance to be the children of wisdom in the recognition of the ways of wisdom, that wisdom at last may gladden us with that stupendously glorious award which she holds in both hands for the accepted of the Lord: "Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honor."

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## Our Surety of Eternal Life

*Death rightly considered — release with hope attached — Moses to Christ — a teacher and witness — dead and resurrected — the disciples' testimony — our lively Hope.*

**W**E have again been reminded this morning that death awaits us all — that life is but a short-lived show: that in the natural order, we must disappear as completely from the scene as the bubble that breaks on the ocean's surface. We have been exhorted to keep the fact in view. There is wisdom in the exhortation. It is what David prayed for. "Teach me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, how short it is." And Moses: "So teach us to number our days." The remembrance of death as the certain issue of all our matters now in hand, has a wonderful power in it to make man more humble, more merciful, more wise. Most men prefer to forget it, and to indulge in those excitements and associations that will keep them in forgetfulness. They live in a state of insensibility to the meaning of life while it lasts, and then go frantic when death delivers his summons, whether on board of a sinking ship or in the quiet of the bedchamber. They are happy who look the subject well in the face beforehand, and adapt themselves to wisdom's behest. To such, the subject is delivered from all its gloom, and is even invested with a certain degree of attractiveness. It is seen in its true place in human history, and the comfort it yields is in more directions than one. Death is not a pure evil when taken with its surroundings. By itself, it would be nothing but evil; but it cannot be taken by itself. It is a part of a system of things, and can only be estimated rightly when taken in connection with the whole. It has been spoken of as a punishment. It is more than this: it is also a remedy — a remedy for an evil which would be much sorer without it. It is God's prevention against the development of permanent evil in the universe. When we look round on the evil that now prevails, we can say, how much worse it would be were there no death. How awful would be the lot of a man if his life of frailty, fatigue, and weariness — exertion, struggle and

competition; ignorance, baseness and malice; ingratitude, hatred and blasphemy; stupidity, pride, and arrogance — were everlasting. How maddening if there were none of the alleviation that comes by death to this madhouse of sinners. How dreadful that the earth should thus be filled for ever with devilry as waters cover the sea. Death is not only a punishment: it is the cure of sin — a negative cure truly, but still a cure — an arrangement by which sin is prevented from getting the upper hand in the long run, by which we might say the situation is kept clear for the purpose that God has of causing good to gloriously triumph at the last.

Then in its personal relations, there is a comfort in it which grows with increase of years and wisdom. Most men of capacity are liable to feel as Job said: "I would not live alway:" for the reason that they experience the truth of what Solomon said, that "all is vanity and vexation of spirit." They find life a burden and a weariness in its unrealized aspirations, and in the prevalent abortiveness of the highest capacities in the overwhelming mass of the population. The constant pressure of care, the constant friction of endurance, the constant recurrence of inevitable and countless disappointments in the highest range of desire towards God and man. The perpetual aimless marchings and countermarchings of life, bring at last a sense of futility that finds comfort in the thought that there are bounds to the individual experience of vanity, that the horizon is shortened ahead; that death waits to administer a calm that will bear no ruffle. This would be a poor comfort apart from the other fact that we have to look at. It would be a demoralizing submission to the grim inevitable, which is about all there is in the lustreless philosophy of the natural man. It is considered the highest attainment of virtue in one of the systems of the wise of this world — the system of Brahma, I think it is — when a man reaches the point of contemplating with comfort his absorption into the indistinguishable 'All' at death. This is nothing more nor less than the weariness of the corruptible resigning a man to extinction. What else can be expected where the purpose of God to emancipate us from the corruptible is not known or believed? It is this purpose that gives death its greatest comfort to those who in life are but waiting "All the days of their appointed time."

This purpose is, in a sense, an affair of experience. It is a purpose in measure performed. Death is not the only thing that has a place in the history and the life of man upon the earth. Resurrection is in that history as really as death—Christ as really as Adam. All the facts connected with Christ show us resurrection begun. Look at them for a moment. When I say the facts connected with him, I do not mean the facts of his biography, the facts of his own personal case, or of his own generation. They lie much more broadly and strongly than these, though these are very strong. Christ is part of a whole from which he cannot be detached. To see him rightly, you must see him in his relation to the whole. He appeared at the end of a nation's life which

began with Moses, and during which the prophets prophesied. He appeared in correspondence with their work — not as a man and a work all by himself. They all spoke of him. “Him of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets did write,” was the natural description of him by one disciple to another when first found. We look at Moses and see that he was not a finished work. He and the law that came by his hand all give indications of but a work begun. Moses was but the pier of one side of an arch. Paul’s comment defines the case. “He was faithful in all his house for a testimony of those things that should be spoken after.” Moses’ own declaration is in the same sense. “I have not done these things of mine own mind.” “After my death, ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and evil will befall you in the latter days.” “A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things.” All the prophets that came after Moses point in the same way forward to one who should victoriously establish the work of God in the earth. Christ appears at the end of the economy of things to which Moses and the prophets stood related. “Once in the end of the (Jewish) world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” All that went before Christ are therefore a witness to him, as said Paul, “To him gave all the prophets witness.”

When we come to Christ himself, he is his own witness. Such a man — if we had only his character, his precepts, his deportment to go by — is inexplicable apart from the divinity which he claimed. But we have more than his character: we have his works — the things he did. They testify of him in the one possible sense only. Nicodemus gave voice to the verdict of common reason: “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him.” Consider the self proclaimed argument arising out of the shortness of time he did the works. For only three years and a half did he traverse the Holy Land, healing the sick, and performing impossible marvels; and yet by so short a work, though only a provincial carpenter, he has established his name in the earth, with a durability that defies the utmost combination of human enmity to uproot it. Only extraordinary works could produce so extraordinary an effect. But that is not all. He was killed, as he said he would be. It was the plan which he announced in his teaching. It was no accident. It was no triumph of his enemies such as when a man’s foes get the better of him by numbers, perseverance, or stratagem. He disclaimed beforehand any view of this sort. “No man taketh my life from me. I lay it down of myself that I may take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.” He came into the world expressly that redemption might be wrought out by him in the condemnation of sin in its own flesh, and in the restoration of life to that flesh by the Father’s favor. “For this cause came I unto this hour.” Therefore, he said, though desiring the cup to pass, “Not my will but Thine be done.” In all these very utterances, he is his own witness, for surely never man spake

like this. But go a step further. The crucified Christ could not be kept dead. He said beforehand he would rise the third day: and on the morning of that day, the grave in which he had been placed was empty. His enemies said his disciples had stolen the body. This was the only way they could meet the testimony of the disciples of Christ's resurrection. In truth it was a confirmation of the testimony. It was proof first of all that the enemies of Christ had not possession of the body of Christ. It had disappeared. Could they have obtained access to the dead body of him they crucified they would gladly have exhibited it publicly and so silenced for ever the testimony of the resurrection. But no: by the story they put into circulation they confessed the crucified body had disappeared. There were two versions of the mystery before the public. The disciples said Christ had risen. The authorities said the disciples had stolen the body. How absolutely incredible — yea, impossible — was this version will appear to any one who thinks for a moment. How could the disciples, who were all scattered and broken-hearted, get at a body guarded by soldiers? Suppose they could, why should they want to get at it? Of what advantage could a corpse be to them — the evidence of their own delusion; the seal of their own discomfiture? Oh, say the Jews, they wanted to say he had risen. But why should they want to say this? What were they to gain by saying Christ had risen if he had not risen? Themselves it brought into trouble; what did it do for others? What benefit did they propose for others in proclaiming the resurrection of Christ? We have their words; we know their proposals. "Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of your sins." "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Is it conceivable that men could find motive for a fraud in such proposals? The idea is monstrous.

It is inconsistent with the universal experience of human nature. The man who can believe it, is either phenomenally shallow or astonishingly credulous, or possessed of a wondrous power of shutting his eyes against evidence that he does not like.

The resurrection of Christ is the only fact that fits and explains the procedure of the apostles; and to this fact, consider the amount and nature of the evidence. From the tactics of unbelief, it would seem that witnesses are to count for nothing when the thing spoken to is unacceptable. A new principle of jurisprudence is to be observed in this case. "A witness must be false if he speaks to a thing that I don't want to be proved." This is what it comes to ye wonderful wisecracs! The rule hitherto has been to show a witness false, and thus invalidate his testimony: but if the witnesses are men of probity, and their testimony agree, it must be received. Here we have 500 witnesses, divided up into groups, speaking to various branches of the evidence. First, we have Mary, she saw the Lord immediately after his

resurrection, receiving from him a message to deliver to the disciples, reminding them of what he had said would happen. Then we have the other Mary, and several women, who, visiting the sepulchre, find the grave empty, and the clothes that had wrapped the body of Christ, all neatly folded, and placed in a corner by themselves. Then we have the same group seeing Christ on their way back to report. Then we have Peter, to whom, being out, Jesus showed himself alone. Then we have the two going a foot-journey in the country with whom Christ conversed, at first, 'incognito,' and then revealed himself. Then we have the eleven, less Thomas, to whom Jesus showed himself and conversed with them when they were all assembled. Then we have the same company, plus Thomas, on a second occasion. Then we have Peter and others to whom Jesus separately showed himself while they were engaged in a fishing expedition on the Sea of Galilee. Then we have the company of about 500 to whom Jesus showed himself in one of the hilly seclusions in the neighborhood of that same sea which he had previously hallowed by his miraculous ministrations to the multitude. Then we have the whole company of the disciples from whom Jesus took his final departure and ascended in their presence from the summit of the Mount of Olives. Now all these proved worthy to be believed by their course before and after. Their course before was this: they identified themselves with and assisted a teacher who commanded all Israel to repent, saying, "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Men and women who take part in a movement like this in any age are worthy of belief, and are in fact everywhere believed, when they speak to matters of fact, such as seeing and speaking to a person. Their course after was this: that they persevered for years in this work, in the name of Jesus, and persisted in their testimony to his resurrection, in spite of the most grievous penalties and hardships heaped upon them by the authorities, ending in very many cases in their being put to death. The reliability of the evidence is guaranteed to the judicial faculty as no other evidence could be in a similar case. But there is something besides this. "We are his witnesses," says Peter, "and so also is the Holy Spirit which God hath given to those that obey Him." This witness of the Holy Spirit was an important department of the evidence; for without it, it is not in the nature of things that the apostolic testimony would have been believed by such a multitude as we know, from Pliny, who accorded credence to it in the apostolic age. Its nature is briefly indicated in the statement of Mark: "They went everywhere preaching the word, the Lord working with them, and confirming their word with signs following;" and in the words of Paul: "God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His will." If God thus put His seal to the testimony of Christ's resurrection, that testimony is true. If He did not, there lacks an explanation of the incontrovertible fact that multitudes

embraced the faith of Christ in the first century in the teeth of the direct consequences, and in the face of the organized opposition of Law and Roman rule. Even here the case does not stop; for by the superlative stratagem of wisdom, Christ in the midst of the hottest persecution, turned the leading enemy of the day into the truest and most faithful witness by showing himself to Saul of Tarsus, afterwards known as Paul the apostle. We have his letters in which, by inspiration he is to us the interpreter of the mind of Christ. He preached successfully the faith he at first destroyed. His reason is brief: "Have I not seen Jesus Christ, our Lord? Last of all he was seen of (or by) me also." He is the last and most effective of the witnesses to Christ's resurrection.

It is in view of such things we can say with assurance that resurrection, as well as death, is on the list of human experiences. It is not altogether a matter of faith. It is not altogether a matter of futurity. As regards the masses of mankind, it is entirely a matter of futurity: but the fact of Christ's resurrection is a pledge of the certainty of that futurity, and therefore brings it within the practical calculations of the present with those who can read the meaning of things, Christ's resurrection though an event by itself at the moment, did not happen for itself. It had reference to others. It occurred as part of a plan. This is intimated in the phrase; "Christ, the firstfruits," and more plainly in those words of Paul: "He that raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise us up also by him." "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead." It is this resurrection that takes away all the gloom of death, and arrays the King of Terrors with habiliments of a welcome friend; for what does death with this resurrection in prospect do for the friend of Christ? It ends the weariness of his separation from Christ; it ends the painfulness of his conflict with evil; it ends for him the present evil world, and conducts him instantaneously from the cloud life of probation to the day of God's manifested presence on the earth. It does not do so in reality, but it does so in the appearance to the man's feelings, and practically to him that is the same thing. Not a moment's conscious interval divides the dead man from the consummation upon which the promises of God have caused him to rest in hope; because the dead know nothing, and all interval is to them as blank as the ages that preceded their birth. Death, therefore is on every hand, deprived of its repulsiveness. Whether we wake or sleep, we are (at his coming) the Lord's; and if we die before he come, it only makes our waiting the shorter.

The supreme question is our readiness to meet him; and this is an affair of mental condition as determinable by the Truth. If we allow that Truth to do its work, we shall be always ready to rise joyfully at the call. We may prevent the Truth from doing its work. We may not give it a chance. We may shut our eyes to death; we may open our hearts to the world in which we live, and become engrossed with the things upon which the world's affections are fixed: (they are multitudinous). We may so cultivate the tastes, habits, and

occupations that have to do wholly with man's ways of looking at things as to become disinclined for the views and ways of wisdom. We may slowly sink into that condition in which the Bible reading seems a superfluity; prayer, a meaningless form; attendance at the meetings, a needless burden; and the ways and scruples of godliness, a childish prejudice. Alas! we may have a name to live and be dead. Christ's own prescription in such a case is: "Repent! and do the first works, or else I will remove thy candlestick out of its place. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear: and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve that thou mayest see." These figures of speech signify the application of the mind with steady diligence to the words of truth which God has given us for enlightenment and instruction in His ways. It is better to attend to this counsel forthwith, than to put off till the last hour strikes, and effort is of no avail. That hour is sure to come. We may think we cannot make time now. We have this matter of business to attend to, that friend to see, that urgent family matter to arrange. Well, we shall have to leave all and follow the messenger of death when he raps at our door, whether we will or not. We had better make a place now in all our arrangements for that wisdom that we shall find more precious than rubies when we stand at the judgment seat of Christ, and which, if we put off and put off under this worldly pressure, we shall find it impossible at the last to procure at any price.

Life is but a shadow: the substance is in Christ. Happy is the man that lays hold on that substance and retains it. It is to be done now by applying the heart to understanding, and letting that understanding bear fruit in a life of "patient continuance in well-doing," by which God has appointed we should seek for "glory, honor, and immortality."

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## Steadfastness in the Faith

*Hold to the Truth — change not — read continually — the Scriptures the source of living waters — Jesus and light — foundation in God — the mediator — walking in light.*

“**B**E ye steadfast, immovable.” Such is one of the leading exhortations of the Truth. It would seem as if it ought to be a very easy duty — to be steadfast. In truth, we have a special liability in the contrary direction. Steadfastness sufficiently prolonged goes against the natural grain. The human mind tires of monotony just as the body tires of one position. It is pleasant to have a change for mere change's sake. Hence new things have an attraction for many people who resemble the ancient Athenians in nothing else. New things may be all right, but they may be much the reverse.



They may be a mere appeal to the weakness that tires of one mental attitude. A liking for them, regarded as a symptom of intellectual superiority, may be due to a mere love of change, such as marks and constitutes the shallow and the fickle mind. The change of fashion from age to age, in every department of human activity, is the result of this. Taste roves and returns in an aimless whirligig of change. God changes not, and His children partake of this characteristic. Enlightened and well-balanced intelligence stably rests in that which is true and eternal. It is the mark of wisdom to be established — to be steadfast — to abide in the same thing from year to year as time rolls. Of course, this presupposes the attainment of truth. Pilate asked what this was. He did not wait for the answer. Those who know the gospel know the Truth, and recognize the wisdom of being “steadfast, immovable.” In this connection, change is not progress. In divine things, change is always more likely to be retrogression than progress. The inherent tendency of the natural mind is to indulge in thoughts and fancies in harmony with its own predilections, which are opposed to divine thoughts and ways, and as the process is combined with the pleasing sensation of the relief that comes from variety, it has resulted in past ages of the world’s history, first in the slight declension and then in the complete apostasy from the ways of God — as in the case of Israel in Canaan after the death of Joshua; and 1,500 years afterwards, in the case of the Christian community when the apostles had all gone to their graves.

How are we to foster this invaluable quality of steadfastness, on which our ultimate salvation depends as much as on our reception of the Truth at the first? Study will furnish the answer. Steadfastness, like every other faculty of the mind, grows by use and rusts by neglect. Its power in this respect doubtless depends, in some measure, on native organization. Some have naturally more stability of mental action than others. Still, the ultimate attainments of every man depend in greater measure on the daily play of mental forces, in the direction of which all of us have some voice. The permanence of mental impression in any direction depends upon continuousness of contact with that which makes the impression in the first instance. Take the most familiar example. A man remembers powerfully the place he lives in, the people he moves among, the calling he follows. How is it that he knows and remembers these so well while his mind is a total blank to the house and friends and occupation of a man in the next town? It is because his mind is in contact with the one set of facts and not with the other. But take him away from his own town and his surroundings — transport him to a distant country and plant him down among other scenes and other neighbors, and you would see a change by-and-by. His impressions of his former circumstances will gradually fade, until, if you give him long enough time, they would disappear. Continuousness of impression in divine things — steadfastness in the faith — depends upon habitual contact with the facts and evidences that generated them in our

hearts in the first case. In the first century, these of course, would consist of what we had seen and heard at the hands of the apostles. In our age, they consist of the writings that God has caused to be written to this very end — the Scriptures, which are able to make us wise unto salvation. “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but the companions of fools shall fall.” He that readeth wise books shall be wise. The wise book above all others is God’s book — the Bible — wherein alone are exhibited to us those disclosures of the divine thoughts and purposes which, when we make them our property by reading and mental assimilation, gives us steadfastness in a world of caprice and change. How necessary this is, experience will show us. From human books we do not easily get away, because we have a natural affinity for things that men like ourselves discourse of. But with a book of divine authorship it is different. Divine thoughts are fundamentally different from human thoughts. There is not the same natural response to them in our own hearts; and we naturally fail to cling close to plans and principles so far above us in favor of those that commend themselves to mere human instincts and preferences and sympathies. So much the more need is there for continuousness of contact with the Book containing them. This contact will overcome natural antipathy, and engender affinity where repulsion originally existed. In the natural state men prefer to contemplate and deal with the works of God without God. They are more interested in the mechanical conditions that govern their being than in any consideration of the ultimate cause of those conditions. There is a powerful natural preference for the study of nature without reference to the origin of nature, and for the discussion of man’s affairs, apart from the anterior purpose in the Eternal Mind out of which man sprang. This is the natural bent of the human mind unenlightened with regard to God. It is the source of the universal distaste for Bible things. It is due to a partial and depraved action of the mind. A full and enlightened action would lead a man to penetrate beneath mere aspects of nature to the fundamental power in which it subsists. When the Truth comes, this comes with it. The illusions of the natural mind vanish. A new mental action is set up. Fact displaces appearance, wisdom overrides feeling: the eternal is seen below all phenomena. God becomes the great truth and the governing point of view. Between men with whom God is a reality and men to whom God is a superstition, there can be no sympathy. Every man truly enlightened in the Truth is bound sooner or later to experience in himself what Jesus said of his disciples, “I have given them Thy Word, and the world hath hated them.” If the Word of God dwell in a man, the world will hate him, because it hates the Word; and it hates the Word because it hates God. This is the cause of the world’s hatred of the Bible. The Bible is full of God. You can scarcely put your finger on a part within its pages where He is not on view in some aspect or other. That which repels the world attracts the children of God. They desire

to come near to God, they share David's thirst for the living water in a land of drought and barrenness. They cry out with him, "Oh, when shall I come and appear before God!" With him, they would "dwell in the house of God for ever." They love to frequent meetings where He is prominent, and to keep the company of men and women in whom His love is a guest. The meeting on the first day of the week for the breaking of bread, is full of usefulness from all these points of view. Here we have God and God only. God in the emblems partaken — God in the Scriptures read. We do not eat the bread or drink the wine for their own sake. As often as we "eat this bread and drink this cup" we "show the Lord's death until he come." This takes us back to past events — to the appearing of Christ among men — to "the wonders and signs which God did by him" — to that most wonderful sign of all by which God has pledged His purpose to all men — the raising of our Lord Jesus from the dead. The reading of the Scriptures introduces us to the testimony on which our faith in this event is built. Our reading this morning from John, for example; "That which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled of the Word of Life — (for the Life was manifested, and we have seen it and bear witness and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." This is not testimony at second hand. It is the evidence of one of the original witnesses — one who saw and heard. It is as striking and as strong as evidence can be. All the apostolic evidence is like this. "We have not followed cunningly devised fables," says Peter, "but were eye-witnesses." That these are the very words of John and Peter is as certain as such a matter can be made. They have been in the hands of the Christian public in every age since the first century; and in that century, during the last half of it, they were circulating among believers with the sanction of the apostles themselves. The guarantee is so powerful that we may rest on the words as implicitly as if we heard them come out of the mouths of the apostles themselves. What was it that their eyes had seen and handled? The narratives of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John inform us fully. They saw and heard what Jesus did — what Jesus said — whose dying request brings us together this morning. Consider his works; consider his words; they bring their own witness. Read them and watch their effect on your mind. Do they not bring holiness and truth and light and superiority? And consider the object with which they were written: "That ye also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His son Jesus Christ" (1John 1:3). What words and works were ever written with an object like this? What writer ever proposed such an object as this but men who "wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit?" Consider also what they declare as the great message authenticated to men by what they had seen and heard: "This then is the message which we have heard of him and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." Here

is the Truth in burning focus. It bears in various directions. It concerns both the nature of God and the character of God. Light is in the universe, but is not the universe, for there is darkness where light is not present in some specific form. And light wherever we see it is derived — even light in the sun is the result of decompositions and combustions that take place in the substance composing it. There must be a power of light behind all light — a power of life behind all life. The profounder class of scientific minds recognizes this. An interesting pamphlet has recently been published by Professor du Bois, of Yale College, in which he demonstrates the existence of God as scientific necessity: His argument is intended to be an answer to Herbert Spencer's theories, and is conducted on purely mathematical principles. He shows that there are logical gaps in the theory of spontaneous evolution which scientifically demand to be filled, and which can only be filled by the recognition of eternal wisdom and power. In the presence of Bible facts, we need not trouble ourselves about science. Still, living in a scientific age, and breathing more or less of a scientific atmosphere, which for many years has tended to the negation of God, it is somewhat of a help and comfort to see God scientifically recognised. It helps us to set a right estimation on Bible revelation. We cannot know God by science, which only faintly whispers that He is. We may know Him by what He has been pleased to tell us; and He has revealed much by Moses, the prophets and the apostles. What He has revealed, it is our wisdom implicitly to receive. It is absurd to sit in judgment on it. As created and finite beings, we can have no capacity to conceive of the Deity, who is Self-existent. Our part is simply to ascertain facts and receive them. The facts in this case consist of what is revealed. From this alone we are safe in drawing our conceptions of God. The conceptions we may form by our own thoughts on such a topic must be held in abeyance, for we who are made can know nothing and think nothing correctly of the Power that is not made. The conception revealed must be the right one, however difficult of reception by some. The conception revealed is a simple one. One Father dwelling in light, personally located in heaven. Yet inter-penetrating and upholding all creation by His Spirit effluent from His person, which effluent Spirit nevertheless constitutes a unity with His person in the way that the light of a flame is a unity with the flame. The Bible reveals this; and one great offence connected with the Christadelphian name arises from the fact of our believing it. It is not the first time that the belief of the Truth should cause offence. We must bear it. The time will come when it will be a glory and not a shame, that we have believed in the God of Israel. Another thing revealed is that the glorious God thus filling heaven and earth, observes certain rules of action in His relations with His creatures He has made, by which sin against Him makes our continuance in the universe with Him impossible. Where He is disobeyed alienation takes place, and death must ensue. We are taught (and our own

experience tells us) that this is the position of the whole human race; that sin has entered and has prevailed, establishing the reign of death; that, being sinners, we cannot return to God except by the mediation of an acceptable mediator; that this acceptable mediator is Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone, beside whom, there is none other. We are assembled this morning because we accept this teaching of the Bible. We are condemned by our neighbors for holding such "narrow" doctrine. Well, we shouldn't invent it. It is here in the Bible; we but accept what is taught here. If it is censurable, the censure lies against the Bible; but what censure can lie against the Bible? The Bible is a revelation from God. The evidence of this is overwhelming. Our only course, therefore, is to put up with the disagreeable thoughts and speeches of opponents, waiting patiently for the day of manifestation when all men will see the truth that is now hid from their eyes.

That God is light in character as well as in nature, John proceeds to illustrate. "If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not speak the truth. But if we walk in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanseth us from all sin." Light in this use evidently stands for truth, wisdom, righteousness. It completes the picture of the glory of God when we have to think of Him not only as a being of physical brightness and power, but of One whose character corresponds with the physical light and purity of His nature. We are told to rejoice in God. We can do so when we think of His goodness, His holiness, His wisdom, and truth. It is something to be glad about that the power of the universe is in the hands of a Being true and merciful. Fellowship with Him requires that we imitate Him in these attributes, "Be like unto your Father." This is Christ's complete summary of all exhortation. To be the reverse of God — to be unkind — unholy — unjust — and false — is to walk in darkness; and for us to profess fellowship with Him while we are in such a condition is, as John says, to act a lie. The only sense in which we can have fellowship with Him now is to be like Him and to receive His approbation. The time will come when men who have acceptably passed through this time of trial will have fellowship with Him in the highest sense. They will not only resemble Him in their moral attributes and enjoy His favor, but they will possess His nature, and be sons of light and power. Meanwhile they must walk in the light of His moral excellence. They must obey His commandments and imitate His character during the days of their mortal weakness. If they do so, the sacrifice of Christ, brought to bear in the priesthood of Christ, will avail for the forgiveness of their shortcomings and sins, which otherwise would be fatal to their prospects of eternal life. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." No man with an adequate sense of human imperfection and the holiness of God could entertain the thought that we are without sin. Our very best attainments are but poor, blemished work. "All our righteousness is

as filthy rags," by comparison with the perfection of God. But John gives us this consolation, that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." At the same time, John links this obligation with our privilege: "I write unto you that ye sin not." To sin not is to disobey not. Hence the keeping of the commandments is the criterion of an acceptable course. "Hereby we do know that we know him if we keep his commandments. He that saith I know him and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar and the Truth is not in him." "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself to walk even as he walked." Here is a simple principle of easy application by which we may judge ourselves before we come to the judgment seat. We need not attempt to judge others. We cannot: for we do not know all the facts. We must not: for we are forbidden. To judge ourselves, we may and must, for we are commanded. There is this encouraging fact about it, that "if we judge ourselves, we shall not be judged." The man who deals hardly with his own faults is likely to receive mercy even at a human tribunal: how much more at the tribunal at which "mercy rejoiceth against judgment."

Obedience as the law of righteousness, John styles "an old commandment which ye had from the beginning." He might well so describe it, for the enunciation and operation of that law are co-extensive with the history of God's dealings with man. Both Eden and Sinai exemplified its work. But he proceeds to speak of another element of the "light" in which the Truth calls us to walk — of "a new commandment" — to which Jesus also made the same reference: "He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness and walketh in darkness and knoweth not whither he goeth because that darkness hath blinded his eyes." There is much in John's epistles about love. Probably this is owing to the fact that they were written when the ecclesias had been in existence some fifty years, and when, through the strifes and frictions inseparable from the intercourse of a mixed community, alienations and hatreds had begun to show themselves to a serious extent. Whatever the cause, John found it necessary to make love prominent in his letters. He has from this been called "the loving disciple," and popular pictures of him give the idea of a languishing, sentimental woman without backbone enough to say "No." There is an evident misapprehension of John's character here, for though his letters speak of love, they speak of it in a way that shows the "loving disciple" as a man of energy and outspoken fidelity to principle. How frequently does he say that in such and such a case a man is a liar; and how decisively does he recommend the test of every professed form of truth, and the uncompromising rejection of that which is found to be error. Nevertheless, he has much and strong things to say about love. He does not

hesitate to declare that a man destitute of love is out of his place in the family of God. God Himself he proclaims to be love: "he that loveth not is not of God." This is reasonable, and calls for the urgent attention of all who aspire to the adoption of the sons of God. How sterile and unattractive is mere intelligence without love. How terrible and overpowering would God be to our poor mortal minds if He were only power, and holiness, and wisdom. How encouraged and soothed, and drawn to Him we are by the declaration that "He is gracious and long-suffering, slow to anger, and plenteous in goodness and truth." How the Psalms delight to exclaim: "His mercy endureth for ever," We can understand David saying, when asked to choose between the enmity of man and the displeasure of God, "let me now fall into the hands of the Lord: let me not fall into the hands of man." The lesson we easily draw is that the brethren of Christ must be men of kindness and mercy. Though easy to learn the lesson from the Scriptures, it is hard to carry it out in the circumstances prevailing on the earth at the present time. The earth is full of unrighteousness and cruelty. Our attempts at acting a God-like part come back upon ourselves oftentimes with great discouragement. Let us persevere. Yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be. The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. The day will come when none but the children of love will be alive upon the earth, and when the comfort of love will be blended with the beauty of wisdom, and the delightsomeness of holiness, and the power and glory of immortality that will never fade away.

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## Sojourning in Fear Awaiting Christ

*The current of life — the Eternal Rock — the world passeth away — pilgrims —  
looking for the city of God's building — the Redeemed.*

**D**AVID says: "Our days upon earth are as a shadow;" John, that "the world passeth away"; James, that "our life is but a vapor that appeareth for a very little while and then vanisheth away." The Bible uniformly holds this fact in the front. The Bible is not therefore a gloomy book. It appears so to some people, only because they lack the mental habit of noting truth. The Bible deals with facts rather than fancies, and appeals to sober discernment rather than sensation. In this it is the sweetest book under the sun, for truth is sweet, even if it sometimes has an ugly side. The happiest men are those who delight in truth and know it.

The transitoriness of the life we now live is part of the Truth. It comes

home with more striking force at some times than others. Today, a brother has announced the death of a sister who has borne us company for many years. This last week the papers have announced the death of John Bright, who has been before the public for two generations. When I came to England, 30 years ago, one of my first duties was to report one of his political orations for the press. He was then a fixed brilliant star in the political firmament. Today, that star has ceased to shine. The contrast between now and then is great and striking. In the presence of it, most men realise the vanity of human life. The pity is, they don't see it sooner. The Truth teaches us to discern it in the steady current of things beforehand. The change from the political brightness of 30 years ago to the eclipse of today's coffin has been in progress all the time, like the slowly shifting sky at night. It is so with us all. "Time and change are busy ever: man decays, and ages move." Wise men note the fact and adjust themselves to it; and in this there is no gloom. The real gloom is with those who shut their eyes to the fact, and drown the sense of it in frivolous occupations and delights. The time comes, sooner or later, when they can no longer shut their eyes, and when pleasure loses its power to charm away the horrors of sin and death which are quietly with us whether we give attention or not.

We turn our attention from the transitory and the apparent to the everlasting and real. These are exhibited to us in our readings of the Scriptures. Nowhere else can we meet them at present. The day will come when they will be displayed on earth in the living power of actuality. Meanwhile we make their acquaintance here beforehand, as a matter of information and faith. Let us get as close as possible. They are our life. They all cluster in Christ, who has no meaning apart from them. Looking at him with discernment we see the whole Truth, which is not visible in natural life and which the world cares not for. We see God first of all, for it was of the Father that Jesus had most to say. He had come from the Father and was returning to Him, and had for his business meanwhile the doing of the work which He had given him to do. To the world this is the least interesting part of the Truth. Nay, it is odious to them. As Jesus said in prayer, "The world hath not known Thee." What men do not know, they have no interest in. How dreadful to be ignorant of God. As Jesus said again, "This is eternal life, that they might know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." This that is odious to the world is the most precious part of the Truth to the children of God. The most grievous feature of the evil state of things now prevailing on the earth, to this class, is the absence of God's visible manifestation, and the absence of all desire for it among men. David stands as their type: "my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God." This that is considered as the mere oburgation of sentimental piety, is the expression of the highest reason. Reason thoroughly applied, bores its way down to the Eternal Rock, or ascends the long line of causation to the First



Cause; and here it finds the root of all life, and excellence, and power; and with communion and recognition here alone can it be satisfied. And what form of communion? Not the intercourse of equals. Nay, worship; reverence, adoration, praise. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory." Man prostrate in adoration; man on his knees in supplication; man lost in an ecstasy of admiration and praise — this is the attitude of reason: for "of Him and to Him and through Him are all things." The Psalms which we have lately been reading give us the right clue. They are full of God. "Praise ye the Lord, Praise ye the name of the Lord, Praise Him O ye servants of the Lord: Ye that stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God, Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; sing praises unto His name for it is pleasant."

This is the state of mind we have to rise to as brethren and sisters of Christ; for it is the Father's predestination that they be "conformed to the image of His son," and we know that Christ was not behind David in the fervor of his admiration of the eternal Father. The world is getting more and more away from this attitude, for with the vanishing of the old superstitions and the diffusion of a correct knowledge of nature and natural law, unaccompanied with a real knowledge of revealed truth, there is setting in a cold, undevout temper which is unfavorable to the recognition of God in any real sense. We are in danger of being infected by this spirit, which is a spirit of godlessness, with however many human graces accompanied. The only models are in the Bible; and among them all, David and Christ stand first in that living sense of God which is the first principle of true godliness. Looking at Christ, the next thing we see is the temporariness of all present relations as estimated by him — a sense as if passing on, as of getting through, as of hastening to a goal. He did not rest on this life as the bulk of men do. He did not aim at achieving anything in it, beyond the using of it for the purpose in hand — the finishing of the work God had given him to do. His objective was always beyond. In this his true brethren also resemble him. It is expressed by Paul when he says: "We have here no continuing city: we seek one to come," and again, "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God;" and again, "our citizenship is in heaven," and again, by Peter, "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." This attitude also is the attitude of pure reason. It is only the ignoring of facts that leads to any other. Men with a distinct sense of the ephemeral and fleeting nature of life as it now is would not set their affections upon it as they do. Men with a strong desire for and faith in the life that is coming would not, and could not, devote themselves, as nearly all men do, to the present world. Most men lack this sense and this faith, and yet both are in harmony with indestructible facts. All realise it sooner or later. In the midst of their struggles and their successes, they are bound to feel sometime or other the unhappiness of having no goal beyond the horizon of present efforts. Friends die; circumstances change; strength fails, and they are

made to see, in spite of themselves, the truth of John's words that "the world passeth away." And as for that which is to come, what man but rudimentarily acquainted with the history of the past can entertain a serious doubt that the world is marching on to a different state from that which now prevails? Who can shut his eyes to the scattered Jews? Who can ignore the Bible? Who can deny the Holy Land? Who can remove the name of Christ from the civilization of the world? And what man of reason acquainted with these things can resist the conclusion they jointly yield, that there is a future for man and for the earth as much higher than the present state as it is lower than that which wisdom and goodness desire?

It is then, but the act of enlightened reason to accept the position which Christ occupied in the present world — that of a stranger — a pilgrim — one not settled to policy rooted in the present — one whose life, whose aims, whose love and aspirations are in the future. Such a choice seems fanatical only to those who are unacquainted with its grounds. It is due to no natural moroseness. It is not the result of any tendency to asceticism. The sons of God are the most cheerful and sociable of men when the right conditions exist. If they "have here no continuing city," it is not because they are insensible to the attractions of polished life. It is precisely the reverse. It is because the life in the world is not polished enough in the true sense that they "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." It lacks the true salt of life in lacking the manifested presence of God and any desire towards Him — which are the root of true well-being. This indeed is the great evil of the times — the characteristics and fundamental defect and deformity of the present evil state. It might seem as if this were not so. It might seem as if the great evil of the present state were death — as if the one great thing needed were the change of our corruptible bodies into the uncorruptible and immortal. On reflection however, it will appear that the disease is deeper. Our afflicted state of life (ending in death) is but a fruit on the tree. What is the cause? This, that God has hidden His face from the human race and left them to shift for themselves instead of leading them by the hand and shining upon them in all the ways of His favor. When God shows His face again (as He has promised He will); when He takes mankind in charge and bestows upon them laws and institutions adapted to develop and bless them (as He has covenanted to do); when the proclamation becomes a fact that John heard in the isle of Patmos: "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God," death and all the other evils that now prevail upon the earth will soon fly away. Evil came because God withdrew: when God returns, evil will flee.

Now, the world is without God. It would be some compensation if in the midst of the evil, the world loved God, and worshipped and served Him. It would be some attraction to the friends of God if the world delighted in Him

and sought earnestly after His ways. Instead of this, how is it — that “the wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God; God is not in all his thoughts.” Consequently, both in fact and in sentiment, the world as it now exists is “the world of the ungodly.” How then can the friends of God be anything else than strangers and pilgrims? They love society and the joy of communion, but they cannot accept these things at the hand of a community of whom it is divinely written, that “the friendship of the world is enmity with God.” Though the friends of God have “here no continuing city,” they do “seek (ardently and earnestly) one to come.” They know it is coming though there are no tokens of its approach visible to merely natural men. They know it will come, however long they may have to wait for it, yea though they wait to the utter weariness of mortal nature, and lie down with the silvered hair of age to rest. And they well know it is worth waiting for, both as regards nature and duration. What is testified of Abraham is true of them all; “he looked for a city having foundations whose Builder and Maker is God.” The “city” (polity) of the present world has man for its builder and maker; consequently, it is evil and transitory, and unworthy of the aim and labor of a man’s life. But the city that Abraham looked for, and which all his children will inherit with him, will be an institution of divine contrivance and that will not pass away at all. “The God of heaven shall set up a Kingdom.” If so, it will bear the stamp of the wisdom reflected in heaven and earth. He has set a kingdom up once already in the history of Adam’s race. Though it was provisional and shadowy, the order of things established in Israel when they came out of Egypt under Moses is the only political constitution the world has ever seen that is perfectly adapted to promote the full well-being of man in a mortal state. If it be thus with a kingdom established in a confessedly imperfect order of things, what may we not look for when the time has come for the full blessedness of all nations covenanted to Abraham? It is part of the unutterable sadness of the civilization now upon earth that the only man regarded as “practical” and wise is the man who dismisses all hopes of life ever being a noble and intellectual thing among men; and who grimly accepts as inevitable the dark and sinister state of things now prevalent. If God had revealed no purpose, the logic of this cynicism would be irresistible. There is evidently no hope for man, or any system he can devise. Divine wisdom backed with divine power is what is needed. This is promised in the gospel preached to Abraham and to many since his day; and to those who believe it, a different aspect is thrown on human prospects altogether. There is hope on the horizon. A stable system of human life will yet appear on the earth — a system in which the highest ideals will be realized. A government composed of righteous and immortal and omnipotent men, under one responsible King and Head, will be established in the land of promise over all the countries of the world. It will

be composed of men who have gone through life before — men with a history — men who have known the world's woes and the world's wickedness — men who have in the days of darkness and despair steadfastly upheld the honor of God and have sought to promote the well-being of man in the only limited way possible to their weakness. These 'redeemed from among men,' in the previous generations, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets for their nucleus, and Christ for their Head and Centre, will reign with power, and joy and honor for ever. Among themselves will prevail the ideal conditions now laughed at as a dream; and among the nations of the earth will grow up under their strong and beneficent rule, all the happy fruits of life that are now cursed, and blighted and killed under every form of government under the sun. Plenty, and health, and wisdom will give gladness to the new life to which mankind will awake under the government of "the city having foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God."

It is written that "for the joy set before him, Christ endured the cross, despising the shame. No empty words of sentiment are these. They express the gladsome reality of the Kingdom of God when it shall have come. And they define the present policy naturally arising out of faith in it. It is a policy in which the fathers preceded all their children, as expressed in the words of Paul: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them and embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

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## Humility of Circumstance Favorable to Godliness

*Isaiah's Rebuke — a Great Light — a heedless world — our calling — in lowly surroundings — Zion's favor — the Bible a rejected yet honored witness.*

**W**E are here again to refresh our minds in the water of the Word. Weary and travel-worn, we need it: necessitous, we get it wherever we may happen to apply. This time it is Isaiah. Isaiah has been called the evangelical prophet. There seems no well founded reason for this beyond the greater fullness of the Word that came by him. It is the same Word that we find in the others. Evangelical literally means having the quality of a good message. All the prophets are good message prophets while bringing presage of evil. If Isaiah had none of the terrible side of God's messages, there might be some reason for calling him the evangelical prophet. Instead of this, his book opens with a message of displeasure and judgment not exceeded by any of the prophets. God calls heaven and earth to hear what He has to say

to Israel — viz, that He has brought up children but they have rebelled against Him; that while the dumb animals know their owners, Israel does not know the God who brought them from Egypt and has sustained them in all their ways. He has to speak of them as “a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters.” He tells them of their body-politic, that it has no soundness in it; that the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint; that from the sole of the foot to the crown of the head there is nothing but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores. In a series of chapters he foretells the direful things that were coming on them, culminating in the gloomy picture which immediately precedes the chapter read this morning; “They shall look unto the earth and behold trouble and darkness and dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness.”

“Nevertheless,” our chapter begins, “the dimness shall not be as in her vexation when at the first He lightly afflicted the land of Naphthali and the land of Zebulun, and afterwards did more grievously afflict her by way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations.” That is, the final darkness that would overtake the land would have a contemporary light with it which the first affliction of Israel had not. In the first affliction of Israel, there was no light. It was pure darkness, there was no promise or indication of good to come, but in the final tribulation, there would be light in the midst of it, as came to pass. “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light. They that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.” What exactly this meant, we know by express information. We are not left to guess. Matthew, by the Spirit, informs us (Mat. 4:13-16) that it was fulfilled in the manifestation of Jesus in these very regions, in an incipient form at the least. Jesus has not yet accomplished all that this prophecy speaks of; for it speaks of a breaking of Israel’s yoke “as in the day of Midian,” which was a day of miraculous destruction of the enemy, but he appeared in the very regions specified in the prophecy, and proclaimed himself “the light sent unto the world, that whosoever followed him should not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” We know that he will, at his second coming, overthrow the power of the adversary in all the land and all the earth; but we have to note that the light appeared in the darkness that was settling for a long night upon Israel 1800 years ago. It was not light in the general sense. It was light in a special form. It was light in the birth and public manifestation of a deliverer. The prophecy itself proceeds to indicate this: “Unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given” — an extraordinary child: a son of the most distinguished order — “his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” The giving of a name in Bible usage has much more significance than among us. We give names for the sake of distinction merely: but the Bible gives names to convey a meaning or a prophecy concerning the persons named, and sometimes concerning others. To say then that this child was to be called, ‘wonderful,’

etc. was equivalent to saying that he was to be so. We look at Christ and see the applicability of these names. None so wonderful ever appeared upon earth. None among the sons of men are truly wonderful as he. Men come into being through the operation of organic law that prevails amongst countless races of creatures that inhabit the earth. There is nothing wonderful about the birth of a man except the inherent wonder that attaches to every process of nature. It is an every-day occurrence — very commonplace and of no significance in millions of cases. But the babe of Bethlehem was due to a supreme operation of the Holy Spirit — a divine initiative — which made the born child an extraordinary phenomenon — an interference with the ordinary run of affairs — a showing of the Creator's hand for a special work, possibly the most interesting work upon earth — viz., the manifestation of His glory with a view to the final purpose He had in making the earth and man upon it. "Counsellor" he was, as none else — in the penetration of his understanding, in the profundity of his knowledge, in the wisdom of his advice. A man following Christ's advice will walk at last into realms of perfect well-being. "The Mighty God" he was, in the power God gave to him; "the everlasting Father" both in being the manifestation of the Eternal Father, and the appointed head, leader, guide, friend, and father of the permanent order of things to be established upon the earth when God's purpose is done. And the Prince of Peace we shall see him to be when, by successful war against all nations, he shall have conquered peace that will be established in righteousness and plenty for ever more.

Consider an aspect of the case which may afford us some satisfaction and encouragement in a day when submission to the Word of God ensures rejection and shame at the hands of established respectability, and when the most robust may be tempted sometimes to doubt their own position in the presence of the universal complacency and prosperity of unbelief. Going back to the apostolic age in the light of Isaiah 9, we know for a certainty that the child born of Mary is the very personage foretold in this chapter — God's own Son whose birth is acclaimed by angels. Should we not expect then according to the popular rules of judgment that this child will be born in circumstances of comfort and plenty, and should we not expect his infancy to be tended by the hands of opulency and distinguished attention? Will not his boyhood be attended and guarded by every adjunct of honor and care? Will not his manhood be splendid in popularity and renown? Will not his mission be hailed by the whole nation in glad submission? Will not his voice command universal respect and obedience? Surely, the religion and learning of his age will hasten to prostrate themselves before the Lord's anointed? Surely nothing but influence, prestige, wealth, and success await the undoubted Prince of Peace? How different the case was from this, you know. Cradled in lowly circumstances, brought up in a mountain village of barren repute, educated at a carpenter's bench, revealed amongst common people, looked down upon by

respectability, his words opposed, his work condemned, his professions scouted, his character hated, his life destroyed, his name cast out as evil by a hundred generations of Israel. Though "he came to his own, HIS OWN RECEIVED HIM NOT." Him, "none of the princes of this world knew;" and as for the people, after a transient interest, excited by his miracles and wonderful teaching, they despised and rejected him. They saw nothing to desire in him. They esteemed him smitten of God and afflicted. At last they clamored for his life and demanded a murderer to be granted to them in his place.

It is impossible to conceive of a more discouraging situation for a work of God on the earth. Yet this was the position of the very Light of God, appointed to lighten the Gentiles and glorify His people Israel. Judged by the tests that men apply, it was self-condemned. Men ask if the thing is respectable, if the learned approve — if it is popular and well supported. A negative answer on all these points is fatal to popular approval. It was fatal in the first century. It is fatal in the present century. Here we have the Truth. There is no gainsaying it. By the very Bible which the people have in their hands, they may know it, and many do know it. Our appeal is to it; read and see. "Yes, but you have no respectable people among you. You have no learned men. You are a poor uneducated lot." We admit the charge. We have no human credentials or recommendations of any kind. When our case is examined, it is found we are nobody according to the current standard. But we have the Bible; we know it; we daily read it; we understand it; we believe it; and we try to obey it; and what other recommendation will prevail with God at last? Jesus (the rejected; the unlearned, the killed but raised again) said, "If any man hear my voice and follow me, him will my Father honor." This is all we claim; this is all we try to enforce, that the belief of the Father's promises and obedience of His commandments is the sole ground of acceptance with Him; and with this qualification, we can afford to be without those adjuncts that are highly esteemed among men. Nay, we can see that in the present state of things those adjuncts are liable to be barriers and hindrances to the way of truth and holiness. God so works that His claims should not rest on human prestige, but on His own authority. If the learned in the land are against us, that is in our favor; for God never has chosen the wise of this world to do His work. He so tells us by Paul. If we have no standing or prosperity, we say, neither had Christ in his day. God so works His works that no flesh should glory. We see nothing and claim nothing but this: that we believe what the Bible teaches, and try to do what it commands, and cannot consent to any departure from its standard. For this cause we are under reproach. We must accept it, and patiently submit for a time, and rejoice in it if we can. We know we could get on by adopting a different policy. If we would hold the thing slacker, widen it a little more, open the bands of a cheerful communion with the looseness and corruption of the churches, not calling it looseness and corruption, but other people's ways, we could sail out into the popular stream, and catch a little of the pleasant breeze

and glide down the stream to the blue ocean of prosperity. But it is not possible, without treachery to the restrictions and separations enjoined by God on all who wish to be His children; and such treachery will in the end appear madness, though it may be convenient for the time being. We are in the social ditch, and we know it. There is no advantage in disguising the fact from ourselves and others. We cannot aim at a respectable standing. Respectability, as a rule is alienated from the love and obedience of God; not that non-respectability per se is any better, for, as David says, "Rich men are a lie;" as he also says, "Poor men are vanity;" it is not in any human condition of itself to be wise; but humility of circumstance is more favorable to godliness than the reverse; and therefore it is wise to be content with the fact declared by James, that "God hath chosen the poor of this world," provided they be "rich in faith." He has not rejected the rich but their salvation is a matter of difficulty, by reason of the unfavorable influences to which they are exposed. All this belongs to the dark side of our calling. There is a bright side. Let us look at that for we need cheering up, and this will do it. The bright side is in the very chapter before us. Having told us of the child to be born, the Son to be given (whose lot it was in the preliminary stage to be "despised and rejected of men"), it tells us this about him: "the government shall be upon his shoulder... UPON THE THRONE OF DAVID AND UPON HIS KINGDOM." What brightness is this? It is the brightness of the Kingdom of God of which Jesus himself spoke: "I appoint unto you a kingdom as my Father hath appointed unto me, that ye may eat and drink with me at my table, in my kingdom, and sit on thrones." "Fear not little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." "To him that overcometh, to him will I grant that he sit with me on my throne." There is nothing more unlikely upon earth, judged from the standpoint of present appearances, than this installation of Christ and his people in the kingdom and throne of David. But see what the hope rests on; see what the verse (7) in Isaiah 9 winds up with: "The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this." "I, the Lord, have spoken it, and will do it" (Eze. 36:36). Is it possible to have a more reliable guarantee? If God purpose a thing, who can hinder it? That He purposes this, He has declared many times without number, as we might say, and sometimes with a very solemn emphasis. He asks, can the ordinances of heaven and earth be interfered with? Can the immensities of space be measured, then He will depart from these purposes (Jer. 31:31-37). Can any one stop the recurrence of day and night? Then may His covenant with David be interfered with (Jer. 33:20-21). The thing may seem to lag, because, in point of fact, there was to be a long time of desolation, during which the vision would seem to tarry (Hab. 2:3; 3:17). There is a time appointed to which repeated allusion is made: "The time to favor Zion — yea, the set time, is come" (Psa. 102). Then "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the LORD will hasten it in his time" (Isa. 60:22). Hasten what? Hasten the change so gloriously described in Isaiah 60; a change from utter prostration and



darkness for all things Israelitish to a position of ascendancy and renown. "The sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee, for in My wrath I smote thee, but in My favor have I had mercy on thee..." "The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted. The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree and the pine tree and the box together, to beautify the place of My sanctuary; and I will make the place of My feet glorious. The sons of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet, and they shall call thee, the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated so that no man went through thee, I will make thee an eternal excellency, the joy of many generations... I the LORD will hasten it in his time." In view of such great and precious promises, of which we have become fellow heirs through the adoption that is in the gospel for all who believe and obey it, we may well wait. God says He will do it, and He will do what He says. There is no room for doubt. We have every guarantee our situation admits of. The Bible alone is enough. It is God's pillar — God's monument, in the earth. It is no myth. It is here — a reality in all the earth. It defies putting aside. It defies explaining away. It is its own witness when read and pondered. It is no possible invention. It is in the hands of the enemies of the Truth. Wherever we go, though we may find the Truth an outcast, we find the Bible an honored guest. It is in the hands of many millions who cherish it, though they don't read or understand it. It is on the pedestal, and men bow down to it, though they do not believe it. In this there is great comfort for us when we come to enquire how the Bible has got into such a position. It has come into it through what it is in itself, and through the actual events of the work of God connected with its production — And the Jews are God's witnesses. There they are in the very position long ago foretold, wanderers among the nations, carrying with them wherever they go Moses and the prophets which give us their history (under the seal and sanction of Christ, who endorsed Moses and the prophets in his day). All the dreadful things written against Israel in Moses and the prophets have come to pass; God's Word has failed in nothing of all that He has said for 3,000 years; and His Word is full of prophecy concerning Jew and Gentile.

What then? The guarantee is before our eyes if we have eyes to see. The matter does not stand in the position of a "maybe." The ground of our hope is not hypothetical. It does not rest on something beyond reach among the stars, or concealed in the fathomless depths of the great abyss that lies under our feet. It might well be said to us, as Moses said to Israel; "It is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven and bring it unto us that we may hear it and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us and bring it unto us that we may hear it and do it? But the Word is very nigh unto thee." The Bible, which we see exalted in the land and

which we treasure in our own private studies, is a great and palpable reality which brings all other realities with it to enlightened conviction. The Bible in the earth means that God is in heaven, and that Christ lives, and that the purpose of God will come to pass in the restoration of Israel and the salvation of all His people. He that caused "the dimness of anguish" to come will bring the everlasting joy. He that brought the darkness and the desolation will cause righteousness and light and praise to spring forth before all nations... He that in anger overthrew the house of David in the hands of rebellious kings, will as certainly build again the tabernacle of David that is fallen down, and establish it high in all the earth in the hands of His Beloved, under whose shadow Israel will revive, the nations find peace, and the saints be saved with an everlasting salvation, even life for evermore: "He shall sit upon it in truth, seeking judgment and hasting righteousness."

Then will glory dwell in the land and overflow to the uttermost bounds of the earth. Then shall the Lord be King over all the earth; then shall all the nations be blessed in Abraham's seed.

Shall we not share the blessing if we continue patient in our confidence in the covenanted word that pledges all these things?

Is it not written, "Them that honor Me, I will honor," and "They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me"? These things are beyond contradiction.

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## Matters of Magnitude

*The Truth's Historical Foundation — Adoption — Conditions thereof — Jew First — Then Gentile — The Elect — The Ways of Hope or Disaster.*

WE meet upon a very solid foundation when we assemble thus to break bread and drink wine in remembrance of Christ. We are not following a fancy, an opinion, a philosophy of our own. We are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. How real a foundation this is in a practical sense we may realise as we read the Scriptures in our midst on all such and many other such occasions. These Scriptures are the embodiment of very real transactions. They take us a long way back, and introduce us to extensive, multitudinous and solid matters — matters of magnitude and tangibility on no ordinary scale. The Bible is nothing less than a nation's history, and a history extending over nearly 2,000 years; and a history unlike all other histories in this, that it is a history of God's making, a history in which His hand is visible and His voice is audible all the way through — from the day He commanded Abraham to leave Chaldea to the day when, by the mouth of the Lord Jesus, He addressed Abraham's posterity in those pathetic words, "How often would I have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, and ye would not."

The hope we have is a hope growing out of that history — a hope as inevitably the logical sequel of that history as any effect is of its cause. For that history is not merely a history of things done, but of the reasons of them, involving purposes reaching forward to endless ages, and promises made as the basis of faith in that purpose. On whatever part of the Bible we lay hold, we are guided by it, if we work it out properly, into the very presence of those great and incontestable facts that lie beneath our position of faith and hope at the table this morning, like the primeval rocks under the soil, and the vegetation in which we have our being. We take, for example, the writing to Timothy, from which a chapter has been read this morning (2Tim. 2). We realise, by the most ordinary exercise of our senses, that this writing was written in the first century.

It has been in the hands of the public ever since. Although printing is a modern invention, copying by hand is a very ancient art, and was practised as a regular occupation in times when there was no other way of getting a book or document. Go to the British Museum, and you will see how nicely the copies were made. By means of that art the writings of Paul and the other Scriptures were multiplied and spread abroad among all nations (though not in the hands of every person) very early in the Christian era. That we have them now as they were then, — that is, unchanged and ungarbled — is proved by the identity of the copies in all languages and centuries, barring strokes and dots that do not interfere with the sense of scarcely a single sentence. That they were his very own is proved by their unchallenged currency. Their very contents is decisive, even if these facts were not available. By this simple method, we get in one stride back to the first century, and find ourselves in the presence of Paul writing to Timothy. What is he saying? “The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” Here is at once a busy scene — things much spoken of by Paul over a lengthened period, and “many witnesses” to the fact. What things were these that were so important as to require committing to other men for propagation? “Remember,” says he, “that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead, according to my gospel, wherein I suffer trouble as an evil doer unto bonds...” “Whereunto I am appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher of the Gentiles, for the which cause I suffer these things, nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed.” Here is Paul, a preacher of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and suffering trouble as an evil doer in consequence. In what way did he suffer? He says “unto bonds.” What! Was he a prisoner? Yes, often. “In prisons more frequent.” “In deaths oft.” Why did this preaching of Christ’s resurrection lead thus to imprisonment and bonds? Because the Jews had crucified Christ and hated to hear of his resurrection: very natural. It was the Jews that hounded on the Romans to the persecution of Paul, as Festus, a Roman

official, testified in open court: "against whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him... against whom, when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed, but had certain questions against him of their own superstitions, and of one Jesus who was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive" (Acts 25:15-19). Here was the matter in dispute; was the crucified Jesus alive? Paul said "YES" and got into trouble for it. Why did he say, Yes? Was he always of that mind? Oh no, as he said in a speech to a turbulent crowd in Jerusalem: "I persecuted this way (the Christian way) unto the death (as the Jews were doing) leading and delivering into prisons both men and women." As he said to Timothy, "I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." How came Paul to be of a different mind? Not by the argument of others, but the sight of his own eyes. The Lord himself, whom Paul thought to be dead, appeared to him as he was on the way to Damascus on a special mission of persecution. The Lord showed himself as at the transfiguration "above the brightness of the sun." That Paul might never be left in doubt afterwards, it was done in the presence of his whole retinue, in the full light of noon day, and left Paul blind for three days. The officials accompanying him saw the glory, and were thrown to the earth, and heard the sound of communication passing with Paul, though they understood not the purport thereof. That communication commissioned him to preach Christ to the Gentiles. We have the particulars of it by Paul's own tongue and pen afterwards. Hence in dealing with Paul's testimony to the resurrection of Christ, we are dealing with a very palpable matter which no man can dispose of or put out of the way. He may shut his eyes, he may look away from the evidence; he may immerse his senses in other things. But he cannot alter the fact that there exists on the earth at the present time, in the form of this Book and all that stands related to it, evidence of the fact that Christ rose from the dead — which is the foundation of our faith and hope in him. But Paul and Paul's testimony is only one of the things with which we are in touch when we stand before him in the first century as he writes this letter to Timothy. He himself forms part of a line of fact and truth that runs a long way behind him. Who was he? A Jew; "I verily am a man that am a Jew; circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews." Who were the Hebrews? "To them," says he, "pertaineth the adoption, and the glory and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God and the promises" (Rom. 9:4). Here is a list of things throwing us back upon the ages that had gone before, and the things that God has done to Israel in connection with Moses and all the prophets. When we look into those things, we discover facts of the first importance as enabling us to rightly estimate our own portion whether as mere Gentiles in the first instance, or as those who have been brought into

beneficial relation with the covenants and promise; and as also enabling us to judge correctly the many-hued sentiments of the age in which we live.

We look first at 'the adoption,' which Paul says belongs to Israel. What does this mean? We know something of adoption as applied to the introduction of a child into a family circle to which it did not originally belong. It means that the child so adopted had no connection with the family beforehand. The idea of adoption could never arise in connection with a child belonging to the family. Here then is a relation between God and man styled adoption which, Paul says, pertains to Israel. Is it so that man, as a race, is in such a position as to require adoption before he becomes connected with God? Is man as a race estranged from God, away from God, having no connection with Him? The Bible telling us of the adoption, tells this also; that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," that they are alienated in their minds by wicked works and through the ignorance that is in them (Eph. 4:18), that they are without God and have no hope (Eph. 2:12); that they are altogether gone out of the way and together have become unprofitable (Psa. 14). The Bible gives us the very beginning of this unhappy situation. It shows us man at the first, disobedient under law; sinning while friendship and communion prevailed in Eden. It shows us man driven out of Eden in consequence, to till a cursed soil and live out a life of trouble, till resolved into his original dust. Before his expulsion, communion and light were his. After it, he was in a position of exile, estrangement, condemnation. If God had done nothing more, human life must have remained a hopeless vanity, tending ever more to that awful time, when population would exceed the limits of subsistence, and hellish chaos set in. But God did not purpose the earth to be a failure. "Working all things after the counsel of His own will," "according to the good pleasure which He purposed in Himself," He predestinated another result altogether, even that the earth should be filled with His glory, as depicted in the closing chapters of the Apocalypse, when there shall be no more curse, and no more pain, and no more death. But He works towards this result by a method, and it is the method of "adoption." If He dealt with man according to his inherent deserts, man must be exterminated. But His plan was to be developed in mercy — by grace — by favor — through faith which honors God, and blesses those who exercise it. In kindness He made an adoption — a selection — on this principle of faith and obedience. The plan, Paul says, pertains to Israel. Looking back we see how God made choice of Abraham, and at a certain stage established His covenant with Him. He first told him to leave his native country and to go to Palestine — which he did. Obedience indispensable — obedience absolute, unquestioning. Then He told him He would make of him a great nation, and that all mankind would yet be blessed in him. Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." Then God tried Abraham — put him to the proof — in asking him to offer up his only son Isaac, in whom God promised him posterity. Abraham was of the right

disposition, and proceeded to do as commanded, but was arrested in the act, upon which God formally confirmed with an oath of adoption which had been made on the basis of circumcision. This adoption did not extend beyond Abraham and his posterity. When his descendants, as a nation, came out of Egypt, Moses said to them — “The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people to Himself above all the nations of the earth” (Deu. 7:6). God Himself said to them by Amos, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.” Jesus recognised the same restrictedness of the Divine operations in saying, “I am not come but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;” and the apostles, in “preaching the Word (at first) to none but unto the Jews only” (Acts 11:19). Everything in the Scriptures shows the truth of Paul’s statement that to Israel pertained the adoption. No other nation was adopted, and even Israel’s adoption was conditional on submission to the conditions of adoption; for there were conditions. They were the conditions that held good in Abraham’s case: faith in the promises and obedience to the commandments of God. With regard to these conditions, myriads of Israel failed, and hence it came to be the case as stated by Paul, that, “They are not all Israel that are of Israel.” Israel in general had not sufficient understanding to perceive this. They valued their descent from Abraham and their observance of circumcision as securing favor with God. Jesus told them that it was necessary to do the deeds of Abraham as well as to be descended from him. John the Baptist told them the same — that God was able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham. The time came when access to the adoption and the promises was open to the Gentiles also. This was the solution of what Paul styles “a mystery which had been hid from ages and from generations” (Col. 1:26) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the spirit, that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel” (Eph 3:5). The mystery lay here: the promises to Abraham contemplated the blessing of all nations in Abraham; the predictions of the prophets exhibited all nations as partakers of the benefit. And yet the divine institutions established in Israel’s midst were so framed as apparently to exclude the Gentiles and to limit the blessing to Abraham’s descendants exclusively. For everything there is a season and a time; and the time came for the clearing away of this mystery in the extension of an invitation to the Gentiles to become “fellow-heirs and of the same body” with those who were favored with this privilege of adoption. This did not change the channel of the adoption... it was still true that to Israel pertained the adoption. “The gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” But whereas thousands upon thousands in Israel failed in the conditions of the adoption — a remnant only obtaining it, and the rest being blinded (Rom. 11:7), God opened the way for another class to come into the favor lost by these, namely, the Gentiles, who are likened by Paul to branches of a wild olive tree grafted into a good olive tree. But it was not the Gentiles

*en masse* that were chosen for this favor, any more than Israel *en masse* that had been chosen. It was only such of the Gentiles as should believe and obey. "Because of unbelief, they (the natural branches — the Jews) were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high minded but fear. If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee." In the final stage of God's work by Christ, whole nations will be joined to the Lord and become His people (Zech. 2:11); but in its apostolic phase the work consists of "taking out a people from among the Gentiles" (Acts 15:14). These, by incorporation with Christ, through the belief and obedience of the Truth, become subjects of the adoption which pertains to Israel, and are thenceforth, as Paul says "No more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens of the household of God" — a household consisting of the children of faith from the time of Abel down to the last days of the times of the Gentiles. The important point to realise in connection with these testified truths is that, as Gentiles we have no divine relationship and no hope apart from submission to the system of righteousness promulgated by the apostles by the authority of Christ. The risen Christ whom Paul preached is the centre of this system. It is his name we are called upon to invoke in the reception of the Truth concerning him and baptism into him. He is the living representative of all who come unto God by him, and by him alone can we receive that forgiveness of sins, without which it is impossible we can be saved. How vain are the ideas current in the world that man can work out a hope for himself by doing the best he can. It comes of the idea that man is immortal and must go to hell if he is not saved. This idea is rapidly giving way. Unfortunately men are not as rapidly taking the other truth that God hath put all judgment into the hands of Christ, and that in him and by him alone can they attain to hope of favor and life immortal. There is much to distress if we look only at man and the state of things upon the earth. It is a vain distress. It can avail nothing. We must turn our eyes to God — to his purpose — to His will as revealed. In this, we find peace. He has a plan that will come out gloriously at the last. He has an "elect according to His purpose." He will find them all. Our concern is at an end when we have done our part as obedient servants. We need not try to carry the world on our shoulders. God will do this. The vast populations that come and go are only as the grass to Him; no void in the scheme of things before they come; no loss when they go; God's substance in circulation according to His will. None of us are necessary to God, for His purpose and of His grace He has called us. Let us do our duty in the part assigned and leave the rest to God. There may be trouble of it; likely there will; but the trouble will have an end, while the result accomplished will last for ever. Paul had much trouble from the doing of his part — trouble as if he had been an evil doer. He says in the chapter read, "but I endure all things for the elect's sake that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." This is the principle on which we must act in our smaller matters. The life of faith is a life of

endurance; It is a life of social death, a life of self-denial in this respect that we have, like Moses in another sense, to refuse to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and to decline the ways that lead, in this world to popularity, honor and advantage. But there is great incentive to those who see clearly and believe fervently the things testified of Christ past and future. Paul supplies it in these words from our chapter: "if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer we shall also reign with him."

The advantage of a right course in the matter is all on our side, and it is unspeakable; and the disadvantage of the other course cannot be expressed in words — "If we deny him, he also will deny us" — refuse to acknowledge us, reject us, dismiss us to shame and death.

Oh, how dreadful for us, but not for him. We cannot take from him. "If we believe not, he cannot deny himself." Our unbelief cannot alter things. He ever lives by the power of God, and will come at the appointed time if every living soul agrees to ignore his testimony and forget his name. Be it ours to act the part of faithful brethren to the best of our ability in the midst of the darkness and chaos of a forsaken dispensation, committing ourselves to God in constant prayer, and throwing ourselves upon His mercy, if happily we may find entrance at the last into His everlasting favor and joy.

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## Nearing the Dawn

*Facts and the Bible — Moses and the Glory of God — Gideon Also — and Later Christ — Dawn — Its Beautiful Phenomena — Judgment — Merit or Demerit*

**W**E are commanded to walk in wisdom and to dwell mutually according to knowledge. To do this, the mind must be exercised in discernment of facts and their relation. Even in temporal things, it is this that constitutes wisdom. A man who is ignorant and unobservant can never succeed in anything. There are various things to know to be wise in. All are more or less important, but some more so than others. Some things we can dispense with the knowledge of. Others we must know or perish. Of such are the things that cluster round this Table of the Lord to break bread and drink wine in remembrance of him. Without a knowledge of them and sympathy with them, we are the mere natural creatures of the day, with which creation teems in countless thousands — sustaining a brief organic existence and disappearing for ever like the insects of a season. Only he that doeth the will of God shall abide forever (1John 2:17). Only he who learns that will can do it. Only he who reads or hears the revelation of that will can learn it. Hence the transcendent importance of the reading of the Word of God and the studying of it.



People scorn us as a people of one book. They say that a man of one book is a dangerous man. No doubt this is true of human books, though even then, it depends upon what book it is. But how can it be true of a book that God has given us? How can it be true of a book that makes us wise unto salvation? How can it be true of a book that makes the man of God thoroughly furnished unto all good works? It is, no doubt, good (for present uses) to have some general acquaintance with the literature of the age; but as between a man of general literary culture, ignorant of the Bible, and a man enlightened in the Scriptures, and of poor acquaintance with human writings, there is no comparison. Even now the mentality of the latter is preferable to the other for real purposes. It is more solid and tranquil and beautiful as the result of a daily familiarity with writings produced by the mind of God, containing the views of God on history, the thoughts of God on human ways, the principles of God prescribed for human conduct, the promises of God for human need and human futurity. The mind of the mere literary man is a thoroughfare of the mere human crowd, with their noise and dust and shallowness and futilities. His mind is soaked and deluged with human thoughts and sentiments which end in nothing. Even now, the man of God has the advantage; but consider the upshot. Even Balaam could say, "Let me die the death of the righteous, let my last end be like his." The upshot will make it manifest that the man of God has achieved the objects of existence, and that the other has lost them. Christ, returned to consummate the purpose that God had in the formation of this planet, can have no pleasure in or use for the merely elegant gossip in human affairs. Such a creature can have no natural place in the final and lasting form of life upon the earth, an immortal life of holiness, glory to God, and fellowship with the spiritual intelligences of the universe. It is, "the man that is (now) godly that the Lord hath chosen for Himself" — the man who knows, believes, fears, loves, and serves God in a time of ungodliness, when the doing of his commandments is difficult and disadvantageous. Natural men may dissent from this principle of choice, but they can no more change it than they can change the constitution of the atmosphere. And their reasons for any desire to change it would be found upon a full examination to be as insufficient and insane as the interference of the limited and the human must necessarily be with the infinite and the divine.

The force of these thoughts is overpowering when a man has reached the end of his mortal journey and lies down to the rest of the grave. How much more will they be so when he emerges from death (instantaneously as it will seem to him) to face the Great Dispenser of life's issues according to the will of God. Let our reading then be as continuous as its importance demands — not literally continuous of course, but continuous as a daily habit. The man who is no reader is necessarily more or less of a barbarian according to the true standard, for not otherwise than by reading can we know and remember what God has done, what God has said, and what He wills us to do. Our

reading furnishes constant materials for inspiring reflection concerning our present ways. We are saved by what we read from being overcome by the weaknesses and the dolefulnesses of present life. We are enabled to see the present life in its right place in the great place God has with the earth and man, and to be patient and wise accordingly. Each part of our reading will give us something different but something suitable for this. Nothing that is in the Bible is unrelated to the plan that it embodies as a whole.

We have Moses before us in the pathetic attitude of imploration against a sentence pronounced against him. What bearing this incident has it may not be difficult on reflection to see. First, what guarantee it affords us of that truthfulness of the Bible which is the first element of its value to us. How came it to be recorded that Moses erred and was in consequence forbidden by God to enter the land of promise, except that the thing occurred? It is not conceivable that such a story could be invented. Stories are invented for credit or advantage. What of either could there be in the solemn record in the national archives of an account which threw a slur on the character of Moses and on the character of the nation? (for the error of Moses is represented as the result of the obstinacy and implacability of the congregation). Such an account cannot in the nature of things be an invention. The occurrence of the incident recorded is the only rational explanation of the existence of the account of it. And being true, what then? Why, that all is true of which the incident forms a part. If God condemned Moses to die before entering the land, because Moses in a natural transaction took the glory that belonged to God, then God was with Israel in the exodus from Egypt, and if with them then, he was with them in their subsequent experience, in which case, Christ's appearance amongst them was a divine reality, his resurrection a fact, and all the hopes, promises predicated thereon — Secondly, see the powerful instruction the incident affords as to the due relations of God and man: God says "I will be glorified: I will be exalted in the earth;" "My glory will I not give to another." Could he have more forcibly pressed this home upon us than by the spectacle of Moses (the most privileged and faithful of his servants among men) excluded from the land of promise because of failure on this point at a very trying moment? The common run of men may be insensible to the idea of the glory of God. But it is the governing principle of the universe for all that. Man is mortal and Israel is scattered because the principle has been overthrown upon earth for a time; and man hereafter, at the great settlement of futurity's affairs will be justified or condemned by the operation of that principle. "That God may be all in all" is the object of God's whole work upon the earth. It will be reached when the population is limited to those (selected from all generations) who reflect His glory in the fervor of true enlightenment and the vigor of an immortal nature. When this goal is reached, the wicked will have perished for ever, and the wicked are those who know not God and glorify Him not — a much

larger category than popular theology provides for, or than human thought recognizes. As for the scientific modifications of the theology, that is paganism in a new form. Theology is bad: scientific theology is possibly worse. The only true godliness is in the Bible which theology darkens and science rejects. The true light will yet come forth to all.

Then we have Gideon asking his tokens. Gideon was what in modern language we might call a small farmer — with a farm away in the mountains, specially subject to the depredations of marauding bands who watched their opportunity and pounced upon the crops at the right time. All Israel were exposed to this affliction because of their neglect of the institutions Moses had delivered to them. The affliction was very bitter, and Israel cried for deliverance. One day, Gideon was threshing corn in secret, for fear of the Midianites. An angel came in response to Israel's prayers and informed Gideon that God would deliver Israel by his (Gideon's) hands, and proceeded to indicate the steps he must take.

Gideon desired a token that his visitor was a divine reality. He could not enter upon such an apparently hopeless undertaking as the overthrow of the Midianite armies of occupation, without the assurance that God was with him. He asked his visitor to stay while he (Gideon) should present him something. The visitor assented, and Gideon prepared a repast of flesh and broth and unleavened cakes, and brought it to him. The angel asked him to deposit the things on a certain spot on the rock. Gideon did so. The angel then touched them with the end of his rod, and flames issued from the rock and consumed them in a moment. This satisfied Gideon for the time, and (the angel having departed) he proceeded to carry out his directions. But days having passed, it appears to have occurred to Gideon that possibly the angelic visit was a dream or an illusion of some kind. He desired a further confirmation. He asked God in all humility that He might suffer Himself to be tested. He would put a fleece of wool in the open air during the night; let it be wet on the fleece in the morning and dry on all the ground. God granted the request. Gideon found the fleece wet and wrung a bowl of water out of it, while all the ground was dry. But Gideon appears to have doubted again. Perhaps someone knew of his wish that the wool should be wet and took and dipped it in water and replaced it in its position whilst he slept. Would God refrain His anger and allow him one more token: namely, let him again place the fleece on the ground, and this time, let the fleece be dry and let all the ground be wet: he would then be sure that there was no human deception. God heard Gideon in this also: the fleece was perfectly dry and all the ground wet, and Gideon went on without further hesitation till he succeeded in routing the Midianitish army and driving them out of the country.

What is there in all this for us? Why this, it is the illustration of a fact meeting us at every turn throughout the whole course of Bible history, that the transactions upon which our faith and hope are founded were all of a

practical, palpable, tangible character. They were not of the dreamy unreal character of heathen prodigies.

There never was any room for the possibility of "cunningly devised fables." There was no hole and corner character about them; none of the demands upon "confidence" that are more or less characteristic of every form of imposture. From the day that Moses brought Israel from Egypt by public acts of power which the magicians of Egypt could not imitate (at last killing the Egyptian firstborn and opening a way in the sea), to the day when mighty signs and wonders were openly performed by Christ in the midst of Israel. For three-and-a-half years, there was one long, strong, and divine interposition of a character as open and substantial as any transaction that ever transpired among men. If God has spoken "at sundry times and in divers manners," He has also attested the fact in a way not to be mistaken by common sense and child-like candor. Faith rests upon a foundation that could not be made more solid except by the performance of miracle before our own eyes, and even this would not, in true logic, add to its strength. The resurrection of Christ is the crowning assurance. His miracles, while he lived, were convincing enough; but had he died and passed off the scene in the ordinary way, it might have been suggested that the power enabling him to perform these miracles was a power mysteriously resident in himself as an extraordinary man, and of no wide significance as regards other men. But what can the caviller say when the dead Christ rises from the dead? A dead man cannot raise himself. A power external to himself must do this. That he rose is certain on the evidence. The world is full of crucifixes today because he rose. The cross of Christ would never have come to be magnified if Christ himself had not risen. The world would never have heard of the crucified Christ had he not become the risen and glorified Christ. The testimony of the apostles is before us in the written form in which they left it; and the evidence of their testimony having been given is to be seen in the altered state of the world, which while idolatrous under the Caesars at the time their work began, is now "christian" and civilized to a degree, bearing witness to the employment of some powerful agency effecting the change. These considerations are of a great helping power while we look for "the dawn" of which we have been singing. "The dawn will bring us light." It is a beautiful figure. It is of Scriptural origin. It is David by the Spirit that has spoken of the coming of the day of Christ as the breaking of a "morn without clouds." It is Paul who speaks of the present time as "the night" — far spent, but still "night." We wait in this night for the dawning of the promised day in the full certainty that.....

*"That hallowed morn shall chase away*

*The sorrows of the night."*

The advent of day is caused upon the earth by the rising of the sun in the east. And it is the most beautiful of all the beautiful phenomena that are to be seen upon its face. Darkness prevails unbroken till the hour approaches for

the return of the day. Then a faint glimmer is seen on the eastern horizon. Gradually the light increases. The narrow band of grey becomes a broad body of diffused light mounting higher every moment into the sky. The brightness grows brighter. The heavens which were black grow light and azure. The face of the earth which was hidden becomes visible in its garment of sparkling green. The birds begin to twitter and man awakes from the slumber of the night. Soon a flood of brightness pours from the eastern sky. Then the high hills are tipped with gold. At last the glorious orb emerges and fills the whole country with life and light and warmth and gladness. The day has begun and the world rapidly fills with life and activity.

There is an analogy between this and the day we are looking for. At present all is dark. Sin and death run riot on the earth. Where hope and plenty, and gladness might be, there is want, and toil, and misery, and disappointment and fatuity of every kind. Man is without a kindly, powerful head, and does not know how to manage his affairs. God, despised, has hidden His face, and man welters as in a bog. God has His plan, and out of the confusion will bring order and light. Christ is the key of the plan. He is the sun whose rising will bring the promised day.

The night is far spent, and there is a grey, faint grey, on the horizon. We are nearing the dawn. The day bursts not all at once. Gradually the preliminaries of his coming unfold themselves in the appointed signs. Gradually the light increases. His own presence will finally dispel the night. The day will be glorious. This is a figure, but not too strong for the reality. The reality will be the arrival of a friend, all excellent, and all powerful, and all beneficent in his purposes of good — not only for his friends, but for all the world. What is there to be desired that he cannot do for us? There is but one qualifying consideration which the analogy of the natural day supplies no equivalent for. Christ judges before he enlightens and heals. We must all appear before his judgment seat before we are admitted to “the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.” At this we need not quail if we are the friends of the judge. We are full of imperfections, but our judge is also our intercessor, and much will be forgiven where the heart is strongly set upon him, and the life conformed to his commandments. We might fear before a human judgment seat, where frailty, bias, ignorance, fallibility and unmercy presides, but before Christ, we stand in the presence of righteousness, penetration, justice, kindness, mercy. We cannot be misrepresented to him or misunderstood by him. His judgment is according to truth. Righteous men will join with David in saying, “Let us now fall into the hands of the Lord, and not into the hands of man.” “Let Him do with me as seemeth good unto Him, though He slay me.” The judgment will be no empty pageant. We must give account. British law closes a prisoner’s mouth, and decides only upon evidence exteriorly derived. The divine judgment will reverse this order. We ourselves will be interrogated by the judge, and no

evidence is needed. The judge knows all without witnesses. He will know how by some leading simple question to plunge right into the heart of our case. Seizing hold of some transaction, "You know what I commanded in such a case! did you do it?" "Did you live for me, or merely as a human creature seeking its own comfort?" "I was hungry; I was in distress, and did you exert yourself on my behalf? If so, what case?" By test questions, he will rapidly thread his way through multitudes of cases in the presence of the vast auditory assembled, and according to results, will separate the assembly into two companies — the one of which, when the process is complete, he will dismiss, He tells us so: "Depart from me, ye cursed." And he tells us what we should expect, that among those so addressed, "There shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth." You may have been at a fire or a shipwreck, or at some other scene of human agony. But never have you heard a wail like that which will ascend from the multitude to be overwhelmed in the judgments that will overthrow the present evil world in the war that will ensue between the Lamb and the confederate kings of the European polity.

The rejected gone, there will remain the other assembly, standing massed in sublime expectancy. Imagine yourself of their number. You are still mortal, but the King has signified his favor. In this alone you are happy, for everything will come out of this. Presently, you cease to be a mortal: for, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, we shall all be changed." A thrill of transforming power passes through the assembly, from him who is the resurrection and the life. In him dwells the power to change the vile body at the right moment, that it may be fashioned like unto his own glorious body. This power, he exerts at the right moment and every person in that vast multitude is instantaneously changed. Each one feels the change. A sense of lightness and freedom and joy passes over them, such as they never felt before; "The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." The mortal fibre of their being is fundamentally altered, so as to be incorruptible.

Day has begun with them. In that day they will shine; for they are the children of the light and of the day. They are the stars of the new heavens. It is their place to reign. They cannot reign until they have taken the kingdom. As yet this is in the hands of the kings who, seeing their power threatened, "gather their armies." They gather them in vain against Yahweh's King and those who are with him, "the called and chosen and faithful." These shall overcome them in terrible war, which will spread devastation to the end of the earth. "And the kingdom and the dominions and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High... and they shall reign." To each man his place assigned as Christ shall arrange — and such a place — a place of power and honor and wealth such as no mortal ruler has ever filled. Such power to bless his subjects and such joy in making them happy, and such honor at the hands of those he governs — such pleasure in arranging human affairs on a new and divine basis; such

ecstatic satisfaction in leading them in worship and bringing the true and real blessing of God upon them in his capacity as their Priest as well as their King.

These are not cunningly-devised fables. These are the true sayings of God. They are the real and practical and promised form of the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him, of which He has given us the pledge in the resurrection of Christ.

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## The Wisdom of Divine Silence

*Night watches — oppressive features — opportunities — Symbols from Zechariah  
— a progressive plan — the offence of the Truth — the Four Living Ones.*

WE have just been singing that Zion's night has been long and mournful. This is true to an extent not always easy to realise in days like ours, of comparative liberty and well being. Past times have been very dreadful, both for Israel after the flesh and Israel after the Spirit. It is well to know this as we may from history. It helps us to be thankful for privileges which we might underrate; and it helps us to estimate aright the time in which we live as a time of the ending of God's displeasure to Israel, and a time of the ending of the triumph of wickedness over His people. We are drawing towards the time of the return of God's favors to His long down-trodden land and nation. We are nearing the day of light and gladness and honor for the house of Christ after the long prevalence of darkness and misery and shame.

But though the night watches are nearly over, the day has not yet come. We are still in the darkness though children of the day. We are made to feel this more intensely as we come more and more into sympathy with the things that belong to the day. The night is truly dreadful still. We are delivered from the violence of man, but not from his unmercy and contempt. He cannot take life or property in the name of the law, but by means of the law, and in a hundred ways without the law, he can crush and blight and destroy. Human diabolism is regulated and restrained, but it is human diabolism still, reigning around us in wide wastes of darkness, and killing with its icy chill the tender plants of righteousness that struggle to come from the heavenly seed. Thankful we are to see the power taken away from the odious ecclesiasticism that once held the dearest of human liberties in iron thralldom even in Britain, who boasts herself as the land of the free; but how much more gladdened shall we be to see the arm of the Lord made bare in the eyes of all the nations so that the authority of His law and His claim to our worship shall no longer rest on argument, but be thrust home into every human bosom by the evidence of eyesight and the logic of resistless events.

Perhaps the most oppressive feature of the night is the divine silence for

the time being. Not a syllable of utterance; not a glimmer of discernible operation. We are put through David's experience. "My tears have been my meat day and night while they say unto me, where is thy God?" It would be a strong answer to the enemy — it would be a tower of strength to ourselves — if we had but one single token from on high — the briefest word of recognition or guidance. But such we are not permitted to have. Such we cannot have. Let us use our reason, and we shall be helped to adjust ourselves to the position and to endure. For want of this, some have grown weary and have given in. For want of it we are in danger of the same, "Be ye not as the ox or the mule which have no understanding;" so we are commanded. Let us survey the facts and we shall be strengthened. First of all, the night is not so long as it seems. We look back to the many centuries it has lasted, and we have a kind of a feeling as if we had lived those centuries and had been in the darkness all the time it has brooded upon the earth. In the same way, we look forward to the days it may yet have to last, with the feeling that these days also are ours. This is an illusion of the mental mirrors with which the inner man is lined. It is liable to be an oppressive illusion if we do not dispel it by the recollection that our short human life is all the measurement of the night for us. We have not had the centuries that elapsed before we were born; we shall not have the days that will run if we have to go to the grave before the coming of the Lord. Our experience of evil is limited to the short day man is permitted to live on the earth. That day will soon be over, with all its futility and pain — we know not how soon; and there is this happy thought about it, that when it is gone, it will never return. There is nothing we forget so soon as trouble when it is over. The only thing left of trouble for us will be the good it has done; for it does good. Evil has a mission. Evil is from God in the execution of His own plans. "The days wherein we have seen evil" are not thrown away. They are not waste. They are grievous while they last, but they accomplish a work with those "who are the called according to His purpose." We may not know all they accomplish, but we can see this, that no creature can be brought to that constant and cordial and delighted sense of dependence which is the first qualification for eternal fellowship with the Father of all life without suffering. A life of suffering tends to break into the self-contentment, self-consciousness, and self-sufficiency that is natural to mere self-enjoyment. It prepares us in the right spirit to pray the prayer of Moses, the man of God: "Return, O Lord, how long? let it repent Thee concerning Thy servants. O satisfy us early with Thy mercy... Make us glad according to the days wherein Thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants, and Thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us."

We are enabled to reconcile ourselves to the silence of God in the present age when we call to mind a few evident truths about it. [1] That "there is a time to speak and a time to be silent." God is not silent without first having



spoken, and without having furnished us of later times evidence of His having spoken. This evidence is in all the world if men had but eyes to see. In nothing is it more powerfully evident than in the existence and extensive circulation of the Bible itself, which is its own witness to those who can read and judge. [2] Having during a period of over 2,000 years, counting from Noah, spoken at sundry times and in divers manners, He is the sole judge of the time to be silent, and of this He also informed men in advance, telling them that He would cease communication, and “for a long time hold His peace” (Amos 8:11, 12; Micah 3:6, 7; Isa. 42:14). It is therefore in proper season that there should now prevail the silence which is so oppressive to the soul that hungers and thirsts after God. [3] There is wisdom in the silence so far as the development of God’s children is concerned. It is faithful men and women He wants — men and women who act a faithful part as the result of knowledge received. How could such a class be developed if He constantly made His presence manifest? Leaving us thus alone in severe silence with His Word, we are thrown upon ourselves, and become manifest to ourselves and others in what we do under such circumstances. If God were openly among us, our service would be liable to be eye service. Servants naturally act circumspectly under the eye of the master. Let the master withdraw himself, and the difference between faithful and unfaithful servants becomes manifest. In this very silence, then, is our opportunity; for it is upon what we do now, left all alone in the unexciting common place circumstances of everyday life, with the Word of God in our hands for direction, that our future will be decided. If we could but see the day of opportunity in the light in which it will certainly appear to us when we look back upon it from the standpoint of Christ’s arrival on the earth, we would be more diligently faithful than it is to be feared most of us are. The profitableness of these meetings rests in their tendency to help us to do this, by setting before us “the terror of the Lord” and the “exceeding joy” that is associated with his coming.

Of this “exceeding joy” we have had a glimpse in our readings from Zechariah and the Apocalypse. In Zechariah, the “man whose name is the Branch” is before us as the builder of the temple of the Lord. Who this is there is no room to doubt. The learning of today would deprive us of our confidence; but we need not be moved by it. There is a great deal of nonsense underneath the highly polished talk of modern times. The understanding of the Scriptures as a whole is essential to the understanding of its parts, and we ‘know’ that the learned do not possess this qualification. By the understanding of God’s purpose in Christ, and the clues to right interpretation which are dropped here and there throughout the apostolic writings, we are able to recognize Christ in many places where he is not visible to the merely learned reader. We see him in the Law of Moses and we see him in personations of the prophets where, to the uninstructed eye, nothing but the natural elements of the case are visible. This case of “the man whose name is the Branch” is an instance. On the

surface of things, it would seem as if the prophecy did not go further than Joshua, the high priest, and the temple that was built on the return from Babylon. Zechariah was instructed to say to Joshua, in the presence of witnesses, "Behold the man whose name is The Branch," as if to say, "This Joshua is the man.... and he shall build the temple of the Lord." But looking earlier and deeper, we see the prophecy goes much further, extending even to Christ, the testimony for whom is the very "spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10). "The Branch" was spoken of before to Zechariah. We find him introduced first in chapter 3 verse 8, in connection with a series of highly symbolical transactions. In one of these, Joshua stood before the angel that brought the vision to Zechariah, "clothed with filthy garments," to represent iniquity and its mortal nature. The angel ordered these filthy garments to be removed and a fair mitre to be put upon his head, and clean garments to be put on — styled a change of raiment, the typical nature of which having been indicated, the angel delivered a message from God to Joshua to the effect that if Joshua pleased Him by conforming to His will, he (Joshua) would be exalted to a place among the angels, described as "those that stand by" (Zech. 3:7). Then we have the Branch introduced as the solution of the apparent mystery of how such a goodness could be conferred. "For behold, I will bring forth my servant THE BRANCH," in connection with whom, the prophecy proceeds to intimate that God would "remove the iniquity of the land in one day." "Joshua and thy fellows that sit before thee" are informed that they were "men of sign" in the case. Consequently, when, three chapters further on, (viz., in the chapter read this morning) we find crowns placed on the head of Joshua and given to his fellows, we witness a transaction which is in its nature a type or sign, the applicability of which is placed beyond conjecture by the history and teaching of the New Testament concerning Jesus and his brethren. Here we are plainly told concerning the prophets that the spirit of Christ was in them, testifying beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. There was peculiar appropriateness in using Joshua as a type of Christ, because of his name, his office, and his work. His name is the name of Jesus... not merely that it has the same meaning as Jesus, but that it is the same name. Jesus is but the form of the Hebrew Joshua or Yah-hoshua, when it has come through the Greek language into English. It is therefore as if Zechariah had said, "Behold in this Jesus, son of Josedec, the type of the man whose name is The Branch; for the man whose name is The Branch shall be called Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." Then, as to his office, Joshua, son of Josedec, was AARONIC HIGH PRIEST, in which capacity he was the already constituted type of him who is the real intercessor between God and man unto life eternal. Then as to his work, Joshua had to build in the temple of God on the return of the nation from captivity in Babylon. In this also he fitly represented the Melchisedec High Priest, who is not only the builder of the spiritual temple of living stones, but who at the restoration from the modern Babylon will build

the latter house, spoken of by Haggai and shown to Ezekiel, whose glory will exceed all former temples — to which the nations will seek, in which the throne of the Lord will be established, and in which peace will be assured to all the world. Then “the crowns will be to them of the captivity,” even to Joshua and his fellows (Jesus and his brethren), who after long and bitter suffering, will reign in glory. “And they that are far off shall come and build in the temple of the Lord,” and then, says the prophet, as representing Christ, “shall ye know that the Lord of Hosts hath sent me unto you.” There is wonderful force in this as applied to the situation of affairs that will exist when Jesus is manifested in the earth as Yahweh’s servant, “to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel” (Isa. 49:6). When Jesus presented himself to Israel at his first appearing, they denied that the Lord of Hosts had sent him unto them. For 18 centuries they have been permitted to blaspheme his name in all the countries in which they have been scattered for their sins. What can they say when, at his return, he shows himself to be their Messiah in the expulsion of the enemy from the land, in the rebuilding of desolate cities, and when “they that are afar off,” the sons of the stranger, troop in glad crowds from all lands at his summons to build up their walls, yea, even to “build in the temple of the Lord.” Mild but powerful are the words “Ye shall know that the Lord of Hosts hath sent me unto you.” The knowledge of it will humble them as never nation has been humbled. They mourn and are ashamed to discover that he whom their fathers crucified and whose name they have execrated with every bitterness of malediction during the long night of their dispersion, is the very Son of the living God. Such an arrangement is a beautiful triumph of divine wisdom. A nation exalted as the Jewish nation will be, as the first people of the kingdom of God under Christ would be liable to that pride which has been shown by the imperial peoples of all history, and which is seen more or less in every metropolis of the present day — a sentiment utterly inadmissible in the Kingdom of God. The way to it has been barred by the Jewish rejection of Christ. They will have nothing to boast of, but everything to be abased about. Their very existence at all will be a monument of mercy. “An afflicted and a poor people,” “all righteous,” “rejoicing in the Lord,” is the picture we have of them in the glad day when “righteousness shall spring out of the earth and mercy shall look down from heaven.” It is the national application of the principle observed in the selection of the highest apostles — Peter and Paul. Peter was allowed to deny his master; Paul, to persecute him in the persons of his brethren. They never could forget it. “I am not worthy to be called an apostle.” The effect was to humble themselves in their own eyes — an essential qualification for the doing of any work of God. It is revealed that no man is acceptable with God who is proud. This is in accordance with the purest reason; man the powerless, favored, permitted offspring of ALMIGHTY POWER, must be odious in the eyes of both God and man when swayed by a sentiment so out of keeping with his

real standing in creation. "That no flesh should glory in His sight," is the result aimed at in all His dealings with man. It is the explanation of the present position of the Truth; and here the matter comes home to ourselves. Just consider the position: here is the Truth revived in our day in all its noble symmetry; in all its pure grace; in all its intellectual and moral beauty; so adapted to elevate and ennoble; so exactly fitted to supply every human need; and to solve every human difficulty in connection with the mighty problems of philosophy and politics that have for ages vexed the mind of man — The Bible Understood! The Scriptures Unveiled! In harmony with every field of knowledge that an age of experiment and discovery has explored. And yet, where is the wonderful attainment situated? Where accessible? How regarded? You know: in the mire, in the ditch of human society. A man has to step out of the respectabilities who lay hold of it. No more complete eclipse of social light can befall a man than that which happens when he accepts the conclusions to which the Truth commits him. What is the cause of this? There may be various causes, but there can be no doubt that the root-cause of all is this, our maintenance of the Bible teaching that no man can hope for eternal life who has not believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and been baptised into his name. This is the great offence of the Truth, which leads it to be a social outcast, and its believers to be hated and derided of all classes. No words are too strong to express the intensity of their scorn. This is not pleasant to be endured. The very reverse. It is what no sane man would submit to without a strong reason. But the reason is very strong. We have truth on our side. The world — some portion of it — professes to believe the Bible to be the truth, and yet will not be guided by it. They misrepresent the issue. They say "Nobody fit to be saved but you Christadelphians!" That is not it at all. We make no boast of ourselves at all; God forbid! We say we are poor worms of the earth like all men, and that we have no hope of God's forgiveness and favor except by submission to the way He has provided in Christ. And we say that that way is the Truth, and that the things believed by the clerical world are not the truth, but fables, and all this we prove. And we further say, that God is no respecter of persons, and that what is true of us is true of all men — that there is but one way — one gospel — one hope for all. For this the Truth is hated as no religion under the sun is hated, and this being hated is a dreadful trial to those who are of the Truth. Well, it is part of God's arrangement that the Kingdom of God can only be entered through great tribulation. In the apostolic age this tribulation took one form. In our day of liberty, it takes another. But the practical result is the same. We are made to realise that the path of obedience is a path of suffering, and the time of waiting a time of endurance.

And in view of what it ultimately means it is not unreasonable that it should be so. Exaltation is rightly preceded by suffering in a form that puts men to the proof. It is to exaltation we are called. It is not to the present circumstances of powerlessness and humiliation that we are called, except as

part of the whole process. We are "called to the Kingdom and glory of God," and what that is we gather from such a brilliant symbolic scene as is described in the chapter read from the Apocalypse — a rainbow canopied throne occupied by a dazzling figure established on a glassy sea, and surrounded by four living creatures sparkling with eyes which the words they utter identify with the glorified congregation of the saints. "Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, and hast made us unto our God kings and priests and we shall reign on the earth." The glorious purport of this symbolism we get at by an inverse process applied to that other symbolism, whose literal counterpart we behold in the corrupt and blighting system of things that has prevailed in Europe for many centuries, and which, with modifications exists in all its baleful vigor in our own day. That symbolism is hideous; a non-descript scaring sea monster, with many heads, and ridden by an inebriate harlot in gaudy finery. We know there are no such literal objects anywhere. They were but the hieroglyphic signs or types of things that were to arise among the nations of Europe through the fermentation of human passions left to shape themselves in the absence of divine compulsion. We see the things themselves in the institutions of Church and State that now give shape to human life upon the earth. The ugly vision that John saw was but the symbolic prophecy of them. So the throne and the glassy sea and the four living ones are but the symbols of another order of things to come after them. This other order of things is the kingdom of God — most glorious.

To this we have been called. When it comes, it will be as real as ever the kingdoms of men have been, the nightmare of the present world will have passed away. To reign with Christ is the highest exaltation conceivable; no marvel, then, that the preparation should be in circumstances of deepest shame and sorrow. In this Jesus himself preceded us. His life was a life of labor, reproach, and sorrow. "If we suffer with him, we shall also reign."

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## A Light that Shineth in a Dark Place

*Light literal, and the Light of the Truth — not in Man to direct his steps — famine when Truth ignored — everlasting light to those who wait on God — present Divine silence, yet guidance throughout.*

**L**IGHT is sweet to the eyes. This is true in all senses. There are various kinds of light, as there are various kinds of darkness. When we are young, the most oppressive form of darkness is the natural darkness of the night when the sun has set. When we are old, it is another form of

darkness that distresses us the most — the darkness of evil circumstances — the darkness caused by God's averted face and man's unloving and unholy ways — the darkness that broods everywhere in the prevalence of pain and death. We can mitigate the natural darkness of night by artificial light, and have comfortable times round the pleasant fire. The other darkness that covers all the earth finds its only alleviation in the Bible.

It has been well said that the Bible is lit up from the beginning to end. We find it to be really so when we become acquainted with it. Wherever we dip into it, we find ourselves in the presence of light and comfort. Our methodical reading keeps us in continual contact with it. The light does not shine for the haphazard or the casual reader. The Bible is so constituted that it requires constant faithful familiarity to make visible and available the light that is in it. To this kind of familiarity, light yields itself everywhere — even in parts where to the uninitiated there seems none. Let us see the illustration afforded of this in the readings of today. The first does not seem very promising. The narrative of Esther, consummate in construction and diction, does not even mention the name of God. What light can there be here? Let us see. The narrative concerns the Jews, God's nation, at a moment of extreme peril. A decree had been obtained for their extermination — not a part of them, but the whole. The decree applied to the Persian empire, and the Persian empire practically meant the whole world. Its execution would have meant the destruction of the entire Jewish race. The catastrophe it is, and the mode of its prevention, that contains light for us. That God was not in the process, it is impossible to suppose; for God had said to Israel, "Though I make a full end of all the nations among whom I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee." Here a "full end" was threatened. Consequently, its prevention was a divine necessity. How was it brought about? In a perfectly natural way. The hand of God was not visible in any part of the transaction. A quarrel between Artaxerxes and his queen leads her to be put away. The selection of a successor falls upon a Jewish maiden. She is to be used in obtaining the repeal of the decree; but in order to predispose the king in favor of the Jewish race, a plot against the king's life is discovered by her Jewish uncle, Mordecai, whose friendly part is recorded in the court chronicles, and brought vividly to the king's notice through his having had a sleepless night which he seeks to beguile in the reading of the chronicles. Then comes Esther's invitation of the king to a banquet at which she makes a petition for the repeal of the decree against the Jews, and the king's hearty granting of the same, to the great joy and deliverance of the Jewish race everywhere. In all this there is nothing but what is perfectly natural on the surface, yet by means of these perfectly natural circumstances a divine result was accomplished, as has been celebrated by the Jewish race in all the centuries since in the feast of Purim.

Now the light here for us lies in a direction where we are most liable to

feel in the darkness. We live in a time when there is no visible interference of God in the affairs of men; and we are liable to feel as if God has nothing to do with our affairs. It is truly written that if we "commit our way unto the Lord, he shall direct our steps;" that "a good man's steps are ordered of the Lord;" and that "all things work together for good for them who love God and are called according to His purpose." But it would seem as if our circumstances did not correspond with these statements. If we gave in to the impressions of natural experience, we should conclude there was no element of divine guidance in our life — all is so intensely dark — so perfectly natural.

There is nothing in our life on which we can put a finger and say "This is divine," as contrasted with something that is human. We have no burning bush; no dry fleece; no angelic visit. Without instruction, we might suppose that therefore there is no God in our life — no guidance to our steps. In this, we should make a great and demoralizing mistake. Here is where the Esther narrative comes to our aid. God may direct a line of circumstances apparently natural entirely throughout. Our inability to detect His participation is no proof that His hand is not there. It will not follow that His hand is in any particular set of circumstances. It is only in certain cases where His guidance takes part. It all depends upon whether they stand related to His purpose. The point lies here, that our circumstances being natural does not mean that they are not also divine. We stand related to the purpose of God if we are children of God, and we are children of God if we are obedient believers of the Truth in the love and life thereof. It is therefore no presumption for us to believe that in the dreary lives of our probation, our affairs, though not apparently, are really guided to those issues of life which God has appointed, and in the realization of which we must utterly fail if left to ourselves. It is not in man that liveth to direct his steps.

We get light of another kind in our reading from Amos. It is sometimes the enquiry of unbelief how it can be that God ever did anything in the earth, seeing He is inactive now; how can it be that the Jews are God's nation seeing they are scattered; how Jerusalem can ever have been the dwelling place of His name, seeing it is down-trodden. Those who put those questions sum them all up in a further, and, as they think, decisive question. If there was a revelation, why is there none now? Why is God silent? Why are things all dark? If we did not understand these questions, they would necessarily distress us. This chapter in Amos gives us the understanding. Here we have the very state of things which now exists foretold, and the reason of it explained. The reason is placed first. It is introduced under a figure. Amos is shown an object, and asked what he sees. Amos answers, "A basket of summer fruit." What can that signify? Ripeness — shortlivedness — perishability. How was this applied? To the people of Israel. "Then said the Lord unto me, the end has come upon my people of Israel; I will not again pass them by any more." Had they been passed by before? Yes, often. God had long forbore with their

wickedness; He would now do so no more. He would bring judgment as foreshown by Moses at the beginning. "In that day," continues the Word of God by Amos, "the songs of the temple shall be howlings; there shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them forth with silence." How terribly this was fulfilled we have recently had occasion to realise in the recital of things testified by Josephus in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem — piles of corpses on all the highways, vast numbers daily thrown over the city walls, till they formed a mass of putrefaction that compelled the Romans to remove their camp to a distance; the temple enclosure, usually a place of singing, crammed with a shrieking multitude towards the close of the siege. The occurrence of such things, so far from discrediting the Word of God, has the opposite meaning, did the objectors but understand. Jesus himself had foretold these things — "great distress in the land and wrath upon this people" — Jerusalem given up to captivity and the sword — her place down-trodden. If Jerusalem were not trodden down; if the Jews were not scattered; if the Gentile powers were not in the ascendant — if things were not just as we see them, then might the scoffer ask with some effect, why is this? The very things that he stumbles at are the strong foundations of faith. So also with the absence of active revelation, the truth of God's Word requires it. Amos throws light on this otherwise dark point also. God by him foretells the cessation of that to which Israel had been accustomed, and of which we have the written form, "Behold the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread nor a thirst of water but 'of hearing the words of the Lord.' And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to 'seek the word of the Lord,' and shall not find it" (Amos 8:11,12), or as it is expressed in Micah 3:6, "Therefore (because of iniquity) night shall be unto you that 'ye shall not have a vision' and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall 'go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them.' Then shall the seers be ashamed and the diviners confounded; yea, they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer of God." In view of these predictions, what can we say to the absence of revelation now but just the reverse of what unbelief would suggest. The very fact that there is now no revelation is evidence of there having been a revelation once, for had the past revelation been merely a human performance, it would have perpetuated itself like all other human accomplishments. Further, had it been merely a human performance, how can we imagine it predicting its own discontinuance? For in that case, it could neither know nor desire such a consummation. If it were not divine revelation, it must have been human imposture, and what account could be given of a human imposture predicting its own cessation? What object could be served? What motive suggested? And lastly, what explanation could there be of the fact that the prophecy has come true? Revelation is the one thing not to be found on the earth except



in the Bible. Men who have the opportunity, wander far and wide (the late Mr. Oliphant did) to find it, but in vain. There is no answer from God. This, in one way is distressing, and gives unbelief the opportunity for cavil, but it is as it ought to be. If revelation were a current phenomenon it would be inconsistent with the prophecy before us. The darkness is dreary and the divine silence difficult to endure; but a discernment of these things will help us. The eclipse is only transient. The same word that foretells the cessation foretells also the resumption of divine communication; and on a far larger and more glorious scale: "I have long time holden my peace; I have been still and refrained myself. . . Yet now hear, O Jacob, my servant. . . I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground. I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring." "He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when He shall hear it, He will answer thee. And though the Lord (for a time — even now) give the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers, and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying, This is the way: walk ye in it. . . in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of His people and healeth the stroke of their wound." "Neither will I hide My face any more from them; for I have poured out My Spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord God." "The Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee." "The glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea." "The Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended."

Thus, we have but to wait to see a very glorious sequel to the present dark phase of God's dealings with Israel. It is not without fulness of meaning that it is written: "They shall not be ashamed that wait for me." Joy and honor and gladness will attend the resumption of revelation in the earth, for those who may have been enabled faithfully to wait through the present time of drought and famine. It is that we may be so enabled that it is profitable to review these things as they present themselves from time to time in our readings. . . They strengthen the mind in this attitude as nothing else can, unless it be the good hand of God upon us in response to that prayer without ceasing which comes to be the characteristic habit of the new man.

Our third reading brings us the same light in another form. There is always light in the apostolic writings. We have not to seek for it: no windows to open — no veils to lift. It shines out upon us bright and full, even in such a letter as Paul to Philemon, even in the very first verse, where we have Paul "a prisoner," and "a prisoner of Jesus Christ." Here at once is Paul's life, and the meaning thereof projected in a sentence before us — a life devoted to the preaching of Christ, and a life that brought persecution — in which, when logically worked out, we have the strongest guarantee of the truth of what Peter says, that he and the apostles did not follow "cunningly devised fables, when they made known the things concerning Christ." They were matters of

actual fact and sober truth, the resurrection of Christ a matter of personal witness — out of which comes “The Light,” that waits in the future — the light of the glory of God, which when exhibited symbolically, becomes a city having “light like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.” This is the light that lights up our forward horizon (like the aurora borealis rays), with the glory of the dazzling sun, not yet risen. Apart from the resurrection of Christ, which gives us the pledge of his coming again, there is no light on the horizon at all, but the darkness of mystery and despair. But the horizon cannot in true knowledge be contemplated apart from Christ, for true knowledge embraces the work of the apostles which has its only explanation in the purpose of God already partly accomplished: and with that part accomplishment, giving pledge of what remains — even the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in power and great glory to take to himself “the kingdoms of this world,” and fill the earth with glory for ever. To all this we have become related by the very gospel that Paul preached — whose work, in a sense not very indirect, all Gentile believers of this century are, in the Lord. Related thus to the resurrection of Christ by faith, we are also related to his present existence in heaven, for being raised he lives for ever, with “all power in heaven and earth” centred in his hand — the work of developing the community that are to be his everlasting associates in the coming perfect day. This is a work, could we but know the details, of special interest to Christ. Paul in one place describes the upshot of the work thus: “That he might present it (the ecclesia) to himself a glorious ecclesia, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.” To this end, he now makes intercession in his capacity as High Priest, without which we could have but poor hope — nay, not any. To this end, as his Apocalyptic messages to the ecclesias show, he guides and regulates the affairs of his brethren that by various means — sometimes the heavy hand of correction (Rev. 3:19) — they may be brought into harmony with his mind. The guidance, though invisible, is none the less real, so that we can heartily join in the words of Paul’s enquiry: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” The result of the guidance is at last very glorious. We will see it only in “The general assembly and ecclesia of the firstborn,” surrounded with that “innumerable company of angels” of which Paul speaks in Heb. 12. Think of it, that every man admitted to that assembly is “without fault before the throne of God” — iniquity forgiven, nature perfected, blemishes removed. Think of it, that not a flaw will disfigure — not a weakness mar a single member of that glorified assembly — all of them “jewels” — so described by God Himself — “made up” — in splendid cluster and setting for His royal use in that glorious day. Then only will the truly “finished work of Christ” be manifest, and its greatness be seen.

It is being done in detail now, in the preparation of the sons of God. It is a work to which Christ is accessory. It is greatly an individual work — each in the separateness and privacy of his own case, getting tried and polished — sometimes in furnace heat, sometimes in darkness and friction, sometimes the sharp rasp of the file, sometimes the smart blow of the hammer. The process is often painful; sometimes the alleviations of love and light are permitted, but ever forward it goes to that final attainment when the heart, weaned from all carnal things, and fully opened and quickened to the high and mighty and the subtle things of God, is prepared as a “polished stone most precious” for use in the heavenly city.

We bring our three beams of light to a focus. Esther tells us that God may be at work in the circumstances of daily life when He appears to take no part. Amos shows to us that the very chaos that now prevails with all divine things on the earth at the present moment is part of the truth and reality of these things, and that any other state, such as the unbeliever mockingly suggests, would be inconsistent with their true character. And finally Philemon reveals to us that in the midst of the chaos, a divine constructive work is going, by means of the Word of the truth of the gospel, supplemented by the Lord's own providential control, which out of the darkness is providing the materials for glorious light. With such clear and guiding light, it remains for us to walk as children of the light, in all faith and goodness and truth, waiting, in the patient performance of the will of God, for that promised day of gladness which will surely come, and which, when it comes, will never pass away, but shine on for ever in ever-varying, ever-progressing forms of well-being to the glory of God and the joy of all His ransomed sons and daughters.

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## Our Goal and Guiding Star

*Profitable exercise — gathering together with Christ in the midst — reality of Spirit presence — The Altogether lovely — the beautiful features thereof — more sombre thoughts — its final consolation.*

**W**E are here to remember Christ. We have come because it is our duty to come, because it is profitable to come, and because we like to come. It is a duty because it has been commanded; and it is profitable because it tends to strengthen the hold of Christ upon the mind; and it is pleasant because every agreeable and ennobling exercise of the mind is called into play by the ideas presented for contemplation.

We make a mistake if we excuse ourselves from attending on any ground, except absolute inability. Duty, advantage and pleasure will be sure to bring us — one or other of them — if we are even moderately in subjection to the

Truth. The presence of an enemy or an obnoxious friend will not keep us away if we can realise that Christ requires our attendance. Christ did not say, "Come when all things are agreeable; come when all think well of you; come when every one else at the Table is perfect." He said, "Do this," and (by Paul) "Keep the ordinances as delivered unto you." He also said, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." Now, if we stay away because someone has played Judas, or we think they have, we are not keeping his commandment but breaking it, and making ourselves as much a transgressor as we think our neighbor is in some other particular. The way to do is to go and see our offending neighbor if there is anything seriously wrong, and bring about a restoration. Try it; it will have a conciliatory effect for you to go and see him. If the thing is not serious enough to call for a visit of this kind, it is not serious enough to think of at all. It is your duty to "drop it" and go on as if all were sweet and right. If your feelings have been hurt, it is an opportunity of seeing if you can overcome evil with good; "not rendering railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing." It certainly is not a reason for staying away from the Table. Nothing can justify this but the open rejection of the Truth or of the commandments by the assembly, or the open espousal of error or unrighteousness in the person or persons of others. Some may stay away because they think it unnecessary for them to come. They think they can get all the good they want by staying at home and reading. This also is a mistake, as must appear to anyone on reflection. It is first of all setting up their judgment against Christ. Do they think the Lord would have required our attendance at the Table if it had been unnecessary for us? As a matter of fact, experience shows the wisdom of his appointment in the matter. We do not get the same benefit staying at home reading that we do in the assembling of ourselves together to call the Lord to remembrance. For this, there may be more reasons than one. First of all, the going out, the seeing of others, the taking part in an outward act in connection with the name and memory of Christ, all has a power to feed the mind more richly and more powerfully than belongs to the mere act of reading at home. We are mentally constituted for variety of exercise, and we get more "good" by going out to a meeting for the breaking of bread than we can get in the passive monotony of home. But then, there is another element in the case which may not enter into the hearts of the careless to think about. Jesus has said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Does not this indicate a special interest on the part of Christ in assemblies held for his memory and love and honor? And must it not be that his attention fixed on such an assembly has a beneficial effect on those who are present? We must remember that in his exaltation, Christ is "the Spirit," as well as the glorified Son of Man. He is a bodily nucleus that has become one with universal power, in nature and control. He requires not to be bodily in a place to be

aware of those who are present, or to influence them for good or evil. His attention practically amounts to a being "in the midst," and his power to give this attention to different assemblies at the same time must be as great as his power to act as intercessor for thousands at once who pray in different parts of the earth. The capacities of the Spirit in this respect may baffle our mortal powers of conception but that they exist is manifest in many ways in heaven and earth. The simultaneous operations of the Spirit is one of the most wonderful facts in the history of revelation, and in the physical constitution of the universe. The action of gravitation, light, "ether," and electricity illustrate the point in physical nature. The opening of the mind to the Lord's power in this respect will help us to appreciate the assemblies in honor of his name, which he has required; and to understand the possible cause of the blessing we receive in the act of obedience in the matter. But every right-minded brother and sister will come also because of the pleasure it is to them. I may safely appeal to the experience of such whether it is not the sweetest, purest, holiest pleasure they have — to come to the Table of the Lord and fix the memory on him. The memory of a dear friend is sweet. True friendship is prone to this memory, and finds pleasure in every occasion and mode of its exercise. In its ultimate form, it is not satisfied with anything less than looking on the countenance: and one look is not enough. Twenty looks are not enough. There is boundless hunger and boundless capacity in true love. It wants always to see its object. This privilege we shall have by-and-by in Christ, if we are happy enough to receive his approbation; the apostles enjoyed it in measure, in their day, while he was with them; and their breakings of bread after his departure would doubtless have a reality and a zest of memory that we cannot attain, who have not seen him, and do not know what he is like. Meanwhile, we have to be content with the privilege that is within our reach, and with nothing less will true intelligence be content. We may know the love of Christ though we have not seen him; and feed sweetly at the Table on his memory though we cannot recall the sight of the eye. Our love does not rest on the contour of his face and the shape of his figure, though both will charm us when we can see. It is what he is in himself, and what he is in relation to our highest wellbeing, that excites our interest and engages our admiration and love.

For himself, we know him as the "altogether lovely and chief among ten thousand." All possible excellence unites in him — the greatness of God and the loveliness of man; the power of omnipotence and the gentleness of friendship; the justice of the highest and the kindness of the most merciful; the spotlessness of perfection and the compassionateness of the most erring; all depths of manly wisdom and knowledge with all grace and tenderness of womanly true affection. Mercy and truth embrace; righteousness and peace salute; strength and beauty unite; unutterable grace is poured into his lips;

ineffable majesty girds him; honor and glory rejoice in his presence. To know him truly is to "know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge" "He is thy Lord, worship thou him." Consider how immeasurably his interestingness and glory are heightened for us by the meaning he has for the noble earth we inhabit and the poor afflicted race to which we belong. We may know an excellent friend, but he can do nothing for us. He is powerless to bless. To that extent our appreciations are diminished. It is only an artificial philosophy that attaches a sinister meaning to this fact. There is nothing evil in it in right connections. We esteem an excellent friend, and we rejoice for his sake in his good fortune if he have any; but if he have power and disposition to bless his neighbors as well, an additional number of our faculties are engaged, and the stream of gratification is broadened. A friend of this sort is simply overpoweringly interesting, though you don't meet with him often. Now such a friend Christ is for all the world at last. Consider the whole ground is covered by that description in which he calls himself "The Light of the world." This name suggests that we are afflicted with darkness which he is destined to remove. So it is. We suffer from darkness in many ways. As regards our mental state, we naturally belong to darkness. We are born without light; and if we are not subjected to the discipline and restraint of education, we grow up barbarians — ignorant and evil. Even with the best of education, we suffer much on both points; and as regards our relation to God, we are "enemies in our minds by wicked works" — are dead in trespasses and sins — "having no hope, and without God in the world." What light is there for any man in this state? Apart from Christ, there is absolutely none. Away from the righteousness of God in him, we are in darkness and must stumble on in darkness and disappear in darkness. Christ is our passover sacrificed for us. He is our High Priest, who ever liveth to make intercession for all who come unto God by him. By him, we have justification through faith, forgiveness of our sins, and peace with God. Naturally darkness, we now become light in the Lord, and have prospect of inheritance among all them that are sanctified through the faith that is in him. Our present darkness flies away before the enlightenment that comes by Christ, and by him alone. Not only are our sins forgiven, but a new man is formed within us by the power of his name, and we become totally different and truly noble creatures. Looking into the state of man upon earth, what do we see but darkness? Think of the countless millions scattered over earth's wide surface, in poverty, in ignorance, in hopelessness and miseries of all kinds. What prospect of betterment is there? Man has had 6,000 years of self-management, and this is what has come of it. Is there any hope of anything different? Politicians are busy with their nostrums; but man is as far off from what he ought to be as ever. He requires a government no politicians can give him. He wants a powerful head who knows what is good for him, and has power to bring it about and ability to preserve it from the "time and change" which

are "busy ever", a kind and powerful captain who can manage rightly, and enforce his management against all comers — securing plenty and peace and righteousness and light and comfort and gladness for all. Where is such a shepherd-captain to be found? Is he not in the nature of things impossible unless God provide him? Yet without him, is not man doomed to welter on in the darkness now covering all the earth? But God has provided such a head and captain — "a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of His people Israel." "God hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by him." The Bible is full of the promise of him. It is the earliest covenant: a seed to poor mother Eve, who should bruise the head of the serpent — the beginner of all our woes: a seed to Abraham in whom all families of the earth shall be blessed; a son to David to sit on his throne — in whose days the righteous shall flourish, and abundance of peace as long as the moon endureth; who shall come down like dew upon the mown grass, like showers that water the earth; who shall judge for the poor and needy and break in pieces the oppressor; who shall fill the hungry with good things and send the rich empty away. He has already shown his reality to mankind in the words and works of 1800 years ago which has already planted a blessing on the earth, notwithstanding the confusion and evil that prevail. Shortly, he will manifest his power in the greater marvels needed to abolish the present evil world and establish a new heavens and new earth wherein light and righteousness and joy will dwell.

Finally, look at the darkness that pertains to individual life followed to its certain goal. See how completely and how gloriously Christ is "the light of the world" here. All is gay and bright in life's early morn. There are no clouds in the sky. Christ is an apparent superfluity. The talk of darkness and vanity seems morbid and unnatural. But give us time enough, and the true state of the case shortly appears. We get older and the friends of youth disappear one after another. The edge goes off our own enjoyments. Things slowly cease to be what we thought them. Strength begins to get less. Elasticity leaves us. Vexations multiply. Earthly hopes twinkle out one after another. The sky clouds over. A short way ahead the horizon is blocked. Friends and acquaintances die off all around us. The cemetery fills and there is no returning. We ourselves have occasional warnings. Ahead, is what people call "the leap in the dark." Dull and dark the night closes in. What light or hope is there apart from Christ? Absolutely none. We walk in the graveyards of 500 years ago, and realise how completely the people who sleep under the worn slabs and long grass have vanished from the scene. Occasionally, the fact stares in upon us, that we too are on the same road and will disappear in the dark with all our friends and concerns. Under this shadow most men's contemplations fall some time or other. What other light is there then but Christ the Resurrection and the Life? None, all else is darkness.

As we sit around the Table then, and call Christ to memory, we can see that everything belonging to him makes him an object of surpassing interest and loveliness. How wise to do this every time we have the opportunity. How unwise to let little things stand in the way. How insignificant will our most important temporal affairs appear when we stand before him in the day of his appearing. How misguided shall we then seem in our own eyes, if it turns out we have given him the second, or scarcely a place at all in our lives. How satisfied shall we be to have made him the goal and guiding star of our course through the present darkness. This satisfaction is to be earned now, while our mortal days are still in hand. Once attained, it will last for ever, for concerning those who remain steadfast in the midst of life's tribulations, it is written that they shall be presented before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, and find in Yahweh everlasting strength and peace.

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## That We Shall Walk in Integrity

*The Psalms, an idyll of Spirit emanation — a form of Wisdom's exercise — righteousness and justification, twofold — effort and self-denial — not of the world — God's honor, the world refuses — incentive and patience — for the joy set before us.*

THE study of the Apostolic writings has made us acquainted with the fact that the Psalms of David are the voice of the Spirit of God in him. This fact is at variance with the common view. The Psalms are commonly regarded as the effusions of David as a national writer — the patriotic songs of the Jewish nation. At first sight this may seem a reasonable view; but when we get hold of the subject by the right end, we see it in a different light. The New Testament end may be considered the right end of the subject. Both Jesus and the apostles attribute the Psalms to inspiration; and David himself made the claim direct. "The Spirit of God spake by me and His Word was on my tongue." The view thus strongly commended to us is confirmed by the internal character of the Psalms. They are not written as men write. Their thoughts are not the thoughts common to men. Their ruling spirit is totally different from that which animates the human race universally — Jew or Gentile, ancient or modern, as expressed in every way it can be expressed. The Psalms are full of God. They are steeped with the sentiments of Him. They are luminous with His praise, and clouded with sorrows attributed to the hiding of His face. It is this that makes them unpalatable reading to the vast mass of men — who are naturally interested in the things



that pertain to men, and naturally are not interested in those that pertain to God or to man in his relation to God.

We who are here assembled this morning are not of those who take the human view of the Psalms. We have adopted and profess the view that Jesus took of them and that Paul took of them. We accept them as illustrating one of the "divers manners" in which God spoke in time past by the prophets among whom David was prominent. We read them as part of the "whatsoever things written aforetime for our learning." The strong mark they bear of David's personality is no barrier to our acceptance of them in this character. The Spirit of God has no limits as to the form it takes in the communication of its ideas. All these are its property; and it can use them as it sees fit. It may give us its ideas direct, as a "Thus saith the Lord." It may give us them indirect in the spirit-generated thoughts of a David, or even a Balaam; or it may give us them in the apparently casual sentences of a spirit-used Paul or Peter. Wisdom is justified of all her children; and the heirs of the Kingdom receive its instruction as little children, as Jesus says.

We must read the Psalms in the right way to read them beneficially. It would be a mistake to read them from what we might call the merely historic point of view. That is, we must not think of them as merely the utterances of David or Christ. They are the utterances of both, but they are manifestly written for a wider purpose than merely to record their utterances. This was no advantage to David or to Christ. They were written for the generations of the children of God to come after. But in what way? To serve what purpose? This is where we must exercise discrimination. It was not merely to let us know what David thought and how Christ felt, but to give us a form of exercise by which we may both try and develop ourselves. They furnish to ourselves a test and a standard as to where we are in true spiritual life — a kind of mould into which we can fit ourselves to see if we correspond to the shape. David was a man after God's own heart; Jesus was the Father's well-beloved Son. Here in the Psalms, then, we have the sentiments and the forms of speech acceptable to God. Let us read them as if they were our own. Can we speak in their language? Can we utter their thoughts? Are we at home in their feelings and sentiments? Here is where they are useful to us — not only informing us as to David's state of mind and his Greater Son, but giving a lesson in the etiquette of heaven, by which we may learn how acceptably to comport ourselves in our approaches to the majesty of heaven and earth, and how to walk before Him in our daily ways, so as to be well-pleasing to Him. Let us consider the three Psalms we have read this morning from this point of view. "Judge me, O God, for I have walked in mine integrity; I have trusted also in the Lord. Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart, for Thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes, and I have walked in Thy

Truth." Are we prepared to testify these things of ourselves? And to make these requests? Do we walk in the right way? Are we anxious to be divinely inspected and exhibited? While it is Pharisaical to be boastful, and while a broken and a contrite heart is the reasonable state for the best of mortal men, yet there must be a measure of what Paul calls "the answer of a good conscience." We must be able to declare integrity the rule of our action and the truth of Yahweh the way of our path. We must not be in the case of the Church of England confessors who always say, "We have done those things we ought not to have done, and we have left undone those things that we ought to have done." Those of whom this is true are without hope; for while it is true that "there liveth not a man upon earth that sinneth not," and that our hope is in the Lord's mercy, it is also true that that mercy is reserved for "such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them" (Psalm 103:18). As Jesus says: "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the Kingdom, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven." We rest on justification, or the forgiveness of our sins for Christ's sake because of our faith. At the same time, we have to "walk worthy" of this position: and if we do so, we are not "miserable sinners," but children of the Highest, walking in love and holiness. "If we walk after the flesh, we shall die, but if we, through the spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, we shall live" (Rom. 8:13). Our approaches to God in worship must be something else than a confession of iniquity and imploration for mercy. There must be thank offering and praise and supplication for guidance. The service of the tabernacle will teach us a lesson here. There were trespass offerings, but more frequently and more acceptably were peace-offerings, thank-offerings, offerings of firstfruits, and other expressions of gratitude and praise. The worship offered by the four apocalyptic living symbols of the saints is the final and glorious service of the saints: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who art, and was, and art to come. Thou art worthy O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power, for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created."

Then the Psalm proceeds to say what David has not done, as well as to declare his positive righteousness. There is a righteousness that consists in not doing. "I have not sat with vain persons; I will not go in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil doers, and will not sit with the wicked." This defines one of the most difficult duties of saintship — the one that brings the most odium and entails the most desolation meantime — this standing apart from those who do not make God their portion. It is the very first declaration of all the Psalms: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the

counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." As the whole world is made up of such at present, it makes the course of righteousness a dreary one. We are all made to be sociable and to find pleasure in mutual honor and commendation. It is therefore a trying ordeal to "Come out from among them, and be separate." We must not forget, however, that it is permitted to us to be kind, and to do good to all as we have opportunity. The practice of this kindness in the capacity of saints, and the remembrance of what is the upshot of it all in the final fulfilment of the promise, "I will receive you and ye shall be My sons and daughters," will enable us to endure the mortifications of the high calling. These mortifications are only for a season. That Jesus should say "Ye are not of this world" is embarrassing for the present time, but how completely will that embarrassment be gone when "this world" will no longer be "this world," but will have given place to that world to come in which the friends of God will be at home everywhere. Considering what the present world is, we need not be sorry that Christ and his brethren are not of it. On the contrary, it is a joyful fact that they do not belong to a world so thoroughly unsatisfactory on all points. The present world is a transient panorama of clouded and unsatisfactory objects and conditions. Its pleasures are empty; its prizes are cheats; its favor is uncertain as the wind; its honors are short-lived; its very best state is altogether vanity and vexation of spirit. The world that the saints belong to is a world of light and reason and goodness, and joy and life everlasting. It is worth waiting for and worth sacrificing something for. It is God's righteous arrangement that we suffer now in order "that we may be counted worthy of the Kingdom of God" when it comes. It is hard for flesh and blood; but faith can submit, and without faith, no good can be done either in this world or that which is to come.

"I will wash my hands in innocency, so will I compass thine altar, O Lord, that I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all Thy wondrous works." Pilate washed his hands, but not innocently, for he lent himself to the unrighteousness about to be done. Our separations from wickedness must be real; ceremonial holiness merely is an abomination. God abhors worship offered with a wicked mind (Pro. 15:8; 28:9). Loud praying and bawlings and even a "multitude of sacrifices," are no pleasure to God (Isa. 1:11). The modern application would be to what is called "the externals" of religion — chapel-going, church building, almsgiving. We might even apply it to more scriptural things — the visible institution of the Truth. Christ is our altar, whether in the dedicatory act of baptism into his death, or the commemorative participation of his broken body and shed blood in the breaking of bread. To be like David we must compass the altar in innocency in order to be acceptable in our approaches. Must it not be so? How could

God, who knows the heart, take any pleasure in the worshipful deferences of a man whose life and mind were out of harmony with his requirements? But as regards the other class, we are informed "the prayer of the upright is his delight."

"Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thine house, and the place where Thine honor dwelleth." This also we shall be able to say if we are of the same mind expressed in the Psalm. It may not be with just the same application, but the sentiments will be entirely the same. Looking back we shall feel our sympathies entirely engaged by the tabernacle, by the temple, and by the Lord Jesus, the living temple of the Father's presence. The same mind will take us forward with strong desire to the day of the still greater temple — the "latter house" of Ezekiel's visions, filled with glory, and forward still to the day of the proclamation: "The tabernacle of God is with men." Our interest in these things will arise from our interest in God Himself. The reason why the ordinary run of men — interested only in natural things — are not interested in temple things is because they are not interested in God. They have no knowledge or faith in Him. A man must love God before he can say, "I have loved the habitation of Thine house", and then he can say it with strong emphasis. His whole being vibrated in joyful response to every idea of association with God. He can say with David, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." Association with God means at the last, peace, holiness, security, life and gladness for ever. Adam had this association before he fell. The redeemed of Adam's race will have it again in the day of the complete restoration. The prospect of it is the joy of faith; and from this arises the sweetness of all present relations of that kind. In the present dark day of our probation, it is connected with the Scriptures, the assembling for the breaking of bread, meetings for the proclamation of the Truth, and all connections of the purpose of God with the fortunes of the land, and the nation of Israel, and the affairs of the nations. Wherever the honor of God is involved, the hearts of His sons rise in sympathy; weary and downcast, forlorn and depressed, they may be as they pass through the great and terrible wilderness of the present experience; but their desires are unquenchable towards God and His holiness and His love. The very darkness gives intensity to their longings for the day of light and honor and gladness for which they are being prepared in the furnace of present affliction.

It follows that they pray with David, "Gather not my soul with sinners nor my life with bloody men." They cannot yoke with men of no scruple, who succeed in this life, with the requisite amount of talent; men with whom God is merely a hypothesis (if so much as that), and questions of principle, points of weakness. Association is not possible to any hearty purpose even now, and as for association when God's purpose on earth is finished, as well think of Pharaoh and Moses, Cain and Abel, standing in the presence of the Lamb.

Dishonor, destruction and oblivion await the wicked; and though God for a season permit them free enjoyment of His bounteous goodness, it is only because His purpose otherwise requires their toleration. David calls them "Yahweh's sword" His "hand" — "men of the world who have their portion in this life — whose belly Thou fillest with hid treasure; they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes" (Psa. 17:14). Their prosperity is great and impressive; ostentatiously borne by them and oppressively felt by the friends of God, but it is only for a time. David was painfully exercised concerning them — "The ungodly, who prosper in the world: they increase in riches," "until," says he "I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image." In this matter, David says, the thoughts of God are "very deep" they are far reaching and go below the appearance of things. "A brutish man knoweth not, neither doth a fool understand this: when the wicked spring as the grass and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish, it is that they shall be destroyed forever... Lo, Thine enemies, O Lord be scattered. But my horn shalt Thou exalt. I shall be anointed with fresh oil. Mine eyes shall see my desire upon mine enemies; mine ears shall hear the desire of the wicked that rise up against me. The righteous shall flourish as the palm tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God."

These are powerful considerations. They lead to the resolve of verse 11 of the psalm we are considering (Psa. 26). "I will walk in mine integrity." Such a resolve requires incentive. It would die in the absence of the assurance that it shall be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked (Isa. 3:10-11). Philosophers talk of virtue being its own reward, and of the hope of good being ignoble. Their talk is fictitious. It is not according to the constitution of things. It is not according to God's communications to us; it is not according to the mental habit of the philosophers themselves. We are made to act by incentive, and the so acting is not ignoble if the incentive be high enough. The incentive could not be higher. The hope of seeing God recognised and exalted on earth; our own natures redeemed from all weakness and pollution; wicked and unreasonable and useless and hurtful men exterminated, and the earth cleared for joyous and beautiful and everlasting life. It is with truest reason that David exclaims in the next Psalm "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." We all should utterly faint and fail without this conviction. This conviction is a source of great strength and patience, and even joy, in the midst of the present evil. It is not a fantasy, or even a probable opinion. It is a matter of certainty, as all conviction is that is established on sound reason. "We have not followed cunningly devised fables." It is an expectation based

upon great and palpable events that cannot be blotted out from the history of the world, and whose monumental memorials are inwrought in the very structure of human affairs upon earth at the present moment. The gospel of a risen Christ announces to us and pledges to us a day when "the goodness of the Lord" will be revealed in the land of the living in a form that none can mistake or gainsay. Christ himself again among men, the righteous of past ages awakened to life and taking a practical and a powerful part in earth's affairs; the friends of God in multitudes (after lives of suffering and darkness), manifested as the irresistible and capable heads and rulers of men, endowed with health and memory such as never was the lot of Adam's sons; all old abuses gone, all grievances redressed, all "questions" ended — a perfectly regulated civilization prevalent everywhere in which the rejoicing millions of Adam's race will for the first time experience the delight of liberty, combined with obedience; mirth mingled with awe; plenty allied with sacrifice to the glory of God and the good of neighbors — the conviction that such a good time will come is a powerful cordial to the faintness of heart that springs within us in the presence of the hopeless welter of helpless humanity in the great slough of impotence and confusion and despondency that covers the earth in the absence of the Kingdom of God.

Well may we say with David, "I will walk in mine integrity;" "I will not sit with the wicked... in whose hand is mischief, and their right hand is full of bribes." The ways of wickedness are ways of darkness and death, however pleasant and helpful for the time being. The ways of righteousness are ways of light and life, however inconvenient or even painful they may be while they last. "Light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart." "Therefore," says David, "wait on the Lord; be of good courage; wait, I say, on the Lord."

But we may feel we are not worthy of so great a salvation. In a sense, we are not and cannot be; in a sense we must be. We must yield to God what He requires of us — faith in what He has promised, and obedience to what He has commanded — this is worthiness. But as for a perfect righteousness that shall entitle us to salvation, this has long been settled as an impossibility. "The whole world is become guilty before God" (Rom. 3:19-20). "The Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe" (Gal. 3:22). What is wanted is a joyful faith, a loving conformity to the commandments of the Lord, and a humble and contrite frame of mind in all our ways — on the basis of enlightenment in the Truth.

All this is consistent with the resolve that we shall walk in integrity because of the joy set before us. Nevertheless, it admits of our participation in the prayer which David links with his resolve: "redeem me and be merciful unto me"... "Hear me when I cry with my voice; have mercy also upon me

and answer me. Hide not Thy face from me; put not Thy servant away in anger; Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation." None of us can feel otherwise than unworthy in ourselves of the great goodness that God has promised. If our faith is counted for righteousness, this is His mercy through Christ; it is nothing upon which we can take our stand in the spirit of claim. To the last, we shall be short-coming, while at the last we may be loving and faithful. To the last we shall have need to cry "Be merciful to me, O God. Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions, according to Thy mercy remember Thou me." And at the last we may hope to shout with David, "Blessed be the Lord because He hath heard the voice of my supplications. The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him and I am helped; Therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth and with my song will I praise Him."

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## The Building up of Lively Stones

*Memorial symbols — their testimony — their call to praise — hardship, and Temple stones in preparation — Through tribulation the Kingdom entered — sojourn as pilgrims — Egypt and its alluring foods — Manna a Divine food — Spiritual training.*

AS long God permits, wise men will be found thus at the Table of the Lord, recalling to mind the great and wise matters that centre in the symbols on the Table. These matters lay hold of every aspect of life, deal with every problem, supply every need, minister to every hope and aspiration. It may not seem so at the moment; but it will be found so in the long run by every man, positively or negatively.

The institution itself is a fact, memorializing a fact, with reference to a worldwide fact affecting us all. Why have we spread this Table? Is it of our own device? Is it not because it was commanded? Commanded by whom? Is there any other answer but one? Is it the command of the British Government, or the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Pope of Rome? Trace the institution backwards. We are not the first to do this. It has been done generation after generation. Trace the practice backwards, and you are bound to land in the first company that broke this bread and drank this cup, in the presence of him who said, "Do this in remembrance of me." We are bound to find ourselves also with Paul, who said, "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread." We look back and see the Lord "the same night in which he was betrayed." Why on such a night did he institute such an

ordinance? Paul gives us the answer. That we might "show forth the Lord's death until he come." Is the Lord's death, a fact then? Aye, indeed. We call the whole world to witness. Crosses and churches everywhere are evidence of that. Jews, infidels, and Mahometans are ready to bear witness to that. But why should we show forth the Lord's death? Death is not a thing to commemorate. No, not ordinary death; but this was not ordinary death. This was a death followed by a resurrection. We call upon the same world as witnesses to this in a certain important way — for how come many nations today in a certain way to profess the name of one crucified as a felon? Examining that, there is but one answer. Of a merely crucified Christ, the world would never have heard more. It required his resurrection to establish his name.

When Robespierre tried to establish a new faith in France, in the times of great upheaval, at the end of the last century, complaints were made that it made no headway with the people. Talleyrand said, "I will tell you, gentlemen, how to make it go: Let one of you be crucified and rise again the third day."

We are not dealing with cunningly devised fables. We are dealing with facts: and wise men have to do with facts. Does the time seem long? It is the fact that the time will run out at last. We have only been here so many years. We can only be here so many years more. The time will certainly come when we shall do this for the last time. Let us not abandon well-doing from weariness. We must be weary in something; for it belongs to human nature to be weary of everything at last; and we may as well be weary in that which has some promise in it. Some years back we were babies in our cradles; now, we are grown men and women; very soon, we shall be old; soon, we must die: and what is there for us, as sinners before God, if we are not the faithful servants of Christ, whom "He hath made unto us righteousness, and wisdom, and sanctification, and redemption?" Let us never forget, too, that we are living in the time of the end, when a glad message may run through the earth, that he who was crucified and raised, and who departed from the earth in the presence of his disciples, has come again, to perform the great and glorious work which he said he would come and do. Does it seem monotonous and superfluous, this giving of thanks and offering praise, day after day, year after year? Let us remember that it has been revealed that it is well-pleasing to God, well-pleasing to Christ. Can the children of God be indifferent to this? Judge even by ourselves. If we love to be remembered and to be praised, do we not love to be always remembered and always praised? Who tires of the incense of admiration if it is reasonable and sincere? If we who have no particular right to thanks and praise, can appreciate their repetition on the part of true friends, does not reason enable us to realise that our perseverance in this line of service to God must be acceptable to Him? And if acceptable to Him, have we not in this a powerful help to continue perseveringly in the same?



Can we think it useless as regards ourselves? It is far from it. It is the most improving exercise it is possible for human beings to go through. The general sterility of human character is due as much as anything to the absence of reverence and gratitude to the Eternal. This, of course, is due to the absence of enlightenment; and the absence of enlightenment is due to the unhappy situation of things among men, in which ecclesiastical superstition is mistaken for Bible truth, and natural truth is supposed to be incompatible with Bible truth. We are happy in having come to see that the prevalent theology is the uttermost darkness; and that the authenticated teaching of the Bible, is confirmed instead of being discredited by the scientific reading of nature. It is the highest privilege possible to man in the present unhappy state of things, and we ought to gladly put up with any of the drawbacks that belong to it.

There are drawbacks. We are insulated from the two great parties of which the world is composed — have the favor of neither and the kicks of both. The theological part look upon us as “worse than infidels,” and the unbelieving part regard us as pitiful fanatics. Cut off from both, we are without the usual field of human ambition. It is a position of hardship, and often pinches extremely. What then? We have the opportunity of sharing in a certain form the position of the early believers, whose sufferings were great for Christ’s sake, but who were able with Paul to say “Our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” Do we think it is a mistake on the part of divine wisdom to subject the friends of God to a position of disadvantage and suffering? Do we think it would have been better for the Truth to be a popular thing, and its profession a source of present honor and emolument? Wisdom will cast the suggestion aside. If we were to judge by human feeling, we would no doubt have many things different from what they are — much pleasanter for the time being every way. But would the result in the end be better? The very reverse. What is the end being accomplished by the means adopted?

When we see this, we are silent and resigned. Look at the typical building of Solomon’s temple, for the answer. The stones were all prepared at the quarry, far from the scene of building operations. The hammer and chisel did their work before the stones were brought to their place. We are informed that the house was built of stone “made ready before it was brought thither, so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron ‘heard in the house while it was in building.’ ” The stones were made ready for their place before they were brought. The process of making ready would be a disagreeable one to the stones if the stones could feel; but it would be nice when they were fitly trimmed, and found to exactly fit their place when brought to the noiseless building.

We are declared to be stones — living stones — being got ready for the great antitypical temple in which God will dwell on the earth — a temple consisting of an enlightened and obedient and grateful multitude.

Shall we begrudge the process by which we are being got ready for our

places? The process is now, in the quarries and sheds of natural life. The judge of our state is the Author of the future building. The choice of the tools needed to give us the right shape lies with Him. Is the shaping process painful? It cannot be otherwise. Consider what is aimed at — that we may be “made fit” for the Kingdom of God. Jesus spoke of some who were “not fit for the Kingdom of God.” This is the state with all of us naturally. We are naturally taken up with our own pleasure, and not with those things in which God takes pleasure. We are naturally prone to our own wills instead of the doing of His will. It is an unreasonable, and in the long run, an unhappy state; but it is the state in which the faculty of free volition left to itself, in the circumstances now upon earth, lands all men. Could men in that state — men indifferent to God’s pleasure, and given to their own wills, be “fit for the Kingdom of God?” It is manifestly otherwise. How, then, are we to be got out of this state into that other state, in which we can say with David, “I delight to do Thy will, O my God” — a state in which the supremest human delight is to be found when the lesson is learnt — a state in which both God and man are a mutual joy. How are we to be brought into that happy state? God’s method of developing His children, as revealed in the Word, is the answer.

First of all, we have to be enlightened as to God’s existence, God’s rights, God’s purpose; man’s nature, man’s state, man’s natural destiny; and the means by which God purposes to reconcile man to Himself, and bring him into final wellbeing. The knowledge of the Truth does this. But knowledge is not all. Knowledge by itself “puffeth up.” We have to be brought into a perfectly pliable adjustment to the Truth which we know. We have to be made to feel how inferior and dependent we are of ourselves; how transient and unreal is the life we now live in the flesh, and how truly and only great and eternal is the Invisible Fountain and Upholder of Life. Can we acquire this ennobling sense in circumstances of pleasure? Let universal experience answer. Let God’s way of teaching wisdom declare: “Through much tribulation we must enter the Kingdom of God.” Is this an accident? Far from it. It is divine contrivance. So it is revealed; that “whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.” Are we in trouble? — deep, scathing, hopeless trouble? Let us recognize the meaning. It is love and not anger that afflicts the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty. It is the blow of the hammer; the bite of the chisel preparing the stone for its place in the everlasting temple. We would have it a little less severe, perhaps; a little easier to bear. God may grant this if the case admit of it, of which He alone is judge. If not, what then? We can at the least say with Christ, “The cup which my Father hath given me to drink, shall I not drink it?” The stone must be squared. The protuberances must be struck off; the roughness must be smoothed. The work cannot be done softly. We would choose trouble that was no trouble, or that was at least only a little trouble. Trouble is trouble, and we must have it, if we are to have the everlasting place that is being

prepared; and we shall all yet in glad acclaim praise and justify the wisdom of God that has prepared us for a place in the age of perfection and joy when we find ourselves sweetly and gladly there.

But there may be times and cases where no great affliction is experienced. Let there be no dissatisfaction on this account. If you are a child of God and have little trouble, it is because you do not need it. There is no uniform rule of treatment, because there is no uniform nature in the cases. Some blocks when they come from the quarry are nearly in fit shape, while others are all out of form. But if there is no great trouble, there is one thing in which all cases are alike, — all are called upon to “deny” ourselves, and to stand apart from the evil world in which we dwell; “come out from among them, and be ye separate.” All are called upon to pass the time of our present sojourn as pilgrims, in preparation for the land of promise. And this to all is more or less irksome; worse — it is often galling to the point of crucifixion. Which of us would not prefer to be at liberty to live in pleasure? — to be at one with the world in all its friendships and diversions? Which of us does not grow weary under what might be called the monotonies of the Truth?

We may be helped by the study of another phase of Israel’s experience. (All their experiences were recorded for the instruction of those who should come after). After their rescue from Egypt they were taken through the wilderness where there was no food for the assembly. God provided them with food. We know what sort of food He provided. It was not a rich and varied diet. It was good, but it was plain, and always the same — manna. The people could cook and serve it in various ways; but still it was always manna; and the people grew tired of it, so tired that they grew vexed; and so vexed, that they cried like children in their tent doors when they remembered the fish, the cucumbers, the leeks, and the garlic that they had in Egypt. “Our soul loatheth this light bread.” God was angry with the people because of their murmurings on this head. Was it not natural that the people should tire of always eating the same thing? We cannot but feel that it certainly was natural, and we cannot help feeling sorry for them, as they stand crying in their tent doors. But was it quite excusable? Here is another question. They had evidence of a very palpable kind that they were in God’s hands; they ought, therefore, to have submitted cheerfully to whatever He required of them, knowing His power and His wisdom and goodness. They ought to have received with contentment the form of food provided for them, even if it had been quite objectionable, which it was not. There was in fact an object in subjecting them to this disciplinary diet. Moses explained it afterwards in the rehearsal on the plains of Moab. “The Lord thy God...humbled thee and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord.” The effect of the prolonged and practical lesson of the manna

was visible in the character of the host that entered the land under Joshua. There has been no such docile and godly and circumcised generation of Israel from that day to this; and will not be till their children have been put through a similar experience prior to their reinstatement in the land at the coming of Christ.

We have the spiritual counterpart of this episode in the experience of the saints in probation. They have been delivered from an Egypt; they are going through a great and terrible wilderness; they have received a law for their guidance; and they have their food appointed. It is manna — manna from heaven — Christ eaten by faith — eaten daily and richly; and there is an interdict on the rich foods of Egypt: “the cares, the riches, the pleasures of this world.” It is rigorous regimen. It is a course of self-denial to which no man would submit without a reason. But there is a reason, though the command is, itself, sufficient of a reason. We are being prepared for divine use afterwards. We are being “made fit” for the Kingdom of God.

Thus we are landed in the same result in another way. The stones of the temple prepared in advance. The restricted diet of the travelling Israelites in the wilderness, combine to tell us that in probation, it is preparation that is aimed at — preparation for something coming after. Let us recognize the fact. It will help us to walk wisely and walk patiently. If our way is restricted, if our lives are dull, if our principles are inconvenient, if our pleasures are shut up to the things connected with the Truth, it is only for a time, and it is for a well-defined purpose. The time will soon be over; the purpose will be served. We shall stand in the joyous assembly of the Firstborn to thank God for His kindness to us in hedging our way to life eternal; and we shall see and applaud the perfect goodness and His wisdom when invited to enter into possession of the boundless good things for which we shall have been prepared by the self-denials of the present evil time.

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## That God Shall Be Sanctified

*False Light; True Light — Death and distress a general condition — God, His prerogative — Gentile glare and blinded eyes — Moses, the form of knowledge and of the truth — Holiness and Supremacy of God.*

**A**MONGST the various advantages connected with this breaking of bread, is that it gives us an opportunity of seeing things in their true light. We do not always see things in their true light. Sometimes they appear in a very unnatural and false light indeed. As an extreme example, take the aspect in which they appear when we awake most mornings — to those of us at all events that are in middle age. Our view for the moment amounts to aberration — everything in a fog, and everything distorted; life a

failure; no use going on. If we were to act on the depression of the moment, we should give in and do no more. But reason comes to our aid. We know it is but a cloud-bank we are in. With an effort of the will, we advance to the attack. We get up, we get our morning bath, the fog disappears. We find that all is comparatively well after all.

This is a case of physical disturbance. There are mental disturbances in which people are quite as much the subject of aberration, though quite sane in the ordinary sense. They see things in the wrong light. The present life seems so real; the prosperity of the ungodly seems so desirable: the promises of God seem so intangible; that if nothing happens to break in upon the fog, they will be liable to give in, and live a false life which will mock them at the last. One of those things is the breaking of bread. It is the centre and meeting point of many facts which enlighten the heart. We require to know facts, and many facts, in order to have correct views of life. Directly and indirectly, they are brought before us at this moment of leisure; and the calm and searching consideration of them will help us to get rid of the aberrations arising from merely natural life.

Naturally, we look to pleasure as the aim of our efforts; but here on this Table is pain. Here is the cross of Christ: his body broken, his blood poured out. We cling to life, and lo, here is death — death too, in a special and extraordinary connection: the crucifixion of one who did no evil, who only went about doing good. Here is something pressed upon our attention, to call for explanation — for deep consideration at the very least. And as we ponder it, and our view extends, we see that this case of pain and death is not alone. We discover that evil is not the exception but the rule in the lot of man. Our reading from Isaiah this morning (Ch. 15), gives us a picture of something that in one form or other is universal. It is a scene of pillage and bloodshed and ruin and tears — a whole district desolated in a single night, and the whole population out next day in bitter lamentation in the open fields. "In the night Ar of Moab is laid waste and brought to silence." Moab, "gone up to the high places to weep:" everyone weeping and howling, their voice heard even unto Jazer. Distress and care are not always to be seen in this acute form, but in some shape or other, in all countries, in every age, in our own age, every day, evil reigns. It reigns intensely. We learn how bitter and incurable it is when capacities to rightly read the situation, open with growth and experience. At times, the fact is overwhelming. It comes upon us with a force that crushes to the earth. It wrings from the heart the bitter wail of David. "O Lord, wherefore hast Thou made all men in vain? Where are Thy mercies and Thy lovingkindness?"

The struggling mind asks the reason. Here is a fair and beautiful earth — the fit platform for a happy and glorious life. Here is man a noble creature — or a creature fundamentally intended for nobleness — with great capacities for intelligence and joy: with great aspirations for high things. Here he is,

painfully struggling with abortion in every shape and form. It is no cant or hypochondriacal phrase that describes his lot as one of "vanity and vexation of spirit." That is the verdict of wisdom: it is the lesson of experience. Only fools challenge it, only men of a limited mind think it an exaggeration. What is the explanation, then, of this distressing situation of things — that a creature formed for goodness — desiring goodness — striving for goodness in some shape and way everywhere, should be weltering in a bottomless bog of failure and evil?

There is a reason, which this breaking of bread enables us to discern and appreciate. It is a reason both simple and profound, at once satisfactory to wisdom and contemptible to the carnal mind. It is a reason arising out of a fact which we see most conspicuously of all when we look at Christ, especially when we look at him on the cross. The one fact visible above all others as we look at him, is that God exists as well as man. If God exists, God must have rights as well as man. What are those rights? Here is where the natural man stumbles. The universal idea is that the universe exists for man, and that if there is a God, it is only as man's servant that He has any function. If this is the truth, the state of man as he now is upon the earth is a problem that defies solution. But it is not the truth. It seems as if the shallowest intellect ought to see that it cannot be the truth, but that only can be the truth which the Bible teaches, that all things exist for God, that His aims, His rights, His principles, and action must prevail. This indeed is forced upon reflection as the unquestionable truth, and as the only explanation of the evil state of things that now distresses us, for when we enquire, we find there is a history to this matter that is open to no other understanding.

The Bible is proved true in so many powerful ways that we only yield to a reasonable guidance in going back with it to Eden to find the root of the matter. God made man for His own purpose, and that purpose required first of all implicit subordination of man's will to God where God's will was expressed. This, in the final event was refused, and that crime was so insufferable on every ground that God banished man from his open society, and gave him over for a time to evil and death. When Adam walked out of the garden of Eden to take care of himself, evil began. The evil that has prevailed since is not to be looked upon as the consequence of the sin of Adam in the penal sense. That is, Adam's posterity are not punished for what Adam did, but what occurred in Adam's case places his posterity in such a position that the cause that brought death and evil on him continues an operative cause in all their generations. Sin brought exile and death, and sin continues among dying exiles, and the sin that they sin brings punishment of its own, as illustrated in the cases of the flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the afflictions of Israel, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the overthrow of their land, and as illustrated everywhere, in the distressful experience of man.

The real and simple explanation, then, of the reign of evil, is that God and man are separated. This is a fact not seen in natural life — a fact not discerned, though felt palpably enough in its consequences. Consequently, most men live in indifference to the fact. We once did so — all of us. We are liable to slip into old indifference and to adopt the foolish policy it inspires. It is here where the breaking of bread helps us. It presents matters in their true light. It recalls the mind to things that are not a human invention. Peter has well said, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables." The breaking of bread itself is not an invention of man. It is an appointment of the Lord. Trace its history, and we find ourselves at last in the presence of him who said "Do this in remembrance of me." Attending to it intelligently, we discern its origin in the unquestionable historic work of Christ and the Apostles, and that work connects us with God, for the work was God's work: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." Hence, at this Table, we are face to face with the most wonderful work that is going on among men, however feeble may be its aspect for the time being — the most wonderful fact among all the myriads of facts that affect our being, however dim in the glare of Gentile day — the fact that Christ gave himself for us, that "he might purify unto himself a peculiar people." If men could estimate this fact at its intrinsic consequence, they would observe a very different attitude to it from what is common. That they cannot do so is due to the mental conditions figuratively expressed thus: "in whom the god of this world hath blinded their eyes." The present world and all that goes to make it up so fills the orb of their vision that they cannot see beyond it, or through it. They are unable to realise that the "world passeth away," and that in the midst of its shifting scenes, a will of God has been announced, the doing of which will secure for the doer this wonderful effect that he will "abide for ever." Their vision is too contracted. They cannot see things in their true light. We were once in the same position. It is for us, while having compassion for them and trying to turn them from darkness to light, to take care that they do not draw us back into the old position. As Paul expresses it "We are not of the night nor of the darkness, let us watch and be sober." Our watchfulness was to be directed to this very point. "Beware lest there be in any of us an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God." The world even in its most cultivated and enticing aspects, is alienated from God. The gospel has caused us to be friends of God. It has therefore called us to a position in which there is considerable present inconvenience; for a man cannot be the friend of the world and the friend of God at the same time. Christ has said it, and the nature of things preclude it. A man who truly knows God requires no arguing on this point. A man who truly knows God yields Him a constant loving reverence; and how can this mix with the mind that prevails in the world, the most predominant feature of which is the absence of reverence?

Nothing teaches wisdom in this matter more powerfully or more directly

than the Law of Moses, and the history of its communication to Israel. For this very purpose they were written, that those who came after might receive the instruction which they naturally imparted to those who received them in the first instance. We deprive ourselves of great good if we neglect their study. What is the foremost lesson of it all, but this that God Himself announces "I will be sanctified in them that approach unto Me." "I will be exalted" — exalted on every day and always. He took hold of a nation for Himself. See what He did with them? First of all, having delivered them with His own naked hand, manifest in direct works of power, in the destruction of Egypt, and their own miraculous rescue from mortal peril, He "humbled them and proved them." He led them in a great and terrible wilderness and taught them. What did He teach them? Science? No. Of what good to show them how He has made things? Political economy? No. The art of legislation, which being interpreted means self-government by count of human wills, whether wise or foolish? No, no, man is not capable of self-government. See what a miserable pass it has brought him to after 6,000 years fair experiment. He requires the government of God. He requires God to tell him what to do, and to compel him to do it by power governmentally applied. What God taught Israel was the art of worshipping God and serving man. This was the essence of the Law of Moses. It was taught in many rites and ceremonies, but this was the thing taught. God was in all things and in every way to be exalted as an object of reverence and fear, and love on the basis of fear. Holiness was the perpetual exhibition. "I, the Lord thy God am holy." "Thou shalt fear before Me." It is the lesson of circumcision: of presentation to the Lord; of the purifications presented in the various recurring uncleannesses of life; of the sacrifices and offerings in the various relations of experience; of the incessant ablutions connected with approaches to the sanctuary.

The pith of all these things is brought to bear on us in Christ — the Holy One of God. The righteousness of the Law was fulfilled in him, and Paul declares it is fulfilled in us if we walk not according to the flesh but according to the spirit. Holiness or consecration to God, is the first principle of righteousness; just as God is the first principle or idea of the Spirit. Here is where the world is utterly destitute of godliness, and becoming more so under the leadership of elegant gabblers infected with Darwinism and the "higher criticism." God is less and less in all their thoughts. With the children of God it is otherwise; they grow in the knowledge and love of God. What greater contrast could we conceive than that between the attitude of the world towards God and the attitude of the symbolic seraphim: "Each one had six wings: with twain he covered his face: with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly; and they cried one to another, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts." This has a practical bearing on us: for though the vision was a symbolic one, it is impossible to mistake its import, the angelic veiling in the presence of the Deity, is not only modesty; it is awe, reverence, fear, and that, too, on



the part of the highest beings. As David says, "Thou art worthy to be had in reverence of all them that approach unto Thee." If we are among the chosen at the coming, we shall be incorporated in a community who are symbolized almost in the same way in the Apocalypse, viz, by four living creatures full of eyes, "who rest not day or night, saying Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty... Thou art worthy to receive glory and honor and power, for Thou hast created all things."

These are among the things brought to mind by this Table of the Lord and which help us to see our life in its true light. Life upon the earth at present is afflicted because God is not allowed His place in human life. He will yet acquire that place without setting aside the free agency of man. He is slowly creating for Himself a family in whose affections He lives and whose life He controls by His Law, and whom at the appointed time He will glorify with incorruptibility of nature. If the process is a painful one, it is because the result is an everlasting one. God's claim on human love and obedience is so reasonable, and so beneficent in its operations; and its repudiation is so destructive of every good and noble feature in life that no enforcement of it can be too stringent. But there is a plan of beneficence in all the confusion. Out of the chaos will come shining order and joy. The Gospel of the Kingdom is the announcement of this. But triumph will not come except with the triumph of the principle, overthrown at the beginning — the principle of God's supremacy. To this principle we have yielded ourselves willing captives. To this principle, let us continue in devoted and unwearying subjection; and ours will at last be the unspeakable joy of beholding its unchallenged and irresistible ascendancy in the great and long-promised day of its earth-filling glory.

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## Strengthened by the Word of His Grace

*Hannah, her request by prayer — answered prayer — its principles — Babylon, its existence, its studies — useless, as a matter of destiny — Scientists, Professors, etc. — Babylonish counterparts in this conceited age — Sardis, a name to live but dead — present reputation seeking — but absence of understanding and works.*

**W**HEN Paul parted with the Ephesian brethren at Miletus, he said, "I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up." Do we not find it so? The reading of the Bible is so up-building. It makes us feel so strong when we receive into the mind and heart the things it contains. Let us endeavor this morning to realise the truth of this in the consideration of the three portions that have been read. It must

necessarily be a mere skim — something in the nature of the bee's hurried visit from flower to flower; still it will give us strength.

We have first the case of Hannah's prayer, and its answer. She was barren, and besought the Lord for a son, and received Samuel. This is among the things "written for our learning." What do we learn from it but this, that God regards the prayer of those who fear Him, and that it is our privilege, in the spirit of faith and hope, to make our requests known unto God? Shall we say it does not apply to a time like ours, when "there is no open vision"? This was the very character of Hannah's time, as we are informed in 1Sam. 3. "The Word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision." Shall we say we sometimes ask and receive not? Perhaps there may be some mistake here. John says, "We have this confidence, that if we ask anything 'according to His will,' He heareth us." Our requests in particular cases may not be according to His will. His will concerning those who please Him is that they shall have what is for their best interest in the ultimate sense. Of this we cannot be judge; but it must certainly be our desire that we should have this and this only. When, therefore, we ask a specific thing, it is because we think it would be for the best; but in this we may be mistaken; and if God withholds it, He is really answering our prayer in not giving us what we ask. We would not desire what might interfere with our relation to God. So we should reason fallaciously and do ourselves an injustice if we were to conclude that God disregards our prayer because He grants not what we request. We know how it is with our own children sometimes; they ask us to do this or that in their innocent inexperience. We have to say, "My dear, I could not possibly do it." Why? Because we love our children not? Nay, but because we love them. Let us have this faith towards God, then, that the best answer He can give us sometimes is not to permit us what we ask.

But there are things He is willing we should have, things perhaps that He may be purposing, and yet which we have to ask for. Samuel was in God's purpose; yet see the interesting method by which He is brought upon the scene — the agonized and tearful prayers of a beloved daughter. It is the principle expressed in His words to Ezekiel concerning His purposed favor to Israel; "For these things will I be enquired of." The practical use to make of this principle would be here. Let us conceive to ourselves, from our acquaintance with the word, what God would have us to be and to do; and then submit this ideal in earnest and constant prayer to Him that we may be permitted and assisted to conform to it — for the glory of His name and the comfort of His people. "If we ask anything according to His will He heareth us."

So much we get from Hannah. Turning to Isaiah 47, the instruction lies in a different direction. The Word of God is in this case against Babylon. It was uttered at a time when Babylon was great and prosperous beyond measure. We all know how completely the prophecy of Babylon's overthrow was fulfilled. This is not the striking feature this morning, however. It is

something else. It is the divine light we get upon a matter which has been set in a strongly human light in our generation. Not only have the remains of Babylon been recovered in our century, but her records and even her books have been exhumed and brought to light — records preserved through all these ages, through being written on burnt clay tablets. Amongst these are prominent the monthly observations of the Chaldean astrologers, by which modern astronomers are enabled to obtain access to valuable astronomical facts of ancient date. These monthly astrological tables are greatly prized, and their compilers greatly praised. They are had in far higher reputation than the Scriptures. The human learning in the case (which did not amount to much), is had in high human repute in an age that does not shrink to disparage the God of Israel. Well, in the chapter read from Isaiah, we have a divine allusion to the very class in question, in the very age when they were busy compiling their monthly astrological tables. The thing that strikes us, is the great difference between this allusion and the spirit of human allusion. "Let now the astrologers, the star gazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from those things that shall come upon thee." Babylon is said to be "wearied in the multitude of her counsels." Reference is made to "the multitude of thy sorceries wherein thou hast labored from thy youth." Babylon is called on ironically to fall back upon these her wise men, who are thought so well of in times of prosperity: "if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail." The divine message continues: "behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame; there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor a fire to sit before. Thus shall they be unto thee with whom thou hast labored...none shall save thee." Thus we see how differently are human wisdom and human authorities estimated by divine and by human judgment. And the course of events has entirely borne out the divine estimate. Where Babylon has gone to all know; and where are her wise men, her star gazers, her monthly prognosticators? Swallowed up in the same oblivion. It is all very reasonable in everybody's eyes as they look back; but see how the same mistake is made from age to age. The so-called great men of the day are allowed to run away with the public judgment in divine matters. People do not seem able to realise, till the great men are dead, how powerless and unauthoritative they are in those issues of destiny which are practically important to us all. God's appeal to the Chaldean star gazers might well be made to the public leaders of our own day, who make light of Yahweh's Word. Britain might be apostrophised as Babylon was: "Stand now with thy scientific speculators, thy professors, thy telescopic heaven-sweepers, thine analytic nature-triflers with instruments of all sorts, let them arise and save one of you from what I will bring upon them." The appeal was vain in the case of Babylon, and it would be equally vain in the case of Britain. It is for us who have had our eyes opened to the wisdom of God to resist the elegant

impositions of all sorts that are practised upon the public. God can save us if we are faithful to His requirements, which an arrogant and self-conceited age despises. To Him let us hold on: in Him let us trust, remembering the joy which we shall yet verify in our actual experience, the truth of God's own saying, "they shall not be ashamed that wait for Me."

From Isaiah we go to John in Patmos (Rev. 2), and receive by him a message from Christ, addressed in the first instance to the seven ecclesias in Asia, but also to "whomsoever hath ears to hear what the Spirit saith unto the ecclesias." He says much more in the chapter that has been read than we can even glance at. But one or two features are very striking. His message to Sardis, for example. "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." This is a verdict which only a divine discernment could pronounce, but the fact that such a verdict should be applicable to any ecclesia (especially one existing at the end of the first century) is suggestive of grave reflections for all, as intended. A name to live is a reputation for spiritual life. Men are liable to work for a reputation. This is in fact the very inspiration in our age of public life of all sorts, and it is liable to intrude into the realms of divine truth. To have "a name to live" is with some an object of ambition and a motive of effort. That there should be some susceptibility to reputation is legitimate, but it is a dangerous incentive, and should be kept in a very small place. Suppose you succeed in establishing "a name to live," what then? you have in all likelihood only made a snare for yourselves — for it is a name or reputation with whom? Very likely with those who see on the surface; with those who cannot recognize genuine life; with those whose standing is false; for this is the character of the bulk of mankind, professing or non-professing. If this be the case, you are likely to be drawn to the kind of things the doing of which will perpetuate it with them, and thus you will be held in the wrong line of things. Or, if it is otherwise, you will be led to act the part of the hypocrites in the doing of things for the reputation thereof, and not for the inherent character thereof. The best plan is, to be on the whole heedless of the name of the thing, and to be bent on the thing itself. What is this? Why, to be really alive, whether men know it or not; whether they acknowledge it or not. And this being alive is an affair of quickened understanding and affection towards God, as revealed in the Scriptures. This state of mind is not only independent of human recognition, but naturally shrinks from it, for the favor of God and the favor of man are on two such totally distinct foundations that they do not in their nature mix. How pitiable is the opposite state, in which there is a feverish care to be right in the eyes of man, with little or no concern towards God. Jesus declares this to have been the case with the ecclesia at Sardis. He warns them, and in warning them, warns us. "I have not found thy works perfect towards God." It is not, however, for the sake of fault-finding, or in the spirit of condemnation that he speaks thus gravely. It is that there may be reformation. "Remember how thou hast

received and heard, and hold fast and repent." "Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die." Jesus would not speak in this strain if change and reformation were impossible. They may be difficult of achievement: but under the right pressure — the pressure of truth and wisdom arising from enlightened desire and fear — they can be brought about. The human mind is a flexible thing, and adapts itself to pressures. The result of education is the universal proof of this. Therefore, the pressure of the Truth, continually brought to bear will change a condition of the mental man, and bring him into the state which Jesus desired. The Truth, consisting of many things, includes this fact: that the eye of Christ is on communities professing his name; that "he walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." That he reads the heart, and will cause every man to find according to his own ways, even now (Rev. 2:1, 23). If men could but see it, there is reason to fear the judgment of Christ even now. He appeals to this in his message to Sardis. "If, therefore, thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I shall come upon thee." This statement, "thou shalt not know what hour I shall come upon thee," shows that the threatened retribution does not refer to the judgment seat at his coming, for that will be open and recognizable by all. It is a retribution in the ways of providence in which his hand is not visible. The wrecking of an ecclesia, or the separation of a body of people through some apparently human issue may be the result of this interference. There is always reason for an ecclesia being on its guard towards Christ. But an ecclesia as a whole may be dead, and a few in it alive. This is shown by the words with which Jesus concludes the local part of his message: "thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy." Here is comfort for those living and true brethren and sisters who may find themselves in the unhappy position of being associated with dead professors whom they are powerless to galvanize into life. Remember that Christ's approval of you will not be weaker but only all the more cordial that your souls are grieved from day to day with the insipidity and the death of the nominal professors of the Truth with whom you have now to mingle; "Spots in your feasts of charity when they feast with you; feeding themselves without fear; clouds without water; carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea; foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." There may be on the other hand ecclesias where there is no redeeming feature at all, as in the case of the Laodiceans, who while on the best possible terms with themselves, and even bragging of their capital state, are so odious to Christ as to be fit only for indignant rejection. "Thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." Wherever there is a

tendency to boast, there is a bad state of things in a spiritual point of view: for in a truly healthy state men perceive that the very best state possible at a time when God is rejected on the earth, is necessarily a poor and an afflicted one, and that the only tolerable attitude at present is that of gratitude for so much mercy in the midst of so much sin, and a patient waiting for the good things promised when the earth is purged by judgment. But even in the Laodicean state, Christ waits with gracious intentions if men will but give him the attention that is reasonable. "Behold I stand at the door and knock, if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him." How does he knock? By all the instrumentalities he has employed to secure the attention of men. These all focus in the Bible. In this he is knocking, knocking always. To open the door is to listen to the knocking in the reading, and to open the mind and heart to the glorious matters he has to present. Even the Laodiceans received time to act wisely in this matter. "I gave her space to repent," is characteristic of all God's dealings. But there is a limit, and there comes a time when He "fights against them with the sword of His mouth."

In all these things there is a comfort and warning. The time is hastening for the full issue of them all. "The way is long and weary," but has an end for us all, either in the consuming judgment that waits the disobedient and unworthy (which God forbid should be our portion), or in the favor and exaltation with which God will crown the course of patient continuance in well-doing with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

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## Our Gathering to Christ

*Gathered together — present and future — lessons of reality — certainty of individual account — serious consequences — public trial and verdict — tried gold — fine linen — eye-salve and faith — the Spirit saith, "Buy," "Repent," "Overcome."*

WE read of "our gathering together unto him." We also read that we are to "forsake not the assembling of ourselves together." These are two different things, but closely related. The one is voluntary, the other compulsory; the one present, the other future. The one is the nature of a performance, which with other things, will determine our good standing on the occurrence of the other.

Our "gathering together" this morning is not a "gathering unto him", except in a sense. He is the idea that brings us together, and he can be with us, unknown to us, when we thus come together to call him to remembrance and to show forth his death until he come; but very different will be our gathering together unto him, in the day of his appearing. At present, it is

“whom having not seen, we love;” then, in many cases it will be “whom having not loved we see” but in many cases also “whom having loved we see; lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.” It is for this gathering together that we are waiting and preparing. It will certainly come. We have to make war with our senses in this matter. There are many things in which our senses cannot be trusted. Understanding and memory have come to the aid of our senses, and tell us things our senses for the moment would deny. How otherwise would we know that we were once puling babes in the cradle, nay, that we once were not at all? How otherwise could we know that we shall certainly pass away from this scene in due course? Those who trust merely to their senses are victimized on both points, and behave with the pride and forgetfulness that are foolish and destructive. They look out on the world around them and see that it always looks exactly the same, always babies, always youths, always middle-aged people, always the old. If they use not their understanding, they will fail to see that it is a shifting scene, like a passing panorama; that life is “but a vapor that appeareth for a very little while and then vanisheth away.”

Failing to see this, they will live foolishly and not wisely, and lament it bitterly at the latter end. The exercise of their understanding will show them that life at any moment is but part of a process that has a beginning and an end, and that it is only wisely used in being adjusted to that which is before and after it — the everlasting, the self-existing, the eternal God, the constitutor and upholder, who faints not, neither is weary, and there is no searching of His understanding.

The same exercise of the understanding will soon show us that “our gathering together unto him” is a certainty, as certain as the ending of life, and a certainty we have the same reason for entertaining, viz., that it is part of a process going forward before our eyes. The second coming of Christ had a first; and the first is past, and has left its mark and evidence before the eyes of all men who will but open their eyes to see. It is not an affair of recondite investigation. “This thing was not done in a corner.” It is a blazing fact to the universal gaze, though men, mostly burrowing in cellars, cannot see it. The constitution of human life in Europe in “Church and State” at the present moment, and the history of the establishment of the name of Christ among men, are the palpable pledges that ordinary intelligence applies to the fact that Christ is the central reality of human history, and that “having once in the end of the (Mosaic) world, appeared and put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” he will as certainly at the appointed time, “appear the second time without sin unto salvation.” It is the part of wise men, therefore, to seek to realise the bearing of this stupendous fact. Christ has not died or changed since the day he “showed himself alive after his sufferings by many infallible proofs.” He has not ceased to be the glorious personage that appeared to persecuting Saul on the road to Damascus, changing him into “our beloved

brother Paul, with labors more abundant" than all the apostles. He has not ceased to live since the day he declared to John in the Isle of Patmos, "I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore." What is there in our surroundings that is incompatible with his existence and reappearance in due time? Does the blue sky interfere? Are the mountains a barrier? Does the rushing wind preclude him? Does the fair face of the earth shut him off? Your houses, your businesses, your tools; yea, your feelings, your eatings and sleepings and goings about? Do they in any wise interfere with his immortal reality or make it in any degree difficult for him to return in power and great glory? These things did not interfere with your appearing on the scene, — frail child of the earth out of non-existence. Why should they offer any barrier to the appointed, promised, needed, irresistible coming again to the earth of him who is earth's deliverer and owner? Nay, they offer none. Get rid of the hallucinations of sense, the narrow-minded language of the eye, which requires interpretation. Open the heart fully to the invigorating power of the Truth, that he who was once "despised and rejected of men," and nailed to the "accursed tree," raised from the dead, and removed from the earth during a season of preparation, will by the same Word come again at the appointed end of the preparation, and take to himself his great power and reign. It is then we may look for "our gathering together unto him." What are we gathered for? For as many things as may be stored for us in the glorious and endless future. But there is first of all one thing we are gathered for which is profitable for us now to have very distinctly and always before our minds. We are gathered for individual account and judgment. No part of the Truth is more prominent than this, "Every one of us must give account of himself to God." "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." Consider this ye who labor in the way of righteousness under much reproach, and with much apparent futility, feeling often as if all were in vain. Consider it also ye who live in the selfish satisfaction of prosperity, and "are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." God said by the prophet "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." This is practically what he says to us by the apostles. Our gathering together to Christ for judgment is a meeting with God. The meeting will be very impressive in its accessories. It would be awe-striking if it were a meeting with Christ, who in the days of his flesh, could read the hearts of all men; this impressive meeting will not be with Christ alone, who can see through a man and has power over all flesh. But the meeting is before our fellow candidates for life eternal, whose numbers (embracing multitudes of the dead) are very great. Not only they, but the angels are present in multitudes. Jesus says so frequently: "The Son of Man shall come, and all the holy angels with him." John, in Patmos, saw them in vision: "The number of them was ten thousand, times ten thousand and thousands of thousands" (Rev. 5:11). Such a vastness of concourse would seem to us to be inconsistent with judicial cognizance



and individual detail. It would seem as if persons must be lost in such an endless crowd. It would be so in a mere mortal multitude. But we must remember that the embracing presence of the Spirit of God will make a great difference on this point. It will gather up the whole assembly into one comfortable unity, as we might say, in which all will be cognisant of everything that Christ says and does, and of every person who is the subject of his remark. And now to have your case exhibited to the cognizance of such an assembly; will it not make your honor great, if honor it is to be? Will it not make your shame overwhelming if your case meet not with the Judge's approbation? It is no fanciful prospect, it is as certain as our birth and death. Does not that contemplation predispose us to conform to the standard of what will be acceptable then? Does not this inspire us to put the proper small valuation on public opinion and human thought? The Bible light of a thing is in very low esteem with mankind at present. It will shine out then as the only light by which men and things can be truly determined. The light created by mere human sentimentalities of all kinds makes a blaze in public life for the time being but it is a mere naphtha lamp glare hiding the light of the stars. Christ is the light of the world, however effete robust mortals may for the time being consider the sentiment. All other light will be found false at last. "Behold all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks that ye kindled. This shall ye have of Mine hand: ye shall lie down in sorrow" (Isa. 50:11).

Practically and literally, the right preparedness for the solemn crisis that is coming consists of having the mind imbued with Bible ways of looking at things and the life conformed to such a state of mind. If in this we fail, it is from no lack of opportunity. The Bible is with us. We have not to wait till God speaks. He has spoken. In a very real sense may Christ say to us all what he said to the brethren at Laodicea: "Behold I stand at the door and knock." He is at the door all the time. He is knocking all the time in the message he has put on permanent record, and in the meantime he has providentially employed to bring it within our reach. We have but to open the door. This requires us to go out of our way a little. If we do not make it a habit to read the Bible, in a daily and systematic manner, if we never attend assemblies where his mind is displayed and his name recorded, our door remains shut and he cannot become our guest. A wise man will open the door and let him in. What then? He likens himself to a caller having wares to offer for sale. "Buy of me gold tried in the fire." This is always the figure of a tried faith. That he should ask us to buy this article from him may at first appear strange. This appearance vanishes when we remember the nature and origin of faith. It is the conviction of things hoped for because they are promised. This cannot be acquired anywhere else except at the hands of Christ. Away from him, there is no ground of conviction. For away from him there are no promises, while "in him the promises are yea, and amen." The faith in them

that leads to victory cannot be got by studying law, or medicine, or politics, or any other system of human knowledge. It can only be acquired by giving the mind to him in that attention which he knocks that he may receive. But "faith tried in the fire": how can we buy this of him? It may seem that we may buy the faith of him, but that the trial of that faith is an affair of our own experience. Well, faith that does not stand the trial of affliction is no faith of any value, and it could not be that he would ask us to buy a valueless faith. And the faith that does stand the test of real trial is a faith that does so because of what it is in itself. A true and sterling and superhuman thing; and this character it owes entirely to the source of its emanation and therefore in the ultimate sense, it is "gold tried in the fire" that we buy of him when we acquire the faith that overcomes the world. Why does he ask us to buy this "gold tried in the fire?" "That thou mayest be rich." This implies that we are poor apart from it. This is certainly the case. However much the appearance of things may lie the contrary way, however worthless enlightenment in Christ and conformity to his ways may seem — however superior may seem the standing of the man who gets on in the world and "goes in" for what is well estimated by the current generation — it will appear at the last that wealth is the appanage of him only who has obtained the favor of God on account of his faith in Christ and conformity to his commandments. It is merely a question of time. The earth and all it contains will certainly be transferred to Christ and his brethren at the right season; and it will then be apparent to all how poverty-stricken are the mortals who have neglected the acquisition of "the gold tried in the fire," however sumptuously they may have surrounded themselves meanwhile with the honor and good things of this life which passes away. They are no empty words in which Jesus comforts the poor in this world who are rich in faith: "Blessed be ye poor; yours is the Kingdom of God. But woe unto you that are rich (or God neglecting class), for ye have received your consolation." So also Jesus offers "white raiment that thou mayest be clothed" — another of the Spirit's beautiful figures of speech — a figure explained. "The fine linen is the righteousness of the saints." The offer of this fine linen implies that we are not of ourselves suitably arrayed for presentation at the heavenly court. And this is indeed the case, as we learn more and more thoroughly as we grow in divine knowledge. The mental panoply of the natural man — the ideas and notions and moods which a human being evolves from his unenlightened mind — are not such as to fit him for divine society. "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." We need a clothing supplied to us of divine manufacture. This is provided in Christ. He is made righteousness to us, and how we may stand clad in him has been revealed. Our reception of him with the heart by faith in the understanding and affectionate acceptance of the Truth and docile submission to its requirements, puts us in the position that Paul affirmed of himself; "found of him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the

law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith." A man's faith in Christ is "counted to him for righteousness," if it be a faith working by love and bringing forth the fruits of obedience. On account of it all his past sins are forgiven and he stands "complete in him who is the head of all principality and power." Such a man has bought white raiment in which his natural nakedness is clothed. A man who has not submitted to these requirements — who is ignorant of the gospel and indifferent to Christ, and uncontrolled by any regard to his commandments, is a man without the white raiment which Christ asks men to buy. He may be a decent man as men go; but he is a sinner as Adam was, and if his sins are unforgiven, he is in no better position than Adam when sentenced to death. Adam's offence was "one"; how many are the offences of his unjustified children? What hope can there be, if we have not submitted to the gospel? And "eyesalve that thou mayest see," this implies that apart from Christ, men are troubled with false sight. Oh, how true this is. Men do not see truly if they do not see that Christ is everything for man, and that life apart from him is a troubled meteor, rushing across the sky of night to disappear in darkness for ever. This is considered mawkish sentiment. But let men study the facts of the case — let them turn their attention to Christ as exhibited in the prophetic and apostolic oracles, let them ponder life as pressed home upon us in its histories and issues, and they will see that as a matter of sober fact, that man only sees the universe of life in a true light whose mental eyesight is bountifully anointed with the Truth of which Christ, and Christ alone, is the embodiment. It is no superfluous exhortation that enjoins upon us to anoint our eyes with eyesalve that we may see.

Before finishing, note two points, [1] The prominence of the personality of Christ in the counsel he gives. [2] The dependence of results upon the exertion he invites us to put forth. "Buy of me," says he, as much as to say "apply nowhere else."—This gives him a high and central place. It is the command of wisdom, for in no other direction can we obtain the things of peerless value signified by gold tried in the fire, white raiment, etc. Every department of human knowledge to which we may turn is absolutely barren of that which makes for life eternal. In Christ, and in Christ alone, "are hid all the treasures," in this respect, means treasure in all respects at last. Yet we would not listen wisely if we failed to realise that in listening to Christ, we are listening to the Spirit of God. We are not listening merely to an excellent personage as we might listen to a friend, but to one who is the mouth of the Eternal. What he utters in these messages is "what THE SPIRIT SAITH to the ecclesias," as the close of each message declares.

As to the other point — the relation of our personal effort to the results proposed — this is conspicuous all through. "Buy", "Repent", "Overcome", "Do the first works," etc. A false theology has obliterated this feature and paralysed human exertion in divine directions with the result of abounding sterility on all hands. There is a place where human effort is of no avail

whatever — namely, outside that position in Christ to which God invites men on the belief and obedience of the gospel in baptism. But inside that position, effort determines everything. And if we put forth no effort — in reading, in prayer, in assembling, in testifying the Truth, in doing good as we have opportunity — we must sink supine into the position of the “wicked and slothful servant,” who, returning his talent to his Lord unused, was cast out into the outer darkness. Be it ours to trade diligently with the talents confided to us, that we may be among the happy number to whom — it will be said, “Well done, good and faithful servants.”

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## Waiting for the Consolation of Israel

*Anticipation — full realization — the Jews, a beginning, seemingly poor material — they show more vividly divine manipulation — Jewish emancipation — Gentile enlightenment — by immortalized saints — the darkness past — an added testimony — Jewish survival.*

**W**E are like Simeon this morning. We are “waiting for the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25). All waiting is more or less of a weariness. People do not wait unless they know what they are waiting for, and are sure that it is coming. The certainty and value of what they are waiting for keep them in the waiting attitude. God has said, “They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me.” In waiting for the consolation of Israel, we are waiting for God: because the only ground we have for expecting the consolation of Israel is the fact that God has promised it. Our neighbors think we are waiting for a poor thing in waiting for the consolation of Israel. This is because they have a poor idea of what the consolation of Israel means. They think of it in the nakedness of what they understand by the “restoration of the Jews,” which is a very cold affair as they think and talk of it. To them the restoration of the Jews is merely a question of the timid, cowering rag-hunting Jew being removed from his dispersed state in the countries to live in his own land. They are tempted to say, “What the better will the world be for that? What the better will any man be for that? What does it matter to us where these Christ-hating Jews live?” If that was all, certainly the restoration of the Jews would be of no more interest or consequence to us in any way than the shifting of the Bashi Bazouks from Bulgaria to Armenia, of which the world heard after the last Russo-Turkish war. But that is not all, or a hundredth part of what is meant by the restoration of the Jews. When we know the Truth, we know that the restoration of the Jews, in its completeness, means everything we can desire for men or nations. We see

this, when we ask, Who are the Jews? There is only one answer sustainable by truthful history, and that is the answer contained in the words of Moses when he said to the twelve tribes encamped on the border of Moab, 40 years after their departure from Egypt: "Thou art an holy nation unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself above all people that are upon the face of the earth" (Deu. 7:6). God Himself joins in the answer: "This people have I formed for Myself: they shall show forth My praise" (Isa. 43:21). The mode and process of their formation and choice are abundantly illustrated in the details supplied to us, in the call of Abraham, God's promises to him, the fortunes of his family, their settlement and multiplication in Egypt, their enslavement there, their deliverance by Moses, their reception of a divine constitution and law through him. These details are well-known to those who know the Truth. The purpose for which the choice has been made is variously expressed. The mode adopted in the verse quoted from Isaiah — "They shall shew forth My praise" in one way, includes all. It is like that other statement, "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord." When this is achieved, "All families of the earth shall be blessed", as promised to Abraham at the very beginning. People look at the Jews and say, "How can we expect any such result from such a people?" In this they judge by appearances, which is always unsafe. The same question might have been asked with more apparent force concerning Israel in their slavery in Egypt. They were not only in subjection, but they were in an utterly benighted state, worshipping the gods of Egypt, as we learn from Ezekiel. Yet we know what has since been accomplished through them — the righteousness of God exhibited in the Law: the great and precious promises revealed through the prophets: the raising up of a numerous family of righteous servants, to God in their several generations, and "of whom, as concerning the flesh Christ came." "To them," as Paul summarizes the matter, "pertain the adoption and the glory, and the covenants and the giving of the law and the service of God and the promises." Had we seen them in Egypt, nothing could have seemed more unlikely that that such things could have come through a nation so downtrodden and debased. In truth these results would never have come had they been left to themselves. They were not left to themselves. God laid hold of them and by them and through them accomplished the results. So when we see the Jews in our day far scattered, benighted and disobedient, we should make a mistake if we formed our judgment of the future from what was naturally likely with them. God has made known His purpose with them, and all that is left for us is to ascertain what that purpose is, for His purpose is certain to come to pass. He has declared that His purpose is to gather them: "He that scattered Israel will gather him". "I will take you from among the heathen and gather you out of all countries and will bring you into your own land" (Eze. 36:24). He has also declared what His purpose is in so gathering

them: "I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel but for My holy name's sake which ye have profaned among the heathen whither ye went — I will be sanctified in you before their eyes." Hence the purpose of God is irrespective of any condition Israel may be in: and our interest in them arises from the purpose and not from what they are in themselves. Not till they are saved can we look for the promised blessedness. For what is their salvation — their gathering together from all lands, their purification, and reconstitution as a nation, but the setting up of the Kingdom of God; and what can we look for till the kingdom of God come? When we look at the matter in this way, we see that this thing that people talk coldly of as, "the restoration of the Jews" is really the beginning of the salvation of God in the earth. That salvation has long been a matter of promise. That salvation, as Jesus said, is "of (or from) the Jews." When it arrives, the prophets represent the righteous as saying, "we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Isa. 25:9). The connection of this saying shows what good reason they have for their joy. "In this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things." Wherein consists the fatness of the feast, we are presently told. First of all, the spiritual and intellectual obtuseness that afflicts mankind is to be brought to an end. "He will take away the veil that is spread over all nations." What an emancipation is this? Consider the difference between an ignorant, loutish man, and a man brimming over with loving intelligence. Such is the difference between the present state of the earth's population and that to which they will be brought by the new influences and institutions of the Kingdom of God. At present, darkness — oppressive and dreary — covers the earth: then the glory of the Lord shall shine: the nations shall walk in the light thereof. No longer will man have to say to man, "Know the Lord;" "all shall know Me." "From the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, My name shall be great among the Gentiles." How interesting will the human race be everywhere when the mortal veil is removed that now overspreads their understanding. It is a veil of different materials, just as the veil of the tabernacle was of different materials, with this difference, that the various materials of which the veil of the tabernacle was composed were all materials of excellence and glory, whereas the veil of darkness is made up of different forms of barbarism. There is the darkness that is native to the unenlightened human understanding, there is the darkness that comes from the perverted action of the human propensities tending to diabolism, and there is the superadded darkness of tradition and of the strong delusion that God sent upon the Gentile community to whom His Word came by apostolic hands, "because they received not the love of the Truth." The whole forms an impenetrable veil and reduces mankind everywhere to a state of barbarism — more tolerable than the barbarism of cannibalism but still barbarism whose hideousness becomes visible when the light of the new man shines. How glorious when Yahweh pours His Spirit upon all flesh, and they become

everywhere gladly responsive to the law that will go forth from Zion. Then only will the dream of poets be realized that “man with man will brother be, the world o’er and a’that.” Then consider the next ingredient of the “feast of fat things” — not next in the sense of being second, by any means, but only next in the order of mention in the prophecy “He will swallow up death in victory.” God says He will do this “in this mountain” — in the Holy Land. To what extent will this go? If we had not the apostolic writings, we should be at a loss here. We might imagine that the whole nation of Israel restored and the Gentile nations everywhere were at this time to become immortal — with which supposition we should find it difficult to harmonize the occurrence of death among the priestly relations (Eze. 44:25), and the population in general (Isa 65:20). But the apostolic writings show us the details and the reconciliation. They not only show us “Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God,” and therefore that resurrected men are in question, but they expressly inform us that it is “those that are accounted worthy of that world and of the resurrection of the dead” that “shall not die any more, being made equal to the angels” (Luke 20:36). Who these are Paul reveals: “We (Paul and his class everywhere of any age) shall all be changed — this mortal shall put on immortality.” And he directly points to this prophecy of Isaiah as applicable to the event: “When this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory” (1Cor: 15:54). By this, the abolition of death is restricted to a particular class at this time, otherwise described as “the time of the dead that they should be judged and that Thou shouldest give reward to Thy servants the prophets and to the saints and to them that fear Thy name small and great” (Rev 11:18). But though restricted to a class, the thing is done at this time and in this place “in this mountain,” and is the most glorious element of the feast of fat things. How perfectly glorious! Such a thing never was before, that there should be upon earth, among men, a class of men who are immortal — ever young, incapable of decay, fatigue, pain or death. Especially glorious is this feature when we consider the relation of this class of men to mankind at large. This relation is in the scripture expressed without ambiguity: “they shall REIGN.” The sense of the reigning is defined: “power over the nations, whom they shall rule with a rod of iron;” “rulers over many things.” Hence “Kings and priests unto God, who shall reign upon the earth.” “The saints shall take the Kingdom and possess the Kingdom.” Consider then that these immortal sons of God shall be the captains of mankind, who shall govern without error, without partiality, and without fear; whom no rebel can successfully oppose; no stratagem surprise; no accident kill, and no disease lay low. For mankind how unspeakable a good is this: for the rulers themselves, how great a salvation. What greater could there be? “There shall be no more curse; the throne of God and of the Lamb

shall be in it. And His servants shall serve Him. And they shall see His face, and His name shall be in their forehead. And there shall be no night there, and they need no candle nor light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light and they shall reign for ever and ever." "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them unto living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Returning to Isaiah's description, it is similar to this of the Apocalypse: "The Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of His people will He take away from off the earth." How fierce the "rebuke," how bitter the tears, we all have some knowledge. Look back upon the frowning ages past of this dark and evil day. The accumulated sorrows of the night looked at thus in the bulk are dreadful to contemplate. Even our own puny individual shares are sometimes too much for our weakness. How fat is the feast that will abolish all this with a stroke, so that the people of God will seem to awake as from a horrible dream of the night to find all serene and the morning sun shining in the azure heavens. The tears and groans of many generations will here find their end, broken hearts their healing, suffering Israel, His long promised "consolation." "Waiting for the consolation of Israel" is to wait for good things indeed. "These sayings are faithful and true," said the angel to John when he told him of them. We can see how true if we but look, and we require to be made to feel their truth while they are still a matter of promise; for no man will submit to self-denial on the strength of a promise as to whose truth he has any doubt. Look at the pledge of their truth we have in our reading this morning. "Fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith the Lord, for I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee: but I will not make a full end of thee, but will correct thee in measure, yet will I not leave thee wholly unpunished — Behold I will save thee from afar off, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return and shall be in rest and none shall make him afraid." It may be asked, what pledge is there here? It may be said this is a prophecy, and what pledge can a prophecy be of a prophecy? Look again; though this is a prophecy, it is something more. It is prophecy fulfilled, or at least involves it, for see: "I will not make a full end of thee; I will scatter thee; I will correct thee." This was written over 2,400 years ago. This prophecy requires that during all the time Israel would be dispersed and afflicted, but not ended. How has it been? Has it not been just so? Do we not see Israel scattered among the nations at this very day? Are they not in affliction great and sore? Now consider this in the light of two natural probabilities lying in opposite directions. Was it not probable that in the severity of such experiences as the Jewish nation has been subjected to, the nation would perish and disappear, as other ancient peoples have done? But if they have so much national grit as to be able to withstand a furnace heat of afflictions that would melt other people, was it not likely that they would assert their racial superiority and



long ago have got the upper hand of their Gentile neighbors, or at least have established their own nationality in the face of all opposition? These undoubtedly were the natural probabilities prospectively contemplated. Yet here is all natural probability outraged, and the Jews, after all these ages, occupying before our eyes the very position that this word of prophecy foretold — widely scattered in every nation under heaven, but persistently surviving, the object of the universal hatred and persecution in which the most powerful governments have heartily joined, yet unprevailed against from age to age, though her ancient persecutors, Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome have passed away, clever, able, wealthy and influential in many cases, and yet unable to rescue Jewish nationality from the abyss into which it was plunged nigh 2,000 years ago.

In this we have a powerful, visible, living pledge of the fulfilment of the other part of the prophecy which says "I will save thee from afar off and thy seed from the land of their captivity."... "Thou shalt be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed forsaken, neither shall thy land any more be termed desolate. As a young man marryeth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee, and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee."

"Consolation" implies a previously grieved and afflicted state. Such has been Israel's state for ages. Such is the state more or less, of all who make the hope of Israel their portion, and who thereby become incorporate in the "commonwealth of Israel" to whom the promises belong. The "consolation of Israel" for which Simeon waited is that for which they wait. When it comes, it will be real, adequate, and everlasting. Shall we not with patience wait?

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## God Requires that Covenants be Kept

*Memories — pertaining to the ages — demonstrable truth — two eagles — Zedekiah's broken oath — covenant keeping essential — a cedar twig planted — Jesus the Davidic "Branch" — a covenant in fulfilment.*

WE are here for purposes of memory, we know. How important is memory. Without memory no human being would be fit for the commonest relations of life. Suppose we were to forget who we are, where we belong to, what friends we have, what business we follow? There have been cases of that sort. They are not common, but they happen. I knew of a case when I was young, in which by some strange and sudden affliction of the brain, memory vanished in a night, and the person, otherwise apparently well, had to begin her lessons all over again. It is not memory of

the common sort we are here to exercise, or at least not on common objects. It is memory concerning a long past, having a longer future which meet and blend in an invisible present, and all combined furnish strong and ennobling mental motive. Most men's minds and memories act on objects confined to the 70 years or so of natural life. They are indifferent to that which was before their day; doubtful of that which will come after; and insensible to present facts which they cannot see; such as the existence of God and Christ, and their views and purposes concerning human life and action. Mental action thus circumscribed is necessarily petty, and tends to check all noble development of the mind. The man whose eyes are open to the past, present and future, walks with a firmer and nobler tread, and is an unspeakably more precious person than those whose minds are walled in, as you might say, by the four walls of our threescore and ten. Men whose discernments cannot go beyond the facts of the moment, and who have no faith, except in what they can handle, have hold of the short-lived and the transitory. You see how poor such a position is when it comes to an end; for come to an end it must. All must die in the ordinary course; and when a man is dead, how unimportant the affairs of his closed mortal life appear! They are important enough in their place, when subordinated to the views and demands of wisdom in other relations but how utterly worthless in the day of death if they have been lived for. This is the case with the majority, because their minds are not in touch with anything else. Their attention is confined to what they can see and hear and feel. If a man let nothing else into his mind than what he can see and hear and feel, he will be necessarily be a fool, whatever his natural mental parts may be.

Our meeting this morning stands related to matters we can neither see, hear nor feel personally for the time being. Such is the fact with reference to what God has done and spoken in the past, and what He purposes to do in the future. We have not seen or heard for ourselves; but who will say we therefore place faith in a myth? Are things any the less real because they happened in time past? Shall we deny our own existence because the lives of our grandfathers, out of which our existence sprang, are closed and passed away? The fact of God having spoken and wrought in time past, is far more thoroughly authenticated to us than the fact that we have had ancestors. We have to rest on argument for the fact that we have had ancestors; but the fact of God having spoken and wrought is evidenced by things visible before our very eyes, such as the existence and dispersion of the Jews, the ascendancy of Christ's name in the earth, and the currency and actual character of the Bible. No, we have not followed cunningly devised fables. We stand on demonstrable truth; and we are here for the purpose of refreshing memory concerning it. There is no better method of doing this than the plan we have of daily reading the Scriptures, and pondering the matters that may come before us in the use of this method in our public assemblies. Whatever is read

is found on consideration to have a bearing in some way or other; for nothing was written by inspiration that had not some spiritual value. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning," There might not appear to be much for us in the chapter read for us this morning from Eze. 17 — the political riddle of the two eagles. Let us see. The meaning of it is settled for us in v. 12. Babylon is the one eagle, Egypt the other. The vine, which was planted by the one and which turned to the other, is the kingdom of Judah, which, after being overthrown by Babylon, was re-established by that power as a vassal kingdom in the hands of Zedekiah who took an oath of fealty to Nebuchadnezzar, and was, at the date of the prophecy, looking towards Egypt in hope of being able, with its help, to throw off the yoke of the king of Babylon. The point of the prophecy lies in the condemnation of the political perfidy of Zedekiah: "Shall he prosper? Shall he escape that doeth such things? Shall he break the covenant and be delivered? As I live, saith the Lord God, surely in the place where the king (Nebuchadnezzar) dwelleth that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake, even with him in the midst of Babylon, he shall die. Neither shall Pharaoh, with his mighty army and great company, make for him in the war — seeing he despised the oath by breaking the covenant, when lo! he had given his hand, and hath done all these things; he shall not escape." To see the precise bearing of this prophecy, we must have in mind the position of Ezekiel and his fellow captives in relation to Jerusalem, and the scornful men who supported Zedekiah in his breach of faith towards Nebuchadnezzar. Ezekiel and others had been removed from the Holy Land, and settled in the country of Babylon, "by the river of Chebar" at the time of the first deportation of captives by Nebuchadnezzar, years before the overthrow of the kingdom of Judah. Those who remained behind gloried against those who had been taken away, as if those who had been taken captive must have been "sinners above all men," and those who were left behind were favorites with God. The matter is referred to thus in Eze. 11:15, "Son of man, thy brethren, even thy brethren, the men of thy kindred, and all the house of Israel wholly, are they unto whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, Get you far from the Lord; unto us is this land given in possession." The appearance of things seemed to favor the complacent view entertained by the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The Eliphazes always go by the appearances and shake their heads over the misfortunes of the Jobs. But the appearance is generally contrary to the fact. It was so in this case. God expressly informed Jeremiah (Ch. 24:5) that those who had been removed to Babylon were the good part of the community, and had been sent to Babylon "for their good," while those who had been left behind, in apparent prosperity in Jerusalem, were only comparable to the refuse of fruit which had been picked, and that they were left there for calamity which would be "for their hurt." They would, in fact, be given over to destruction, while those who were in Babylon, against whom

they harbored jealous and spiteful thoughts, would be divinely visited after a while, and brought back in blessing (see Jer. 29:4-14; Eze. 11:15-16). The riddle of the two eagles had a bearing on this situation. It was an intimation that the intrigues in which Jerusalem, under the leadership of Zedekiah, was engaged, would end in calamity for them all (Eze. 11:20-21; 17), and that in fact, the scornful speeches in which that community were indulging would be silenced in desolation and death. But the noticeable feature in the prophecy is the side light it sheds upon all kinds of covenant obligations entered into by men as they are estimated from the divine point of view. Zedekiah had "given his hand" to be a faithful vassal to Babylon. Now, according to human principles it would be considered perfectly legitimate and even praiseworthy, to break away from a bargain of this sort. In this particular case, there would not be lacking apparently strong arguments in its favor. Here was Babylon, a pagan power, imposing its yoke on Judah, a divine people; could it possibly be wrong to throw it off by any means available? Nay, must it not necessarily be a righteous thing to regain independence for Jerusalem on the first opportunity? Such is the way human courtiers would have whitewashed Zedekiah's procedure. But here is the divine view in a directly opposite direction. "Shall he prosper? Shall he escape that doeth such things? Shall he break the covenant and be delivered?" We must be blind if we do not see a lesson for ourselves here. It is the lesson of Psa. 15, "who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord... He that sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not." Covenant keeping is one of the things God requires in us. He is a covenant-keeping God, and He expects all His children to be the same. They are not His children if they depart from their pledged word to escape an inconvenience. This is the way of the world; they tell the truth and stick to their promises as long as it is to their interest, but as soon as the current sets the other way, their words are flung to the wind. Their word is not their bond. This was Zedekiah's case, and nothing but wrath and ruin came of it, and it will not end differently in any case, though for a while the way of the wicked may prosper. How detestable in this connection does the doctrine of the Jesuits appear which became almost a public law of Europe at one time, that promises made to heretics were not binding. Had there been any Jesuits in Jerusalem, no doubt they would have eased Zedekiah's conscience about the treaty with Nebuchadnezzar. We see how contrary the divine law is to all human theories on this point; and the divine law will judge us at last, and not human traditions. It is worth noticing that submission to an enemy sometimes becomes a duty as in the case before us. Zedekiah had "given his hand" — had entered into a covenant. He was bound on that head to be faithful to Nebuchadnezzar though Nebuchadnezzar was an enemy. The stringency of the obligation as recognised from a divine point of view is seen from the fact of God calling the covenant in that case, "His covenant" — "My covenant that he hath broken, Mine oath that he hath despised." Then

Nebuchadnezzar's getting the upper hand was God's arrangement; though Nebuchadnezzar was unaware of it. Nebuchadnezzar was "His servant" (Jer 25:9). He worked for God though he did not know it (Eze 29:20; Isa. 10: 7, 12, 15), and it was the duty of Zedekiah to submit to the servant of God. From this we clearly get a principle of action of practical value to us now. God rules in the kingdoms of men for His own ultimate ends, and it is our duty to submit to the powers that be so long as He tolerates them. So Paul teaches (Rom. 13:1, 7; Titus 3:1). The doctrine requires but this qualification, that our submission to the powers that be respectfully ends when they require us to disobey God. This is exemplified in the case of the Apostles (Acts 4:19, 5:29), and it is according to reason. Therefore, when we are called upon by the institutions of our country to act as if we were "of the world," which Jesus says we are not; when we are called upon to act as constables, to take part in politics, or to serve in the army, we are bound to fall back upon the commandments of Christ, and to say "We ought to obey God rather than men." In the parable of the two eagles, the tributary Kingdom of Judah is represented by a cedar of Lebanon, which the Babylonian eagle would pull up by the roots and leave to wither. There is a very interesting statement in the chapter concerning this plucked up cedar, in which we recognize the gospel of the Kingdom. "I will take of the highest branch of the cedar, and will set it; I will crop off the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon a high mountain and eminent. In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it, and it shall bring forth boughs and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar; and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell." The fulfilment on both points has been quite remarkable. The Israelitish tree was "plucked up by the roots" effectually, first by Nebuchadnezzar, and afterwards by Titus. But the stock has not perished. Israel's race is extant in the earth, where the Babylonian tree has been extinct for ages. But it is more particularly in the case of the young twig cropped off, that the prophecy has received its most signal and most important fulfilment. It was taken off "the highest branch." The highest branch of a political tree is the royal family. From this highest branch, "the house of David" has the young twig been plucked, and the plucking has been God's own act. "He hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets which have been since the world began." So spake Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist in view of the birth of Christ. In this birth and what it led to, we have the cropping of the young twig illustrated. It was due to the divine interference. It was due to the action of the Spirit of God on a virgin of the house and lineage of David. By this a young twig was cropped off, from which the Israelitish tree will again sprout at the right moment to the filling of the world. Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David, "the man whose name is the Branch — the Branch of David," the "Branch of Righteousness," has been

plucked off the Israelitish tree; he has now nothing in common with it except historic extraction. He was finally broken off in death, and glorified and exalted to the Father's right hand, reserved against the day of the planting upon the mountain of the height of Israel, when it will become a great tree affording refuge to all creatures — a figure of the Kingdom of God. By a happy coincidence we have this shown to us in the New Testament portion of our reading (Luke 13:18). "Unto what is the Kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and cast into his garden; and it grew and waxed a great tree, and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it." This is the day we are looking for. We look eastward to "the mountain of the height of Israel" and see little at present but emptiness and desolation. Those who judge by appearances would say there will never be anything else. Those who believe in "the sure word of prophecy" are certain of the reverse. The Word of God cannot fail. He who is "the root and offspring (branch or twig) of David" will certainly perform his word and "come suddenly" and show us the high cedar fair and flourishing to the ends of the earth. In that day, songs of joy will be sung in the land of Judah (Isa. 26:1). Happy will it be for us, if we are able to say: "Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

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## Attaining the Mind of the Spirit

*Mind relative to action — motive a kinsman of fact — The Bible — prophecy and accomplishment, Daniel and Christ — revelations to Daniel — its power to exercise him — "thy people shall be delivered" — the verge of consummation.*

OUR meeting this morning has to do with the state of our minds. For this reason it is, in the eyes of many people of very little importance. The state of our minds, they think, is an affair of sentiment and fancy that may well be left to take care of itself. If it were a question of the state of our pocket or the state of our business, they would consider that a matter of real importance. Yet even in temporal things, the state of the mind is of the very first importance. In fact, it is the state of mind that constitutes the difference between one man and another. On the street, one man goes one way and one man another. Why? Because of a difference in mind. One has one set of impressions that takes him to a warehouse, a workshop, or bank, or counting house, as the case may be. When you want a job done, you send for a man who has a peculiar state of mind qualifying him for the same. That state of mind enables him to do what you want, and with another state of mind, he would be of no use to you. A chemist could not put your drains right because his mind has no acquaintance in that direction. It is the mind that guides the hands; state of mind is, therefore, all-important even in common

things. See how important it is in another way. State of mind in another has just everything to do with whether you love them or regard them with aversion. If they are of an excellent mind, you love them; if of an evil mind, you may be kind to them and refrain from rendering to them according to their evil but you cannot love them in the way you love those who are excellent. How important then to that person is the state of his mind. Who is there that does not like to be loved? There is probably not a living person who is indifferent on this head. So important, then, is the state of our minds — even in common ways. But these may be considered poor comparisons for the subject in hand. So they are, but they are stepping stones. They have to do with what men think of each other, whereas our meeting has to do with what God thinks of us. The object of the meeting is to bring or keep us in that state of mind that would be acceptable to Him. There is a state of mind acceptable to Him, and there is a state of mind the reverse. What these are we can only know from what is revealed. This revelation is very plain. “The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him — in those that hope in His mercy.” “The Lord taketh not pleasure in fools.” “Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.” “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word.” The concrete form of these abstract declarations in our day would be this: the Lord loves those who heartily believe the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, and ardently desire the promised salvation, and who, having attained to a knowledge of the will of God, are anxious on the subject of conforming to it in all particulars. Now, what is it that brings men to this state of mind? What is it that imparts motives in these directions? It is that which moves men in everything: facts — the knowledge of facts. This is the moving spring of all human action. Examine the conduct of men in every relation of life, and you will find this to be true. If a man emigrates, it is because he has heard of the fact of another country, and of what may be realized there. If a man persevere in any settled line of business, it is because he knows certain results of value to him will come out of that line of action.

What knowledge, then, is it, that leads men to fear God and hope in His purpose and to conform to His commandments? It is the knowledge of facts. Our meeting brings us into renewed contact with the facts, and these make their own impressions and produce their own results. They are facts of the past which men are liable to forget, but which have lost none of their reality by reason of being out of our sight. Our readings of selections from the Scriptures keep these facts before us — sometimes in one form and sometimes another, but always facts, and all supporting one another. The Bible itself is the first and most wonderful of all contemporary facts. For want of a constant acquaintance with this, men are liable to drift into forgetfulness that there is such a thing as a Bible in existence, except in a hazy way. Our habit of

methodical reading prevents this forgetfulness. The Bible is always before us in the exhibition of the wise and perfect and beautiful ways of God.

The chapters read on a particular day may be considered as windows through which we look at some section of the busy past, with reviving effects to our minds. In our first, it is Daniel we are with — Daniel in the act of receiving prophecy; for Daniel was a prophet, as believers in Christ are bound to recognize. This 11th chapter of Daniel that has been read would be dry reading from the point of view of popular theology. What use could be made of it? The question is answered by the fact that it is never used in popular religious exercises. How different it is from the point of view of a scriptural enlightenment. It is deeply interesting and highly profitable. First of all, there is the fact that it is a prophecy. Anybody can see this at a glance. It is all “shall,” “shall” throughout, as to movements of kings and armies. Next, it is prophecy that has since been fulfilled in so remarkable a way that the enemies of the Bible have invented the supposition that the prophecy was written after the things had happened, and by some one who had the history before him. It is a foolish hypothesis whichever way you consider it, for it is very certain that anyone knowing the facts at the time he wrote them as prophecy, would have been much more circumstantial in his foreshadowings. He would have given us the names of the kings. We should have had Alexander the Great to start with, and the names of his four successors, Cassander, Lysimachus, etc., among whom his dominion was divided, and we should have read all about Ptolemy Philadelphus, and Euergetes, and Antiochus Epiphanes, and the rest. Instead of this, it is merely the impersonal “King of the South,” or “King of the North,” all the way through as befits the dignity of divine condescension to human ways. Then how foolish it is to suppose that a pretended prophecy of Daniel could have been palmed upon the Jewish nation. The book of Daniel was in their hands in the time of Christ. The priesthood were the custodians of the Scriptures, and of this as a part. That priesthood had existed in an unbroken line since the return from Babylon the year after Daniel’s death. How impossible it must seem on reflection that a false book of Daniel could have been foisted upon them at any part of that line. How impossible that a book recognised by Christ could be an imposture. Christ is the key of the position in many ways. His resurrection settles all, though his character is sufficient even without that. The prophecy is specially interesting in this way, that it not only brings with it, in its past fulfilment, the pledge that God is at work in the matter, but it comes down to our own day, and goes beyond us to the resurrection and the Kingdom of God. The circumstances attending its communication greatly add to its force and interest. It was given to Daniel in Babylon during the last year of his life. Daniel had risen to great importance in Babylon. He had been taken to that country as a captive about 70 years previously, when



Nebuchadnezzar had successfully besieged Jerusalem. As a member of the royal family, he was early taken notice of in high quarters. His recital and interpretation of the image dream which Nebuchadnezzar himself had forgotten, led to his high promotion, for "The king made Daniel a great man and gave him many great gifts and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon." For a long time he retained this high position, which a variety of incidents helped to strengthen him in. But at no time did he withdraw his desires from the land and city, from which he had been carried away captive at the beginning of his career, and which had finally been laid in smoking desolation. He was of those of whom we read in the Psalms: "By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down: yea, we wept when we thought of Zion... If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth."

Those who know the Truth understand why Daniel should feel like this. It was not what is called "patriotism" though no doubt an ingredient of natural affection was in it. God has chosen Zion as the seat of His authority and the radiating point of His wisdom and power. Abraham came to it originally from the very country to which Daniel was taken captive. "He looked for a city (there) having foundations," and therefore, by faith "sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country" (Heb. 11:9). His descendants in Egypt, under Moses, sang on the shores of the Red Sea, on the morrow of the Egyptian overthrow; "Thou shalt bring them in and plant them on the mountain of Thine inheritance; in the place O Lord, which Thou hast made for Thee to dwell in." Jerusalem and the Holy Land were therefore much more to Daniel than his native country. They were identified with the purpose of God. They were associated with "the exceeding great and precious promises." Babylon's power and prosperity were an oppression to him; Judah's desolation and downtreading were a distress. It was therefore a natural desire and petition with him in Babylon that God should return in favor to Zion — the more especially as he understood from the reading of Jeremiah the prophet that in seventy years from its commencement, God would end the Jewish captivity and restore His people to the land of their fathers (Dan. 9:2). With these feelings he set himself "to seek by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes." He confessed Israel's sin and said, I beseech Thee, let Thine anger and Thy fury be turned away from Thy city Jerusalem... O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do. Defer not for Thine own sake, O my God: for Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy name." The answer which he received enlightened Daniel to his grief on one point, namely, that though the restoration would take place ("the restoring and building of Jerusalem") — in accordance with the Word to Jeremiah, yet it would only be a transient gleam of prosperity, and would

be followed by increase of corruption in Israel, bringing with it the putting to death of the Messiah when he should appear, and another overthrow of the Jewish state, and an indefinite prolongation of desolation and darkness. In this distressing prospect, Daniel "set his heart to understand and to chasten himself before God" (Dan 10:12). What should be the end of these things? It was in response to these several mental exercises that the prophecy outlined in chapters 10 and 11 was sent to Daniel, "to make him understand what should befall his people in the latter days" (v. 14). "The vision" said the angel, "is for many days," and so it has proved, even for over 2,300 days, as specified in the ram and goat vision of chapter 8. The angel begins right where events were at the moment of his communication (ch. 11:2). Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia, and the fourth shall be far richer than they all, and by his strength through his riches he shall stir up all against the realm of Grecia." The outline of futurity is conducted to "the time of the end" at v. 40. Then we have the events of this time described, including the one feature that was of engrossing interest to Daniel, "At that time shall thy people be delivered." Now what was of engrossing interest to Daniel is of engrossing interest to us, for the people of God are one, and those who do not find their interest active in this direction have cause to doubt if they have part or lot in the purpose of God. The identity of the hope of believers with the matters communicated to Daniel is shown by the statement immediately added: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." Thus the resurrection and the setting up of the Kingdom of God are the upshot of the long prophecy shown to him. Now, that prophecy has been so completely fulfilled in the history of the world (as has also that other prophecy in the Apocalypse sent to John in Patmos, and embracing the Christian era from that time till now), that we have the strongest ground for confidence concerning the finish. What stronger pledge could we have than a 3,000 years' run of fulfilled prophecy? For prophecy goes back far before the days of Daniel — back indeed to Abraham's time, which would give us about 3,700 years of this wonderful experience. Let us hold fast our confidence then without wavering, for He is faithful who has promised. The events of our own day show that we are on the verge of the consummation. The dense cloud masses that overhang the political sky; the unparalleled state of armament among the nations; the heavy swell of the democratic sea, and the roar of its breakers on every strand; the impotence of the beast and his image to touch the hair of a single saint against whose community they made deadly war in past times; the utter sickliness unto death of the Euphratean power whose

waters contract themselves into narrower and narrower channels with every upheaval of events; the consolidation of Britain's power in Egypt and the Mediterranean; the commenced revival of the Holy Land and people and the intense watchfulness of a scripturally-enlightened class throughout the world, who ardently desire the promised thief-like advent of the Son of Man — all these things tell us plainly that the end is at hand, and that God is about to perform His long-promised work of deliverance on behalf of the whole house of Israel, of which Jesus and his brethren are the true kernel. How misguided are those who may allow themselves from any cause to drop out of the position of watchfulness and faithfulness. The cares and pleasures of this life, it is long since Christ warned us against them, and they have not lost their dangerous power. The quarrels of brethren are on the same evil list. "Take heed that ye be not consumed one of another." These are the apostle's words. Wise men remember them and leave off meddling. The love of many may wax cold. Disputations may rage and blight among "lovers of debate and despisers of those that are good." But wise men will hold themselves aloof, in the loving service and patient waiting for Christ, knowing that the present hour will soon have vanished and return no more, while beyond lies the day of peace and holiness and love and life and joy for ever.

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## God's Greatness Shown in Small Mercies

*Each day's mercies — heedless partakers thereof — the reward of righteousness — the attainments of foolishness and ignorance — examples of wisdom — Christ is coming.*

IT is customary with brethren leading us in prayer on these occasions to give thanks "for yet another opportunity of bringing Christ to remembrance." To some it may seem a mere form of words. It is far from being so. It expresses a sincere sentiment for which there are weighty grounds. A thousand things might interfere with this privilege of coming together to soothe our jaded minds and comfort and purify our hearts by contact with divine ideas. When any of them do happen, we feel the reality of the privilege with an intensity that words cannot express. It is customary to speak of God's mercies as "more than the hairs of our head." It is a Bible form of speech. It may seem an extravagant comparison. Reflection will show it otherwise. Our life is not just the one thing it seems to be. It is made up of a thousand things, interference with any one of which is the suspension of a

mercy. Think of the multitude of conditions in our bodily frame that go to make up life and health: the multitude of infinitesimal vessels and tubes and little contrivances in the mechanism of the body, interference with any of which would produce pain and death. Each of these represents a separate mercy. While in health we may not think of it. It is well to look round that we may be helped in this matter. We may have had to go through a hospital some time or other — perhaps to visit some sick brother or sister. At such times, we see a multitude of forms of suffering, to any of which we might be subject — and any of which would be a great burden and involve great deprivation. For it is not the physical pain that is the measure of the evil. It is what infirmity cuts us off from: the enjoyment of activity, the continuance of usefulness, the communication of friends. So our freedom from disability is not to be estimated by itself alone, we have to consider what it ensures for us, and then we can see the greatness of small mercies. It may seem a small thing to be able to walk up the street to attend the breaking of bread; how differently it seems when we have sprained an ankle or broken a leg or taken a rheumatic agony. We then see how great is the mercy of sound limbs. We might go over every organ of the body and every part of every organ in the same way. See what sufferings and disablements might easily befall us, and keep us prisoners at home. And we shall then realise that it is no vain thing to give thanks “for yet another opportunity.” It might so easily happen that we could not have any more. We can say with intelligent emphasis that “His mercies are new every morning.” It but requires us to look round and consider. It is the characteristic of the brutish population now upon the earth that they do not consider, but appropriate all God’s mercies to themselves unthankfully and even arrogantly and with consequent lack of mercy for others. It was God’s complaint against Israel: “The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know; My people doth not consider.” Why was the complaint placed on record? That men might afterwards know that people thus “unthankful and unholy” are offensive to Him. There is a popular impression abroad to the effect that if there is a God, He is kind without discrimination. That He is good to all is true, as Jesus says: sending His rain on the just and the unjust. But this does not mean that He takes equal pleasure in all. Far from. “The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in them that hope in His mercy.” As for the other class His own expression is, “My soul hateth.” This will not surprise us if we think. It is even so among men who are in the image of God. Righteous men find more pleasure in some than others. They may be equally kind and forbearing to all, but all do not yield them the same satisfaction. The wise give pleasure to the wise. It is a rule of the universe and holds good at its eternal centre. “God taketh not pleasure in fools.” “The foolish shall not stand in Thy sight: Thou

hatest all workers of iniquity." It is not in vain that we exercise our minds in this way. We may read how Daniel rebuked Belshazzar for his neglect in this respect: "Thou hast not humbled thyself, though thou knewest all this, but hast lifted up thyself against the God of heaven and hast praised the gods of silver and gold, of brass, iron, wood and stone which see not nor hear nor know, and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways thou hast not glorified" — "whose are all thy ways" — mark the expression: absolutely every little bit of faculty we have is His and in His hand. He could withdraw it in a moment. A sense of this will keep us dependent and humble and grateful and kind. The proud indifference that is common is irrational. It is hateful. It is destructive. God will bring down all high looks, and exalt to the final inheritance of the earth those only who have the beautiful humility that comes from wisdom — which is a very different thing from the dejection of moroseness or the cant of Pharisaical speech. Paul's chief anxiety about the brethren was that they might know how to please God. It is a wonderful idea that man can yield pleasure to God. It is a revealed fact, so that we have only to note the fact and act on it. We cannot read the Bible regularly and attentively without becoming aware of what is well-pleasing to God. We shall discover a different form of action from what is in force among people who merely know nature (and very little of that) and know not God. It is written in the Psalms, "Many there be that say who will show us any good?" This is the universal question in effect. Everyone is desiring and pursuing good in some form or other. Some look for it here, and some there. Some seek it in politics, some in business, some in science, some in art, some in self-cultivation, some in social enjoyments. We read "The Lord looked down from heaven to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God." In the midst of all human seekings here is one thing that God is interested in and that most men have no taste for, the seeking of God. It is a seeking in which good is to be found. "The Lord is good to the soul that seeketh Him." The full measure of the goodness can never be apparent in mortal experience, though even now the highest satisfactions are in the way of wisdom. The full measure is indicated in the Voice that speaketh thus: "I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me. Riches and honor are with me, yea, durable riches and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold, and my revenue that choice silver. I lead in the way of righteousness: in the midst of the paths of judgment that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance and I will fill their treasure...Whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord" (Pro. 8:17-21, 35). Here is a divine light thrown upon the movements of human life upon the earth. By this light alone, we see correctly. By any other light, we look upon a false picture. Man has filled the world with his own contrivances; kindled

his own fires, lit his own lights. Society walks in this light, and delights in these contrivances. They seek and obtain honors one of another in a very pretentious paraphernalia of ceremonies and titles. They make a great ado with their ways and have eclipsed God with their own greatness. We are in danger of being sucked in by the current. We can judge the situation if we are but able to apply the tests that God Himself has given us. How many are there that seek God — (which is a very different thing from noisy doings in the public gaze). How many are controlled by a solicitude to realise His will in their lives? How many are there to whom the purpose of God is a matter of interest? His fear a practical motive? His honor a matter of concern? His commandments of a supreme and tender obligation? You may think, looking upon the world in the mass, "Oh, there are plenty if we knew them!" Judge by actual experience. See how men are in your familiar contacts. Do you find seekers after God in the street? Do you come in contact with them in the places of business? Do you come across them in the warehouse? In the workshop? In the field? Is it not the fact that they are scarcely to be met with at all; and that even such as profess godliness are found too often in simpering subserviency to the sinners by whom they are surrounded! A few here and there are to be found. The general flood of human life is godless. Why dwell upon it? Well, it is helpful as regards our own way. If we estimate the world in its true character, we are less likely to be influenced by it to our spiritual hurt, than if we assume it is alright with God. It is far from right. It is entirely astray from God. Even if it was an honest kind of world, it fails in the very first element of godliness in not knowing God, and not caring for Him, and not obeying the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The knowledge of God is the first necessity of human life, though men as a rule do not realise it till it is too late.

They realise it for their dead ancestors but not for themselves. There is no final good in anything detached from God. Science is beautiful, but it is an empirical toying with God's inventions if pursued with reference to Him; a presumptuous gossiping about His property, who is Creator and Possessor of all things. Music is fascinating, but it lacks the real inspiration if divorced from His praise. Even for human uses, the best music can only be found in association with Bible themes. As for business what is a man profited if he gain the whole world as a godless man? Follow the life of any man who seeks good without God? Go clean to the other end, when his days are done. What have you? A decrepit old man, thoroughly tired out — without satisfaction — without hope; his conscience senseless, the future dark — life a puzzle, destiny a dimness, the universe a frightful maze. And now the light flickers in the lamp, and now it goes out, and now is all dark and finished. Order the coffin; send word to the registrar, arrange for a grave. Fix the funeral. Take

him away, lower him to his place, shovel the earth. Leave him to the worms and forgetfulness. Is not this the end of all human attainments? Shall we then neglect the attainments? Oh, no; that is another thing. There is good in everything when God is in His place. That place is the throne. Let God be first with a man, and then "all things are clean unto you." The most fervent men of God have in their time been the most capable in human achievements. See David, an accomplished musician, and an inventor of musical instruments. See Solomon, the greatest scientist of his age, wiser than all men... "Who spake of trees from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall. He speaks also of beasts and of fowl, and of creeping things and of fishes."

See, Abraham, the capable man of business; Joseph, the supreme dictator of an empire; Daniel, the faultless administrator of a province. Natural men do not come up to men of God, even in natural things. But the great difference between the two is in their end. We are permitted to see the end of a man of God in David. We have his "last words." His sun was setting, and he knew it; yet the future was not the blank and oppressive mystery it is with natural man. He was able to speak of something which he calls "all my salvation and all my desire." He could rejoice in the Lord God of Israel as an high tower, a rock and a refuge, a shield and a deliverer. Here the merely natural man is silent. He has no tower — no shield — no salvation. He is merely a creature in the universe, without any abiding relation to the scheme of things as existing in the mind of its Proprietor. But with David, God has made "an everlasting covenant," therefore he rejoices in hope, and will not fear though he walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Why did God make this covenant with David? No doubt we may say that it was part of His eternal purpose. But there are wheels within wheels. God made the covenant with David because David was chosen. But David was chosen, because, as he said: "He liked me above all my father's sons." And why this like? Because David was a man after God's own heart? And what made him a man after God's own heart? Because he recognised God as the Holder and Controller of the universe from everlasting to everlasting; and had Him constantly in view as the controlling fact of his life. His psalms show us where God was with him. Natural poets portray nature. God fills David's effusions as the sun in the sky. Find a psalm without God in it. You cannot. Natural rulers employ their wealth and station for personal aggrandisement. How was it with David? He acquired incredible riches. What did he do with them? "I have prepared with all my heart, for the house of my God" (1Chr. 29:2). It all depends upon the use to which a man puts his wealth, as to what it is to him — whether his ruin or his salvation. Science, music, business — all things have their right place when God is on the throne. In the world God is not on the throne. But we are not of the world. We are striving after conformity to Him who said "It

is my meat and my drink to do the will of Him that sent me." We are asked to follow him. We excite the world's pity by the effort. Never mind, "The world passeth away, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." The end will justify all. There is final good in no other. All other paths end in darkness, however bright now. Christ stands at the end of it. Christ is coming. He will come as surely as the world is filled with the cross of his shame on church spire and prayer book cover, and it will then be manifest to all the world which class have sought good in the right channel — those who see man only in all they do and arrange, or those who have set God before them in the faith of His existence, the belief of His promises, and the obedience of His commandments.

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## Human Evanescence and God's Omnipotence

*True edification — lessons from death — One Personal Immeasurable Power, yet a God of love to obedient — separation from world obligatory — Bible testimony true — conviction brings action.*

**I**N the chapter read this morning, we have Paul commanding the Corinthians to "let all things be done unto edifying." In this, he refers particularly to speaking at the ecclesial assemblies; for this is his subject. He refers to some who edified themselves, but not the ecclesia, and such he commanded to be silent. This is according to reason. The usefulness of a man's speaking (or writing) is to be measured by the pleasure it imparts to others, and not by the satisfaction it may afford to himself. The man who enjoys his own rhetorical performances is, as a rule, a failure as regards others. It is also nearly a rule that those who speak with most profit to the hearers, are the least satisfactory to themselves. The point to aim at, the standard to judge by, is the edification of those who listen, "Seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the ecclesia."

What is this "edifying"? It is more than entertaining. A man may be an entertaining speaker, without being an edifying speaker. Edification is building up, strengthening the convictions of the mind in things pertaining to God. Some men weaken those convictions. Some men are as a debilitating air on the vegetation which droops under the influence; others may even be as a flood devastating the land, and washing away the growing plants. Some are mere lime-water squirts, causing blight where the drops fall. There are all sorts. Let us seek to excel in comforting and fortifying. This is to be done by bringing to bear those considerations which in their distinct apprehension



result in the mental ardor of conviction and decision. Let us try the process with the materials before us this morning.

We have had singing and reading in the things of the Spirit, some things concerning man, and some things concerning God. We have been singing of frail man, whose days are like the grass; "as a flower of field he grows." There may not appear to be much of an element of edification in this; but there is much. It is one of the leading facts in the enlightened resolution that springs from edification. The forgetting of it is one of the principal causes of the folly that is universal. Here we are for only a few days, and yet people go on living as if they would live forever. Each man believes that all the rest are mortal, but concerning himself, he has a difficulty in realizing that it is quite so with him. It must be evident that whatever helps to break in upon this illusion is edifying. It is profitable then to dwell on the fact of human evanescence. It is not moroseness to do this, it is common sense. It is part of ordinary wisdom to recognize that "life is but as a vapor that appeareth for a very little while and then vanisheth away." Whatever helps us to do so is good. It is on this principle that Solomon says "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting." We must die, and it is no use averting the face from the fact. Most people are frightened at coffins, skulls, and graveyards. Why should they? These are the facts we cannot get away from. Looking at them will help us to be wise; looking away will not abolish them, but may unfit us for adjusting ourselves to them. This is where pleasure-following is hurtful. It indisposes the mind to deal with facts as they are, and leads to the fostering of illusions. The things of God have a feeble light to the eye dazed with spectacular displays which please and dazzle: the heart kept in a simmer of frivolous mirth; or the mind engaged on passing human things. People who follow that line of things live as fools, and cannot do otherwise: for wisdom is not innate; and it is not in the power of pleasure to put it in. Living as fools, the future is always a subject of dread to them, and they die in despair. Shall we mope then, and be dejected, and miserable — thinking only of crape and dust and worms? There is no cheer like the cheerfulness of a sound mind. Believers of the Truth can say with Paul, with a true force and weight, "God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love and of a sound mind."

But the cheerfulness does not come from the gloomy side of human life. If there were nothing else to think of than the frailty of perishing man, of which we have been singing, there could be no cheerfulness but the cheerfulness of inebriation: "let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." But there is something else to think of — much else — which when grafted on the evil, turns it into satisfaction and joy. We have been singing of God as well as man. Here is where the light comes in — the light of wisdom, joy and hope and holiness. We have been singing of His "uncreate unity." This is not a mere phrase; it is expressive of a fact as apparent and inevitable as the sun is to the eye. Yet it is a fact subtle and stupendous. It takes us into the realms

of truth too high for mortal faculty; but we will not turn away. The sun is too great a thing for us to grasp, but we accept it with satisfaction and rejoice in its light. So God in His uncreate unity is a Rock of strength and a bed of rest and comfort to the mind, though beyond comprehension. We know some little of what we mean. By unity we intend oneness, a something that cannot be separated into parts. Can you separate the light of a candle into parts? It is one yet you know not how. The mode of its subsistence in unity eludes intellectual effort. How much more the light of the sun. How much more the power and light of the universe. There is a unity comprehending all. Lift your eyes to the starry host, though the individual stars, suns and worlds are separate from one another, they are embraced in ONE POWER, they are one system, there is the reign of one law. There is no antagonism or division anywhere.

What is this universal, invisible, all-embracing energy, which interpenetrates immensity, and holds the countless orbs of the universe in one grasp? Human knowledge cannot tell. Human knowledge confesses it cannot tell. In its most pretentious modern form, it plainly says, "I do not know!" It goes further: it says, "it is unknowable." From this it takes its latest name: agnosticism: un-knowingism: a true and modest title, as applied to what man can learn for himself of such profundities. But does it follow that because man does not know, this universal power has no knowledge of itself? Is man's knowledge the highest? Is it possible it should be so? The power that has formed the human brain, should it not know? Here the Bible steps in. What man cannot know concerning the power of all things, the power of all things has revealed. God at sundry times, in divers manners, has spoken. God says "I have created all things; I made man; I made the stars" (Isa. 66:2, 40:24-26; Jer. 27:5). "I fill heaven and earth" (Jer 23:24). He says "I am everywhere present. To whom will ye liken Me?" He enquires (Psa. 139:7-12; Isa. 40:25). Here then is rest for the mind in the "uncreate unity." We need not, we cannot go a hair's breadth further than this. To know God is enough; how He is we cannot know. We cannot even know how our own brains work. Why need we trouble about them? From everlasting He is the "uncreate unity" — stupendous — overwhelming in his unutterable greatness — GOD.

Thinking only of His greatness, we are liable to a feeling that can only be expressed by the word "crushed." It seems as if we were too insignificant to be objects of His notice; as even the earth itself was too small for His care. This feeling which is not according to truth, is dissipated by the addition of another word which we often find associated with His name in the Scriptures: "My God." True it is that it is mostly the spirit of Christ that thus addresses the Creator but it is also employed by the humblest of his servants: Moses, Samuel, David, Daniel, Nehemiah and others (Deu 4:5; 1Sam. 12:19; Dan. 9:18; Neh. 13:31) as Jesus said "I ascend to my Father and your Father: to my God and 'your' God" (John 20:17). He has been pleased in His earth

communications to describe Himself as the God of Abraham, as the God of Isaac, as the God of Jacob. In this, the terror of His vastness disappears. He comes near. He is love. "He humbles Himself to behold the things that are in the heavens and in the earth" (Psa. 113:6). He is not only the God of the terrible universe, but the God of all its details, and therefore of a poor afflicted world and the poor afflicted race upon it, who in Him live and move and have their being. Here is where the joy comes in. It may be asked, what joy is there in an abstraction like this, seeing that evil reigns, and seeing that it would appear as if God were indifferent to the earth He has made and the human race upon it?

There is an answer that follows as naturally as the formation of water from the juncture of warmth and ice. Give us God and man, and it follows that there must be a purpose of beneficence involved in their mutual relations, however difficult to discern at any given moment. We could not of ourselves know anything definite about this. Without information from God, we could only speculate as philosophers in all ages have speculated, and our speculations must needs be as bootless as theirs. Nevertheless, the existence of such an abstract necessary conclusion imparts an intellectual bias that prepares the way for the information that has been given; the glorious information. God has revealed Himself to Israel's race, at sundry times and in diverse manners. He has announced His intentions and made great and precious promises to which He has pledged Himself by covenant, which covenant he has ratified and confirmed in a public manner by Christ. Those intentions and promises give us a ground of hope that we could not otherwise entertain. He has declared His purpose to fill the earth with glory and blessing at last, through Abraham and his seed. And so practical is the definition of the glory of the blessing that we know the shape it will take and the effect it will have. He will set up by the hands of Christ a Kingdom, which will gather all mankind into its fold, and bless them with plenty and enlightenment. He will redeem from death. He will abolish every curse, and remove every evil. There shall be no more pain or sorrow, nor affliction. The inhabitants of the earth will at last be immortal in nature and perfect in mind. Everlasting joy is the prospect ahead.

The very greatness of God comes in here as a pledge. Nothing can be too good or too great for Him to accomplish. It is merely a question of His purpose, and this He has declared. We have but to rest on it, which pleases Him. The reverse state of mind disqualifies any mortal being for His regard. Without faith it is impossible to please Him. This is testified, and it recalls our attention to the fact that our individual relation to Him is an affair of condition. He is revealed as the 'God of Israel' but He is not God of every individual Israelite.

A whole generation of them perished in the wilderness for their insubordination, and only a few in all their generations pleased Him. Of

them He says "they shall be Mine in that day that I make up My jewels." As Paul says, "they are not all Israel that are of Israel." But though the God of Israel, the other races of mankind are eligible for His regard and gracious intentions, if they conform to His will. "Is He the God of the Jews?" "Is He not the God of the Gentiles also?" enquires Paul, which he answers by saying "Yes, of the Gentiles also." But as He is not the God of every individual Israelite, He is far from being the God of every individual Gentile. Paul reminds the Ephesians that when he came to them with the gospel "At that time, they had no hope, and were without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). At that time he further says, they "walked according to the course of this world," in fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as others. But God who is rich in mercy by the great love wherewith He had loved them, even when they were dead in sins, had quickened them together with Christ, that in the ages to come, He might show the exceeding riches of His grace, and His kindness towards them, through Christ Jesus. We cannot too scrupulously recognize that God has nothing but disfavor for Jew and Gentile who walk in darkness. He entrusted the Apostles with a mission of invitation to all who had ears to hear. The invitation was to come out of the darkness into the light. The terms of the invitation are paraphrased in a variety of ways. The meaning in each case is the same. It is plainly discernible in the words: "Come out from among them and be ye separate, and I will receive you and ye shall be My sons and daughters." This separation offends human vanity on the part of those from whom the separation is made, and creates enemies. But this has to be submitted to. God requires it. We can but make the sacrifice if He is to be our God. "The friendship of the world is enmity with God" (Jas. 4:4). It is hard to understand the state of any man's mind who would hesitate to make the sacrifice, if he is persuaded that God has made the demand. Doubt of His Word or work would explain uncertainty. There is no ground for doubt when the whole case is before the mind. Even to our generation, who have not seen with our eyes the wonderful works of God, God has given every evidence that a time of silence admits of. Look at the remarkable instance we have in the chapter before us. It may not seem an instance at all. But let us see. What is Paul's object in the chapter? (1Cor. 14). To induce the Corinthians to observe order in their ecclesial exercises. What exercises? The delivery of speeches? Something much beyond this. The gifts of the Spirit, and the way to use them, are in question. He had said (12:7), "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man (that is, among you) to profit withal." He meant the supernatural gifts of the Spirit, of which he said there were diversities (v. 4). He makes his meaning quite plain. "To one," says he, "is given by the Spirit, the words of wisdom... to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another divers kinds of tongues, to another the

interpretation of tongues." The object of these gifts of the Spirit is defined in Heb. 2:4: "God bearing witness (to the testimony of the Truth) both with signs and wonders, and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit;" and (Eph. 4:12) "Gave gifts unto men... some apostles, some prophets, etc., for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

The Corinthians were in the possession of these gifts of the Spirit, but they had fallen into a disorderly way of employing them. "Every one of you," says Paul "...hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation" (v. 26). A brother finding himself in possession of a gift of the Spirit, seemed to think it was his duty to yield to the impulse without regard to convenience or suitability. A number would speak at once with no result but confusion. "How is this?" enquires Paul. "God is not the author of confusion" (v. 33). God had given miraculous gifts but He expected them to be used in a rational manner as with natural gifts. "The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets" (v. 32). Therefore, he advises that if anything is revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace, that is if the new matter is of a character that will edify the body. If not, he is to be silent. If it be a tongue, and there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the ecclesia. Let him speak to himself and to God. "If", says he, "ye all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned and unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy (that is, speaking to men to edification, exhortation, and comfort) — (see v. 3), and there come in one that believeth not, he is convinced" etc., (vv. 23-24).

Now, the question to be considered is — how came Paul to indulge in this strenuous plea for an orderly and rational use of miraculous power? Was it not the existence of a disorderly use? It is impossible to suggest or imagine another reason. What follows? That the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were a common and notorious possession in the midst of the Corinthian ecclesia, as with Paul himself, for he says, "I thank my God I speak with tongues more than ye all, yet, in the ecclesia, I would rather speak five words with my understanding than by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue" (vv. 18-19). Tongues, he goes on to say, were a sign to unbelievers, and not bestowed for the private use of believers. In what way they operated as a sign we learn from Acts 2:6-13.

The point lies here — this 14th chapter of 1Corinthians, is an actual proof and monument in this 19th century, of the gifts of the Spirit having existed in the first century. And if they existed then, what follows? That the testimony of the apostles was divine, a true testimony; that Christ rose; that God exists; that His law is righteousness; that His purpose is sure; that Christ will return; that human life will be redeemed from the cloud and darkness that now overspread it; and that the earth will be filled with the peerless glory of the Creator, as He has promised.

This is extracting conviction from the facts before us. Out of conviction comes action. Out of action will come the blessed result that God has associated with it as fruit from seed sown. A patient continuance in well-doing which He has prescribed will end in glory and honor and immortality in the happy day of earth's redemption. "Though now for a season, if need be, we are in heaviness through manifold temptations, the trial of our faith, like gold tried in the fire, will be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Christ." Let us therefore earnestly heed the exhortation that Paul administers in those weighty words: "Be ye therefore steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

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## Fortified to Endure

*A pilgrim journey through an evil world — Bible reading a solace, guide, strength — present training essential to exaltation — God remembers iniquity — a few obedient and waiting for Christ — immeasurable future glory.*

**W**E are seven days further on the journey than when we last broke bread together. It is a weary journey in which we need rest and refreshment or else we should fail altogether by the way. Like the children of Israel, we are going through a great and terrible wilderness, wherein are scorpions and fiery flying serpents. We read of Israel that "the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way." It is no wonder. When difficulty succeeds difficulty apparently without end, human strength and patience are likely to give way. Israel's journey was long and trying; but under divine leadership, they persevered, and the end came at last. They found themselves at the end of the forty years, (and after a few years' fighting), settled in peace and safety in the land of promise.

These things were types and examples. They serve their purpose if we learn from them to be patient under all the toils of the journey we are making through the present evil world. The journey will not last for ever. It is sure to come to an end. It may end sooner than we are expecting. It has ended for Bro. Ingram, and may end for any of us in the same way. To fall asleep in Christ is a quicker road to the Kingdom than having to wait for his appearing in the land of the living. By a single step, we go from the presence of the darkness at present brooding upon life on the earth, into the glorious presence of Christ returned; for the death state is but a wink of sleep to the dead.

But while we are here in conflict with the evil we need to be fortified — fortified to endure. To fortify the mind is to make it strong, and to make it

strong is to fill it with ideas that give a joyful reason for action. There are ideas that have no power to influence the mind in this way, but contrariwise. This is why some books are profitable, and some not; some men helpful and some not. The ideas that inspire us to endure tribulation, and to deny ourselves are those that are connected with God. As David says, "I saw the Lord always before me, therefore I shall not be moved." In proportion as God is a vision before the mind, will we feel strong to sustain the part of waiting for Him. We cannot in our day get this vision apart from the Bible. We cannot see God with the natural eye. We could even do this, if God permitted. We may hope to see and feel Him in the glorious ages, if we are permitted to have a place therein. But, meanwhile, our privilege is limited to knowledge and faith, and these we do not get as students of nature, but as students of the Scriptures. God has put it in our power to know Him by the abundant revelation He has made. Oh, how privileged we are to have this revelation. It is communicated to us in a form so full of interest and so able to thoroughly furnish the man of God unto all good works. Those discover this who read methodically and daily. By this habit they open for themselves treasures of acquaintance and conviction that cannot be reached by the casual, desultory, or indifferent reader.

The Bible is the book for men in trouble, and trouble is the thing for preparing men for divine use — always pre-supposing that they know God and fear Him, and habitually subject their lives to Him. We profess to belong to this class by assembling ourselves at this "table of the Lord." The use for which God is preparing us is not visible now. It is to be discerned only in the revelation of His purpose by His servants, the prophets and apostles; and even here, our inherent weakness and lack of experience in the matters presented to our view is necessarily feeble. But we can see enough to re-echo all that Paul says about its exceeding glory. We can form some faint idea of the satisfaction that must accompany divine recognition and acknowledgement in the day of Christ, and its consequent bestowment of immortal vigor of constitution and allotment of a place among His glorified associates, and the conferment of power and dignity among a happy and submissive population in the new and righteous order of things He will establish upon the earth. Consider how high and great is the position offered to the friends of Christ, and that death will never terminate their felicity. Realizing this, we cannot marvel that we are called on to suffer now. It is a rule among men that the severity of a man's training is in proportion to the eminence of the position for which he is intended. If you want farm laborers, there is no need for training of any kind. Any education or no education will do; but if you want a man to lead an army or guide a state, you must bring to bear much preparatory discipline. Now, though the qualifications required in men for

divine use are very different from that which human employment calls for, the same necessity exists for discipline and preparation. The use to which God intends to put His chosen is great and lasting, and, therefore, the trial is sharp and long. Peter tells us to “think it not strange.” We are enabled to catch his thought by such reflections as these. Apart from these reflections, we are liable to “think it strange” — very strange — that God should hide His face and leave those who seek and love Him in affliction. Human nature — weak and blind — is apt to grow weary and doubtful under the process. The words are needful which say to us, “Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him.” The reason is all powerful: “for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.”

The Scriptures enable us to endure with patience. They do so by the perceptions they impart. Wherever we dip into them, we find something to aid us in this matter. Even in so apparently stern and barren a portion of the Word as that read this morning from Amos, we find something to furnish the man of God in his warfare. Damascus, Gaza, Tyrus, Edom and Moab are addressed on the subject of their sins, and not only they but Israel and Judah — God’s own people — of whom He says in the third verse of the third chapter, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.” There is not a good word for any of them: there is condemnation for all. From the divine standpoint, they are all wrong — “none that doeth good — no not one.” There is no book on the earth like the Bible for this; because there is no book on earth in which God speaks but the Bible. Man speaks in all other books, but in this it is God and God only. We have refused to listen to those who would invite us to allow a place to man also in this book of God. We will not have it, and for this we are in trouble. But what is there in this unfavorable portraiture of human nature, to upbuild and strengthen the man of God? Just this: the Truth has called upon us to accept the monstrous conclusion, as people consider it, that the world at large is walking in the way of death. We have accepted the conclusion, but the weight of it is sometimes burdensome to human weakness. We ask ourselves, Can it be? We look at the Truth again. We say “it must be.” Amiable neighbors reprove, and uncertain believers suggest, and astute-minded critics maintain it cannot be. In the conflict of feeling and opinion, conviction is liable to waver. But here, in the presence of a prophet, through whom God speaks, discernment is fortified and confirmed; and we are enabled, in spite of the apparent presumption and enormity of the thought, to hold on to the attitude imposed upon us by the testimony of Jesus and the apostles, and to say, “By ecclesiastical sorcery, all nations are deceived” and “if men speak not according to the oracles of God, it is because there is no light in them.”



Then we look at the things that God charges against these communities, and we learn another lesson not just visible in the charges themselves. They are different in form; Damascus had inflicted cruelty on Gilead; Gaza had handed over Israel to captivity; Tyre had violated the covenant with Judah; Edom had nursed perpetual anger with his brother Jacob; Moab had burnt the bones of the king of Edom into lime, etc. But though differing thus in form one from another, all these offences (here made the ground of condemnation) resemble each other in this that at the time they were committed, they were apparently unnoticed and unrecorded. Those who got the upper hand in them and by them, seemed to do so with impunity. When Moab's slow fire, for example, was incinerating the bones of the enemy whom they had got into their power, it did not seem to matter to any one. There was no interruption to the sunshine; the fresh air was not withheld; the Moabites were able to go home and sleep and rise and partake of their meals in all peace and security. Yet the iniquity was seen and remembered by One who does not forget, and here it comes forth by the pen of Amos, written on the indelible page of that Scripture that cannot be broken.

This reflection has a special value in our own circumstances. The most depressing part of our experience consists of this very thing. In hundreds of matters, we see the wrong done with presumptuous fearlessness on the part of the wrong-doers and without the least indication that God sees or regards. Time passes, and the wrong-doer not only seems none the worse, but all the better for his wrong doing. In this, our faith is sorely tried. But if we are wise, we will endure the trial. We will not be deceived by appearances. We will be guided and fortified by this instruction of the Scripture. We will behold, without dismay, the success of evil doing in the knowledge of a final and effectual remedy. We will hearken to the voice that addresses us by Solomon: "If thou seest the oppression of the poor and violent perverting of justice and judgment in the province, marvel not at the matter, for He that is higher than the highest regardeth." We will remember that though God suffers long, there is an end to His patience with iniquity. This end is an appointed end and a revealed end. Great Babylon comes at last into remembrance before God, "to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath" (Rev. 16:19). God's elect crying night and day unto Him, will at last be thoroughly avenged, as Jesus tells us (Luke 18:8, 7) "God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil" (Ecc. 7:14). Here, saith the Spirit, is the faith and the patience of the saints. That is, it is these convictions that inspire faith and induce patience. We can endure when we have reason for it. We have great reason for endurance when we know that God will at last put right the dreadful wrongs of the present hour.

The second of today's readings (1Tim. 4:5) tells us that the Spirit expressly foreshadowed the evil state of things from which we suffer. "The Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times, some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from meats which God hath created to be received with thankfulness of them which believe and know the Truth." The "some" spoken of here as departing from the faith are by Peter described as "many." "Many shall follow their pernicious ways" (2Peter 2:2). So many are they at last that "all nations" are ensnared (Rev. 12:2, 13:3); and the situation among men at last is so spiritually barren that Jesus did not anticipate finding faith upon the earth at his coming, though that coming was to be in response to the prayers of the faithful (Luke 18:8). Yes, he plainly says that the state of things at his coming would resemble the state of things "in the days of Noah," when only one small family were found in an acceptable attitude before God. In view of this, what can we say concerning our evil day but that in a certain sense, things are as they ought to be. Few are they who are found honoring the name of God and waiting upon Him in the way appointed in His Word. Few are they with whom His commandment is a law, and to whom the things in which He delights are a pleasure. Few are they to whom His Kingdom is a reality, and the high calling a business of practical moment. It was thus in the days of Noah. The multitude now, are where they were then — seeking their own ways, finding their own pleasure, looking upon the claims of God as an intrusion; His will, an inconvenience; and His purpose, a distasteful interference with their rights and occupations. It is an evil situation — a dark and dreadful day. But let understanding rule, and we shall not be overthrown.

What we see and mourn at, was foretold. It was foretold because it was foreseen. It was foreseen because to God all things are known; and with God, we may abide in peace, even during the evil day; for, not only has the evil day been foreshown, but the glorious day that comes after — the day of light and gladness, and righteousness and honor. The fact that the evil day has come, is a guarantee that the day of good will come. Come it certainly will, however long it tarry, and however sore the evil, with which, in the wisdom of God it is preceded. And when it comes, it comes to stay. Never again will darkness cover the earth or death reign. Never again shall we know the weakness of mortal nature, the distress of human misjudgment, the inexpressible misery of sojourning, poor and powerless, in a benighted population that know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The day of the Lord will not only be without cloud, but without end.

We are unable to grasp this fact in all its magnitude and power. But the

knowledge we have, enables us to receive it in faith, even if the faith of a helpless little child. Reason leads us to the threshold of the morning dawn, even if our weak eyes are unable to behold the brightness of the everlasting glory, that presents itself to our view. By this we are strengthened to endure the horrors of the night. By this we are enabled to hold on in the face of all discouragements; to retain confidence and purpose in the midst of a thousand contradictions; to pursue an indomitable way against a world in arms, and the path of our pilgrimage through this great and terrible wilderness, notwithstanding the hiss of the serpent and the arrow of the Amalekite. The night will end and the day will dawn; and happy shall we be if it then appear to have been our part now to have walked — not as children of the night, but of the day.

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## The Similitude of the Four Carpenters

*One with brethren of past ages — the world unheeding and disobedient — Zion and God's purpose downtrodden — Four Carpenters — The Lamb and 144,000 — short wait, then unspeakable glory — a virgin community.*

WE are with Zechariah and John this morning. They are both our brethren. They were interested in the same things and aiming at the same ends. The whole family of God are alike in this respect. It is in fact this that makes them the family of God — their knowledge and love of Him, their submission to Him, and their joyful anticipation of the good thing He has promised to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It is this common sympathy with God and all things appertaining to Him that makes them one, wherever they meet, and that will tie together in a common joyful affinity men of extremely different countries, age and custom. When they meet at the resurrection they will be no strangers. The reserves and checks of the present state, when the children of God are scarce, and no man can be sure that he knows who is who, will entirely disappear with the evil age to which they belong, and the fountains of heart and mind will be opened in streams of joy.

We find Zechariah among things relating to the down-trodden state of Israel — among visions and symbols — horses of different color, horns and carpenters — matters having no interest for his contemporaries. His contemporaries were not distressed at the condition of the Lord's land or the Lord's nation. They cared nothing for any prospects there might be of a different state of things. They were pleasantly occupied with their own prosperities. The "heathen" were "at ease." This was a state of things not

pleasing to God, though it was He who had put Israel down, and caused the heathen to triumph over them. "I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease, for I was but a little displeased and they helped forward the affliction" (Zech. 1:15). The situation is similar now. All things pertaining to God's purpose are in the dust; and few are "grieved at the affliction of Joseph." There are a few — a very few — watchmen on Zion's walls, who give the Lord no rest on the subject, but remind Him day and night of the promised restoration of His favor. The mass of the population are worse than heedless; they hate everything connected with God. They are taken up only with their own pleasure which they follow with great talent and diligence. The situation is trying to the children of Zion. They are liable to feel disconsolate oftentimes; and to mourn sore with David at the grievousness of living solitarily in a wilderness. But reason comes to their aid. The day of desolation is appointed. "Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice." But the day of desolation has an end. The day of unspeakable comfort is fixed and hastens with every hastening year. "I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice." "Ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem." "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." Wherefore, "be glad with Jerusalem all ye that mourn for her." "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem."

The enemy "mocked at Zion's sabbaths." They mock at her symbols. We share in this affliction also. In revealing His mind, God has "multiplied visions and used similitudes by the ministry of the prophets" (Hosea 12:10). We get to know His mind by the study of those similitudes; and allusion to these similitudes necessarily enters largely into our communications on the subject. We speak of "the beast," "the Dragon," "the Euphrates," "the frogs," etc. The mirth of the enemy is excited by such allusions, and derision naturally inflicts pain. But we endure it. It is for God's sake we suffer this; for it is with Him that these things have originated. We know what He has said: "They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me." We can afford to wait. What becomes of human consequentiality in 100 years? Search for it among the worms. Where will human scorn at the things of God be when God lifts up His hand again the second time, to show His glory to affrighted man, and bring into contempt all the honorable of the earth? Yes, we can afford to wait.

Zechariah heard a question propounded which we can well accommodate to our own age. Jerusalem had been in ruins for 70 years; and the time for promised revival had come. And the question was "O Lord of Hosts, how long wilt Thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which Thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?" "And," Zechariah says, "the Lord answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words." The similarity of our position you will perceive at a glance. For a long period Jerusalem has lain in the down-trodden state foretold by Jesus. The times of the Gentiles, during which that downtreading was to continue, are nearly at an end; and it is a rational prayer

for us to pray in the words that Zechariah heard: "O Lord of Hosts, how long wilt Thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which Thou hast had indignation these 1,800 years?" If we could hear a response to our words as Zechariah heard, we should hear "good words and comfortable words" like him. "My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad: and the Lord shall yet comfort Zion and shall yet choose Jerusalem." The answer that Zechariah thus received was immediately illustrated by one of those "similitudes" which the Truth enables us to understand. And by the illustration we may see that the answer related to the whole future of God's purpose with Israel. Four horns were shown to him, concerning which he was told that they were the horns or powers that had "scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem." This was showing, on the smallest scale the antagonism of the Gentiles to God's land and people in their whole history. Other visions show us that this antagonism has assumed the form of four successive empires — represented to Daniel by four beasts; and that it will not go beyond the fourth beast phase which is destined to be destroyed by the coming of the Lord. Four horns comprehend all. Then he saw "four carpenters," coming to fray or cut them down, "What come these to do," was his question. The answer was: "These are come to fray them — to cast out the horns of the Gentiles which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it" (v. 21). This is plain. The four horns are the Judah-scattering powers of the Gentiles; the four carpenters are the destroyers of those powers at the last. Now we know that Jesus and the saints are the appointed executioners of Yahweh's judgments against the powers of the Gentiles when the time comes to put them all aside and to set up the Kingdom of God. Why should they be represented by carpenters? Probably the answer is suggested by another question which was put 1,800 years ago concerning Jesus: "Is not this the carpenter?" Jesus is the covering name of the whole body. Relatively to the world's corporations, they are the carpenter community, destined to cut the others all down. Why four? There being four Gentile horns, a carpenter for each horn is appropriate; but the principal reason doubtless lies in the four-camp organization of Israel's host when they came out of Egypt — a matter of divine arrangement with typical forecasts. This division of the camp into four gave an analogical relation to the commonwealth of Israel in its final aspect as a city lying four-square; and also yielded four cherubic living creatures as the symbol of the divine organization — corresponding antagonistically to the four beasts into which the camp of human Satanism has been historically divided. However this may be, there can be no difficulty in recognizing Jesus and his brethren in the four Gentile-levelling carpenters. Thus we read ourselves into the symbol. We assemble round this table of the crucified carpenter — a carpenter to build as well as to destroy. We are here because his name has been named upon us; and we bear that name and all the dishonors meanwhile associated with it in the hope of being finally chosen for the real and ultimate

work for which the carpenter community is being developed — a work of pulling down the evil and building the good — that the earth may be filled with joy to God and man.

In John's company (in Rev. 14), we are permitted to behold a community in the day of their elevation to power and glory. John sees "a Lamb on the Mount Zion and with him an hundred, forty and four thousand having his Father's name written on their foreheads." A lamb — here is another of the divine symbols. The various secret orders and societies among men have their symbols and mysteries. Their employment is found to be convenient and effective. The idea of using them is doubtless of divine origin. The Freemasons claim to be descended from Solomon as regards the insignia of their craft — in which there may be a grain of truth. The meaning of the Lamb we know: slain at the Passover, and every morning and evening, it was pre-eminently the symbol of the reconciliation to be effected in the sacrifice of Christ, in whom God was to be exalted, and man abased, sin condemned and righteousness declared — as the foundation of the system of love and purity and life to be established finally in all the earth. Amongst all the animals, the lamb most fitly represents the innocence and gentleness and harmlessness of the Christ character; which is developed in times of evil with a view to glorious establishment in times of perfect well-being. The Lamb and all who are with him are of a like character — the Father's name in the foreheads of all, that is the knowledge and love of God established in their understandings and hearts. John saw them as 144,000 — the arithmetical symbol of their complete multitude. Their root is 12 — 12 tribes, 12 apostles, 12 thrones; and the square of this root (or the sum resulting from the number being multiplied by itself), is, 144. Absolutely, their number is a countless multitude — embracing all the faithful from Abel to the generation contemporary with the Lord's coming. It is the peculiarity of a symbolic vision to represent them by a number of Israelitish meaning.

They are seen as a rejoicing multitude. John heard their voice "as the voice of many waters and as the voice of a great thunder," "the voice of harpers harping with their harps." Let us realise this for our comfort. We are in distress on many accounts at present. It will not always be so. "Weeping may endure for a night; joy comes in the morning" — a morning without clouds. It is the dawn of this morning that John saw, and that we see through his description. Let us remember it is not a piece of fancy. His words are "words of righteousness, of truth and soberness." They are "the true sayings of God." They present to us a transporting vision of light and joy awaiting our issue from the present vale of darkness and tears. While we are in this vale, it seems as if we would always be here. Remember, this is an illusion of finite sense. A little common reflection will help us to dissipate it. We are only here for a short time. We may not have to wait the full efflux of the latter-day programme of signs. The curtain of death may drop at any day on our present

scene; and in death there is no interval. Ages pass in a moment to the dead. The curtain will drop and the curtain will seem immediately to rise on the things seen in the vision by John, but then become joyful realities. Hold on to this comfort in the dark. It is real and lasting. Our present life is but an appearance, lasting a very little while; what is coming is real, joyful and lasting. Godliness will not always be a thing of faith, self-denial and endurance. The things that God has in store for them who love Him pass human imagination.

Meanwhile, those who belong to the 144,000 are strangers on the scene. This is intimated pretty strongly in the words John was directed to write: "These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins." Here is something requiring understanding. Some have read the statement literally, with disregard of the symbolic character of the vision. This mistake has doubtless done something to establish monasticism in the earth. We have been emancipated from many mistakes of the past, and this is among the number. The virgin-community are the redeemed who surround the Lamb in the day of his return. They are "redeemed from the earth," and they "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." It is so stated plainly (v. 4). We have only to ask who they are who do so. This we learn in many ways. Paul's definition is sufficient: "They who are Christ's at his coming" (1Cor. 15:23). These include "men and women," for men and women were baptised (Acts 8:12), and they are "heirs together of the grace of life (1Peter 3:7). They include Peter and other apostles who were married (1Cor. 9:5). If then married, male and female are ingredients in the body of Christ, what can be the meaning of speaking of that body as consisting of those who are "virgins," and of their virginity particularly consisting of not being "defiled with women." There must be a meaning to such words. They are remarkable words. When studied they become intelligible words, and instructive words in a direction somewhat astounding to the religious and secular respectabilities of Christendom.

Women have a symbolical sense in the Apocalypse. The nature of this sense we easily discover from the study of the two leading women of the vision — one an intoxicated harlot, and the other a pure and chaste bride. Of the first it is said "The woman that thou sawest is that great city that reigneth over the kings of the earth" (17:18) — in whom, therefore, we discover Rome; for to no other city could this description apply in the days of John. It is Rome in her ecclesiastical relations, for she is said to have made all nations drunk with what she administers to them; and to maintain unlawful intercourse "with the kings of the earth." The other is said to be "the Lamb's wife" — the true ecclesia of Christ. Women, therefore, when symbolically employed, represent ecclesiastical communities. Now, where are the communities with which the saints of God are declared to be undefiled? The answer is suggested to us by the name applied to the head woman of the

earth in Christ's absence — the "Mother of Harlots." Rome is the Mother-Church.

Where are the daughter churches? They are to be found in all the earth. We need not trouble ourselves about other countries. If there are churches in Britain affiliated to the Roman Mother, there are "women" in the country from which it is the duty of the friends of God to stand apart. Are there such? Nay, where is the church that is not affiliated to Rome, both in the sense of holding her leading doctrines, and recognizing her membership of the body of Christ? There is scarcely such a church to be found. A spurious charity is advocated everywhere, which, discarding "party shibboleths" (as the claims and obligations are styled), seeks to embrace all creeds and churches in one indiscriminate communion whose principle shall be to insist on no principle. Apocalyptically speaking, the practisers of this doctrine are "defiled with women." By taking part with them, they make themselves responsible for the universal revolt against the divine principles which were placed in the world by the instrumentality of prophets and apostles (long dead), and preserved in the pages of the holy oracles inscribed by inspiration for the preservation of their message. The 144,000 are not in this position, They stand apart from them all. They are "not defiled with women." They are not to be found in the Church of England, nor in the so-called evangelical communions, nor in the various sects and denominations that acknowledge each other as members of the "church universal." They stand apart in virgin isolation, "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets," and repudiating all identity with the Bible-nullifying institutions that men have built up and established in the earth.

Is it unreasonable that God should require this at our hands? On the contrary, does not the logic of all the past and of every known principle of truth necessitate it? God has appointed faith in His promises and obedience to His commandments as the condition of our acceptability with Him. How then could He regard us with favor, if for the sake of respectability or the things of this life, we make ourselves one with those who are either ignorant of or deny His promises and who violate His commandments every day of their lives, and yet who ostentatiously parade themselves in various assemblies and institutions as His very elect in all the earth? The way of life is thoroughly reasonable, but for that reason it is narrow; for that reason it is hard for the present; but it is not an impossible way, many have trodden it before us. Let us not fail where others have overcome. Let us renew our courage and go forward with resolution. The way may be toilsome, but it is not long. It may be hard to endure, but there is every inducement that can possibly influence men to great achievement. The rugged, dark, and narrow way has its exit in the bosom of the 144,000.



## Wisdom and Comfort Obtained from God's Ensamples

*Moses exiled because of faith — 40 years wait — waiting in adversity necessary — trouble not a sign of wickedness — “sorrow of heart” at human rebellion — “conformed to the image of His son.*

**W**E must all feel it to be a relief to come away from our daily occupations and anxieties and troubles and to sit down to contemplate the scenes of other days exhibited to us in the Scripture readings we have together at such meetings as these. It is a relief to look at any scenes that take us away from our own troubles; how much more when the scenes not only give the pleasure of change, but contain the promise of benefit in all the directions and forms of our need. Such are the scenes we look at in these readings we have had this morning. We will look in a cursory way at each of them by way of getting that relief and encouragement which the pilgrims of the Lord require so long as they are in the desert of the present evil life. They are all co-related, though differing in form and aspect. In all of them, we are in contact with the wisdom that comes from above, though dealing with men and matters transacted on the earth.

The first shows us Moses — Moses the flockmaster — Moses, the servant of Jethro, the Midianite, before the Lord had called him to bring His people out of Egypt. It shows him in the act of looking after the flocks in the pastures of Sinai (for there are pastures there, though the neighborhood is in the main a wilderness). How came he there? for he had originally belonged to Egypt, and had been born and brought up in high station there. He had arrived in Midian as an exile from Egypt from which he had had to flee for killing an Egyptian in defence of a Hebrew. Why was he so zealous on behalf of a Hebrew, seeing the Hebrews were a serf race in the country, and he an Egyptian courtier, as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter? Because he had faith in the promises made by the Lord God of the Hebrews to their fathers; and he “chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ (which was associated with the Hebrews) greater riches than the treasures of Egypt” (Heb. 11:25). Why did he take upon himself to interfere in so practical and decisive a form in the affairs of his brethren? Because “he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God, by his hand would deliver them” (Acts 7:25). Why did he entertain such a thought before God had appeared to him? Probably, because the time spoken of by God to Abraham having drawn near, he concluded that his own elevation to a position so near the throne of Egypt was a providential indication that God would make use of him in accomplishing the promised deliverance. In this thought, events

ultimately proved him right; but in proceeding to act upon it without authority, he made the mistake of beginning 40 years before the time, and had to flee from the country and take refuge in Midian where the chapter read from Exodus shows him to us at the end of forty years. Forty years! Consider the length of this time under such circumstances. We glibly say "40 years;" but in no light or rapid manner would forty years pass with Moses as a tender of flocks and herds in the solitudes of the Midian desert. Look back forty years, and see what it means. Most of us here can look back forty years. In a certain way, it does not seem a long time to look back upon, but how sufficiently long it is for a man's ardors to abate, we all know. The impulsive zeal of Moses had evidently cooled all down. It turns out that he did not circumcise the children born to him during this time. This would indicate, not exactly the abandonment, but certainly the subsidence of the hopes and convictions that led him to slay the Egyptian. And now he sees a bush all aflame on the hillside, but not consuming. He draws near to inspect the curiosity. He discovers that the hour has come for God to commence the work of Israel's deliverance, and that he, after all, is to be employed in it.

Now, it is not difficult for us to make a comforting application of this case to our circumstances. Having been led to discern the arrival of "the time of the end," we have been looking for the Lord for a number of years. We have not exactly slain Egyptians, or taken judgment into our own hands in any way but our conviction has not been without practical effect. Some, perhaps, have refrained from enterprises upon which they would have entered, if they had not entertained the conviction of the Lord's nearness. Some have spent money upon projects which perhaps they would have let alone if they had supposed the time of the end in the indefinite future. All have, more or less, been the subjects of premature impulses like Moses, and reapers, it may be, like him, of the depression of deferred hope and prolonged disappointment in the wilderness. But shall we lose heart? Shall we not rather renew our courage? Look at the flaming bush at the end of forty years. These forty years were not lost. They were probably necessary to prepare Moses for the mighty work he had to do. How could he have been admitted to the privilege of face-to-face communication with God — how could he have been qualified to be a god to Pharaoh, and a prophet and lawgiver to the hosts of the Lord — without the weight and gravity and wisdom that came with years and adversity? So it will, doubtless, appear in our own case. The delay has not been without its necessary effect on all the servants of the Lord who are waiting for the promise, fearing God and doing His commandments.

We have not yet been waiting 40 years. We have seen many signs, and we are seeing them day by day. The manacled despotism of the Vatican, — the exhausted power of the sick man at the Golden Horn — the totally eclipsed French imperialism after a 20 years' war — causing control of European diplomacy at its three leading centres — and the reviving vitality of the

Lord's land and people, with Britain's shadow extending in their neighborhood, are all signs that cheer the heart with a rational confidence that the long night of God's hidden face is near its end, and that the time is at hand for the Lord to "revive His work in the midst of the years and in wrath, to remember mercy." One of these days, the counterpart of the flaming bush will suddenly arrest our attention. It may be an angel's presence — it may be a well-founded report concerning the same. In one way or other, the moment will come when we shall say, "It is enough — the Lord has come — at last, at last!"

In our second reading, we are with David. The attitude in which we see him differs from that of Moses, but yields us practical guidance in another way. Moses shows us the certainty of deliverance after long waiting. David, in Psalm 56, illustrates to us a man of God in trouble. His trouble is deep; the prayer heartfelt. He is among enemies — enemies numerous, strong, lively, and clever. "They be many that fight against me, O Thou most High... Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil." "Be merciful to me, O God, for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me." Now, we know that God loved David and brought him at last out of all trouble, and will place him high in the Kingdom of God. It is this that makes it so helpful for us, who are in trouble, to see him in trouble. The very fact that he is in trouble is instructive. Why should it be so? The Eliphazes of the natural mind always reason that it should not be so, and as a fact is not so, that a righteous man should get into trouble. They argue that the fact of a man getting into trouble is a proof that he is a God-forsaken man. They did so in the case of Job, whose case has been placed on record to enable the children of God in all ages to correctly interpret trouble. Job was in the deepest trouble it is possible for a man to get into. His friends said it was evident that he must have been a wicked man in secret. But Job would not have it. He protested his integrity. He said he would die, asserting his innocence. To God he said: "Thou knowest that I am not wicked." He could not account for the terrible calamities that had overtaken him. His philosophy of the case was that God had a right to do as He liked with His own; that He had given him great blessing in the past, and now He had taken it away, and who could hinder or find fault? "Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and not receive evil?" He recognised God's right to kill: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him." God endorsed Job's speeches on the matter, and reprov'd the views of his three friends. So it is no strange picture that we see, when we see David in trouble. It is the portion of all God's children at one time or other of their lives. It is necessary. It is refining and improving every way when not carried to the point of destruction — which God does not allow. "He will not suffer us to be tried above that we are

able to bear." A good man is made better by trouble. It chastens and subdues and humbles him. It enables him more acutely than ever to discern and feel the vanity of all mortal excellence, and the intrinsic majesty and authority of the Eternal One, from whom all have proceeded and in Whom they subsist from day to day. It enables him to sympathize more easily with others. It prepares him for the Kingdom. The way to the Kingdom of God is therefore, a troubled way. Rich men find it difficult to enter the Kingdom. Their hearts are liable to be satisfied with the creature, instead of seeking rest in the Creator. It is through much tribulation that God brings men to Himself. Moses had to spend a long, hopeless time in the wilderness, before God judged him fit to be entrusted with the mighty works accomplished by his hand. Joseph had been fitted for his exalted part by the ignominy of slavery, slander, and imprisonment; David was prepared for the throne by exile and implacable and deadly persecution. Jesus himself, we are told, learned obedience by the things that he suffered. Reviewing these facts, are we not more able to reconcile ourselves to the troubled day through which we are called upon to pass in this period of the world's history? It is only preparatory. It will not last forever. It cannot last for ever. It must end in a few years at the very longest, even if it come in the form of death. Death itself is a welcoming ending to those who have entered into the new covenant; for, by one short step, it transfers them from their present evil state to the Lord's presence at his coming. Let us then be comforted in all our tribulation that we endure, knowing that though painful to endure, it is working out for us a great result, for which we shall thank God in great gladness, when the work is done, the night past, and the morning arrived.

The third scene introduces Paul seated before a parchment, with pen in hand, or rather sitting by the side of one so seated, dictating words to be written to the brethren at Rome — words reputed at the time to be weighty and powerful, and which we find to be so to this day. The particular portion of those words read this morning brings before us a strong feature of Paul's character, which it is of importance for us to realise and consider, in view of the fact that Paul was put forward by Christ as "a pattern" for the guidance of all who should afterwards believe on him to everlasting life. The feature brings before us the very sorrow we have already been considering. "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart." Let us stop for a moment and think of this. Here is Paul a sorrowful man — a continually sorrowful man — and such a man, a pattern set forth by Christ for our imitation. It is evident that there is here a radical difference from the ideal character of modern times. The central feature of the modern ideal is stoicism — grinning and unwincing submission to every pang that comes along. Sorrow is marked off as a weakness — an effeminacy. British pluck, British hardihood, British

insensibility to pain and sorrow (the bear-it-and-come-up-smiling-mood), this is the type that is applauded as manly and strong. "Great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart" would be scouted as a species of monomania, unfitting a man for the society of his kind — especially sorrow of the sort that burdened Paul. He tells us what it was — "for his kinsmen according to the flesh, Israelites," who "having a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge," had placed themselves in opposition to "the righteousness of God" in Christ. This is a sorrow for which the world has no sympathy. It can understand sorrow for the loss of a wife, the loss of money, the loss of friends, but sorrow because Israel is not in harmony with God, — this, in their eyes, is theological craze. Yet here it is, a foremost feature in the character pattern set before us by Christ. What shall we say? Why, that Christ and the world belong to two different systems of thought. Christ was not of the world, the apostles were not of the world, nor are the people of Christ in any age. The joys and sorrows of the children of God are not the joys and sorrows of the world. Why is this? There is a reason. Joy and sorrow are results. They are not fixed attributes of character. When they are, it is madness. Joy or sorrow depends upon love. What the mind loves, it will joy to receive, and grieve to be deprived of. Paul's sorrow was because of the absence of that which he would have rejoiced to see. He would have rejoiced to see Israel in submission to God. This was because he delighted in God and loved man. He would have rejoiced to see God had in reverence and man in the way of true well-being in fearing and serving Him. The world cares for none of these things. The world cares only for those things that minister to its pride or its love of folly, or its appetites in various departments. For this reason, it has no sorrow for the absence of godliness. It detests godliness, and would have looked upon Paul as a maundering bigot. It shows these characteristics in various forms. From some of them we are in danger. Its offensive forms have little power to ensnare. The ribald jest of the pot-house frequenter repels by its ugliness and manifest unreason, but there are polite and elegant forms in which the same spirit is distilled through all society, and is liable to infect us, and assimilate us to itself. Let us be on our guard. We have a standard. It is not in the newspaper press, it is not in the classics of any age or country; it is not in "society." It is in the Bible. It is in the apostles and prophets. In their written minds, the Spirit of God breathes and moulds. Let us surrender to its power in reading, meditation and prayer. Thus we shall become finally incorporate in the family of God's elect: for "whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His son." This image is a noble image. The world may boast of manliness and heroism, but there is no manliness that comes near the beauty of Christ-likeness, which is brave without boasting, frank without pride, cheerful without folly, patient without

insensibility, submissive without fear, indomitable without stupidity, gentle without effeminacy, kind without weakness. The fear of God, and the love of man, in the confidence of what God has accomplished in the past, and promised in the future, combine to give a combination of strength and beauty that far outshine the cold glitter of the Greek elegance so much admired by the natural man. The Greek glitter is the glint of an iceberg, destined to thaw and disappear before the sun, whose waxing warmth will shortly fill the world with light and heat. With that sun comes the day, and we are not of the night, but of the day. Let us walk as the children of the day.

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## Eternal Verities and Love Centred in Christ

*“In remembrance of Christ” — a person, not a system — flesh knowledge “profits nothing” — obedience to Christ’s command essential — first, love God and Christ — everything in them to love.*

THE breaking of bread is a pleasure; and the pleasure is of a kind that yields profit, which is a great and constant evidence of the wisdom of Christ in appointing it. There is no exercise in life which we can ever compare with it. It differs from every effort of instruction in which men can engage. We do not come together at the Table of the Lord to learn. We do not meet to revive knowledge of any abstract truth we may have acquired. We meet to call to our remembrance a personal friend. He who commanded it, and whose command is alone our reason for attending to it, said “Do this in remembrance of ME.” The institution is intensely personal in its meanings and associations, both as regards the object it brings before our minds, and as regards the relations it is intended to establish between ourselves and that object.

In this, it differs from all human systems of wisdom and knowledge. These systems are impersonal. They exist independently of any man. The men die and are forgotten, but the systems live on. English Liberalism is for the moment bound up with the name of Mr. Gladstone, but Mr. Gladstone will die and Liberalism will go on its course as if such a man never lived. The scientific speculations popularized by Charles Darwin will thrive long after his bones have mouldered to dust. It is not so with Christ. He did not found a system, in the ordinary acceptance of that term. He offered himself. His

language was "Without me, ye can do nothing." I am the living bread that came down from heaven, whereof if a man eat, he shall live for ever." "I go away, but if I go away, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." "I go to my Father and your Father: to my God and your God." "This is the Father's will that of all that He hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day."

It is therefore a man — a person — a friend we meet to think about and to fix our minds on; more, a head, a captain, a God. In this, the Truth supplies our need as no human system does. We need truth and duty drawn into this personal focus. We are not constituted to worship the abstract. Our minds have no faculty to work on the infinite. We are adapted to the personal and the single. We can worship truth... incorporate and individualized... Every power of the mind is thus drawn out, every spring of the heart opened. Christ meets all our need. He is the standard of our duty, the magnet of our loyalty; the absorbent of our love, the theme of our intellectual appreciations, the stimulator of our sublimest sentiments, and the adequate object of our most fervent adoration. There is no extravagance in Paul's declaration that "in him are filled up all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

In this is the perfect beauty of the gospel as contrasted with the wisdom of the world in its most pretentious forms — that in Christ, we have a man who is "the truth." Astronomic truth has no personal applications. It is beautiful, but it is high and cold like the glitter of the stars on a frosty night. It speaks no hope and yields no guidance. We are glad to retire from the fatiguing futility of trying to grasp it, and to take refuge in our small mortal way. So with all other forms of scientific truth. They know us not and comfort us not as persons, and mock us with their sterile beauty and consistency, telling us that low and mortal we are, and must remain, and that the grave is the inexorable corollary of life. On the other hand, if the world offers us a friend in some man of excellence, we have a theme more suited to our smallness. But how equally vain in another way! The best and strongest of mortal men are like the worst and weakest in one respect: "all are of the dust and all turn to dust again." As the flowers that grow and bloom, and show their beauty and exhale their fragrance in their season, and then wither and vanish, so the best mortal friend we can have is but a transient form of the universal power, destined to disappear in the ceaseless transmutations of things, and leaves us comfortless and forlorn. Mortal friendship has no root. "The flesh profiteth nothing." Human knowledge has no result, and human friendship no permanence. And thus if we look to the wisdom of the world in its ultimate issues, "all is vanity and vexation of spirit." What is wanted is something that will connect the eternal verities at which science can only

peep, with the personal attractiveness of friendship made perfect and abiding. This is exactly what is done for us in Christ. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." The Word, which is God, and by which all things have been made, becoming flesh, has given us a man "full of grace and truth" — a man in whom blend the sublimity of the infinite, the beauty of the perfect, the interest of the advantageous, and the felicity of the strong and lovely — yea also, the solution of history, the secret of futurity, and the remedy of the world. Science is poor by his side, for he holds in his hand the power whose multiform products science can but register and classify in man's puny style. History apart from him is high-banked accumulation of cloud and fog, lurid with distant conflagration; futurity, an impenetrable night; destiny a frightful abyss; the universe, a suicide-engendering enigma.

In Christ is peace. He combines all that the heart can desire or the intellect aspire to. He is a friend and a head, and at the same time, the incorporation of the Eternal and the universal. Sublime and glorious combination! He gives bosom to the aching heart and pillow to the tired head. They are no empty words that he uttered, though they have been deprived of all meaning by the vapid sentimentality with which they are usually associated, when he said "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" — rest now, from the burden of human futility — rest supernal in the issue to which he is leading human life upon earth.

Being such, ought we not to listen, with fervent submission, to his voice? He says, "Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am." If he be Master what are we? His servants whose part it is to obey his word — with understanding, with implicitness, with thoroughness. This is reasonable. It is what he commands. It is what human masters exact, do you think Christ will be satisfied with less? On this Christ has spoken plainly, and it is for us, in calling him to remembrance, to remember what he has said. He says, "Call me not Lord, Lord, if ye do not the things that I say." "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." "The man that heareth these sayings of mine and DOETH THEM NOT, is like a foolish man that built his house on the sand, from which it was washed away by the descending storm." Here is a point that it is not possible to emphasize too strongly. However unpopular the doctrine may be — however much men may fail in acting on the principle, it remains the same Truth that will confront us at last when life's feverish struggle is in the past for ever — that the standard of our acceptance with Christ in the day of his appearing will be the obedience of his commandments. We may overlook this in the theoretical contentions forced upon us by the modern exigencies of the Truth. We may even in some cases be tempted to profanely make light of the



commandments of Christ, either as an impossible rule of action, or as one that in our curious blindness we may say no man acts up to, but the fact remains the same. God has given no authority since Christ's ascension to relax any of these commandments given for general obedience.

Let us spend a moment in considering one or two of his commandments. Three times he asked Peter "Lovest thou me?" This points directly to what, in a certain sense, we might call the first of his commandments. All through his teaching, he exhibits himself as an object of love. He makes a man's love the test of his worthiness of the privilege of his friendship. "If any man love father or mother... more than me, he is not worthy of me." This was new and extraordinary teaching in the midst of Israel. They had been accustomed to the commandment delivered to them of old time. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart... Him only shalt thou serve." Here was one placing himself on the same pedestal as the Father. "I and my Father are one." This was what the Jews could not endure. They took up stones to stone him, saying, "For a good work, we stone thee not, but because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God." The Truth has enabled us to understand where the Jews failed to understand. Begotten and anointed by the one Spirit consubstantial with the Father, Jesus was the manifestation of the Father — the Son of the Father, whom it was the Father's will all men should honor, even as they honored the Father. Therefore the love that men were Mosaically called upon to give to the Father, belongs to Christ also, the love of whom becomes the test of fitness for inclusion in the family of the Father. Here then, Christ calls upon us — commands us — to love him. It was a love active with Paul He said "the love of Christ constraineth me." It was a love that was strong, high, deep. He speaks of it as "the love of Christ that passeth knowledge." This is what we might call natural to the subject. Love varies with the value and loveliness of the object it acts upon. A man does not love his horse as he does his friend, nor the coals in his cellar, as the books in his library. A man who truly knows Christ cannot love anything as he loves him. Because he is so great, the love of him, when fully awakened, is a love transcending what we feel for any other object. The command to love him, and by comparison, to hate even our own lives, is reasonable; for ultimately, it will be seen that he is our life and our joy; that apart from him there is no well-being at all. It might seem as if the command to love were an anomaly. Love, as an affair of moral affinity, might seem beyond the range of command. It is not so really. We have all heard of people trying to love persons to whom they did not feel drawn, and we have heard of success. Love can be cultivated. How much more where all the materials of love exist, but are inactive from inertness or ignorance, and where it is but needful to apply the fire of the will to set the whole aflame. The love of Christ will grow with acquaintance and contemplation: it will grow till it becomes the leading and constraining bias.

Christ gives us a rule by which we may judge our attainments in the matter. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." And again, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." It is evident that Christ will not accept a sentimental appreciation that falls short of practical compliance with his enjoined will. The reasonableness of this will commend itself. Do we not see in everyday life that where love exists it powerfully inclines the subject of it to do what is pleasing to the object of his love? Should we not say that one did not really love another if he showed himself indifferent to his wishes? Christ is only recognising a universally operative rule when he says "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." It is, therefore, in our power to judge ourselves, as we are told to do. Do we know his commandments and keep them? The answer will be the true decision of our standing in the matter of love. Love cannot be quenched; hatred may tire, but love: never.

We look at Christ. There is everything to love, his own excellence; his unflinching devotion to the Father; his tireless compassion for the multitude; his love for his friends, even unto death; his holiness as the sin-hater and sin-remover; his power, both to heal and destroy; his towering greatness as the Son of God and the heir of all things; his immeasurable importance as the coming possessor of all things on earth and the dispenser of the permanent goodness of the ages — everything combines to engage the highest love, a love passing knowledge, when the eyes are fully open to his unsearchable wealth in all things. With this love aglow, his commandments become easy, and shortcomings a burden. We eagerly believe and are baptised. We joyfully yield him the first place in our lives, with bended knee and confessing tongue. What next? We desire to do what he instructed the apostles to enjoin on us: to "observe all things whatsoever he has commanded." Love cannot be satisfied with anything short of this. He has commanded many things — some of them easy — some of them difficult. Love will not evade the difficulties, it will desire to "observe all" the things difficult and easy.

Of one thing, he specifically says, "This I command you," namely, "that ye love one another." It is well that he spoke so plainly as this. It is a great help in the matter. It is comparatively easy to love Christ, because he is "altogether lovely," and it is in a manner natural — natural to love the lovely.

But among ourselves, there are many faults and blemishes — a good deal that is not lovable; and if Christ had not made love one to another a matter of command, we might easily have given in to our aversions, and found ourselves hating where we ought to love. We are not to wait for the lovable before we love. We are to be beforehand with it, and even shut our eyes to the unlovely. Love covereth a multitude of sins. We are to carry this love so far as to "love even our enemies, and do good to them that hate us and despitefully use and persecute us." Some say this is impossible. It is impossible for those who start wrongly. No man who does not first love Christ will love

his enemies. If a man love Christ, he can love his enemies because Christ has commanded it. His love of Christ will constrain him. If he look only to his evil neighbors and his own feelings, he will fail, he will hate his enemy and do him evil, in word and deed. But if he have Christ in consideration and view, he will find it possible to do good to them that hate him. The will of Christ whom he loves will help him.

The reason that Christ gives will also help; "that ye may be the children of the Highest who sendeth His rain upon the just and the unjust." The goodness of God is a fine copy for mortal man who was made in His image. It is high and, in its perfect form, unattainable by weak, erring man. But in measure, we can reach to it in obedience to Christ, who says, "Be like unto your Father." He giveth liberally and upbraideth not. So the Lord loveth a cheerful giver. The world prescribes political economy as the rule of action. Christ prescribes the character of God as the standard. It is for us as His children to choose the one and refuse the other.

There are those who cynically declare that these commandments are never obeyed. We must not be discouraged by such. They speak not truly. They might speak for themselves, but they speak for others, and thus disobey the command which tells us to judge not one another. No one can judge another, for a just judgment requires that the judge know all, which mortal man cannot do. It is not for us to judge one another, but to exhort each other, pointing to the commandments delivered unto us, and the glorious inducements God has associated with their obedience.

By this course, obedience will grow in ourselves and others, and the abounding evil of our present state be a little modified and overcome by the good that God has brought to bear upon us in His Word. And the way will thus be prepared for that morning of brightness and healing which will chase this night of darkness for ever away.

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## Humility and Sorrow Precede Honor and Joy

*Breaking bread a time of comfort — affliction now a preparation for everlasting joy  
— a life of self-denial and reproach — hated by the world — future rejoicing  
in retrospect — God's ways always right.*

ONCE in seven days is not too often to come to this breaking of bread. We are just about ready for another refreshing by the time we have had six days of the present evil state of existence. Whatever sphere we may move in — whatever may be the nature of the occupation we have to follow — our experience is common in this respect, that God is dimmed

by our intercourse with man, and our duty and hope require refurbishing after six days of worldly toil. This refurbishing we get at the Table of the Lord.

Attendance thereat is essentially a memorial exercise — a bringing to mind of things that bring great comfort and strength in their remembrance, but which are liable to lose their power by the forgetfulness more or less incident to all human faculty. All the things of which we are thus reminded are comforting. We are reminded of Christ's love, of the Father's love who sent Christ, and of the practical form which that love takes in the forgiveness of our sins, and in the arranging of that true feast of fat things which is to be spread for the brethren of Christ at his coming. When we have a clear and abiding view of all these things we are comforted.

We need the comfort. We are often in great depths, like David — some in one way and some in another. We have all matters in hand that are apt to drag us down and keep us down. We come to the Table of the Lord and get eased in our trouble. We even get to the point of being thankful for trouble. Trouble is good for us. It breaks the spell of this natural life, draws us nearer to God, and throws us more and more upon the Kingdom of God as our portion. David speaks of some who are "not in trouble as other men are — who have more than heart can wish." We may know of such, if we are wise we will not envy them. Even in a natural sense, they have not the joy in life they seem to have. Their very abundance is often a weariness. Things cease to please, and ennui afflicts. As Solomon says, "The abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep, but the sleep of the laboring man is sweet." And how calamitous is that situation of which Jesus has to say "How hardly" shall they who are in it enter the Kingdom. To the poor, the gospel is preached: "blessed" therefore, "be ye poor; yours is the Kingdom of God." The rich, in their unbelief and scorn, say "We will let you have the Kingdom if you let us have the present world" — a piece of pleasantry to smile at just now, but with what a side of sternness when the Kingdom is truly come. They are truly well off who are poor in this world if they are rich in faith. But we require helping in the matter. We are shortsighted and would choose what was not best for us. We are not very different from children in this respect. We would prefer what is immediately pleasant. We would choose to be well and free from care and affliction, and to have plenty of all things. In a sense, it would be a healthy and rational choice. Only, as things are on earth for the moment, it would be premature.

God intends His children to have all that the heart can desire at last. He does not intend to keep them perpetually bound in affliction and iron. The wealth of the sinner, the honor of all men, and everlasting joy are waiting them at last. But there is a time for everything. Now is the time for preparing for that. Before honor is humility; before joy is sorrow. We are being prepared for the one by the other. Unspeakable gladness is coming; and we are being prepared for it in part, by the evil we are now passing through. The day will

come when we shall be thankful to God for that evil as we cannot feel now, — a day of which the Psalm (126) read this morning gives us a sort of reflex. The Psalm may refer to the return of the Babylonish captives but there is a greater deliverance coming, to which, therefore, it will have more forcible application. "When the Lord turned back the captivity of Zion, we were like those that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. Then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them. The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad." A Christian of the popular type would read this without feeling it had anything in it for him. Most of us can recollect that day when it would have struck no chord in our own hearts; but the Truth has changed this for us. There is nothing bearing upon the salvation of Israel, that has not also a bearing upon us; for by the gospel, in the obedience thereof, we have in a sense become "Hebrew of the Hebrews" — Israel in a truer and more living sense than the sons of Abraham according to the flesh. We can use the language of another Psalm with a heartiness never manifested by the "Jew outwardly" — "Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion."

"When the Lord bringeth back the captivity of His people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad." In this joy we shall partake above all others as the brethren of Israel's King. Then shall we be "like those that dream." When a thing is so good as to be inexpressibly enjoyable, it seems like a dream. This will be the experience of the saints. But to attain to this experience, we must have trouble now. Trouble is the seed from which the flower of gladness springs. A man who is full can never be brought to the state of being very glad about anything. To reap in joy, we must sow in tears. As the 5th verse of this Psalm says "They that sow in tears will reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." This is our whole case understood rightly. The sowing must be taken in a larger sense than what we understand by sowing the good seed of the Kingdom. The publication of the Truth is only one part of the sowing. The sowing is a larger sowing. It is the sowing of Paul's declaration, that "he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." It is a sowing done in tears.

Sorrow is inseparable from a life of waiting on God and doing His commandments: because such a life is a life of self-denial — a life of reproach, a man who earnestly identifies himself with the hopes and principles and duties of the Truth in this generation (who lets his light in these things "shine before men") is certain to be hated by those who belong to this world, and he is certain to be isolated from much in this world that gives comparative joy. It is, as Jesus said, "Ye shall weep and lament but the world shall rejoice." Our comfort in the midst of it is that it is not for ever. "I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." "If the world hate you," said the Lord — (and he says it will do so if we are faithful to him,

and that it will only love us if we make ourselves of the world, for the world loveth its own). "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you." It is surely an honor and almost a pleasure to be hated in the company of the Lord Jesus. "Now are we sons of God," says John, "therefore, the world knoweth us not, even as it knew him not." If a man is content to be a Son of God, he will be content to be regarded as Christ was regarded; he was regarded as a madman, and certainly, in all points, a man in whose ways the world could find no pleasure. To be so regarded is a deep affliction; it is part of the "tears" that belong to the sowing of the precious seed.

Let a man love God with all his heart and strive to act on all divine principles in all his ways, and he will experience the bitterness of being ignored as Christ was — "despised and rejected of men." But God's ways are beautiful and wise. It is only for a time. There is such a thing as "reaping in joy." They are no vain words. The day of bountiful sheaves will come — a day in which the exact outcome of present dishonor borne for Christ and present profitless work done for his name will be experienced in joy that will fill our mouths with laughter and our lips with singing. It will seem a dream, but it will be a very practical reality which, once come, will never fade away. Not only the circumstances causing joy will remain, but the appreciation of them will be perennial. This will be something new in all senses. If we have joy now, it subsides, whatever its cause and however good. Mortal mind gets accustomed to all circumstances, and so at last loses the power to be glad about that which gave great joy at first. But it will not be with mortal powers that we shall rejoice in the goodness which God hath laid up in store for them that love Him. "This mortal" will have ceased to be mortal. It will have put on the immortal, and this must necessarily mean a great change as regards capacity for enjoyment. The analogy of present experience points to this. We know what it is in the present state to be in different conditions of physical vigor, and we know the great difference between the weak, cloudy, vapid, unhappy times of low health, when "the grasshopper is a burden," and the times of comparatively joyous health and elasticity. In these latter times, we get joy out of what is a trouble to us at other times. And so, when this mortal is no longer a fragile organism, depending for vigor upon the precarious supplies of the electrical fluid yielded by stomach and blood, when it is so changed that Spirit is latent in every atom and aglow in every fibre, available for every exertion, and for any amount of continuousness of exertion, it must needs be that mental relish will be always at its keenest, and its joy necessarily a thing "everlasting."

Part of the joy of deliverance is the memory of peril. From this, we may conclude that the lessons and recollections of this our stormful probation will be permanently fixed in the mental mirror, and yield the perpetual satisfaction that results from the contrast which mortal memory is incapable

of long enjoying. It will be as if some of the manufacturing processes connected with the trade were applied to the mental mechanism; as when a "fixing solution" secures on the photographer's glass the image which would otherwise fade away, or the potter's glaze secures the colors of his china ware; or the plater's electric stream the precious deposit on the surface of inferior metals. The Spirit of God will show us wonders in this way that we have not dreamt of, and fill our mouth with laughter and our lips with singing. We shall never be tired of the gladness or forgetful of our indebtedness to God for the goodness which will be ours through Christ in those happy days.

Is there not everything in such a prospect to encourage in that patient continuance in well doing which belongs to our present lot? If there is anything to mar its satisfaction, it may sometimes be the thought that so few of earth's multitude will attain to it. It may give a twinge of distress to think that if we may be chosen for such a great salvation, so many will not. We are apt to painfully wonder why we should be brought into relation with such unspeakable goodness, and so many left to grope and perish in the darkness that covers all the earth. This thought has been so painful with some minds as to deter them from embracing their own privileges, and led them to let a salvation slip that does not seem intended for all. We may quell such thoughts by the exercise of reason. We must remember, first, that the whole affair belongs to God, who is working it out "according to the counsel of His own will;" and who has a perfectly good reason for everything He does or omits to do, if we could only know it. The words of Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth suggest some help on the point. "There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent save unto Sarepta, a city of Zidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the times of Elisha, the prophet, and none of them were cleansed save Naaman the Syrian." So we may say with reference to the matter in hand. There are many poor and needy people in the earth, but only unto some is the healing of the gospel sent. It is God's work, and God's wisdom regulates it. The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. Cannot we, therefore, trust Him to work out His plan rightly? It really comes to this. Here we find rest at last. We may be quite sure that we shall see the wisdom of God's ways at last, and His wisdom, therefore, in not inviting many people that we might like to see invited. If we do not see it now, it is because we cannot see all. The people we know are known only to us as they appear. To judge competently, we should require to see them as God in His omniscience sees them. As God said to Samuel in the house of Jesse when he went to anoint David "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart," and it is not every heart of which He can make suitable use. Exercising our minds in this way, we shall find it easy to suspend judgment on problems that would otherwise distress;

and be left free to bend our whole energies to the part that practically belongs to us in the place we occupy in God's scheme of things.

Do our own part faithfully. This is the sum of all wisdom for us and the end of all anxiety. What that part is we learn from the revelation of His will in the Word of His inspiration. We are here only for a short day to do it. Our little day is infinitesimal in the countless ages before and behind. What are seventy years in the midst of seventy millions and seventy times seventy millions? James well says, "What is your life? It is but a vapor that appeareth for a very little while and then vanisheth away." It is only wisely used in applying the heart to the wisdom of God which begins with His fear. Only thus can we obtain a place in the endless aeons that are rolling. If some say, "We don't want a place in the endless aeons that are rolling, it makes us giddy," let us not be like them. Talk like this is the talk of folly. There is just this glimmer of sense in it, that the prospect of endless ages is a little liable to stagger human faculty: but the feeling is an illusion of the imagination. The ages do not come upon us in their bulk. Time in them will be like time now — viz., one day at a time. The difference will be that time will always go on in a sunshine of existence that will never dim. Nobody would want time to end under such conditions. The endlessness will be no oppression, but rather a constant delight.

Such a project is on all hands considered utopian. The way to confute that thought is to determine the simple question: Has God promised it? If He has, there's an end of it. If God who has made sun, moon, and stars has promised to bring a morning without clouds on the earth, and a day without end, it is not the attitude of reason to say either that the thing promised is too good to be true, or that He will fail in bringing it to pass.

It is only a cloudy state of intellect that doubts and hesitates and maunders in this matter; and can we wonder that such a mood of mind should be offensive to Him who has condescended to utter His voice in kindness upon the earth! Need we marvel if it is written that "without faith, it is impossible to please God?" But it is ours to obey the exhortation which says to us, "hold fast your profession... cast not away your confidence which hath great recompense of reward." For only a very few years shall we behold the vanity that is now under the sun. Death will shortly blot the scene from our view if the Lord's return should not end it before then; and in one moment shall we seem to pass from the present night to the long-promised day.



# Understanding According to the Word

*Feast days in Israel were to God's glory — a wonderful land-law — future restoration — "vanity of vanities" because man disobeys God. — God's plan to remedy — Stephen's defence and death.*

OUR readings for the day present a pleasing variety of subjects. We may profitably spend a few moments in skimming over them. The process, though hurried and superficial, may help to revive the knowledge we have acquired by more thorough study at other times, and re-animate our courage in the battle which must continue with us so long as we are in the present evil state.

The reading from Moses may to some lack interest. There has been a time with all of us when we should have failed to see anything in it suggestive of hope or wisdom. But this time must be long past — with some, at all events. Such no longer see a dry and heavy "chapter" divided into "verses." They are able to look through the mechanical structure of the writing, and to see the living things expressed by the words. The subject is that of the three annual feasts enjoined upon Israel. Three times in the year were they all to come together to an appointed place in the land — prepared to spend a week or fortnight together in a joyful manner. They were to cease all work, and to come provided with plenty to eat and drink, and to bring with them all belonging to them. In Scotland they have "fast days," but these were to be feast days. In England, we have Easter and Whitsuntide holidays, in which people who can afford it scatter about in all directions to see friends, or get a little fresh air or change. But Israel's feasts were the munificent originals of these modern seasons. They were feasts in which the whole nation was called upon to take part by the plenty secured for all by the blessing of Abraham's God, and by the operation of the splendid land law He had given them, by which the wealth of the land was kept permanently divided among all. They were feasts with an ennobling tendency. They were not mere secular holidays like Gentile holidays — not mere times of merriment. More gladsome than any Gentile holiday, they were times when God asked the nation to meet Him collectively, and to call to mind the great things He had done for them in the past, to remember His Law, and to rejoice with a grateful joy before Him in all the plenty He had bestowed upon them. A well-dressed, well-provided, healthy, and prosperous multitude coming together under such auspices, in such a beautiful country, for such a length of time, once every three or four months (roughly speaking), presents such a picture of effective human life as has never been seen in any other country in the world. In

Gentile lands the mass of the people are too poor to be cultivated, and times of holiday, when they come, are times of either simple inaction or degrading revelry. Their mirth lacks an ideal. In Israel, plenty was diffused; and the centre of their festivities was God and the memory of His deeds on their behalf.

It is true that it was only occasionally in Israel's history that this beautiful ideal was realized. Had they remained faithful to the Law, they must needs have realized the perfection of human life upon the earth as it now is; and never would have ensued that desolation of their country and dispersion of their race which we see at this day. But they were disobedient, and the Law for long seasons was a dead letter in their midst. And now God has withdrawn Himself from them. No more, for ages, have her joyous and beautiful feasts been seen upon their beautiful land, Jeremiah's words portray the situation: "How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people... the ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to her solemn feasts: all her gates are desolate... Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper, for the Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions." God has deserted Jacob for a time — but only for a time. The time is nearly at an end. For a long time, darkness and chaos have prevailed with all things Israelitish as foreshown to Daniel — yea to Moses long before him. But the time draws near for the promised return of God's favor. God Himself has told us: "Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against Me, therefore hid I My face from them and gave them into the hands of their enemies, so fell they all by the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions have I done unto them and hid My face from them. Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel and will be jealous for My holy name after they have borne their shame."

It is this purpose of God to restore His favor to Zion that imparts such peculiar interest to the record of the feasts. They are not wholly things of the past. They are much less things of the past than of the future. The "restitution of all things which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" includes the restitution of the feasts, for the law of which they are the most glorious features will be re-enacted in Israel's midst in the day of their return (not as the ground of their acceptance but as the rule of their action which circumcision of heart would qualify them to adopt) as saith Moses. "The Lord thy God will turn thy captivity and have compassion upon thee and will return and gather thee from all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee... and thou shalt return and obey the voice of the Lord, and do all His commandments which I command thee this day. And the Lord thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thy hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good, for the Lord will again rejoice over thee for good,

as He rejoiced over thy fathers" (Deu. 30:2-9). The law of the feasts will therefore again become the law of the land — (the passover, the first fruits, and the in-gathering). A joyous and wholesome system of periodical and collective travel will again come into vogue among the populations inhabiting the happy land of promise in the day of restoration. God will be known among them, from the least to the greatest, and intercourse to them will be a joy that is not possible in the present state of things. But the beauty of the feasts will not be confined to Israel's land. "Many nations shall be joined unto the Lord in that day," and the law is to "go forth" to them with no ineffectual result: for they shall say, "Let us go up to the house of the God of Jacob, and He shall teach us of His ways and we shall walk in His paths." We shall therefore see the whole earth taking part in the happy life springing from the Lord's land. Plenty will be among the nations as in Israel, and with the plenty righteousness and wisdom will blend, finding gladsome public expression at recurring periodic seasons, differing as much from the holidays of British life, as the Kingdom of God will differ from the present evil world.

From Moses to Solomon is a long stride in point of time (as men reckon), but it is not leaving one system of teaching for another. We are with the same spirit of wisdom in Ecclesiastes as in Deuteronomy, but the same spirit applied to a different topic: In Ecclesiastes, we have such a picture of the present state of existence as is not to be found in any other book under the time. It is a picture differing from all others in its truth, and therefore in its gloom. Mere human writers paint life in gay colors, and deck human nature in tinsel — partly as the result of the theory that man is immortal and full of latent excellence, and partly as the result of the limited view of existence that is visible from the standpoint of mere human sensation. Solomon writing by the Holy Spirit in his opening sentence dashes all complacent views of human life to the ground. He strikes a bold key-note, which sounds harshly but not discordantly, through all his piece: "Vanity of vanities," saith the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labors which he taketh under the sun?" By a certain class of thinkers, this is considered misanthropy. Deeper thought will find it simple truth. It harmonizes with experience. Human life in its completeness, is not the good thing it is pictured, either by the writers of this world, or the ardent imagination of our own breasts in youth. Its efforts, its aspirations, its enjoyments, end in weariness, decay, and death. Its programme is an abortion at the end. It is well to know it. Life pursued with false expectations becomes a bitter disappointment at last. Most men, coming on the scene with eager hope, retire at last baffled and spirit-spent. If they knew life at its reality, the result would be different. This reality is made known in the Scriptures and nowhere else. The knowledge of it is a key to problems that otherwise vex and overwhelm. Such for example, is the puzzle pointed out by Solomon — that there be just men to whom it happens according to the work of the

wicked, and that there be wicked men to whom it happens according to the lot of the righteous. Just men suffer equally with the wicked and the wicked prosper equally with those whom God has blessed. On the face of things, there seems an absence of what men call "moral government" in the world. "Time and chance happeneth to all" with an apparent disregard to justice as man conceives it. This is one of the heaviest stumbling blocks to men of thought, leading, in many cases, to the unhappy conclusion that there is no God at all, and that the world is a fortuitous evolution of blind inscrutable forces. Bible revelation comes as a solution. It is the only solution. It may be an unwelcome solution to our feelings, but it is as inexorable as the facts of chemistry and as futile to quarrel with it. The revelation is that God and man are not friends, that human life is consequently in an abnormal state upon the earth at present which nothing but vanity and vexation of spirit can attend. Man disobeyed God at the start and has disobeyed Him ever since. God having left man to shift for himself, man the noblest creature upon earth, for the time being, is the greatest failure. The vanity is inevitable. Man was made for God, and by his constitution, cannot be satisfied without Him. Two things cannot be denied, not even by unbelievers: first that man is seen at his best when controlled by the fear and love of God, and animated by hope of promised goodness to come, and second that few men upon earth are now to be found in that state. Here man is without God, and preferring to be without Him with ignorance of His highest need. Therefore the misery of man is great upon him. If this were all that is revealed, it would not be much comfort. It would be satisfactory as the explanation of a dismal phenomenon, but it would not bring the comfort that God has associated with it. The revelation goes further: it tells us not only that man is estranged from God, but that God has a plan in progress by which man will at last be reconciled — not every man of the race as it now is, but every man at last found upon earth. The plan is large, as the case requires, and involves a variety of instrumentalities — beginning with a system of family worship at the beginning, and ending with a Kingdom which will govern all the earth "in the dispensation of the fulness of times." For the time, it seems a failure; but no matter is to be judged by appearances. It only seems a failure to those who do not understand the plan. They look around, and see man miserable, and at enmity with God and man. They say, where is the "glory to God in the highest, the peace on earth and goodwill toward men," sung of by the angels? We say "Wait a little, the plan is far advanced, though seemingly abortive." The plan involves and requires the prevalence of evil for a time. During this time, God is preparing the instruments of blessing for the next stage. He has prepared Christ. Through him He is preparing "many sons" whom He will lead to glory, and who will reign with him, and bless all families of the earth. Most of them have been prepared. Most of them are in the dust — forgotten

of men, but not forgotten of God. They are all as distinct to His memory as living men; and at the appointed time they will stand forth from the grave, a multitude that no man can number. Part of the number is even now being made up. When the hour arrives for their manifestation, some are found in the land of the living; "We shall not all sleep." Consequently, as their preparation is in progress, the darkness continues; for darkness is needful for a generation of the children of light. Like the brilliant gem, they are prepared in the bowels of the earth, and only appear in glory when the light has come. The two things together, the hopeless vanity of a state of things in which man is estranged from God, and the proposed redemption of all things by the establishment of reconciliation in God's appointed way — are a precious revelation bringing peace and joy. The first prevents us from looking for good where it is not to be found — a vexation with which all the world is afflicted; and the second solaces the mind with the anticipation of good things to come, imparting resignation and patience in the midst of the evil and giving us the rational and satisfactory policy of aiming at life eternal by a patient continuance in well-doing that God has prescribed. We are taught and made to feel that the frets and disappointments of this vain life are of a transient nature, and that peace lies beyond them all like the calm glory of a summer evening.

Our third reading (Acts 7) shows us a brother accused, and replying to his accusers with a "mouth and wisdom," which they were "not able to gainsay or resist" as Jesus promised. At first sight, it seems strange that the inculcation of the way of truth should lead to enmity. It only seems so to inexperience, and, therefore, to ignorance. Deadly opposition has been the uniform fortune of the Truth in every age of the world. Therefore it must be a natural result of the forces at work. We find upon investigation it is so, and this may help us to accept our own share of this experience without undue dismay. The reason for the opposition to Stephen is more obvious than opposition sometimes is. The authorities in Jerusalem had condemned and (by the Romans) killed Jesus a deceiver. The apostles in a variety of ways proved that he was the Christ. In this demonstration, Stephen took a leading part. He was an active controversialist. He enters the lists with the Alexandrian Jews who were in repute for superior acumen. They "could not withstand the wisdom and spirit with which he spake," so, as it is usual in such cases they resorted to calumny and false accusation. Under cover of the this accusation, they were able to do what is now out of the power of most malignant foe. They handed him over to "the power and authority" of the magistrates, who in Jerusalem were the priests and scribes. Arraigned before them, we find him delivering an argument which was too strong to be answered on the merits, and which they met by stopping their ears and marching him out to execution. The question turned upon the murdered Jesus: was he or was he

not the Christ? It was one of the Jewish arguments that he could not be the Christ, because he had been crucified. Had he been the Christ the nation would have accepted him: he would have delivered himself from the hands of his persecutors. Stephen's answer fastens on Moses of whom these rulers made their boast. He reminds them of the circumstances connected with the appearance of Moses as the deliverer of Israel. Israel would have none of him, "who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?" was the question with which they first greeted his interpositions on their behalf; and Moses had to fly. Yet this Moses whom they refused was afterward established and accepted as their leader and deliverer. Their rejection of Jesus was therefore no new thing. Nay, they had rejected all Yahweh's servants age after age. "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" exclaimed Stephen, "The prophets who showed beforehand the Just One, of whom ye have now been the betrayers and murderers?" They made it an objection that Jesus was from among themselves instead of being, as they contended the Messiah would be, of an unknown origin. Stephen reminds them that Moses himself had told them that the Lord would raise them up a prophet like unto him from among themselves. And now that He had fulfilled His word they had despised and rejected him... The argument was powerful... its consequence to Stephen was fatal. It cost him his life. He will presently awake none the worse, but glad rather at having, even at the sacrifice of his life, borne to Christ a testimony that has blazed before the eyes of men in all the dark ages since... May we catch his spirit and emulate his example and be found with him and his fellow heirs when the age of conflict is past, and when there has been established in all the earth the rest that remains for the people of God.

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## Comfort — When The Lord Comes

*Look to the end — the Cain-class cause trouble — "you who are troubled," because of faithfulness — God's vengeance upon troublers — rest and comfort for the faithful when the Lord comes.*

**I**T is good to come here. It is good to get another glimpse of the facts upon which we stand and out of which our hopes arise. The facts are apt to get out of sight somewhat. Our faculties are dim at the best and our lives are apt to make them dimmer in divine directions. Our lives now, in fact, may be compared to a day of fog and rain in which it is very difficult to realise the sun and the glorious blue of heaven. The meetings act as a rift in the cloud. They show us the smile of heaven behind all the unfavorable aspects of the

moment. They help us to feel again the reviving strength of the things most surely established by the testimony of God, and to resume the journey with renewed determination.

We are like the children on the road to a house to which they have been invited. Our stature and our strength are small, and though the prospect of the party is attractive, our little steps grow tired. What do we say to the children in such a case? We comfort and encourage them by telling them they will soon be at their journey's end, and that they will forget their weariness when once they get there. Our journey is not long though it seems so. We look at our future in perspective and think it longer than it is. It cannot last above so many years, and perhaps not even one; and when it is over, it is over for ever. The toils of this mortal life will never return. The anxieties, and weakness, and disappointments of this state will be replaced by comfort, strength, and gladness for ever. We get this assurance from whatever part of the Word comes under our notice at these meetings.

This morning it is by Paul to the Thessalonians. His very theme is comfort in distress. This may not have much interest for those who are not in distress. The man at his ease can take the subject very indifferently, and even loftily. He can feel a sort of pity for the weakness that needs comfort — till it comes to his own turn; and then he feels as other men feel who are made to taste the evil of the present state as the Thessalonians tasted it. We are all more or less in this line of experience; that is, made subject to evil and standing in need of comfort. Therefore what Paul says to the Thessalonians is suitable to us all.

He speaks of those who trouble and those who are troubled. With the first, we do not wish to have much to do. There have always been those who trouble. At the very start Cain troubled Abel. Ever since, the Cain-class have done the same to the Abel-class. The Cain-class have always hitherto been in the large majority, and have had power on their side which they have used without mercy for the suppression of the Abel-class. In our day, the power of the Cain-class, in this respect, has been considerably abridged, but the same hostile feeling exists, and makes itself manifest as far as its opportunity allows. It might seem strange at first sight that God should tolerate the Cain-class to the extent he has done in the history of the world. A deeper study of the subject will show that such a class is a necessity in His scheme of things. Faithfulness under trial is the rule upon which God is making a selection of sons for the perfect ages. The action of such a rule requires the prosperity of the Cain-class for a season. God's anger burns against them, but His wisdom restrains judgment till the due time. What God said to Israel applies to all the ungodly of the earth, of whatever name, state, form, aspect, or hue: "For Mine own name's sake, I have deferred Mine anger that I cut thee not off." If God's anger flamed forth before the time, the perfect result that will be seen when the whole of His tried and perfected children are exalted to high places in all

the earth, would be prevented. He purposes to exalt His name in all the earth in the exaltation of the humble who prove their trust therein by faith and obedience in a day of unfaith and dishonor. Hence, the triumph of the wicked, though short (relatively) is a necessity for a time; to which the saints are enabled to submit with a patience that is the result of enlightenment. It was thus that Paul was able to say to these Thessalonians that he gloried in them "for their patience and faith in all their persecutions and tribulations that they endured."

They represented the second class: "you who are troubled." Although the least pleasant to belong to this class at present, this is the class we here assembled belong to by preference; not that we prefer trouble, but we prefer to be in that line of things to which the endurance of trouble meantime belongs by divine appointment. We prefer to belong to the Lord's friends — those who have faith in him of a type sufficiently strong to take sides altogether with him during this the day of his rejection, and to be obedient in all things to him. Why should such a class excite enmity in others? It seems as if such an antagonism should be morally impossible, for the friends of Christ are the inoffensive and excellent of the earth. Many things that seem unlikely do happen nevertheless, and this is one of them. Who would have imagined beforehand that Jesus, the sinless man, who went about doing good, would excite hatred so intense as to bring about his destruction? The explanation in his case is the explanation in the case of all his brethren. He demurred to the ways and principles and sentiments of the wealthy religious, who were on good terms with themselves and in high estimation with all the people. The wounds that he inflicted on pious self-love, by his contentions for righteousness, created for him among his own people implacable foes more cruel than the heathen. They could not forgive his reproofs. Had they loved the praise of God more than the praise of men, it would have been otherwise, they would have rejoiced in Christ's zeal for God, and would have been ready to believe it possible that his condemnations of their class were just. But on the contrary, they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. Consequently, his words and attitude hurt their self-love incurably, and goaded them to compass his destruction under the respectable plea that he was a promoter of disorder and a mover of sedition. But God overruled their malice to the accomplishment of His own purpose.

Paul says "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you who are troubled, rest." What God sees right to be done will be done. Therefore, we may rest assured of this, that the end of all who trouble the word, or work, or people of God, will be an end the reverse of satisfactory to them on all points. It is an end frequently described by Paul. He summarizes it thus luridly in Romans 2: "Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil."



In one word, he describes it to the Philippians: "whose end is destruction." Daniel speaks of "shame and contempt;" Malachi, of "ashes under the soles of your feet;" Jesus, of "weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth." Jesus connects this tribulation with what the weepers will "see." "Ye shall see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of God, while ye yourselves will be thrust out." There will be many details of this kind in the terrible experience of the rejected. In his message to the Philadelphian ecclesia, Jesus says, concerning the Satanic element in the body. "I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." This will be a terrible ingredient in the experience of those whose turn will have to come for tribulation; that they will be made to defer, in abject submission to those whom, in the day of probation, they have rejected and scorned. The elect of God may well in patience wait. "I will repay, saith the Lord." When God executes vengeance, it is always done with great thoroughness. Wherefore, saith Paul, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves." Pray for your enemies. Do good to them that hate you. God may give them repentance to the acknowledging of the Truth that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil. If not, then God's righteous arm will vindicate the just who wait on Him. The hour will come when the terrible portent will be uttered: "Your enemies whom ye have seen today, ye shall see no more for ever."

Thus will tribulation be rendered "to them that trouble you... and to you who are troubled, rest." This is the other side. This is the final purpose of God, to give rest upon the earth in righteousness — "the whole earth at rest" — the wicked rooted out of the earth and forgotten — the meek of the earth established in imperturbable security, delighting themselves in the abundance of peace which a life of tribulation now so well qualifies them to enjoy. This is the tranquil prospect ever forward on the horizon of probationary life, however troubled by affliction or shadowed by death. There remaineth this rest for the people of God. Nothing can touch or interfere with it. It is the stable hope of the gospel.

"Rest with us," says Paul — with Paul and with all Paul's brethren of every age. This is a glorious feature of the prospect. To have a good thing is good; to have it in good company is better. The change to the immortal and promotion to power and honor awaits every son of God. No good can exceed this; but consider the joyful zest of a simultaneous entrance upon such a state by thousands whom God has prepared during the ages of evil — "glorified together." True, the judgment precedes and selects; but this is but a preliminary detail. The glorious event, in its real and ultimate character, consists in the entrance into life at the same time, of a numberless multitude of such as have pleased God by a loyal faith and patient obedience in widely-sundered generations and under circumstances of a common difficulty and bitterness, though differing in local form and complexion. It is not possible

to conceive a more joyous conjuncture of events. It is what awaits every faithful saint.

It is "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven." There can be no advance in the direction of consummated salvation "until he come." Everything waits his coming. He is gone into heaven, anointed with the oil of gladness. In his Father's presence are light and "pleasures for ever more", but on the earth, in his absence there is the darkness that always prevails when the sun is withdrawn. It is needful in the scheme of things upon which the Father is working, that he should be gone for a season. But the promise of his return is as plain and certain as any part of God's spoken or written Word. Therefore, the saints turn their eyes to that event with longing. They are waiting for the Lord from heaven, not only when coffined in the cemetery, but in the various paths of their living sojourn. All of them are "looking for and hastening unto" that gladsome event. The expectation of his coming is not with them the sensation of a day, or an anticipation hanging on some conjuncture of political events. It is the inwrought conviction and indelible longing of the deepest reason which the signs of the times may pleasantly stimulate, but which lives immortal in the dearest calms of human life. Eighteen centuries ago, the Philippian section of their company, having turned to God from idols, were waiting for this Son from heaven and they have not yet forsaken that attitude, and never will. They will be found in it when the supreme moment arrives that brings to fruition the hopes and aspirations of a hundred groaning generations. While their waiting attitude continues, their motto is supplied to them in the last words of inspiration: "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

There is a third class affected by that event, in addition to "them that trouble you and you who are troubled." And that is, "them that know not God and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul says that vengeance is to be taken by the Lord on them, and that they are to be "punished with everlasting destruction from his presence." At the present time, nothing seems less important to a man than that he should know God and obey the gospel. The prosperous and the great and the successful are those who know not God and obey not the gospel. The man least valued or regarded among men is the man who knows God and obeys the gospel. Consider the great change that will take place in this matter when the Lord comes. His coming, though secret at first, will be a great public and world-booming event, which will alter the views of everyone in a radical manner. What Christ thinks will become the most sovereign of questions, though now so little considered. His purposes — his movements — will absorb public and private attention as nothing has ever done. There will be panic everywhere till things adjust themselves. At such a time, when it is discovered that the thing that finds favor with him is the knowledge of God and the obedience

of the gospel, these attainments, so little valued now, will acquire an importance that will make all men wish themselves their happy possessors. It will be too late with the majority. Now is the time to obtain the knowledge of God, and to practise the obedience which by the mouth of Paul He has enjoined upon "all men everywhere" (Acts 17:30). Then will be the time for the outpouring of that long-gathering vengeance which God has restrained so long for His name's sake. And then will be the time when the treasure we now possess, and which we have to hold in difficulty and gloom, will appear in its true character of untold value.

The time draws on apace. Some people say "perhaps we won't live to see it." What then? They will die to see it. Those who die will see it quicker than those who live, because the death interval is but a flash. In life, we have to wait the slow roll of years. In death, the interval is abolished, and we are hurried as in a moment to the very coming of the Lord. Consequently, in any case, it will be soon to every one of us. In this, we have great and constant comfort. While sojourning in the land of wickedness and strangers, we may have the constant feeling that we are within sight of home, and that if we can only endure for the short journey that lies ahead, we shall soon be out of the desert, and safe in our Father's house of righteousness, whose shining form we can discern in the approaching distance. A little more courage! a little more perseverance, and by his coming, the Lord will gird us with immortal strength. He will clear our blurring eyes, and rouse our failing hearts, and strengthen our faltering steps, and revive our drooping life with a vigor that will never abate, wisdom that will never err, and joy that will never end.

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## The Song to be Sung in Christ's Day

A "day" long-looked for — a "day" of retribution — a "day" of gladness — a "righteous nation that keepeth the Truth" — now afflicted, then glorified — "well with them that fear God" — because He never forgets.

**W**E have recently had special occasion to recognize the comforting fact that in the Holy Scriptures it is God, and not man, that speaks to us in all the "divers manners" of their authorship. The writer is human: but the Power using the writer is divine. The fact comes continually before us in our readings. Today, we have Paul in the Hebrews (for Paul undoubtedly was the writer) citing the prophetic Scriptures as the "witness" of "the Holy Spirit" (Heb. 10:15). "Whereof," says he "the Holy Spirit also is a witness to us," and he then quotes from Jeremiah. It is this quality of the

Old Testament Scriptures that gives them their superlative value. It is this that gives us the comfortable feeling of safety and security which we experience in “the reading of the Old Testament.” It is this that makes us hang on the words as words of truth on which we can build, and to which we can surrender without any of the reservation with which all human writing has to be received.

With this comfortable feeling, let us go to the portion read from Isaiah (Ch. 26) and extract from it some of the edification it is calculated to afford. In this portion we are informed of a song to be sung at a certain time and place.” “In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah.” When we find what “day” this is, we find the matter in hand is one to which we have become personally related by the Truth. It is not difficult to find the day. The part going before makes it known very plainly. It is a day long-looked for — a day in which expectation long cherished is realized in joy unspeakable. “It shall be said in that day, Lo this is our God, we have waited for Him... we shall be glad and rejoice in His salvation” (Ch. 25:9). Such a day must be neither more nor less than the day of salvation. One more look makes it quite certain: “He (the Lord of Hosts) shall swallow up death in victory: and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of His people shall he take away from off the earth.” If there could be any doubt, that this is the day of the manifestation of the sons of God and return of Christ from heaven, such doubt is set for ever at rest by Paul’s declaration in 1Cor. 15, concerning the day of the last trump and the resurrection of the dead: “then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up of victory,” a saying written in this 25th chapter of Isaiah, and in this chapter alone.

Now, from the Scriptures of truth, we have learnt several things concerning this day of Christ, the remembrance of which will help us to rightly understand this song to be sung “in the day... in the land of Judah.” It is a day in which the oracle contained in Psa. 110 will be fulfilled: “The Lord shall send the rod of thy (Messiah’s) strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies... The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of wrath.” It is a day in which the vision shown to John of things “to come to pass hereafter” will be fulfilled when “the kings of the earth and their armies will gather together to make war against the Lamb,” and when “the Lamb shall overcome them.” It is a day when a specific league of Gentile powers, found in the land under Gog, at the coming of Christ, will be broken up and expelled like chaff before the wind. “The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters, but God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee afar off” — (Isa. 17:13). It is a day when the power of man in all the earth shall be in the process of receiving that irretrievable overthrow symbolized by the breaking of Nebuchadnezzar’s image to pieces by the little stone destined to grow to a great mountain, filling the whole earth.

Now such a day will necessarily be a day of great gladness for those who shall be gathered around the Lord in friendship and glory. The gladness will have pointed reasons in the current situation. Their gladness finds expression in the declaration of these reasons. Let us imagine all these events accomplished, or in process of accomplishment, and let us imagine ourselves by their side and in their ranks in the land of promise, and we shall then be able to enter into the exultation and catch the spirit of this song: "We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." The glorified immortal throng will stand in need of no walls and bulwarks. No city was ever so strong as theirs. "Salvation," upon which they have just entered will be their walls and bulwarks. Salvation is no sentimental affair, but a very physical reality. Shot and shell will be powerless against a company covered and penetrated by the Spirit of God. Walls and bulwarks would be a clumsy defence for those who are protected by the primal energy of the universe, thrown over them by the will of Him in whose Word all things subsist; and from whose Spirit-clad presence shot and shell would recoil more helplessly than cork missiles from an ironclad fort. Their exultation in the power of salvation is no extravagance. Bible salvation is something very different from the salvation said to be "got" at Salvation army meetings.

"Open ye the gates," shout this Spirit-panoplied congregation, "that the righteous nation that keepeth the Truth may enter in." Ay, and the gates will be opened. The gates have been long closed, but the time has come for them to be thrown wide open — the gates of heaven, the gates of honor, the gates of wealth, the gates of the Kingdom, — the gates of glory, honor and immortality. The summons will not be unheeded. The summons will be obeyed. The gates will be opened — to whom? "The righteous nation that keepeth the Truth." What nation is this? There is no room for doubt. Jesus told the Pharisees in his day — speaking in the very same locality where this song is to be sung — "The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." Speaking to the disciples as constituents of this nation, he said to them, "Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." And afterwards, Peter addressing other members of the same body, said, "Ye are a holy nation, a peculiar people." The connection between this nation and "the Truth" is also equally manifest. Jesus said, "I am the Truth," and also, "everyone that is of the Truth heareth my voice;" and also John, "The Truth dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever."

The community to be glorified with Christ at his coming, being a "righteous nation that keepeth the Truth," it follows that we cannot hope to be among them if we follow unrighteousness or if we are destitute of "the Truth;" for no one can "keep the Truth" who has it not. This is worth the attention, in passing, of those who either "hold the Truth in unrighteousness"

or who trust for salvation to their own righteousness apart from the Truth. By our profession as brethren, and by our assembly this morning at the breaking of bread in remembrance of Christ as appointed, we belong to neither one class nor the other. We belong rather to those who are seeking admission into the ranks of the righteous nation that keepeth the Truth. As such, we may dwell with consolation on the picture before us. To have and to keep the Truth is not only accounted a very small thing just now; it is worse than small in the estimation of this enlightened generation. It is derogatory to manhood and culture and good sense. It is a disqualification for every kind of worldly advancement. Well, this is no accident. It is appointed. It is part of the "light affliction which is but for a moment" and which, as Paul says "worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Consider what a change it will be when the righteous keeping of the Truth will be the only passport to power, respectability and life. The gates of honor and distinction are all shut now to those who keep the Truth — who are considered a species of monomaniacs by those who love the present world. But the cry will go abroad yet, "open ye the gates! open ye the gates!" "Bow the knee! bow the knee!" The time has come for the exaltation of the Lord's faithful people. "This is the day which the Lord hath made. We will be glad and rejoice in it." "Lo, this is our God! We have waited for Him: we shall be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

The song proceeds — "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee." When the singers sing these words, they have in view the peace that has come to them, and that lies before them in the happy day commenced for Jerusalem. This peace is promised. "Great shall be the peace of thy children" (Isa 54:13), and again, "Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream" (Isa. 66:12). We are asked to pray for it. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem." It is a peace not reached till the Prince of Peace "speaks peace to the heathen." There is a peace that comes now to those who trust in God, but this is not the "perfect peace" which the song celebrates. Often the reverse of perfect peace is the lot of those who do the will of God. Jesus and Paul may be taken as examples. Jesus, the "man of sorrows;" Paul, "distressed, perplexed, persecuted, cast down," did not experience the "perfect peace" which will belong to the righteous nation that keepeth the Truth in the day of this song in the land of Judah. But this peace awaits them, even on the very occasion depicted in this joyful chapter. There never has been an occasion on earth in which the human mind will be so much stayed on God as the mind of that exultant assembly will be stayed on Him; never such powerful trust as will be reposed by them. We, too, naturally assume that the need for trust and mental stay on God will have passed when the day of triumph has come. The reverse state of facts will be found to be true when that happy day arrives. Mortal men cannot in the nature of things stay on

God and trust in Him as those will stay and trust, whose iron heart will have been opened to God with the change from the earth-cleaving nature of present experience to a nature instinct with divine sympathies and affinities. Those who experience this change will be able to apostrophize each other in the exultant adjuration of this song: "Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Yahweh is everlasting strength." They will be able to feel the reality of God with a strength and ardor impossible in the mere day of faith. They will be able to realise practically their dependence upon His everlasting strength. Now, it is a matter of faith merely; then it will be self-manifest knowledge and experience. Now, the acknowledgement is liable to die on the lips of weary faith, or degenerate to cant through human weakness; then, it will be a vivid sensation whose fervent expression will be highest satisfaction.

"For He bringeth down them that dwell on high: the lofty city, He layeth it low: He layeth it low, even to the ground: He bringeth it even to the dust." This is an allusion to events just accomplished — the work of power and judgment by which the high-borns and mighty of the earth will have been brought down — brought down by God and not by man at all. This will be the characteristic of the epoch — that human pride and power will be levelled and the Lord alone exalted, as it was when Israel crossed the Red Sea. So it is testified: "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." Realise then that at the epoch of this song, the glory of London, of Paris, of Berlin, of St. Petersburg, of Constantinople is brought to the dust, their armies overthrown, their power wrecked; the arrogance of man everywhere smitten and lowered by disaster; his pride dissolved in spoliation and blood — the lofty city of human power everywhere laid low.

There is a companion picture: "The foot shall tread it down," What foot? "Even the feet of the poor and the steps of the needy!" This is God's decree. This is "what is written" — and the Scripture cannot be broken. The poor and needy, who are condemned with ineffable scorn by the opulent classes, are the destined heirs of all their power and glory. No more odious dispensation could be contrived for the rich sinners of the present evil world. But in what way will the Lord be exalted by the substitution of the poor for the rich in the possession of earth's goodness? It is no ordinary class of poor whose stewardship of the riches of God would be more grateful to Him than the occupancy of the rich. The ordinary poor are as godless as the rich, and lacking in their elegance and culture. A dreadful exchange would this be. No: it is no ordinary poor. It is God's poor: the poor of whom Christ is the prototype. He was a "poor and needy man," but he was rich in faith and did always those things that were pleasing to the Father. This is the class of poor, the God-believing, the God-loving and God-serving poor, gathered from every age, made alive with the vigor and power of an immortal nature, whose

righteous feet will tread down the lofty city of human power and pride now uplifted in all the earth. This will be more galling to the sons of pride than even a pure democratic insurrection. They might reconcile themselves to an upheaval of the working classes as a calamity they might at least regulate — as a movement having something of human principles in it which they might turn to account — as a disaster from which recovery might at least be hoped. But there will be no mitigating circumstances in a revolution which places them in the power of a godliness bred in poverty, and now enforced with divine aims by a government men cannot understand or resist or baffle.

The song justifies the changed by reference to the past course of those now promoted “The way of the just is uprightness: Thou most upright dost weigh the path of the just.” We must remember this, now, in these days of darkness. It is written, “Though a sinner do evil an hundred times and his days be prolonged, yet I know it shall be well with them that fear God.” The time for developing and trying this class is our mortal lifetime. During this time, it seems as if God took no notice, and as if righteousness were a mistake. The events contemplated in this song will yield a very different verdict from this. They knew what this song says — that God “weighs the path of the just.” He watches, reckons, and estimates with a view to the day of recompence which this song celebrates. God is not unmindful — not forgetful — not unfaithful — He is not unjust. All these things are declared of Him. Therefore, when His servants speak or do or labor or suffer for His Name’s sake, though there is no sign, it is all recorded. “A book of remembrance was written before Him.” What then? A time comes for the book to be opened. Facts forgotten by man are brought to light, and every man receives according to his works.

The song proceeds to give a general description of their course and character looking back. It applies to all of them. “In the way of Thy judgments have we waited for Thee. The desire of our soul is to the remembrance of Thy Name.” The judgments of God, which men can keep in “the way of” are the ordinances or appointments of God. The word “judgment” is often used with this meaning. We see at a glance in what way this is applicable to the rejoicing utterers of this song in the land of Judah. It in fact describes their class in all ages. They are such as walk in the way of God’s appointments. These have differed with different ages; but the attitude required has been the same in every age — faith and obedience. Trusting to what God has promised, and doing what God has commanded, they have waited for the day of salvation, which is to make them glad with exceeding joy. There is instruction in this for those who despise what God has appointed, or who at least regard His appointments with indifference, and who yet hope that on some principle or other, though casting the Word of God behind their backs, they will receive His favor and enter into peace in the day of His accomplished purpose. We must sorrowfully recognize that all



such hopes are unfounded, and that only those may hope to stand with the heirs of salvation in the land of Judah on the glad day of its attainments, who can say with them, "In the way of Thy judgments have we awaited for Thee: the desire of our soul is to the remembrance of Thy name." We may look, upon another day, at the second half of this instructive and joy-inspiring song.

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## God's Judgments Upon a Wicked World

*Seeking for God — the world's rejection of God's law and rights — nations will fight against God — Israel restored — trouble before deliverance — God's interposition — Resurrection and Glorification — the Day of God.*

PERHAPS we can do no better this month than resume the consideration of the song to be sung in the land of Judah at the crisis of the day of salvation. The day of salvation is a long and cloudless one. The song belongs to the beginning of the day — when as yet its full glory has not been manifested. The Lord has come and expelled the Russian invader from the Holy Land, but the whole earth beyond Judah's frontiers is in arms, and, under "the Beast and the false prophet," will put forth a gigantic effort to crush the newly manifested Israelitish power. A recognition of this is necessary to discern the bearing of some parts of the song.

The righteous, in one body, look back from the song point of view, upon the night from which they have just emerged. They rejoicingly declare the fact which is now sweet to them in retrospect, viz., "With my soul have I desired Thee in the night." It was sweet to them at the time, but sweet to bitterness, for the desire for God in a day when He is not to be found, is not a refreshing experience but the reverse. It is as David expresses it: "As the hart panteth after the water brooks," which is not an enjoying state. But now, when the day of song for the righteous has come, it will be pleasant to look back and think that while the night prevailed upon the earth, their eyes were in strong desire towards God, and that God has openly acknowledged their love by manifesting Himself to them in the sending of Christ. — "With my spirit within me, will I seek Thee early. "Early" is suggestive of morning. The morning has come when the song is sung, but the seeking for God has not ceased. Only now it is a seeking with a finding, which differs from the seeking of these days of darkness. The sons of God will always seek God. They will never forget Him or tire in their love. They will always feel what David says: "Thy love is better than life." But at the

date of the song, it has special point: "When Thy judgments are in the earth, then shall the inhabitants of the earth learn righteousness." They have not learnt righteousness at the day of the song. They are about to do so by the judgments about to be manifested in the terrible war of the great day of God Almighty; and it is meet that those by whom those judgments are to be inflicted should have their eyes especially on God. How incongruous it would be that those who are about to bring the world to God should for a moment lose sight of Him. They are for the time being in the position that Christ occupies in the interval between his rejection by Israel and his coming. "I will wait upon the Lord that hideth His face from the house of Jacob, I will look for Him."

The judgment to be inflicted upon the world is not in wantonness or superfluity. It is a necessity: it cannot be dispensed with. The righteous, rejoicing together, recognize it. "Let favor be shown to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness. In the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord." The history of the world is the proof of this. God's favor has been shown to the race of Adam since the day the first sinner was driven out of Eden; and the result is before our eyes in a world lying in wickedness. The wickedness differs in form, complexion, and intensity, but in its most cultured forms, it is wickedness still, the rejection of the law God has given; the refusal of His rights and honor, the assertion of man's right to what he enjoys by favor; the appropriation of earth's goodness to human service and glory. Favor does not teach mankind righteousness — judgment will, and in the song under consideration, the righteous contemplate the prospect with satisfaction. It is a divine purpose much spoken of throughout the Scriptures. "For a long time I have holden my peace; I have been still and refrained myself. Now will I cry like a travailing woman. I will destroy and devour at once" (Isa. 42:14). "The needy shall not always be forgotten; the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever... The Lord trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence His soul hateth. Upon the wicked He shall rain snares, fire, and brimstone, and an horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup" (Psa. 9:18; 11:5-6). "The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance. He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily He is a God that judgeth in the earth" (Psa. 58:10-11). "They shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in that day that I shall do this" (Mal. 4:3). "For my determination is to gather the nations... to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger; for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy" (Zeph. 3:8).

At first, the uplifted hand of God is not recognised (going back to the song): "Lord, when Thy hand is lifted up, they will not see." It is probable

that for a good while, men all over the earth will refuse to recognize anything divine in the events that will have expelled the Russian army from the Holy Land, and checked the British advance in the South West and in the Mediterranean. In the pride and wilfulness of their "manly" hearts, they will attribute them to a natural origin. Have they forgotten the destruction of Lisbon by earthquake, and repulsion and appalling re-rush of the Tagus? Has not all the world heard of the volcanic submergence of Pompeii and Herculaneum? With these occurrences of nature, they will try to class the earthquake that divides the Mount of Olives and the bituminous rain that decimates the Gogian hosts, and for a while they will calm themselves with this view, in which they will doubtless be fortified by the arguments and opinions of scientific experts at the various continental capitals. But the delusion will vanish at last. The song proceeds: "But they SHALL see and be ashamed of their envy toward Thy people. The fire of (prepared for) their enemies shall devour them."

If nothing succeeded the Gogian catastrophe — if affairs in the Holy Land quieted down and events resumed their wonted channel, as in the case of all natural calamities, their theory might last and quell their fears. But great and equally appalling events ensue. The nations re-organize and rally. Masses of troops are thrown forward to retrieve the day. Conflict ensues with the Holy Land Power that only heaps disasters upon disaster. Rome is sent crashing into the abyss. The forces of the European muster are repulsed. Supernatural visitations of fire — à la Sodom and Gomorrha — spread terrors in the countries of the enemy — especially "among them that dwell carelessly in the isles" (Eze. 39:6). Repeated efforts to continue the war only entail repeated disaster and overthrow. Vast multitudes are slain in all the earth (Isa. 66:16; Jer. 25:35). Now the conviction steals over the population that the hand of God is in the situation, and that the demands addressed to the courts are not those of fanaticism, but of Omnipotence incarnate in Jesus and his brethren. At last they "see" and are ashamed, and surrender, and wait for the law that will come to them from Zion, in compliance with which, they will everywhere bend themselves willingly to the work of Jewish restoration.

"Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us, for Thou also hast wrought all our works for us." This is the natural sequel. "Peace upon Israel" is the motto of God's dealing with men upon earth, and will now receive political illustration in all the earth. The saints who sing this song are the inner kernel of the commonwealth of Israel. From them, peace will extend to every part thereof, and finally to the Gentiles at large. The dreadful Gentile downtreading ages of the past will then be a subject of contemplative retrospect. "O Lord our God, other lords besides Thee have had dominion over us, but by Thee only will we make mention of Thy name. They are dead: they shall not live. They are deceased, they shall not rise. Therefore

hast Thou visited them and destroyed them and made all their memory to perish." When this can be proclaimed as a matter of accomplished fact, there will be such peace and joy as neither Israel nor mankind have ever known. The scattered, reduced, and stunted nation of Abraham's race will revive. "Israel will bud and blossom and fill the world with fruit." This is the subject of the next sentence of the song: "Thou hast increased the nation, O Lord: thou hast increased the nation. Thou art glorified. Thou hadst removed it far unto all the ends of the earth." Yes, Thou hadst removed it, but it had been written, and at this crisis is now fulfilled: "He that scattereth Israel will gather him and keep him as a shepherd doth his flock." So that, as it is again written, "Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale. But when he seeth his children the work of Mine hands in the midst of him, they shall sanctify My name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel. They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine" (Isa. 29:22-24).

Then the song goes back once more to the day of trouble, that precedes the day of glory — the day of suffering and abortive effort. "Lord, in trouble have they visited Thee: they poured out a prayer when Thy chastening was upon them." The "they" of this sentence while expressive of the national Israel, is inclusive of the "we" who sing the song, for both are inseparably associated in the purpose of God. The day of national deliverance is preceded by a day of great trouble. This is Jeremiah's forecast of it: "We have heard a voice of trembling — of fear and not of peace. Wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces turned into paleness? Alas, for the day is great, it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it. For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of Hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him, but they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their King, whom I will raise up unto them" (Jer. 30:5-9). The time of Jacob's trouble has been long and severe, but gathers to a head as the hour of deliverance approaches. We see something like this going on now. The Jews have come into great trouble in those countries where the bulk of their race is located — Russia, Germany, Austria, and Rumania. The persecution against them is enough to bring tears from a heart of stone. It is relentless and cruel to a degree almost equalling the worst periods of their history. It is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it, but not by man. No one can save him out of it but God, who brought them out of Egypt, and has scattered them among the nations because of their disobedience. There is none among all Jerusalem's sons to take her by the hand and guide her out of the morass in which she has been sunk for centuries. The Rothschilds and the Montefioris and the Sassoons — what can they do? They are great financiers; but they dare not move to Israel's rescue if they had the heart. Their positions depend upon

their service to the Gentiles: and their hearts are not with Israel's woes or God's dishonor, but with their own family greatness. This would be sacrificed by any practical effort on behalf of Yahweh's down-trodden land and people. Israel is truly helpless, but God Himself will be her helper, as he says: "O, Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in Me is thine help. I will be thy King. Where is there any other that may save thee?" (Hos. 13:9)

The faithful in Israel, national or spiritual, are powerless to change the situation by any effort or combination in the absence of God's interposition. The song recognises this in its next measure. "Like as a woman with child that draweth near the time of her delivery is in pain and crieth out in her pangs, so have we been in thy sight, O Lord. We have been with child: we have been in pain: we have, as it were, brought forth wind. We have not wrought any deliverance in the earth, neither have the inhabitants of the earth fallen." But all this is changed now. God has arisen to judgment; and the reigning governments of the Gentiles in every land and tongue will have to come down and stoop low at Israel's feet. Here the song ends, and God, by the prophet responds. His words indicate the means by which the great salvation is to be wrought: "Thy dead shall live," (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, and all of their type and family in all their generations). "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake" (Dan. 12:1-2). "My dead body, they shall arise." The righteous dead, in their totality are the body of Christ and of God in the earth. As such, they cannot be held by the grave. As Christ's personal body arose, so will his mystical body arise. "He that raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also, and present us together." It is a question of the appointed time. At the date of the song, the time has arrived: "Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust." Receiving this summons, "the earth shall cast out the dead." They find themselves in new circumstances and a new time. After the judgment preliminaries of the era, they are summoned into retirement for protection from the fearful visitation about to burst forth in all the earth, in "the time of trouble such as never was." "Come my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself as it were for a little moment until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the Lord cometh out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain."

Then ensues the struggle with wickedness as organized in the states and kingdoms of Europe in latter-day fourth-beast manifestation. "The Lord, with His sore, great, and strong sword, shall punish leviathan, that crooked serpent: and He shall slay the dragon that is in the sea." This slaying of the political dragon that swims in the sea of peoples will involve the suppression of the governments, the punishment of the population, and the transfer of all power to Yahweh's anointed and his multitudinous consort — "the Bride,

the Lamb's wife," consisting of the justified and glorified brethren of the Lord, manifested by resurrection, as a new, practical, living reality in earth's affairs, with blessed consequence to all lands and peoples. All will at last say with them: "We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

Such is the assured and glorious prospect exhibited in the song that will be sung in the land of Judah "in that day." We may rest on it as on a certainty, and not as a dream or beautiful poem. It is the purpose of God, which no power in the universe can disannul. Men come and go in a ceaseless stream of generations; their thoughts and their schemes, bulking large in each other's eyes for a time, come and go with them, and pass into a forgotten oblivion, age after age. But the Word of the Lord, whether unknown, or known to be despised, endureth forever. It is fixed and established as the heavens, and will bring forth its own accomplishment at the appointed time. "God hath appointed a day." This is the apostolic proclamation. He has given a pledge of the fact in the resurrection of Christ; this is the apostolic assurance. Therefore, we are in the position of true wisdom when we wait and watch for the fulfilment of His Word. We have waited long. We shall not have to wait always. The hour will come when we shall unite in the rapturous words, "Lo this is our God: we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is Yahweh: we have waited for Him. We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

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## Development of Children of Promise

*The Truth for every-day use — disobedience through human history — children of God by faith in His promise — Bible "election" according to fitness — conformity to will of Promisor — human schemes and teachings hopeless — Truth changes mind and ways — godly alone live on earth in future.*

**T**HE Truth is for everyday use. It is not, as some people imagine, a theory of things which, once known, may be put away in an intellectual drawer or cupboard, in reserve, like a useful document or a memorandum of reference. It is not a sensational thing, or an exceptional thing. It is a thing of sober and practical necessity. We require it every day, like our food. God lives every day, and must be thanked and supplicated every day, as the daily incense in the tabernacle typified. This is what he requests, and what we need. Christ lives every day, and makes intercession every day, and every day we must come to the Father in his name, as the morning and

evening lamb of the first year on the altar showed forth. The need for hope is with us every day, and the need for help and the need for learning and guidance in the ways of righteousness and danger. "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long," is one of the standing exhortations of the Spirit, and it points to a constant actual need which the Truth alone supplies. If there are some who have no experience of this need, but on the contrary, get along the most comfortably with the Truth out of sight, it is because they are dead while nominally alive, abortions of human development while supposed to be sufficiently after the divine type to be fitted to become the sons of God.

Because the Truth is for everyday use, God has given it to us in a diversified form, admitting of a constant familiarity without mental weariness. The wisdom that has varied natural food in so wonderful a manner has done the same in the supply of the spiritual man. The Scriptures exhibit a constant variety. It is not all history; it is not all prophecy; it is not all precept. It is not all joy; it is not all sorrow; it is not all reproof. It is sometimes one thing and sometimes another, but all spiritual, and all fitted to furnish the man of God thoroughly for the life and state that God requires in him. It matters not what comes before us in our daily readings; we find something fresh, and always profitable when thoroughly seen into.

This morning we have a theme causing sorrow at first sight — a sorrow which every deeply thinking mind is made to feel in his own particular way — yet a sorrow for which there is an entire antidote in a very unexpected place — also before us this morning. The theme comes before us in a message by Jeremiah to Israel. The message is one of reproof. The reproof is based on this accusation, that the whole land is estranged from God; that every one, from the least to the greatest, is given to covetousness; that none are valiant for the Truth; that none are zealous for the ways that please God in their midst — because of all which, the prophet is instructed to say there will be calamity and desolation. The sadness of the theme is partly connected with the date of the message — in round numbers, 600 years before Christ. Israel came out of Egypt over 1,500 years before Christ. When they came out, Moses bewailed them as a stiff-necked and faithless generation, and here, nearly a thousand years afterwards, is the same apparently hopeless state of things.

Not only so, but we come 600 years — nearly 700 years further down the stream of time, and what have we here — in Romans 9. The same thing. Paul speaks of "great heaviness, and continual sorrow of heart, for his kinsmen after the flesh, who were Israelites" — who were the people of the covenant — and yet who were blind and obdurate and disobedient — from age to age, the work of God an apparent failure.

We come to our own day — 1,800 years later, and we have the same sad discouraging state of things — Israel disobedient, and not only Israel, but the

Gentile nations, to whom the word of invitation was sent in the days of the apostles, given over to entire indifference and disobedience; nursing lies when they give any attention at all to religion, and for the most part despising all wisdom and following ungodliness with eager steps. This prolonged spectacle of failure and sin is liable to be depressing to the point of destruction. It is liable to present itself to the mind as a problem that defies solution. We are liable to ask ourselves, Why has not God constructed the world upon a principle admitting of better results than these? Why has He not managed things in such a way as to secure some sensible measure of success to the efforts put forth from the beginning to bring mankind to ways of wisdom and life?

Now, there is an answer, and it is profitable to get thorough hold of it, for with the getting of it comes great rest. In the first place, we must remember the obvious truth that it is God, and not man, that has invented the universe — to use human language; and that, however incapable we may be in following His plan of management, it must be that His plan is a wise one, and must, in the upshot of things, be a successful one. We are always liable to look at the affair from the human standpoint — as if man had made the world and could work it. Man forgets that he is himself a part of the system of things, and cannot, of himself, judge the working of it. We must ascend to the standpoint of the mind that contrived the universe, and the power that upholds it before we can see the drift and understand the enigma. If God had not spoken to us, we could not have done this. But He has spoken, and so we are able, in some measure, to enter into His mind.

We get the clue in the chapter read from Romans, and in a verse in it where it does not seem to be lurking. It lies in verse 16: "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." To see wherein this furnishes the clue, we must follow the line of thought of which it is the climax. Paul having deeply lamented the perverseness of Israel, anticipates the suggestion that in that case, the Word of God has been without effect — has failed in its mission. He demurs decisively to this suggestion: He says: "Not as though the Word of God hath taken none effect, for they are not all Israel that are of Israel, neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children, but in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, they who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted for the seed." The argument is that though the Word has failed to transform the mass of Israel to whom it has been sent from generation to generation, it has not failed as regards the result aimed at, viz., the development of the children of promise. As it is written in Isaiah, concerning the word that goeth out of Yahweh's mouth, "It shall not return unto Me void. It shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Ch. 55:11). But who are "the



children of promise"? They are mentioned in contrast to "the children of the flesh." Of the children of the flesh, Paul plainly says, "these are not the children of God!" In this he condemns the doctrine which is becoming so prevalent in our day, that all men are the children of God. It is a pleasing doctrine to the mind of man, but it is not a true doctrine. It cannot be made true by any amount of human concurrence. Those are the children of God whom God recognizes as such, and, by the mouth of Paul, he here tells us who they are not and who they are. The children of the flesh are not they, the children of the promise are. What this means is made plain by the illustration of Isaac which he introduces, "This," says he, "is the word of promise. At this time will I come and Sarah shall have a son." This was the promise in the case, that Isaac should be born of a barren and aged mother. It was something more than a prophecy. The conception of Isaac at Sarah's time of life was outside the resources of nature. It was a divine performance, because of promise, and the promise was given because of purpose, and the purpose was performed because of faith: for as Paul says "through faith, Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised" (Heb. 11:11). So that Isaac stands before us as the prototype of the children of promise. They are a divine development by a divine agency, as the result of a divine purpose by the power of faith in the divine performance. As Paul said to the Galatians: "we brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise" (Gal 4:28). They are of the promise, and by the promise, that is, God promises them, and by His promise, begets them. As James says, "Of His own will begat He us by the Word of His mouth" — which is a word of promise. "We are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:26).

The kernel of the whole idea lies here, that a divine purpose underlies the history of human life upon earth, and that this is the truly governing element in the situation. Man may plan, and theorize, and work, but he can effect nothing against the purpose of God. The purpose of God will prevail. Paul further illustrates it by reference to Jacob and Esau, whose respective places were marked out before they were born "that the purpose of God, according to election, might stand, not of works (that is, not of human contrivings or accomplishment), but of Him that calleth" (Rom. 9:11). There is a purpose of God according to election. Some people see Calvinism here, but Calvinism gives us only half the thought, and by leaving out the second half, turns the first into a lie. Calvinism makes the election, or selection, an act of sovereign prerogative without reference to fitness, whereas Bible election is always according to fitness. God foresees and foreordains, but always in harmony with all His will. Jacob was a God-fearing man, a man of faith, whatever his personal frailties were. Esau was a mere man of nature — lusty, strong, and ingenious, but with no fear of God before his eyes. God had regard to the one

character and not to the other. God's foreordination did not place an Esau in Jacob's place. It always put the right man in the right place. Paul refers in further illustration to Pharaoh, and to God's statement to him by Moses: "For this same purpose have I raised thee up that I might show My power in thee," adding, "Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy and whom He will He hardeneth" — in reference to which, he immediately anticipates a natural rejoinder: "Thou wilt say then unto me, why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will?" He disposes of this by asking on what ground a thing formed can say to Him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus? "Hath not the potter power over the clay of the same lump, to make one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor? This is absolutely final. "We are the clay, and Thou our potter" (Isa. 64:8). Until a man accept this position, he is not in a state of true reason. "God hath made all things for Himself, yea even the wicked for the day of His power." The untutored mind cannot realise this, but is enslaved by a feeling that things exist for man.

Now applying the principle to the problem before us, we can see where perfect rest comes to the jaded spirit. The masses of mankind that come and go — Jew and Gentile — are "the children of the flesh" — the mere mechanical propagation of sinful flesh — an adjunct to the working out of God's purpose with the earth, but not a vital element thereof in its ultimate form. It pleases Him, in the execution of that purpose, to ordain that the children of the promise shall be counted for the seed. He has made the identification of these a possibility. Those who answer to this designation are those who are generated by the promises — those who believe the promises, and are so powerfully constrained by faith in them as to conform themselves to the will of Him who is their author. It is here where the matter bears practically. If God's purpose, according to election were carried out on the inscrutable and arbitrary principle inculcated by Calvinism, we should simply stand distressed and bewildered in its presence, powerless to hope for ourselves or others, except as a mere chance that we could not discover till the Lord Himself declared it. But the matter stands in no such painful position. Though the purpose of God is conceived in His own absolute prerogative — "after the counsel of His own will" — it is worked out on principles of perfect reason and justice. In its work of individual selection it is carried out by the gospel, which is the sum of all promise. The gospel having come to us is a proof that we are in the scope of its call. If we are so controlled by it as to be obedient to its requirements, then are we included in its choice, as the judgment seat will make manifest. We know we are the children of promise, if we believe the promise, and comply with the conditions and requirements associated with it. Our hope towards God is not based on anything we are in ourselves, or that we can do for ourselves. It is based solely upon God's declared purpose, and the invitation we have

received in connection with it. Salvation is "not of him that willeth or of him that runneth, but of God, that showeth mercy."

By the reverse application of this rule, we can see where the world is. From the days of Socrates to the days of Henry Ward Beecher, it has been busy "willing" and "running," and scheming and teaching according to its own ideas. It is all bootless. "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise that they are vain." Their subtle disquisitions — their eloquent harangues — their mutual glorifications, cannot alter things. The word of the Lord standeth sure, and that alone. By this word it is made certain that "the children of the flesh are not the children of God," but that "the children of the promise" alone "are counted for the seed." Man can neither alter nor improve the ways of God. Man's wisdom lies in simply finding out what those ways are and conforming to them. His purpose is to populate the earth with "children," not with mere human creatures. The existence of the latter for generations is necessary to the development of the former, but will not be continued a moment longer than required. The destiny of flesh and blood is to disappear from the earth for ever. The children of God immortal will take their place. Those children are drawn from the generations of flesh and blood. They are "taken out from among them" by a change of mind. Their ideas, their loves, their policy, and their aims become revolutionized by the Truth which is the developing power.

The effect of the change is disadvantageous to present surroundings. They become strangers and pilgrims upon the earth, "having here no continuing city, but looking for one to come." They cease to belong to the world, and the world consequently ceases to love them, for the world loves only its own. But the bitterness of this discipline is only for a time. The day will come when none but the saints will be tolerated upon the earth. A clean sweep will be made at the last of every human creature that ignores God. Earth's inhabitants at last will consist of those only who are in the mental attitude symbolized by the ceaseless ejaculations of the four living creatures of the Apocalypse "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."

Time is all on the side of godliness. Peace and joy are on the wing for all the children of God. God is managing the world for Himself. The sands of the hour glass are running out for the children of the flesh. The ripe hour hurries when a numberless multitude of the forgotten righteous will spring into being by the fiat of Yahweh's power; and unite in a shout of glad thanksgiving to Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will. From the presence of that long purposed manifestation of glory, the darkness of earth's long estrangement from God will flee; the wicked will perish, and the children of promise will arise in light and beauty forever.

## David Devising Liberal Things For God

*Bible matters alone supply edification—sin brought alienation—David from shepherd to King—godly from despised poverty to rule earth—through darkness to everlasting light—sharing prosperity with God—covenant with David—faith and obedience will bring joint heirship.*

A MAN cannot estimate his life properly without looking before and behind. He must remember that he sprang from babyhood, and that he is going on to the decay of old age. He will then be reasonable, and humble and wise. So we cannot understand our meeting this morning without looking a long way back and a long way forward. We are here because of facts of almost hoary antiquity, and prospects of almost inconceivable splendor and durability, and it is in proportion as we open our eyes to these that our coming together is useful and pleasant. It is precisely that we might be helped so to open our eyes that God has required this periodic assembly at our hands as a matter of duty. In our daily lives, we are, as it were, walled in by our immediate surroundings. We "cannot see afar off." The places, the persons, the circumstances of mortal life are liable to fill the mental horizon, and to hide from view the remoter and infinitely more important facts to which we are related. Coming to the breaking of bread helps to break down, or at all events to see over, the four walls of our present petty experience, and to be ennobled and braced by the view of things beyond, before and behind.

Apart from the Scriptures, the help afforded by these meetings in this respect would be very slight. Dim and traditional and weak would be our faith if it depended merely upon our own acts and utterances on such occasions. It is the matters exhibited to view in the divine records that supply the material of those mental exercises that result in "edification." The matters, while having a certain sameness of fundamental topic, are wonderfully varied, and absolutely inexhaustible in their suggestiveness. Whether Moses, the prophets, or the apostles, we are made to feel that their words, given by inspiration of God, are profitable for reviving and strengthening the man of God to every good work.

They all relate to one system of truth. It does not matter which part of the Bible we touch, enlightened by the Truth, we can place it and use it. We are not as we once were, and as the great mass of people are today, — so ignorant of Bible things (though it might be, so religious), that the biggest part of the Bible had no meaning and no use for us. Every part we now find connected with the whole, and, by its means, we can obtain access to its whole breadths and heights of present meanings and future glories.

We take David for example this morning. He is before us in the reading — before us as a king firmly seated on his throne. We ask, how came he there?

Was he always king? No. Was he the son of a king? No. What was he? A shepherd boy, the member of a humble family. How came he then to wear a crown? Because of the visit of Samuel years before, to pick him out of his father's family, and anoint him for the throne. Who was Samuel? A prophet. What is a prophet? A man through whom God speaks. God? Yes. Who is God? The Eternal, the Creator, the upholder of all things. How do we know? Because He has manifested Himself in speech and action. He chose Abraham and made him a nation, and brought that nation from the servitude of Egypt by many wonderful works, that that nation might be to Him a witness and a monument and a name in all the generations of mankind (Isa. 43:10, 21; Jer. 13:11). With what purpose? That He might at last realise His object in creating the earth and man upon it. What is that? That the earth might be filled with His glory and peopled with an emancipated and rejoicing race.

If we ask more searching and earlier questions than these, we get our answer. If we ask how there came to be an afflicted race such as now occupies the earth? How came they to be in need of emancipation? The Bible fails not. It takes us away to the beginning of man upon earth. It is the only book that does. It gives us a clear and chaste line of genealogical descent right away back to the start. No other book upon earth does. Human accounts do to a comparatively short way back, and lose themselves in the cloudland of fable and guess. The Bible goes clean back to the start and shows us how God, having made man for His own glory (in which lies man's highest joy and well-being), man — Adam — the first man — deflected from that perfect line, and in the breaking of law, set aside the divine will and set up his own as the rule of action — the consequence of which was alienation and sentence of death, with much attendant evil on the road to the grave. Adam, the exiled, propagated himself, and filled the earth at last with a race in his own unhappy position. The race continues to this day, amid all the evils that result from man having to take care of himself instead of living under the open guidance and friendship of his Creator. But God purposes redemption; and His plan is laid in Abraham and his seed, Christ. Working out the plan, Abraham's descendants were nationally used, and in the picture of David before us, we have a stage in the work — an important stage.

There are several things connected with him that will yield comfort and instruction; for this is the object of the record, as Paul informs us (Rom. 15:4). In the scene exhibited in the chapter read, he is in prosperity and exaltation. It was not always so. As already said, he was once in a very lowly way of life — a rustic lad following the sheep; and God made choice of such an one to be captain over God's people. Accustomed to think of David as a crowned monarch and the founder of a long line of illustrious kings, it is not easy for us to realise his humble origin in its full force. If we suppose a mechanic or herd boy in our own age exalted to power, we will be enabled to understand the case of David — a man of no "birth" — having none of the

human prestige arising from rank, wealth, or pedigree — suddenly called to the highest position. The case is practically interesting to us in this way, that we are called by the gospel from the humblest classes of society to be heirs with Christ, the son of David, of the kingdom in Israel in the coming day of its universal dominion upon earth. Our neighbors laugh at the presumption of the idea. We would agree with them in thinking such an idea presumptuous — absurd — insane — any other hard name they might choose to use — if it rested in any degree on human opinion or conception. But it is God's own invitation — God's own promise; and the case of David is a historic illustration of the very feature of it which is now so much scouted: "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world — rich in faith — heirs of the Kingdom which he hath promised to them that love Him." "Rich in faith;" this is where David would present a great contrast to the mechanics and shepherds of our day. He was of a fervent mind and affection towards all things pertaining to the purpose and Law of God. He was a man of love, of faith, of obedience. In this, he was a "man after God's own heart." In this, he differed totally from most men of similar social position in our day. For this he was chosen. So it is now. Poverty is no recommendation to God if the poor one lacks the wealth of mind that can rejoice in the worship and fear of God, and in the hope of His covenanted goodness, and in all the service God has associated with these things. The poor must be "rich in faith" before they will be chosen for the Kingdom — a faith, too, that works by love; a faith that is not dead, but fruitful in every good word and work, according to the divine law of these things.

In the next feature of David's case, we may also learn something. Though called to the kingdom by the anointing oil of Samuel, he was not immediately elevated to it. He was put through a preliminary period of trouble — so dark and sore that often he despaired of the upshot: "I shall one day fall by the hand of Saul." We have been called by the gospel, but we are in trouble — often dark and sore. Are we tempted to despair? Remember David. The exaltation to which we are going on is for ever, therefore the trial is longer. It is no accident, it is of divine appointment, though it may appear all so human. Let us endure; there will be a bright opening to the darkness by-and-by. The trouble is good. It humbles us and proves us. It is easy to believe God in the light, will we trust Him in the darkness? This is the question which is settled to God's glory and our honor if we continue steadfast unto the end. Faith tried in this way will "be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Christ." It is truly a privilege to be tried. We do not always see it in present weakness. We shall see it when the process is finished, and when we stand accepted and comforted in the presence of Christ.

David came at last to great prosperity and power. What was his first

thought? Here again we get instruction, and perhaps reproof. David said to Nathan: "I dwell in an house of cedar, and the ark of God dwells in curtains" that is, "I am well provided, the things of God are not, I cannot be satisfied with this situation of things." "Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed. I will not give sleep to mine eyes nor slumber to mine eyelids until I find out a place for Yahweh — an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." (Psa. 132: 3-5). The instruction is this, that a man after God's own heart is not satisfied to enjoy personal prosperity without making the things of God an equal sharer, at least, in the prosperity. This we have to apply to ourselves. We have no such prosperity as David had; and we have no ark of God to provide with a splendid tent. But in measure, according to circumstances, every man of God will act out David's principle. If God has not an ark, He has a Bible, and a gospel, and a people and a work. With all these, the honor of His name is associated. And he is a wise man who attaining to great estate like David, is able to feel as David felt — unable to enjoy his own part until he had done bountifully for God's part. In the highest sense, God requires nothing from man, but it has pleased Him to have requirements upon earth; and to depend upon His people for their supply. David proposed to do what God could not sanction. He proposed to build a temple. In this scheme of prophetic analogies, God had reserved this work for David's son, and therefore He forbade David to proceed. But nevertheless the existence of the project in David's mind was pleasing to God. "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart." The "devising of liberal things" is always acceptable to God. We have here a possibility of reaching a high mark in His favor. It is much decried in our day. Spiritual enterprise is quenched by the children of the flesh under various specious pleas. Big ideas and small purses don't go well together. This is the sort of water-hose they turn on. But the fire kindled from the altar cannot be put out. "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart." What is in the heart will struggle even through a small purse sometimes. It is not the big purses and small ideas that do the work or give pleasure to God.

Out of David's voluntary scheme for honoring God came a result of recompense which was David's comfort to the day of his death, and in which we have a personal interest by the gospel. David referred to it in his "last words." "God hath made with me an everlasting covenant, which is all my salvation and all my desire." This covenant was communicated by the prophet who brought word from God that David was not to build the house. "Thou shalt not build Me an house: Yahweh will build thee an house... thy house and thy kingdom shall continue for ever before Me." "Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne." This covenant, though bearing on Solomon, had ultimate reference to Christ, as David's own last words show,

and as was plainly declared by Peter on the day of Pentecost. God had promised to Abraham the everlasting establishment of his seed as a great nation in the land of promise. God now opens to view in the covenant made with David the means by which the greater purpose is to be accomplished. The house of David is made the royal house of the nation; a son of David is to be Yahweh's anointed, by whom its whole work is to be done. And we, brethren, if our faith and obedience are such as to be well pleasing to Him, are this man's brethren and joint-heirs. In him, God had made with us "an everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David," as promised (Isa. 55:3); and we look forward to participating with him in the glory and honor and immortality of David's throne in the age he will introduce at his coming. It is a great future, and would be a presumptuous and an insane expectation if it did not rest upon God's own promise by Christ. It does so rest. "To him that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, will I grant to sit with me in my throne" (Rev. 3:21). The identity of his throne with David's is established beyond all doubt by the angel's words to Mary: "The Lord God shall give unto him (Jesus) the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:32). Consequently, we indulge no illusion, and foster no fanatical thought in looking forward to sharing with Christ, with David, with Abraham, the unutterable glories of the age of righteousness and life that will yet dawn upon the earth in virtue of the covenants made of God with the fathers. God has promised, and the Word of God cannot fail. It is all a question of conformity to the requirements with which the glory is conditionally associated. God had given us models to copy from, as well as precepts to obey. We have them in Christ, in David, and others. There will be a family likeness running through all the accepted. Differing in measure and degree, they will all be men of faith and obedience, and love and fervor — delighting in God more than in the works of God — in the Creator more than in the creature.

A final instruction of the chapter before us may be found in the act performed by David on receiving the covenant-message from God by Nathan. He went before the ark of the Lord, and offered thanks and prayer. We need this lesson. Performing "devotions" and "saying" prayers has become such a rank abomination in our age — matter of dead formalism and hideous superstition — that we are liable, by reaction, to be carried into the opposite extreme, and to become prayerless and heartless men, and, therefore, such as God cannot regard with any satisfaction. Of this, we must beware. Prayer is the most ennobling and the most beautiful act of high reason in the universe, notwithstanding the abominations with which it has become associated. It is the expression of fully developed and instructed intellect.



## Daniel at Prayer

*Daniel and Babylon both realities — one old man beloved among millions doomed — all gone, but Daniel will live again — Jewish history God's work — God's Word read and believed — Daniel prays, an Angel answers! God's purpose will prevail — alone like Daniel now — redemption will soon come.*

THE friends of God are few and feeble in our day and generation. We must not be discouraged at this. In the purpose of God, His children will yet be a multitude that no man can number; but in the process of their preparation during all the ages that have elapsed since Adam went forth in sorrow out of Eden, it has seemed good to the wisdom of God to get only a few ready at a time, and to have the children of folly in the preponderant majority all the time — and that while His few children are in affliction, the numerous wicked should prosper. The depressing nature of such a situation is part of the trouble by which the children of God are developed and tried. Are we liable to be too much depressed by it sometimes? Let us exercise our reason, and we shall be strengthened.

There are many things upon which reason may act with this effect. Let us choose this morning the one that is before us. We have Daniel at Babylon. Both Daniel and Babylon are realities to us, in spite of the sneer which the name of one or the other excites. For ages, Daniel has been a reality under Christ's recognition both of him and of the Scriptures of which he forms a part; and it has pleased God in recent times to make Babylon a reality also by the excavations of Layard and others on the banks of the Euphrates. Babylon has been brought to London in a very tangible form. In the relics and remains deposited in the British Museum, we are enabled to see with our very eyes the historic reality of a city whose existence was questioned by the sceptics of the last century. By the inscribed burnt clay tablet archives of the public offices of Babylon, we become almost spectators of the life of the city. By Nebuchadnezzar's own name-stamped bricks, that monarch is brought as it were into our presence.

When Daniel was there, Babylon was in her glory. It is advantageous to get a glimpse of that glory, in order to learn rightly the lesson of Daniel's case. We get a glimpse of it in the description of Herodotus who visited it, whose description is confirmed by the accounts of the writers who were with Cyrus, and by those of others who afterwards accompanied Alexander the Great in his conquest of the city. The few allusions to Babylon in the Scriptures are in harmony with the statements of these writers. Babylon was great architecturally as no city has ever been since. It covered an area of something like 400 square miles. It was surrounded by a wall about 300 feet high and 40 or 50 feet broad. The wall was surmounted by towers and pierced by gates at regular distances.

## SEASONS OF COMFORT

Its interior was laid out in streets of great breadth and regularity — the houses well-built but not close to one another — leaving ground enough between for a year's tillage. The Euphrates went through the city, and was lined with magnificent wharves on each side.

The population was immense, and comprised people from every country, for Babylon had been the conqueror of all kingdoms, and was the centre of all traffic and the headquarters of everything honorable and important in the earth. Behold the picture, then, of this wealthy, populous and powerful city; and consider Daniel — one old man in the midst of this busy mass of human life. How did God look upon one and upon the other? We know, for He has told us.

Of Babylon he saith, "I am against thee, O thou most proud... Thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge have perverted thee and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and there is none beside me. Therefore shall evil come upon thee... Desolation shall come upon thee suddenly... Babylon shall become heaps, a dwelling place for dragons, an astonishment and a hissing without inhabitant" (Jer. 50:31; Isa. 47:10; Jer. 51:37).

To Daniel he said, "O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee... thou shalt stand in thy lot at the end of the days" (Dan. 10:19; 12:13).

Here, then, Babylon with its busy thriving population was nothing in the divine estimation, while Daniel was "greatly beloved." Here is a study for us which we may find to yield lessons of comfort in our own situation when human glory spreads and vaunts itself so much, and nothing is so contemned as the hope which God has given us concerning Israel.

Why was this old man beloved while the stirring, important inhabitants of Babylon were of no account? This also we may know quite plainly; for we are told: "From the first day that thou (Daniel) did'st set thine heart to understand and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard" (Dan. 10:12). Could we have been in Babylon, we should have found Daniel as much an exception in this as those of a similar disposition are in the European or American towns today. We should have found all the people engrossed as they are today with the matters of the passing moment. We should have found that nothing seemed so worthless in their eyes as any attempt to "set ourselves to understand" or to "chasten our hearts before God." We can see that lesson plainly enough. Where is the glory of Babylon and her people now? "Hell (the grave) hath opened her mouth, and their glory and their honor have descended into it. They sleep a perpetual sleep, not to wake" (Jer. 51:39). They are as much passed, perished and forgotten as the great creatures that once crashed through primeval forests, whose bones are occasionally found at a great depth. But Daniel is "written on high." To God, he lives, though dead. The moment is near for him to awake from that "sleep in the dust of the earth" in which he has been sweetly at rest for

centuries; and from which he will emerge to take effectual part in earth's public affairs.

We look at Daniel again as he appears in the chapter before us (ch. 9). We want a full view, because it is the picture of a man greatly beloved. We find him in prayer. But we must note the occasion and the theme of his prayer. They have nothing in common with the loud prayer-sayings and shoutings of modern pulpitism. They are both related to matters as greatly in contempt with the theologies of our day as they were with the Babylonians of Daniel. Why did Daniel "set his face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes?" He tells us (v. 2): "I understood by books the number of the years whereof the Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet — that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolation of Jerusalem." The end of those years had come, and, therefore, Daniel prays for the end of the desolations. But why should he be anxious for the end of the desolations? Why should he, like the apostles after him, be so earnestly asking "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6)?

This opens up a history which Daniel himself glances at in his prayer; which is often rehearsed and alluded to throughout the Scriptures; which is very dear to all who "set themselves to understand" the work of God, like Daniel, and apart from which it is impossible to comprehend the drift of human life upon the earth. It is a history that goes back to the choice of Abraham, the increase of his posterity to a nation, their deliverance from Egypt and settlement in the Holy Land, and God's dealings with them while living there for a thousand years. It is the history of the work of God upon the earth — a work not broken off though apparently interrupted — a work of which the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ is a continuance, and which only reaches its completion when Christ returns again to the earth, and establishes the name of God among men in power and great glory. From this work (a work among men and on the earth), immortal-soulism turns away the eyes of all people. Religious enthusiasm, originating in this corrupt spring, turns with disgust from the hope of Israel; while as to the irreligious, their affections are too much on earthly things to allow of their having any sympathy with the principles and objects of God's dealings with the race of Israel. The Daniels stand aside from both, they are deeply concerned in the whole story which still works itself out before their eyes. They see in it the supremest ends of life involved: the ultimate supremacy of God, the ultimate well-being of man in the highest form.

Daniel had had a taste of what it was to have a kingdom founded on divine principles and conducted with divine objects. He was a member of the royal family of Jerusalem. He lived the first part of his life in Judah during the reign of Josiah and Jehoiakim, and, in the reign of the latter, was brought away captive from the Lord's land and taken to Babylon to ornament a pagan

monarch's court. As a student of Jeremiah the prophet, he was aware that a limit had been fixed for the captivity at Babylon, and while living a stranger among the heathen, he looked forward with hope to the end of seventy years as the time when Jerusalem would be recovered from her ruins, and the Jews would return to occupy again the Lord's land, from which they had been expelled because of their insubordination to the law that God had given them. How much this involved to his imagination it is not easy for us to realise. We look back upon the restoration from Babylon as upon a naked and meagre transaction that could not have excited any man's ardor. But had we been living in Daniel's time, we should have felt, as he probably did (in the absence of any knowledge of times and seasons) that the end of the seventy years might be the end of all trouble, and the beginning of the establishment of Jerusalem as head of all the earth, so gloriously foretold throughout Isaiah, with whose writings Daniel would be as intimately acquainted as with Jeremiah. With such an expectation we should have felt all his interest and shared all his desire; for what would such a consummation have meant, but the attainment of every desirable condition for the earth and man upon it? — the blessing of all the families of the earth in Abraham as promised? — in fact, the setting up of the Kingdom of God, which yet remains the hope of mankind (though they know it not) — the divinely promised and provided remedy of which they are ignorant.

Is it a wonder that Daniel, with such views, should "set his face unto the Lord God" in prayer and supplications at the end of the seventy years? His prayer is given in extension. He confesses Israel's sins for many generations. He acknowledges the justice of the evil that had befallen them, as Moses had threatened. Yet he appeals to the "great mercies" of God, who had "brought his people out of the land of Egypt," and who had thereby established a great name for Himself in the earth, to "turn away His anger from Jerusalem," and for His own name's sake to forgive their sins, and to cause His face to shine upon his desolate sanctuary. The answer was swift and, in a sense, effectual. While he was yet speaking, Gabriel appeared to him, and informed him that at the beginning of Daniel's supplication, the commandment came forth from God to him (Gabriel) to repair to Daniel, and impart to him understanding of God's purpose in the matters he was asking about. The information brought by Gabriel was not of a kind to gratify Daniel. Daniel had asked for Israel's forgiveness with a view to an immediate and final return of God's favor to them. The information was that God had marked off a period for the finishing of transgression — "that seventy weeks," or 490 years, would elapse from the pending re-building of Jerusalem before that work should be done — that it would be done by the appearance and cutting off of the anointed (the Messiah or Christ), who should bring in everlasting righteousness by what he should do; after which, the city and sanctuary should again be destroyed, and desolation should set in a second time, and should prevail for an indefinite

time, reaching to "the consummation" when the judgment determined should be poured upon the desolator.

The prospect of a renewal of affliction was depressing to Daniel to a degree that made him ill — which shows the intensity of his affection for the things concerned, for a man is not affected in his appetite by the postponement of prospects in which he has only a mild interest. The reflection suggested for our own comfort is this: here in the midst of great and busy Babylon, the man whom God favored was a man who was deeply interested in the affairs of Jerusalem, which were of no moment to the crowds of people moving around him. He was the only man out of millions whose views were wisely formed and placed — barring such as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Are there no Babylons today? Are there no Daniels today? Are there not those who pray for the peace of Jerusalem in the midst of heedless communities of Gentiles? Who love her as David and Daniel loved her, though surrounded by the things dear to natural men? Whose hopes and hearts rise and fall with the waxing and waning signs of the Lord's returning favor? Our presence here this morning is an answer to these questions. We know in whom we have believed. It is not for the sake of the stones of which Jerusalem is built; it is not because of the geography of the land once the land of the Canaanites; it is not on account of the qualities of the stiff-necked race of Israel's sons, who "Roam the scorning world around;" it is not for any of these things that we feel our hearts glow with inexpressible anticipation when we turn our eyes to the desolations of Jerusalem. It is that God himself has a purpose which He has disclosed, and that He has authenticated this purpose in an extensive and tangible manner by His wonderful works with Israel. His resurrection of Christ, His apostolic invitation to the world, the existence, preservation and circulation of His Bible in the lands of the Gentiles, and the wonderful fulfilment of His prophetic Word. Our confidence in the purpose is the confidence of reason that cannot be overthrown. It is a confidence that will be justified by the realization of all that we are looking for. The life of all men will end; the mightiest empire will pass away; the loftiest edifice of human power will crumble to the dust. But the purpose of God lives for ever. It cannot die. It depends not on human help or human memory. It will stand in quiet strength if a hundred great Babylons laugh to scorn the hopes that are built on it. It will be accomplished if not a single human heart believed it. Christ will come, though the fourteen hundred millions of earth's population should join in one voice to deny him. Jerusalem will rise from her ruins if every man should shout himself hoarse in opposing it. The Kingdom of God will come though all the kingdoms of the world unite, as they will, in war to prevent it. Christ will reign at the appointed time, though there should not be a man in this generation to bid him welcome at his arrival. Looking at Daniel's lonely watch at Babylon, we gain strength. We claim him, not only as a brother in affliction but as a companion in hope. We are looking for the same things — he in the far east,

we in the west. We have to rejoice that the night is nearly past, and are lifting up our heads in hope at the numerous tokens of the latter-day foreshown to him, but which he could not understand, as he said. Are we alone? So was he. Are we surrounded by multitudes who have no interest in the hope of Israel? So was he. Are we strangers in a strange land, feeling often weary in spirit, sighing and crying for the prevalent abominations within and without; and thirsting, — aye, fiercely thirsting in a land where there is no water? Such also was the experience of Daniel to whom the visions were shown. Let us not think that “some strange thing hath happened unto us.” It is an old, old story. The children of God are in all ages one in experience as well as in hope. In moments of comfort and privilege, we are liable to forget this, and to think that by some arrangement we ought to be able always to dwell in pastures green. No man can redeem the present life from the vanity that is fundamental to it. Redemption draweth nigh, but will not be here till it comes. We please God and prepare ourselves by waiting patiently for it. Its clear light shines with electric brilliance at the end of the prophetic programme of the night imparted to Daniel. “At that time thy people shall be delivered.” At that time, “many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” At that time, “they that be wise shall shine as the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.” That time is nigh, even at the door. For that time, let us patiently, faithfully, dutifully wait. Let us not cast away our confidence which hath great recompense of reward.

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## Applying Our Hearts Unto Wisdom

*Possibility of assembling “for the worse” — Christ may come sooner than we think — present life a bubble — Creation proves a God — His Word reveals His purpose for our guidance — History His work, our warning.*

**W**E have been reminded that our meeting this morning is a matter of command. It is well it is so. If it were left to inclination, we would often be absent when we are present. It is good to be present. It is better than we would think if we were merely left to theorise about it. We would be liable to imagine, as some people do imagine, that, knowing the Truth, it is all one whether we stay at home or come to the meeting. It is not all one. God who commanded this meeting knows us better than we do ourselves. He commanded it because He knows us. “It is not good for man to be alone.” He requires rousing up by social contact. He will go to rust if left to himself all the time. The Truth will lose its power over us if we forsake the assembly of ourselves together as the manner of some is.

Let us see, however, that we come together for the better and not for the worse. The brethren at Corinth, according to what Paul says came together for the worse. If they did this with the very gifts of the Spirit in their midst, how possible it is that we may do so if we are not on our guard. The mode of conducting the meeting and the topics chosen for the theme of exhortation, have much to do with this. If there is no recognized order of procedure, or if there is want of punctuality in the hour of attendance, or if matters of debate or matters of a merely business or local character are introduced, there will be a great danger of failing in the object of coming together. That object is edification — a building up of the mind in the confidence and comfort of the Truth. This is done by having the things of the Truth passed before us in such a way that the mind is able to lay hold of them with clearness and joy. Reading, prayer, singing, exhortation — all have this effect if rightly attended to. Foolish and unlearned questions avoid, and all strife exclude. Let the Word of Christ be ministered in its richness. If there is no brother present capable of speaking to the edification of those who hear — a man may be able to speak and not able to edify, a man may speak to his own edification and not to that of others, the hearers are the judges — if no such brother is present, then let an absent brother do it. I have heard of spiritually encouraging letters from correspondents being read with advantage in such a case. Others have read extracts from Dr. Thomas' writings. Some read an address from Seasons of Comfort. Some object to this who would not object to Dr. Thomas or other writers speaking if present. It is an objection without reasonable ground. Doubtless, it is best when the presence of brethren able to edify the rest renders all resort to such aids unnecessary, but where there are no such brethren, good sense and an ardent appreciation of spiritual things will sanction them.

Then we have been reminded that we are waiting for the Lord's return. There is an aspect of this which grows more and more powerful with my mind the longer I live. It is perhaps a little difficult to express. It is this — that we are nearer to the Lord's coming than we may be in the habit of thinking. We think of the Lord's coming in connection with the signs of the times — which is right, because the Lord's coming is connected with signs, and the signs are visible: but these signs take longer to unfold than we expect in our first fresh ardor; and there is apt to creep over the mind a sort of feeling that many things may yet divide us from the coming of the Lord. We look back to the destruction of Jerusalem, and to the long-drawn, weary, complicated programme of events that has filled up the time since. And we are liable to look forward to the future with a sense of the ages that are behind us, as if the future acted on the past as a mirror acts on what is behind a person as he walks towards it. Now, there is in all this a good deal of what we might call spontaneous fallacy or self-deception. The fact is — and we do wisely to familiarize our minds with the fact — that the interval that yet lies between

us and the Lord's coming may have no existence for us, or at all events a very brief existence indeed. Death will destroy that interval for us as effectually as if the angel of the Lord appeared to us suddenly in the midst of our occupations to tell us the Lord had come. We may assent to this without feeling its full force. There is great power in it when realised. We miss the power of it through thinking that death will be a long time in coming to us. It may, but it may not. We presume on the average of human life, but that average may not be ours. A comparatively young brother (only 27) died over a week ago, who had every prospect within four days of his death that he would have a long and healthy career. A little internal trouble, that might occur to any of us, and of which within five minutes of his death he thought he was getting better, suddenly ended his useful days — for he was very useful in the little ecclesia of which he was a member. What has happened to him might happen to any of us; and it would mean that in a moment we would be wafted away from the midst of our mortal cares and occupations into the presence of the solemn, though glorious realities that are associated with Christ at his coming. It would seem to us a momentary, an instantaneous transition. Of course, it would not be really so in relation to the progress of events in the universe, but it would be really so in relation to our own feelings, which in this sense are everything to each of us. We will be out of the grave before ever we are aware that we have gone in. In this case, the signs of the times and the weary evolution, it may be, of our own anxious lives, will be stopped and abolished in a moment.

Is it not wise and helpful to carry about with us a sense of this imminent possibility? The power of the idea will be instinctively felt by every one, and its value also as a corrective of life in all its relations. We can imagine, for example, how powerfully up-borne in a spiritual direction our deceased young brother would have felt during the month before his death if he had known that in four weeks, his course would be finished.

The advantage of exercising our thoughts in this way lies in the similar stimulus it will impart to us if we realise that we may but a short time have to do with the circumstances of life as it now is, and may in a brief period of time stand face to face with the Lord Jesus who was alive ages before we were born, and will live for ever, whatever may become of us. If men could carry this thought of common sense more constantly and vividly about with them than is commonly the case, things would be different with them on many points. Many things would receive a less anxious attention, and some things would be better attended to than they are.

This line of reflection is but the expansion of the thought expressed in the 39th and 90th Psalms — "Lord make me to know mine end and the measure of my days, what it is, that I may know how frail I am. Behold Thou hast made my days as an handbreadth, and mine age is as nothing before Thee... So teach us to number our days THAT WE MAY APPLY OUR HEARTS UNTO



WISDOM." This measuring of our days — this endeavoring to withstand the deceptive impressions of sense and to penetrate through all the appearances and the feelings of life to the naked fact that we are all the time on the brink of existence, as it were, and may at any moment disappear from the land of the living and the realm of being, as completely as the collapsing bubble on the water, is certainly calculated to lead us to "apply our hearts unto wisdom." The people around us are busy applying their hearts — but not to wisdom. They apply them to everything but this. Wisdom is with them either a matter of aversion or a matter of scorn. We are liable to be carried away with the prevailing taste. It is a broad stream on which the world is drifting to destruction. We are here to resist the flood so far as we are concerned. We come to the Table of the Lord to apply our hearts to wisdom. We do so in recalling the meanings and associations of "the bread which we break," and "the wine which we bless." We do so in the reading of the Oracles of God. They are a continual call of wisdom to us. They are God's written voice, by which alone we have access in our day to His mind. There is no truth less appreciated by the mass of mankind than this. There is none in such danger of disappearing from the practical recognitions of the educated. We have recently had to insist on it with a special emphasis. We cling to it as to a life-buoy in the surging waters.

In the whole of the Scriptures — in every part in Genesis as in the Prophets — in the Psalms as in the Apocalypse — we are in contact with the authorised expression of the mind of God in some phase or other. Consequently, as we listen, whatever part is being read, we are "applying our hearts" to that wisdom which purifies the present, gives stability and comfort to the remainder of our mortal days, few or many; and enriches for us the future with an exhaustless inheritance of well-being and joy.

What do we learn as we listen? That the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. We may think this trite and even questionable. Increasing age in the truth will show us the truth and depth of the saying. We cannot fear (in the sense of revere), where we do not know. Hence, to know God is the first thing; as Jesus says, "This is eternal life, that they might know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." We can only know by acquaintance, and we can only make acquaintance in this matter in the Scriptures. We have read this morning that "The fool hath said in his heart — There is no God." A man must be a fool to say this, and many say it in their hearts who do not say it openly. It is contrary to the most obvious considerations of reason. A man has only to look round and note the myriad indications of contrivance in things small and things great to feel an intuitive certainty that there is somewhere an intelligence as much above man's as the works of nature are above the works of art. And then when he reflects upon the fact (evidenced by the many things in heaven and earth) that the universe has not always existed, he is taken away back to the beginning, however

remote, and made to feel that that which then was (by whatever name called) must have possessed the power and wisdom to elaborate the material creation we now see. Human thought calls it "force" without allowing the wisdom and the power. The Bible exhibition of this beginning is the only one that meets the demands of reason. "In the beginning — God;" this accounts for all. It gives us the wisdom and the power equal to the production of what is. "In the beginning — force," this accounts for nothing; it neither accounts for the work of creation when it began nor for the previous quiescence of the cosmic energy. If God is mysterious, force is not less so—a little more so in fact when considered as a something that slept for eternal ages and then without any reason, suddenly woke up and started building up worlds at "the beginning." Let reason rule, and God will be joyfully perceived and received as the everlasting foundation of all things. Only the man in whom reason is weak or warped, or unenlightened, will say "there is no God;" and the Bible gives us the right name for a man with reason in such a condition.

Wherever we look in upon the matters contained in the Bible, we find the work of God in progress in some form or other, and all one work — not disjointed acts having no connection one with another, but things and acts that form part of a connected plan reaching from the beginning of things upon the earth to the second appearing of Christ in power and great glory. Let us note the illustration of this point our readings today have afforded — Exodus, the Psalms, Romans.

In Exodus, it is Israel in Egypt, and Moses born. Here is the beginning of things in relation to revelation on the earth. The form of that revelation Paul defines in Heb. 1:1, when he says that "God, at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets." Here in Exodus we have the commencement of the process. In this early generation of Israel, we recognise "the fathers," and in Moses, we have the greatest of all "the prophets," and in the things about to be transacted, we have the most palpable and impressive of all the "speakings" that God performed by the one to the other. The foundation was then laid for the things that came after and which culminated in the appearance and crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. The things spoken of were connected with all that we read of afterwards, down to the closing prayer in John's "Revelations." "Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly." They all pertain to Israel and the God of Israel. They are all beautiful and righteous and full of hope. Rightly estimated, they are the only interesting and truly important things upon earth. All human things apart from these are transient as a flower and worthless as the tinsel on the toys of children. The purpose that God has purposed in connection with Israel has in it the root of every good the heart can desire. God is in that purpose and that work all the way through, and God is everlasting, and from Him will come that perfect adjustment of human life in all its relations which is essential to the realization of the end and aim for which the planet was made. It is an uninformed state

of mind that sees nothing but narrowness and sterility and obsolescence in the Jews and their literature. The Jews themselves are certainly an uninviting theme, but it is very different with their history as regards hope for the future and comfort for the present. The Bible does not ask us to look at the Jews for what they are in themselves. At every stage, it paints them as we find them. It asks us to look at the God of the Jews, who has chosen them for His own end and who says in reference to their restoration, "Not for your sakes do I this, O house of Israel. Be it known unto you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own evil way." Acquaintance with the Bible enables us to look at the subject as the Bible asks us to look at it, and thus we steer clear of the stumbling-blocks encountered by those who look at it from the outside, who see only the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of a perverse and ignoble race, and who miss the glory to be seen by those who go inside of the subject and see it from the standpoint of God's own purpose of goodness.

In our reading from the Psalms (53-55) we are not with a different affair though it might seem so. We are only at another stage of the same thing. We are with Israel seated in the Holy Land about 500 years after Moses led them out of Egypt. We are with David enthroned as their king, and writing by the Spirit of God upon him. His theme is related to the purpose of God with Israel. He laments the obtuseness of the common run of people with regard to God, and the consequent prevalence of violence and darkness. He longs for what God has purposed with Israel. "Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!" He prays that meanwhile he may be shielded from the machinations of ungodly men who are bent upon his destruction. He groans with pain of heart, and confesses that fear and horror have invaded his soul, by reason of the activity and success of men of enmity who have no fear of God before their eyes. In all this, he outlines a mental condition that answers exactly to what is experienced by men in every age, who believe in the God of Israel and have made His Word their portion. It is all within the compass of the ground marked out and all built on the foundation laid at the beginning, when God openly interfered to bring Israel out of Egypt by Moses.

And we are on new and strange ground in Romans chs. 7 and 8? By no means. It is the same work and the same theme a thousand years later than David. The writer is a Jew — a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He is writing to believers in the hope of Israel at Rome. How comes he to be doing so? Because Christ had called him. Who was Christ? The son promised to David: begotten by the Spirit of God of David's seed. The promise had long been on record. It had but recently been fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, who, at the age of thirty, had presented himself to Israel as the son of God and the heir to David's throne, and having incurred the enmity of the ruling classes, had been put to death, as pre-arranged in the wisdom of God for the accomplishment of a purpose not contemplated by them — the taking away of sin, and the establishment of a basis of reconciliation with God through Christ. This Jesus, in three days raised

from the dead, and in forty days more exalted to the God of Israel's right hand — was now preached by the apostles (to whom Paul, a persecutor, had been added in a special manner). He was preached as "the way" to forgiveness, and hope and life, the only name given under heaven for the salvation of men. Paul, in the chapters read, is writing to those who had received Jesus so preached by him — writing to establish them in the faith of Christ, and to enlighten them on many deep matters connected with it, with a view to their preparation for that final attainment of "glory, honor, and immortality," which he told them was the end of his work with them in Christ.

He tells them in chapter 9, that the heedlessness and unbelief of the vast mass of Israel will not interfere with God's purpose with them — that the Word of God could not fail in its effect, and that the oppositions of the unbelieving class were only a part of the process by which the intended result would ultimately be reached; just as Pharaoh's opposition to Moses and Aaron was a part of the instrumentality by which the power of God was shown. All this he sets forth for the comfort of those who are called according to His purpose. All things, he says, work together for their good. Their very afflictions befall them as a means of preparation for the glorious use that God purposes with them in the glorious ages to come. He asks, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" and declares that nothing created in heaven or earth, and nothing that can happen in the form of the direst disaster can "separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord", the Son of Abraham, the son of David, the son of God.

In all this, you perceive, we are in the current of things started in the beginning with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is one purpose, one work, one hope from the beginning. Our wisdom is to hold close and fast to it, giving ourselves daily to the reading of the word and to prayer, and addicting ourselves to those varied services which, though bootless in the eyes of men, the Scriptures assure us precious in the eyes of God, and will at last be acknowledged and rewarded by Him in circumstances of great honor and joy everlasting.

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## The Psalms and Praise to God

*All things in nature testify to God's greatness and goodness — His future blessings greater — altogether worthy of unlimited praise — His mercy relates us to a glorious future — praise Him.*

SOME time ago, a brother remarked in his exhortation that he would be sorry when we had got through the reading of the Psalms — not, he said, that other parts of the Bible were not equally, and, in some cases, more instructive in the ways of God, but there was a beauty and a comfort

about the Psalms all their own. Every appreciative reader of the Scriptures will share this sentiment. The beauty of the Psalms requires a predisposed state of mind to see it. You could not prove it any more than you could prove the beauty of a Greek statue. But you can see and feel it, if your heart is in tune with the key-note that governs them all — God. This is the note that spoils their music throughout for some people. To those in David's mind, who thirsted for God as the panting hart for the waterbrooks, it is their light, and joy, and beauty. You feel when you have read them, that you have been, like Moses, with the glory on the mount, causing the skin of the face to shine.

The Psalm we have read today (107) is peculiar among the Psalms in being divided into equal sections by a recurring refrain, which would probably be sung in the temple in connection with the recitation of that Psalm by the priests. The refrain is this: 'O that men would praise Yahweh for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men.' Let us consider this, and extract from it what belongs to us as those who have been called out of darkness for this very purpose. It refers to the themes rehearsed in the intervals of the refrain. These themes cover a great variety of topics. Israel's deliverance from Egypt is, of course, very prominent; but there are other things. They range, as the Psalms in their entirety do, from the individual experiences of divine goodness in little things to the incomprehensible achievements of divine power and wisdom in the boundless field of nature. Concerning all of them, the intense desire is expressed that men would open their eyes to the discernment of the greatness, and their mouths in praise of the goodness to which there is no weariness or end. Is not this rooted in the deepest reason? Men do praise things. It is going on every day. They praise beautiful workmanship, they praise disinterested actions; they praise noble deeds. They praise many smaller things and some larger. It is better they should praise small things than praise nothing. A man who has no praise for anything but his own things, who has no commendation for anything but himself, is an abortion of a man. He lacks the noblest side of man. Better that a man should be enthusiastic about dogs or birds' eggs than enthusiastic about nothing. But among all the praise that is going on, who thinks of praising God in the sincere manner in which they praise a public singer or a public man? It does not occur to them. One here and there may be found with a mind open and a heart fervent in this direction like David; but to the mass of mankind it is foreign, a lifeless idea — a thing of "cant." Yet consider how reasonable it is, and how unreasonable by comparison is the praise of anything else. Why should a picture be praised? It is a lifeless thing. Why should a man of talent be praised? He did not create his talent. A certain kind of praise is doubtless appropriate, the expression of admiration is natural; and that God intended its use in measure is shown by the constitution he has given to the human brain, which in one of its faculties yearns to bestow it, and, in another, has pleasure in receiving it. But we are considering the matter in the bearing

suggested by the Psalm. If praise is legitimate towards men and things, how much more called for towards God. This is the argument of the Psalm. Weigh it, and see how powerful it is. Look around. Man made nothing. He is himself a made thing and frail at that. He is a flower, as the Scriptures declare, that cometh forth and is cut down — a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanisheth away. But some great Maker is somewhere; for here is a vast universe, full of the contrivances of a perfect wisdom in things great and small. It is enlarging to the mind to study these things — the organisation of invisible animalculae, the structure of vegetation, the mechanism of a thousand living things, and the balanced majestic movements of the starry universe over our heads. They bear the impress of a Master Workman — an adjusting, purposeful, contriving Workman; as the Duke of Argyle triumphantly shows in his work on “The Reign of Law,” and “The Unity of Nature,” in answer to Darwin, Spencer, Wallace and others. The Psalms invite us to study these things, “the works of His hands,” and to join in the exclamation of over-powered and astonished admiration: “O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all. The earth is full of Thy riches.” “Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.”

Here we find scope for unstinted and rational and ennobling and rejoicing praise. We contemplate the Eternal Father, who is ONE and everywhere present by His limitless and subtle Spirit. We recognise with joy and satisfaction His invisible and universal energy as the source of the latent wisdom and power we see expressed in the visible universe; and the Psalms give us suitable utterance to the otherwise inexpressible feelings that swell the enlightened heart. We praise, we magnify, we exult in the fathomless ocean of power and wisdom in which we live and move and have our being.

God’s revelation of Himself by Moses and the prophets, Jesus and the apostles, enables us to do this to some purpose. Apart from this, we should not know that praise from feeble mortals could be acceptable to “the High and Lofty One inhabiting eternity;” nor could we be aware that He had any purpose with us beyond the fleeting life we now live for threescore years and ten. We could not be sure that we were justified in hoping for any further goodness than we experience in this mortal state. But in the light of what He has said, and caused to be written for our instruction, during those sundry times and divers manners in which in time past He spoke to the fathers by the prophets and lastly by His Son whom He hath constituted the heir of all things, the case stands very differently. We have learnt that He delights in the worship of those who are of a humble and earnest, and enlightened and obedient mind towards Himself; that to such He looks with complacency, and guides their ways, even when He seems not to do so in the darkness; and that He has a purpose of kindness towards them in Christ, according to the counsel of His own will — a purpose for which He is now preparing them, and which He will accomplish towards them in those “ages to come” when

He will banish all evil from the earth, and confer upon them the glory of an immortality that will render them the everlasting inhabitants of a finished and beautiful earth.

With such an apprehension of the bearing of things, we can give wings to our praise, and soar with David in all the lofty flights in which by the Spirit he was able to indulge. Do we weary and fail by reason of this weakness which belongs to mortal nature? We have reason notwithstanding to refuse to be discouraged. The goodness of God enables us to lean on His indulgence with regard to such incapacities; they belong to those "things that we would not but which we do" to which Paul makes more than regretful allusion in Rom. 7:15-20, and for which he comfortingly argues we are not responsible. The 103rd Psalm is very specific on this point. It first exhibits the benevolence of God's character: "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy." What a pillow of rest there is in this declaration, especially when considered in the light of the express historic illustration it receives in the record of God's dealings with Israel: "They kept not the covenant of God and refused to walk in His law, and forgot His works and His wonders that He had showed them... Therefore their days did He consume in vanity and their years in trouble... Then they sought Him and they returned and enquired early after God... And He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity and destroyed them not. Yea, many a time turned He His anger away and did not stir up all His wrath. For He remembered they were but flesh: a wind that passeth away and cometh not again" (Psa. 78:10-39). There is nothing more constraining in the direction of obedience, holiness, and comfort than this view of God's patient kindness. The heart has but to open to its reception to feel its great purifying power. When it has free course, it enables us to join heartily in the opening oburgation of the 103rd Psalm: "Bless Yahweh, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless Yahweh, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies: who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's."

What good thing is absent from this list of benefactions? If the comfort could be made greater, it is when it goes on to speak of the bearing of this goodness on our manifold imperfections, shortcomings and sins. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy towards them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame. He remembereth that we are dust."

We have therefore every cause to be of good cheer as the apostolic writings

exhort — always presupposing one thing which even these comforting psalms do not forget to state: that we fear God with an earnest and intelligent fear and wait diligently upon Him in the observance of what He requires at our hands. There is a danger of presuming on mercy that will not be ours. God is not the God of the universalist or the unitarian or the mere philanthropist. “God is love,” but “our God is also a consuming fire;” and how these two attributes mix and work together we learned from the Scriptures and the Scriptures alone. We should make a mistake if we were to apply all the consolations we have been looking at to such as are regardless or forgetful of God, or to those who are negligent of His commandments. God is good and forgiving, but it is on conditions, and the conditions are expressed in the very psalm that tells us so unctuously of His mercy. “The mercy of Yahweh is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him... *to such as keep His covenant and to those who remember His commandments to do them.*” This is where our meetings and our readings of the Word are so valuable — so indispensable to us. They keep us associated with the covenant of God, and they keep His commandments in our living memory, and thus keep His mercy always active towards us in the forgiveness of our many shortcomings, and will finally give its glorious effect in our absolute deliverance from all evil.

“Oh, that men would praise Yahweh for His goodness.” “It is,” as another psalm has it — “a good thing to give thanks unto Yahweh, and to sing praises unto Thy name, O Most High;” and yet another, “It is good to sing praises unto our God: it is pleasant: praise is comely.” It is, indeed, beautiful, pleasant and comely. Human nature never appears in so lovely an aspect as when moved by the unaffected sentiment of adoration. We see little of it in this sterile age, because “the world lieth in wickedness.” When we do see it, it is as one of the flowers of heaven springing in the desert. The desert in this sense shall yet blossom as the rose: and “the earth shall be full of His praise.” For this, by the power of the gospel, we patiently wait in hope, able to endure the present desolation by the certainty of God’s purpose in this matter: “As truly as I live, the whole earth shall be filled with My glory.” If it is pleasant to see, how glorious to feel. We are susceptible of a great variety of kinds of feeling. Some yield satisfaction, and some the reverse: but none can exceed the pure gratification of the sense of admiration, excited by whatsoever. The degree of it is of course proportioned to the object that calls it forth. There are small admirations and large ones. What can compare with the admiration excited by God when we get a full view? — holding in Himself all power and wisdom — absolute, underived, eternal; and being in Himself an inexhaustible fountain of goodness, light, beauty, strength, and joy; and embracing by Himself all worlds, all phenomena, all space; without whose cognizance nothing can occur in heaven or earth, “of Whom and through Whom and to Whom are all things.”

Praise is beggared and baffled. He is “exalted far above all blessing and praise.” Reverence, silent, deep, profound, seems the only seemly part for



mortals, as saith the Scripture, "Let all the earth keep silence before Him." We may be glad that it pleases Him to be worshipped. This worship is a great privilege. The pureness of reason and the sweetness of emotion unite in a transporting thrill. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory." We are but dust, animate for a few years by permission. We have no claim to honor except such as God may confer. "Give unto Yahweh the glory due unto His name." To Him it is "due." He doeth whatsoever pleaseth Him in heaven and in earth. There is not an excellence in nature, there is not a faculty among animals, there is not a power in man, there is not a grace in angels, but what is rooted in Him. They are all but the flowering of His invisible energy by the contrivance of His exquisite wisdom in the effectual working of His unfailing power. Praise to Him is reasonable and glorious. Man was made to praise Him, but man has failed in this object of his existence. "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any that did understand that did seek God." What is the result of His inspection? "They are all gone back. They are together become filthy. There is none that doeth good, no not one."

Will God's purpose with man fail then? Oh no. He will yet fill the earth with His glory. This is the earliest pledge of His goodness. He is preparing the way for it in all He has been doing upon earth for ages past. He is preparing the material for the work even now. We are in the channel of this preparatory operation. God was in Christ when — 1850 years ago, he initiated the process of reconciliation in his crucifixion and resurrection — and He has not since abandoned the process of reconciliation by the forgiveness and purification of those believing. The process has been going on more or less ever since. In the working out of it we have been provisionally included in the selection by our submission to the Gospel in this nineteenth century. The gospel was established for the purpose — that Christ might purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works. Wherein we may have been purified and rendered zealous in this direction, "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." We would not have been what we are if we had not come within the transforming influence of the gospel — which is His power unto salvation. Let us not forget the object for which we have been called even now, "that we might show forth the praises of Him who hath called us from darkness into His marvellous light." Even now are we the sons of God. Even now we are we His temple — if we are anything real in Christ. Even now will His praise be our delight; thanksgiving the daily incense of our hearts; supplication the daily staff on which we lean. If it be not so, how can we be fitted to enter the state in which "every one doth speak of His glory?"

We are unfavorably placed in an age when worship is either burlesqued in the irrational excesses of superstition and effeminacy; or killed by the frosts of misapplied science. God knows our drawbacks in living in the midst of

such frightful desolation. Let us not despair. We have His Word, which is both a light and a fertiliser. Keeping close to it in daily reading, we shall be kept from evil, and grow into conformity with its noble spirit of enlightened devoutness, notwithstanding the deforming blight that reigns in all the world. By the power of the Scriptures and the protection of God, we shall be preserved in the universal corruption, and be prepared for the glory of God in that gladsome and glorious day of which the Psalm concludes with a glimpse: a day when He will "set the poor on high from affliction and place them in families like a flock; when the righteous shall see it and rejoice, and all iniquity shall stop her mouth." Then shall all the earth be invited to "sing a new song to Yahweh... before Yahweh who cometh to judge the world with righteousness and the people with His truth."

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## Without God, All is Vanity and Vexation of Spirit

*Life a vanity because of sin — the coffin inevitable — man's brain-constitution requires God — higher moral faculties undeveloped in majority — Jesus the light of the world — the only hope.*

**T**he meeting this morning, as we know, is a meeting for "remembrance" — as Christ said, "Do this in remembrance of me." In remembering him in a truly intelligent manner, we remember many things, for he is the converging point of many things — things concerning ourselves; things concerning the nations; things concerning the race, things concerning God. He never would have been born but for such things; and we cannot Scripturally understand him apart from these things. One of these things is before us in a very unlikely part of our reading this morning, and in a very unpromising item. "There is a time to be born and a time to die." Birth, life and death describe the circle of human experience as it now is. It was because of this experience that he was manifested; but we must take it widely enough to see the bearing. We have children born and ourselves have been born of our parents; our parents, of their parents, and so backward till we get to the starting point of the process. The Bible only gives us this starting point in a reliable and reasonable form. All human thoughts on the subject are speculations, and self-destructive speculations when thoroughly reasoned out, as Argyll and Hall and others show. The Bible gives us a first pair at a distance of time corresponding with the multiplication of posterity that has since taken place; and it accounts to us for the sad marring of that posterity that we see before our eyes. It shows us the will of God set at nought — in a small matter, to be sure; but the smallness matters not, the principle of

disobedience is the same in small as in large matters (and to God, the source and container of all, there cannot be large matters and small matters). And it shows us the vital paramountcy of that will in a light that nothing but sentence of death could have made so strong. In the channel of this sentence, we are born; for death is a physical thing and runs in the constitution. Our "time to be born" is therefore a time to come under the dominion of evil. Of this we cannot complain, as the unwise do. Before we were born we were nothing. It is better to be born mortal beings than not to come into existence at all, for the goodness of God prevails over his holy severity even in mortal existence. It is the plan God has adopted in working towards the final upshot of His wisdom, and who can say unto God, "What doest Thou?"

To this process of mortal generation, Christ stands related. Our "time to be born" unto this evil state, brings Christ with it in the association of things, for it is because of this our lot that Christ was "made of woman, made under the law, that he might redeem them that are under the law." It was the "one man's disobedience" that necessitated the arrangement for one man's obedience, that whereas chaos and death have come by the one, life, love, and order might come by the other. Christ's life in this sense comes out of ours. It was because of poor, afflicted, dying man upon the earth that the angels were able to say to the shepherds, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Without Adam the first, there would have been no Adam the second. Without the continuance of his posterity "made subject to vanity, but not willingly," there would have been no remedial provision such as God made when "of the seed of David according to the flesh he raised unto Israel a saviour." We remember this when we remember Christ in the breaking of bread. And it is not difficult or unprofitable to glide from his birth to our own. His birth was a great event, ours was not; but there is this much of advantage in reflecting on the arrival of our "time to be born" that it is good for every man to look back and behold himself a feeble, puling infant in the cradle. It helps him to that modesty of reasonable feeling which is beautiful always, but which is rarely to be seen in the world as it now is, when the habit is to swagger and swell up to an insufferable degree of arrogant self-importance — odious alike both to God and man. The poor little baby that has been allowed to grow up ought not to behave like that, but to be humble and kindly, godly and wise, and rational in all his ways. The recollection of the cradle will help. How much more, the recollection of the coffin? Some people make a shudder as if you did an unpardonable violence to good taste when you speak of the coffin. Why should it be so? Because true enlightenment, which consists in the knowledge and recognition and logical allowance of all truth, is scarce. Most of the "good taste" so called will be found to be the fostering and fondling of flattering illusions. People like to think of themselves as noble, pure, undecaying, angelic. They deck up and cosmetique poor mortality. They

don't like to be brought down to the humiliating level of the actual truth, that they are decaying organisms, evanescent forms of life, living in a state in which the curse of God prevails. They are shocked at the familiar introduction of the coffin. Well, to a certain extent, it is possible to sympathise with their susceptibility. It springs from the latent aspiration to be something better than they are — an aspiration that can only be gratified in reconciliation with God. But, at the same time, when it rebels against the Truth, it is a nuisance to be put aside. "There is a time to die," and it is well to remember it. The man who remembers it is wiser every way than the man who habitually dismisses and ignores it. It is for this reason that it is written: "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men and the living will lay it to his heart... The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth." The man who fully realises that he will soon be done with all the matters he has in hand will find it much easier to carry them lightly, and to act the part of righteousness than the man who suffers himself to be overpowered with the sense of this present existence as if it would never end. He will find it easier to remember God, to continue in His Word, to hold fast the Faith in all its service, to be kind, to be just, to be self-sacrificing, and everything else required of us by the Law of the Lord, if he have his end in view, than if he habitually draw the veil to the disagreeable aspects of life. From this we may readily deduce the unwisdom of association with the lovers of the present world, in whose company our perceptions will be blunted, our senses drowned in a flood of foolish excitements, and our hearts drawn away from the beautiful, wholesome, lasting, satisfying things of God, which, while they may have a present bitterness with them, as of the bitter herbs of the Passover, are even now a source of far deeper satisfaction than is to be derived from the ways of worldliness in all departments.

Between birth and death lies the region of life as it now is. The aspect of this region depends upon the eyes that look upon it. With which eyes should we seek to look? The eyes of children and fools? The eyes of the unwise and sinful? The eyes of the children of this world? Or the eyes of eternal wisdom? Surely there can be but one answer. And where shall we find the eyes of eternal wisdom. In Christ — in the apostles and prophets — in the men by whom God spoke. In what aspect then does life as it now is appear in their eyes? In a very different aspect from what it appears in the eyes of children, or in the eyes of men in general. Jesus speaks of its denizens "walking in darkness;" Solomon sums it up in the phrase "the days of our vanity" and says of it in general that it is "all vanity and vexation of spirit." Let us consider this a little, so that we may not run away with mere phrases which are liable to degenerate to cant. We will look at it from another point of view.

Jesus declares of himself that he is "the light of the world," and that without him darkness comes upon men. In our youthful days, perhaps we

could not understand this. The words seemed to have no meaning. To our childish eyes, the sun seemed the light of the world, and the only darkness the darkness that sets in when the sun sinks in the west. We knew nothing of any other night. But when we grew older, our view expanded. We found there was a night upon the earth far more frightful than the natural darkness that lasts from sunset to sunrise. The natural night ceased to be dreadful: nay, it acquired the character in our eyes of a welcome drawing of the curtain which we could not do without — a healing and restoring balm to the fever-stricken life of the day. But the other night of which the Bible speaks became apparent to our eyes and hearts with a sense of desolateness that no tongue can utter. What is this night? It is a figure of speech, of course, but descriptive of a very real and terrible thing. It is a figure derived from the analogy of nature. When the sun is in the heavens, all is physically bright and joyous. Its pouring beams seem to fill earth and air with an ocean of healing and cheering power, in which man and beast, insect and flower, rise to the full capacities of their enjoyment of life. But withdraw the sun, all is dark, dank and unwholesome. Life seems to have lost its charm, and the mind becomes an easy prey to depressing imaginations. Now, what is there in relation to human life that fills the part of the sun? Only those who discern and appreciate the answer to this will be able to feel the reality and bitterness of the night that prevails. We get the clue when David says, "The Lord God is a sun and shield," or when God says, "Unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his beams," or, "Yahweh shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory."

If we will but closely consider the constitution of man, we shall discover a fact which in the statement thereof, may seem very trite, and which may fall with very little weight on the ear, but which, nevertheless, is a great and prevailing truth that furnishes the key to the perplexing enigma of human life as it now is. The fact is, that primarily, man was made for God, and that he cannot rise to the full gladness and effectiveness of his being in a state of insulation from Him.

What the constitution of man has to do with this, may be seen if we look at man as we know him. He is a bundle of powers, faculties, and capacities, among which there are such as are low, and such as are high. All his powers fulfil a good purpose in their right connections and subordinations; but some of them are manifestly fitted and intended to have the controlling place, while others put in this place are odious and destructive. Now, the very configuration of his brain tells us which were intended to be in the ascendant. The powers that distinguish man from the brute creation are all in the upper region. It is these that impart to him his characteristic beauty, not only in mental manifestations, but actually in physical contour. You cannot have true human beauty without amplitude in the upper region of the brain.

Now, the powers that lie in this upper part of the head are all those that

have to do with objects considered and disparaged as "sentimental" by the civilization now prevalent on the earth. In the very centre, looking straight away up to heaven, lies "veneration," and the capacity to worship and adore, and having its most natural action in the recognition of God. By each side of it lie the organs of hope and faith, which unitedly give the capacity to realise the action of unseen power, and to base anticipation thereon, and in front of it, the faculty that gives the impulse of benevolence. Just behind it is the staying power of firmness, flanked by conscientiousness which gives sensitiveness with regard to right and wrong. The whole group is of angelic tendency when allied with enlightened intellect in the front of the brain. Of themselves, they have no definite or effective action. They require development like every other faculty or capacity in the human mind, and this development can only be attained by the education appropriate to their action. A man may have the faculty of music or arithmetic, or language, but if uneducated, it will lie dormant, or spend itself in abortive action. And the education suited to one will not act upon another. A purely musical education will not develop linguistic or mathematical ability. The upper brain must have the education which by its nature it requires and demands, and no education short of the knowledge of God is suited to those requirements. The whole group of the moral powers (and they are the dominating powers in the human organisation), require God for their action. Without action you cannot have development; and without development, man cannot rise to the standard of His being.

Now, we live in a state of society where these powers are not provided for. Modern life and modern education address themselves almost wholly to the lower range of the brain faculties — such as are located in the side, front and base. The objects pursued and the qualifications fostered have all to do with the lower relations of being — relations that are good when lower but that become evil when exalted to the leading place. Wife, family and business are all in all with the majority; a few add reputation and artistic refinement; few include God in the practical objects of their exertion and concern. The consequence is that human nature scarcely anywhere attains the beauty of development of which it is capable. The upper brain is checked in its action and dwarfed in development by the universal manners, and consequently the vast mass of human beings on earth are but insipid specimens of a noble race, unhappy in themselves and possessing only the capacity of being a trial and a nuisance to others. There is little intellect, less mercy, and less expansive and noble godliness anywhere. It is as the Scriptures testify. They are all gone astray, every one to his own way, which is as far as possible from the way God designed them to walk in.

It is night, it is dark. All things are out of course. Human life is not what it ought to be, and cannot be what it ought to be, under the conditions that prevail. Who will alter those conditions? Who can give us the conditions

that are needed? What are they? We need God to take the world in charge. We need the bungling incapacities of man to be put on one side, and all power and authority vested in one government of His direct appointment — a government that cannot err, and that cannot be resisted, and that cannot be removed. Give us such a government, and you give us the sun, at whose bright presence, darkness will soon fly away. The reign of such a government will change the life of the world in a single generation. Such a government is coming. "God hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men in that He hath raised him from the dead."

They were no empty words of poetical flourish that Jesus uttered when he said "I am the light of the world." He spoke the truth — absolute and unmixed. There is no light apart from him, in either individual or national relations. It is the individual bearing that most concerns us at present. What is life without him? A fevered dream — a bootless activity, having promise and incentive at its beginning, but gradually settling to a doleful vacuity at its end — a paleful gloom, as with spent power, we draw near to the grave in the clear perception that, without God, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. Introduce Christ and see how changed the scene. The love of Christ constrains; the obedience of Christ subdues and ennobles; the hope of Christ brightens, and imparts an interest to life we never knew before. We live no longer to ourselves; we yield no longer to ourselves; we surrender no longer to the gloom of a headless universe and an uncertain future. We open our hearts to God in faith and reconciliation, through Christ who died for us; we confide in his direction though unseen; we walk through the darkness in joyful trust and anticipation of the promised day when God will wipe away every tear and remove every curse. Letting Christ dwell in our hearts by faith, our darkness is dispelled, our coldness ended, our waywardness corrected, our loves purified, our whole life cleansed and redeemed from the ultimate corruption and abortiveness of mere natural power. He becomes our light and our life to whom we daily grow as the thriving plant before the sun, seeking more and more "to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge," "counting all things but dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord," "in whom is filled up all the fulness of the God-head bodily."

And looking out with unavailing pity and distress on the larger field of racial affliction, do we not see plainly that Christ is the light of the world? What darkness broods in all lands after the most prolonged and careful experiments in self-management. See the struggling masses of the poor shaking the clenched fist of desperation in the face of the educated and provided classes, and this, not in despotic and brutalized countries, but in "civilised" England and America. What hope is there in political systems? Henry George has his remedy, but it is only a theory which could not be enforced without successful bloodshed on a large scale, and which, even if

established in practice, must, in human hands, inevitably run into the old, old grooves, for there is not a political experiment but what has at some time or other in the world's history been tried and failed. The problem of human management is too intricate, too subtle, too difficult, for human power. It needs God who made man to successfully manage him, and God has purposed to do it at the right and the ripe time which is now near. Christ is His strong right arm for the work, and he comes anon to do it. He will "break" the current systems "with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." He will then give the world such a system as it has never seen since the days of Adam's departure from Eden — such a system as it exactly needs — a centralized system of invincible power and unerring wisdom which will promulgate and enforce the laws that are needed for the glory of God and the wellbeing of man without asking for the consent of parliaments or the suffrages of peoples. This system in the hands of immortal and infallible agents will soon cause the present desert of human life to rejoice and blossom as the rose. What an honor, what a dignity, what a prize, what an unspeakable glory to be chosen to act as the king's representative in the day of light and gladness. To this we are called, and to this we shall attain if meanwhile, in faith and patience, we walk as children of the light.

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## Through the Windows of the Word

*Read the Word — every page exhibits God's work, order and method in service dictated by God — interpretations and wisdom from God alone — patient continuance in well doing.*

**W**e never tire of the fresh air and the beautiful light, or grow weary of the blue sky or the face of nature. Wholesome food is always acceptable to a healthy palate. There is something in the adaptations of things that makes these things perennial in their power to satisfy. So it is with the things of the Spirit of God to the new man formed within us by the Truth. They are always fresh and sweet to the taste. They are always beautiful and holy and strengthening. They never grow stale or pall upon the spirits. They are adapted to our highest desires. They alone can supply the demand of our ultimate aspirations. This is true of the mental relations of this mortal state. How much more must it be true of the Spirit state in which all earthly affinities will have been absorbed in the wonderful physical transmutation which changes this corruptible and mortal body into the incorruptible and immortal.

For this emancipation we are longing. For it we are preparing. We would



not know how to prepare if the Spirit of God had not instructed us in the Word written under its inspiration. With this Word in our hands and hearts, we do know. We are commanded to come together thus to the breaking of bread. This is one part of our preparation. By this we are kept in constant memory of Christ, and constant sympathy with him; and by this we are trained to that idea and habit of loving assembly in praise of God, through our Lord Jesus, which will be the normal relation of the perfect state for which we are hoping. We are commanded also to "pray always," by which God is pleased, and our minds gradually opened to the full and living sense of His reality. Above all we are commanded to attend upon the diligent and regular reading of the Word which alone can enlighten our darkness, and bring us into fitness for a place in the inheritance of the saints in light.

Our readings on such occasions always provide us with the material of true edification. Wherever we read, we seem to have a window opened through which we can see the divine work in the earth as contrasted with the mere work of man to which we naturally belong. We are most of the time shut in by high walls to the mere work of men. If we see nothing but this work, we shall be entirely misled as to the meaning of life, and fatally misguided as to the way to use it. A look through the window will show us something going on outside of first importance for us to know. Let us call the chapters so many windows along the extended route of a procession. There are many windows, but through whichever we look, it is the same procession we see, though a different part. It is the work of God proceeding at some stage or other.

In Numbers, we have the organisation of the camp of Israel in the wilderness. It might seem at first as if this had no interest or use for us — a thing of the past — an inherently transient thing, which having answered its purpose during Israel's passage from Egypt to the promised land, could be of no possible service to those who came after. This must be a wrong thought in view of the elaborate record it has received among those "whatsoever things" which have been "written for our learning." That it is a wrong thought we discover when we apply our minds to the subject itself. The mere circumstance of a large travelling body of people being arranged by divine direction would impart to that arrangement a supreme interest — as a thing to study — a thing certain to be characterised by ingenuity and wisdom — a thing to be delighted in by those who admire the works of God, and take pleasure in seeking them out. But when, in addition to this, we find that a typical significance was stamped upon all these arrangements, in foreshadowing of God's ultimate will concerning man, it is manifest that a subject of great depth and richness is opened out to the mind in these Mosaic specifications.

On the first head, we may note the perfect symmetry and convenience of all the arrangements. There was a system observed throughout. The whole

congregation was sub-divided into tribes, consisting of descendants respectively of the twelve sons of Jacob. These tribes were grouped in three's, so as to make four camps of three tribes each, each camp having its own standard, the lion, the man, the ox, and the eagle. The camps were named after the leading tribe in each camp — Judah, Reuben, Ephraim, and Dan. The four camps were arranged in a square around the tabernacle in the centre — the camp of Judah forming the east side, the camp of Reuben the south, the camp of Ephraim the west, and the camp of Dan the north. Inside these four camps, lying between them and the tabernacle in the centre, were four minor camps, consisting of the tribe of Levi, separated and sanctified for the priestly service in four sections, according to the sons of Levi — Gershon, Kohath, and Merari — the family of Moses and Aaron forming the fourth.

The order of march was accommodated to these divisions. When the time arrived to strike their tents, Aaron's sons blew an alarm on silver trumpets (made for the purpose). At this signal, the camp on the east (consisting of the tribes of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun) broke up and got on the march. At the same time, the Levites were getting the tabernacle down in the order of their service; and first went the Merarites with the sockets, pillars and boards, and then the Gershonites with the curtains, cords, and coverings. When these had marched, another alarm on the trumpets summoned the south camp, the camp of Reuben, which marched, then marched the Kohathites, bearing the ark, the altars and holy vessels, for which, when the march ended, the Gershonites and Merarites had got the tabernacle erected in readiness. Next a blast of the trumpets brought forward the west and then the north camp, all halting in the same order at the end of their journey, and pitching in the original form of a square round the tabernacle.

No better arrangement could be imagined for the guidance of an immense body of people on the march. It bears the mark of divine wisdom on the face of it. But consider the spiritual significance which it yields. Here is a divine organisation of human life in a national capacity; and what is its most conspicuous feature? The tabernacle of the divine presence in the midst — **GOD IN THE CENTRE** — the pivot upon which the whole system turns — the source of all direction and law. How great a contrast is this to human systems! How complete the lesson that human life can never be and will never be what it ought to be until God's authority in visible administration is the heart and kernel of human society upon earth. It is nothing less than the Kingdom of God in miniature. Christ enthroned at Jerusalem, and ruling by the hands of his own immortal friends in all the earth, will soon establish the Father's name as the controlling power of human life — a fertilizing and ennobling ideal that will generate joy and beauty everywhere. The antitypical tabernacle of God will thus be with men as the typical was with Israel; and they shall be His people, as Israel was; and, what Israel did not experience, God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and at last, there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying.

We look at the perfect order extending to the smallest minutiae of the Mosaic encampment, and we may conclude with certainty that the same principle of fitness and method will be carried out in the arrangement of the heavenly encampment in the Age to come. The saints will be a multitude that no man can number, but everyone will have his place and his work. There will be no loose or unallotted parts in the system — no surplusage — no misfits — no waste power — no confusion. Everything will fit perfectly. We see the salient points of this exactness of order when we see the Holy Land, the Lord's portion (Zech. 2:10); Jerusalem the Lord's throne (Jer 3:17); Jesus the occupant of the throne (Luke 1:32); the twelve apostles, heads of the twelve tribes under him (Mat. 19:28); and the saints exercising dominion according to "their works" (Rev. 2:26; 22:12; Luke 19:16-17).

These features stand out like the spires and towers of a city seen from a distance. We cannot make out the details, but we know when we behold a city from a distance that the details of streets and houses are there, and that when we get to the city, we shall find out these details down to the very persons and their affairs. So we know from these indications of the leading features of the Kingdom, considered in the light of the perfect organisation of the details of the Mosaic camp, that when we get there, we shall find everything arranged in a perfect system of order and fitness.

Then as we look at the camp in the wilderness, we find it a prophecy. It tells us the connection in which the goodness of God is to be manifested on the earth. The divine encampment which we see is a camp composed of the twelve tribes of Israel. So it was under the Law, and so under the gospel when the Gentiles were invited to become Jews. So it was at the beginning, and so at the end when the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are inscribed on the gates of new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:12). So it has always been in the history of the earth; so it always will be. The work of God is inseparably associated with the race of Israel, "to whom pertaineth the adoption and the glory and the covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the service of God, and the promises" (Rom. 9:4). In the past, the kingdom of Israel was the Kingdom of God (2Chr. 13:8); and in the future, the Kingdom of God will be the kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6; Micah 4:8; Isa. 60:14). First, the natural and then the spiritual, — this is the rule both of God's political work, and of His individual work. All are not Israel that are of Israel, still, there has always been throughout their generations, a remnant according to the election of grace, and these will in the end be all gathered together in one glorious polity of righteousness, peace, strength, wealth, honor, life and joy everlasting — God in their midst forever, and the congregation wholly sanctified to Him.

All this and much more is involved in the picture displayed to the mind's eye as we read the full particulars given us in Numbers of the organisation of Israel under Moses as they came out of the wilderness. So much for the first of today's three windows. The second window shows us Solomon enthroned,

and speaking wisdom in the Proverbs to all who have ears to hear. This wisdom "cometh from above." It is the effluence of inspiration. It is no more Solomon's wisdom than the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream was Joseph's (Gen. 41:16), or the disclosure of Nebuchadnezzar's vision was Daniel's (Dan. 2:27-30). God gave this wisdom to Solomon (1Kings 4:29); and Paul informs us that the utterance of it in the Proverbs is the divine voice of exhortation "speaking unto us as unto children" (Heb. 12:5). Consequently, what we see as we look through this window is God speaking for the enlightenment of men. What does He say? "My son attend to My words: incline thine ears to My sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; KEEP THEM in the midst of thine heart." Brethren, this is what we are busy doing. We are here for no other reason than that we desire to attend to the Word of God and to keep fast hold of His instruction. In doing this, we are doing the most foolish thing under the sun in the estimation of our neighbors. There is nothing less to the popular taste than what has been said in commandment and promise; but if we are wise we will not be deterred by the popular distaste. The world chooses that which there is no substance in. Destruction and misery are in their ways. We will rather choose what Mary chose, which Jesus describes as "that good part which shall not be taken away" — a part which has just the reverse ending to the part of ungodly men; not the destruction and misery, but salvation and joy. Even now, it is the highest satisfaction attainable to mortals on earth, the answer of a good conscience, the confidence of God's friendship and the hope of good things to come. As the darkness of life increases, the hope of the gospel grows brighter. It is ahead of our path like a great light illuminating the horizon, increasing in brightness as we draw nearer to it. Even now, godliness is the best portion for men; but what shall we say about "then" when we have done with this vain life, and when we have placed our feet on the threshold of eternal day? Our poor minds fail to conceive the glory which God hath prepared for them that love Him. It is our wisdom then to cling closely to the words addressed to us in the Proverbs, "They are life unto those that find them and health to all their flesh."

Our third window lets us look out upon Jesus walking among men. He is near Jericho, and passing along the road, accompanied by a crowd. Ahead of him, a little man has climbed up a tree to get a good view of Jesus as he should pass. When he reaches the tree, Jesus stands still and calls up to the little man, "Zacchaeus, come down, for today I must abide at thy house." Zacchaeus comes down with alacrity, and leads the way to his house. The religious critics of Jesus among the crowd say that Jesus has gone to be the guest of a man that is a sinner. But Jesus knew better. When they got to the threshold of the house, Zacchaeus, recognizing Christ's authority as the standard and the judge of righteousness, gives humble account of himself before accepting the great honor of entertaining Christ under his roof: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor: and if I have taken

anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." Christ's response is the expression of satisfaction with this account. "This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham" (Jesus had said before that the children of Abraham were those who "did the deeds of their father Abraham," whence we may note that not faith only, but the works of faith commend a man to Christ). The people standing around, who heard this speech, concluded that "the Kingdom of God would immediately appear." No wonder; "this day is salvation come." "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." We would all have been likely to have taken the same impression had we heard such things from Christ's own actual mouth. So "he added and spake a parable" to correct their wrong impression: "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return." Living in our age, and looking back, we can see how signally the parable has been fulfilled. The departure of Jesus is not the only thing we see, but his absence "for a long time," as he said in another place. We are nearing the end of the long time, and therefore the end of the parable has a special interest. "He commanded those servants to be called unto him to whom he had given the money." Judgment at his coming — this is what we have to look for, a standing before his judgment seat that we may "give account," and receive "according to our works." It is important that we have this always in view. The account will refer to the events of this unexciting interval of trial, and not to the feelings we may feel when we stand before the presence of his glory. Every one will be painfully attentive and deferential then. But that will go for nothing in the decisions that will be given. It is the account of what we are now doing that will be in question. This account must be a good account to receive the Lord's approbation. He will not say "well done, good and faithful servant" if the doing has not been well and the servant has not been good and faithful. Orthodox theology has obscured this as well as many other things. It has confounded the justification of a sinner by faith with the acceptance of a saint by works. A justified sinner has to "work out his own salvation" by a "patient continuance in well doing" — "enduring to the end." If he trust to his justification — that is, to the forgiveness of sin which he receives when he obeys the Truth — if after receiving this forgiveness, he walks after the flesh, and is again entangled and overcome in the pollutions of the world, his latter end is worse than the beginning. It were better for him not to know the way of righteousness than after knowing it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto him (2Peter 2:20). So says the Word of inspiration which we may safely place against all the smooth uncertainties of "learning" and the pleasing lies of superstition. But let a man faithfully serve Christ, adopting his commandments as the law of life, and speaking right and left according to due opportunity of "the glorious majesty of his Kingdom," he may have "boldness in the day of judgment." For though no man can be perfect in this

imperfect state, the sins of faithful servants, confessed and forsaken, are forgiven for Christ's sake, who is their high priest who ever liveth to make intercession for them. And the faithful service is accepted as the measure of the degree of exaltation to be conferred in the great day to which the Lord makes such frequent reference in his last message to John: "Behold I come quickly; my reward is with me, to give to every one of you according as your works shall be."

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## The Hapless Plight of the Rejected

*Hell-torment a fallacy, but judgment to come a terrible reality — deserved severity of past judgments — future punishments beyond equal or measure — the rejected suffer to the limit without easement — better suffer affliction in obedience now.*

**W**e all know that the object of our meeting together is to bring to memory certain things, to brush up again the picture that has been drawn upon our minds by knowledge. It is of very great importance that we do this, for the things we have learnt — things past and things to come — are true, and will work themselves out whether we remember them or not; but they will not work themselves out beneficially for us if we forget them or cease to be influenced by them. The truth of them does not depend upon our memory, but their value to us does so, as Paul said to the Corinthians that the gospel would save them "if ye keep in memory the things that I delivered unto you." It is well to realise distinctly that the Truth is true independently of us. We all know this to be the fact, but we do not at all times feel the force of it. We are so liable to think that the Truth is a little more true when we happen to remember it, or not so important when we let it dull out of our memory. A little mental exercise will help to dispel this illusion. If we look in at any stage of enacted history, say the times of Elizabeth, or the irruption of the Danes and Saxons into England, or the Roman invasion of Britain under Julius Caesar, or the overthrow of the Jewish state and the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, or the wars of Alexander against the Persians, or the doings of the Greek republics in arms and letters, we have to think that these things were transacted without us in any sense or way. We were nowhere, we had no knowledge of them, yet they went on and enacted themselves, and would remain enacted realities if we had never been born.

It is so with those other matters that the Bible has made known to us, with this difference, that out of Bible history arises a Bible futurity that will

enact itself whether we believe it or not. Bible history and Bible prophecy cannot be separated. Prophecy is mostly glorious, but there are dark features. The things to come, of which Christ is the centre, are both good and evil. The Truth has two sides — salvation and condemnation; — acceptance and rejection; great joy and great anguish. We are in the habit of mostly looking at the beautiful side; it is well occasionally to look at the other. We have got rid of the popular hell, and we are liable to go to the other extreme and to forget that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Comparatively little — perhaps too little — is said of judgment to come in our lecturing up and down the country. Judgment to come is a terrible reality. As Paul reasoned with Felix on the subject, it made him tremble (Acts 24:25). Paul made it a point to give prominence to it in his teaching. He said, “knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2Cor. 5:11). He declared that it is part of the testimony of the gospel that God will inflict “indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first and also of the Gentile” (Rom. 2:8, 9, 16).

Jesus gives to the subject of judgment to come a fiery prominence in the chapter read this morning (Mark 9). “It is better for thee to enter into life maimed than having two hands to go into Gehenna into the fire that never shall be quenched, where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off, it is better for thee to enter halt into life than having two feet to be cast into Gehenna, in the fire that never will be quenched, where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out; it is better for thee to enter into the Kingdom of God with one eye than having two eyes to be cast into Gehenna fire, where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.”

Let us ponder this a moment. Let us endeavor to realise it. Eternal torments would be dreadful, but for the time being, the sufferings of those who are the subjects of the punishment to which Jesus refers will be as terrible. Jesus associates them in another place with “weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.” God is kind and long-suffering, but He has another side, “Our God is a consuming fire.” God is love, and His tender mercy is over all His works, and yet Paul invites us to “behold His severity” in certain relations (Rom. 11:22). The history of His transactions with men is full of illustrations on this point. The flood is a standing instance to which Jesus more than once refers. An irruption of merciless waters drowned the whole population — nice babies, pretty children, beautiful girls, stalwart fine-looking men, and old men of grey and venerable aspect. What was the cause of the terrible visitation? Because “all flesh had corrupted His way, and the earth was filled with violence.” Men thought it a light thing to corrupt the way of God. They were not afraid to disregard His appointments; they thought it a weak and womanish thing to fear to do wrong — just exactly as it is now, as Jesus said would be the case. After a time of long-suffering and

expostulation, destruction swept them all away, and so it will be again, except that the destruction will not be of so sweeping a character, as the times and circumstances are different. The judgment to be inflicted on the world's population at the coming of Christ is to subdue and enlighten them, and bring them into harmony with God for the glory of God and His people in the Kingdom to be set up. Yet as regards vast masses of mankind, it will be as thorough a perdition as that which overtook the contemporaries of Noah. Sodom was overwhelmed in the most direful destruction in another instance; so also with the plaguing of the Egyptians, the slaughter of the Canaanites, the affliction of Israel in various ways till the piled-up wrath of God descended upon the unhappy nation in an avalanche of destruction at the hands of the Romans.

These are illustrations in the past from which we learn something for the future. The Scriptures inform us that the anger of God will burst in an aggravated form upon the heads of rebellious mankind in the latter days. "The whirlwind of Yahweh is gone forth with fury, a continuing whirlwind, it shall fall with pain upon the head of the wicked. The fierce anger of Yahweh will not return until He have done it, and until He have performed the intents of His heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it." Of these days, it is written both in Daniel and the Apocalypse that they will exceed in stress of evil all the previous experiences of mankind, "a time of trouble such as never was." Such a time happened to Israel; such a time will befall the Gentiles. People to the last moment have a kind of feeling that their affairs are secure. It does not occur to them to think how easy, humanly speaking, it is for God to bring evil upon them. Look at London, with her seven or eight millions of people. What an enormous quantity of food is required for the daily victualling of such a community; where would they be in the event of that supply being cut off, either by failure of seasons, or the fortunes of war? Or look at Britain as a whole, with her 45,000,000 of population and producing only about a third of the food required by the inhabitants of the island; where should we be if our fleets happened to be overpowered and the supply of food from other countries were cut off? But what need of multiplying illustrations! We are helplessly in the hand of God. "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his refuge," and helpless is he that hath God for his enemy.

In the tempest of trouble that will overwhelm the world at last in its conflict with Christ arrived, no sufferers will be so hapless as those whom Christ rejects in judgment, and sends away into the lands and troubles of his enemies. Let us try and catch a glimpse of the lurid terror of the time; they are not fantasies, but words of truth and soberness, however much derided by men in these the days of their security. Suppose that our meeting this morning was not a meeting for the breaking of bread, and calling Christ to memory in peace, but a meeting for him to separate the sheep from the goats,



and to say to the goats "Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." We will not cumber ourselves with the orthodox conception. We will deal only with that which we know to be according to truth. With no Miltonic monster or Dantesque deeps of fire have we to deal, yet with something unutterably awful. The devil and his angels is the Bible synonym for the organized hostility of man to God at the coming of Christ — the kingdoms of the world arrayed against him — and waiting in sultry suspense for the shock of "the war of that great day of God Almighty," in which the ripe fruit-bunches of human wickedness are thrown into the winepress of the wrath of God, and trodden in anger with the resultant streams of human gore. Consider what is meant by being sent away among them instead of remaining in the security of Christ's protective presence. In ordinary circumstances, we have always a reserve thought that eases off our worst troubles — a velvet cushion of some kind that breaks the shock. We have at least our own home left, our own friends, our own liberty, our books to read for comfort, our walks abroad to ease our agonies — the blue sky, the fresh air, the smiling landscape. We can at all events take refuge in slumber's pillow at night — which is all very true and helpful, but will no longer be true if we are dismissed with the terrible words, "Depart from me ye cursed." There is no resource of comfort or easement left then. The unhappy part of the rejected is to be driven out among the Lord's enemies who are themselves afflicted as in a lake of fire, to suffer they know what for and with what end. If you are among them you arrive as a vagabond, without house, without friend, without calling, without hope. There have been days of peace and privilege and health, but they are gone now. Wrath heaped up against the day of wrath has caught you in its whirlpool blast. The righteous judgment of God envelopes you in "tribulation and anguish." You have had pains and toothaches and torments; they are gathered on you now tenfold, without access to remedy and without the power to end your misery, for you are in the hands of God whose slighted mercy and unappreciated greatness and discarded rights and claims now rise up against you, and smite you with scorpion torments. You now know the truth of the words, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." "Be not deceived, God is not mocked." Your horizon has no light, your black sky is without a break. You know the only end is in the second death, in destroying fire, which will wipe your dishonored memory from under the heavens. It is not eternal torments, but it is as bad while it lasts. We ought to look it in the face as a possibility to be averted. Christ's words imply this. The contemplation of it will help us to estimate their wisdom and their force. It is better to enter into life halt or maimed than having perfect members to go into the fire that no man can quench. He does not mean that men will enter into life without an eye, or a foot or a hand; for the resurrection body will be perfect. He means it would be better were such a thing possible. It is one of his parables, to the use of

which he was prone. His meaning is evident, namely, that it is far better to forego any advantage or any pleasure, or even any privilege that will imperil our fitness for the Kingdom of God, than to preserve our perfect satisfactions now on all points and discover at last that we have indulged them at the expense of our calling and election. If we do not see this now, we shall certainly see it then, too late — when all the things we have tried to secure are gone from our grasp for ever — when it will be said to us as to Great Babylon of that same crisis: “The fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee”; “Thou shalt be found no more at all.”

Especially grievous will rejection be when the rejected see what they have lost — see it with their eyes as a shining and glorious reality. What this is, we have a peep at in the other part of the chapter from Mark, in the account of the transfiguration. See what the power of the Spirit of God can do. Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth, unglorified, ascends a hill with three of his disciples. His mortal face shines as with the burnished light of the sun; his common clothes glisten with a snowy whiteness of glory beyond the utmost power of human art to imitate. Moses and Elias appear with him in glory, and they confer familiarly together. Here was an exhibition in advance of the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom. It was a miniature illustration of what is meant by the glory to be revealed. What was done on the small scale then will be done to all the elect of God at the time when the rejected will depart from the presence of the Lord “with weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.” Then shall the righteous — (the class who have figuratively cut off their right hands and pulled out their right eyes that they might enter the Kingdom rather than preserve all intact for wholesale consumption with the wicked) — “then shall the righteous shine forth in the kingdom of their Father,” so says Jesus, who also said, “Ye shall see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and ye yourselves shall be thrust out.” This is equivalent to saying that the rejected in the day of their anguish will have that anguish intensified by the spectacle of the glorified multitude that no man can number, rejoicing in the salvation from which they themselves are excluded. There they are, a shining noble throng, you were once among them, now you are no longer of their number, you are cast out as unworthy of a place. What have you gained by your snug and successful management by which your offending eye, hand and foot have all been preserved in such healthy vigor? What can the bowing and smiling friends whom you have propitiated at the cost of faithfulness to the Lord do for you now? What can your property that you prudently conserved for personal uses wholly, avail you now? Of what good to you now is the respectability you carefully cultivated with a God-despising generation — men of the world who have their portion in this life? All have perished from your hands. They are but fuel now for the everlasting fire that waits to devour. God takes no pleasure in you. The holy son of His love, now the manifested Judge, dismisses you with calm, judicial firmness. Long-suffering has come to an end. The day of

unrecognised grace has become the day of insistent judgment that cannot be evaded or put off; and you behold the glory you have missed — the splendid gift of incorruption, the shining honor of a place among God's ennobled friends, the priceless treasure of a crown of glory that fadeth not away, "Hark, those bursts of acclamation," your voice contributes no ingredient to the enraptured song. Listen to the wail of terror-stricken multitudes as they depart with weeping and gnashing of teeth, you swell the shrieks that rend the sky. You will find no comfort from your fellow-shriekers. Sinners can do something for you now, they can do nothing then. Their day is done: judgment has arrived: in the scathing fires of which they curse each other and curse the infatuation that blinded them in the day of their opportunity to heaven's beautiful light. They will then remember the still, small voice of the Son of Man that speaks unheeded now. "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off. It is better for thee to enter into life halt and maimed than having two hands to enter into the fire of Gehenna that never shall be quenched." It is better to remember it now. It is better to act on it now. It may be difficult, it may be hard, it may often be heart-breaking, but its deepest sorrow is nothing to the "wrath of heaven revealed against all unrighteousness of men" when "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." The sorrows and self-denials and the burdens of the present course of faith and obedience will all be made up to us a thousand-fold in the words of sympathetic welcome that wait the approved, "Well done, good and faithful servant, you had a hard struggle, a difficult fight, but you have got through victoriously. You made the most of the very little that was in your power; enter now into the great and high and pleasant ways of everlasting rest."

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## The Mouth of the Lord Hath Spoken It

*God spoke through Israel's prophets — we relate to them by adoption — future comfort and glories — all flesh grass — Divine coercion necessary for good — immeasurable greatness and goodness of God.*

**W**e have, as usual, had a reading from the Prophets and one from the Apostles this morning. How greatly mistaken are the people who say that as believers in Christ, we have nothing to do with the prophets. The most superficial acquaintance with the apostolic writings is sufficient to cause any one to recognise the commanding position of the whole Scriptures of Moses and the prophets. In all these writings, there is the

completest recognition of the divine character of the "Old Testament." This character could not be more distinctly expressed than in Paul's statement in Hebrews with which we are all so familiar: "God, at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets." It is therefore a case of God speaking to us in the prophets, and when God speaks, shall we not listen?

He speaks by Isaiah 40 this morning. The speech is a comforting one, as all divine speech is, to those who follow after righteousness. It is in the express terms of comfort: "Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people, saith your God." Are we included in the phrase "My people"? This is the only point to settle in order to be justified in appropriating the comfort. We are not Israelites according to the flesh, though a good many misguided people are of that opinion. We are Gentiles by descent and physical constitution. But we may be among the people addressed as "my people" for all that, "God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people." Peter was first employed in this work, and Peter writing to some of those so taken out, says, "In times past, ye were not a people but are now the people of God" (1 Peter 2:10). In times past, we were not a people; are we now the people of God? We are, if we have been the subjects of the process which changed those in Peter's day from the no-people to the "people" state. Have we been the subjects of this process? This is only another way of asking, Have we believed and obeyed the gospel, for this was the process by which the Gentiles in Peter's day became, "no more strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19). That we have believed and obeyed the gospel, we know, for this is a matter susceptible of demonstration. Therefore, we overstrain nothing in listening to these comforting words to Isaiah as though spoken concerning ourselves.

We certainly stand in need of comfort. Comfort is for those who mourn and are distressed; and that is necessarily the condition of everyone who, in an age like this, is in sympathy with divine objects and principles, and thus discerns the true position of things as they are. When we faint and languish by reason of that position — when we are oppressed by the constant effort to endure the prosperity of all that is opposed to God, and the weak and dishonorable and downtrodden state of everything identified with His name and honor, let us remember that that very experience is our qualification for the comfort which God Himself has condescended to proclaim for His people. Let us not think as if "some strange thing had happened unto us." Weary and lonely and desolate as we may sometimes feel ourselves, we should only aggravate our affliction if we allowed ourselves to suppose there was anything wrong in such a state in the Truth; or to forget that such a state is expressly arranged for those who are being prepared for divine use in the gladsome ages beyond. God commands us to be comforted in the midst of our distress. Therefore let us be comforted.

But it may be said, the comfort of Isaiah 40 is for Jerusalem, and not for us: "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of Yahweh's hand double for all her sins." Well, the comfort is for Jerusalem, but it does not follow that it is not for us. The Jerusalem addressed is not the merely architectural Jerusalem, but Jerusalem with her citizens, and not these in the statistical sense at any given moment, but in the sense of including all that belong to her by spiritual relation and ultimate association in the final purpose of God. These are scattered all up and down the ages, and have not all belonged to the literal Jerusalem. Multitudes of the literal inhabitants of Jerusalem have nothing to do with them — the population of the city at the present hour, for example, or at the crisis of her destruction by Titus. The complete and perfected Jerusalem, that will come out of the fires of affliction glorified at the coming of Christ, will include in her citizen roll, myriads who never saw the literal city in the days of their mortal existence. If we are among the saved, she will include us, and therefore we are entitled to recognise ourselves addressed in words addressed to her. "Comfort to Jerusalem and all her children," is the purpose, as the opening symphony of Isaiah 40, considering it as a musical performance throughout, which it is in the highest sense.

But the execution of the purpose is an affair of work, and a work of such magnitude requires preparation, and so the next intimation concerns the preparation: "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord: make straight in the desert a highway for our God." We know, on apostolic authority, that this has reference to the work of John the Baptist, who was sent to prepare the way of Christ, as a herald opens the way of majesty. He accompanied the work here figuratively described: "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain." He accomplished this in a moral sense — removing obstacles, filling up gaps, and generally making a level way on which the Messiah might make his appearance: "And the glory of Yahweh shall be revealed." So it was. All who looked on Christ saw the manifested glory of Yahweh — "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," said Paul (2Cor. 4:6). "We have seen his glory," said John, "the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father." — "*All flesh shall see it together.*" All flesh has not yet done so. The bulk of mankind, living or dead, have never heard of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Has the prophecy failed then? By no means. There was no statement in the prophecy that all flesh would see the glory of God at the moment of its first and preparatory manifestation in Christ, but that the glory then manifested should ultimately be seen by "all flesh." The prophecy has been fulfilled so far as the programme has been unfolded. John, as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness," proclaimed the impending appearing of him whose shoe latchet

he was not worthy to stoop down and unloose. In due time, the Great One so heralded appeared, and presented himself as the bearer of the divine glory to the thousands of Israel; and in due time the glory so exhibited will be witnessed and rejoiced in by earth's uncounted millions, for "the whole earth shall be filled with His glory," and he who was then in Israel's midst, crucified and raised from the dead, and exalted to the Father's right hand, returns at an appointed time, when every knee shall bow to him, and every tongue confess, to the glory of God the Father.

"The mouth of Yahweh hath spoken it." This is the guarantee of its fulfilment. What a rock to rest on. If the mouth of Yahweh hath spoken it, it cannot fail to come to pass. In view of what it is that has been promised, it is difficult to understand the prevalent indifference. Either people do not believe that the mouth of Yahweh hath spoken it; or they have no heart for what has been spoken. It is probably a little of both. They doubt the divine authority of the written Word, and their relish is not in the direction of what God purposes to bring to pass. They "mind earthly things." The glory of man or the prosperity of man in a material sense they can appreciate, but the glory of God touches no chord. This state of mind is part of the barbaric condition of the world from which it will not be effectually roused till God show His existence and power and exclusive prerogative in a repetition of the visible acts of might that brought down the pride of Pharaoh, and by which we are informed, but this time in all the earth, "the lofty looks of man shall be humbled and the haughtiness of men shall be laid low, and Yahweh alone shall be exalted in that day."

That this is reasonable, the prophecy proceeds to intimate. "The voice said, Cry, and he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field... The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand for ever." There is no truth more evident and none more practically ignored in the world than this. A generation is sufficient to show the transient nature and intrinsic vanity of human existence; and every day's experience is burdened with a sense of the inefficiency of human power in every form, sense and direction. Man, as a self-manager, is a failure, and if God come not to his rescue, he must remain unblest for ever. But God will come to his rescue. This is the pith of the "comfort" which God commands in Isaiah 40. The very next verse is an emphatic enunciation of it. "O Zion that bringest good tidings" (or, "O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion") "get thee up into the high mountain. O Jerusalem that bringest good tidings" (or "O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem"), "lift up thy voice with strength. Lift it up: be not afraid, say unto the cities of Judah, 'Behold your God,'" In what aspects are the cities of Judah invited to "behold their God"? The next verse answers the question, and shows us that it is in the practical interference of human affairs — no other than a practical interference would be adequate to the needs of the world. It

is government we want, the application of compulsion to enforce that which is right and wise, and to restrain that which is foolish and wrong. The divine voice that leaves every man at liberty to obey it or not as he likes, is only sufficient to make a selection — a sparse selection — of fit men for divine use afterwards. It is not enough to keep or bring the world into harmony with divine wisdom. The world pays no heed to wisdom and follows the bent of unregulated desire. It therefore requires “coercion.” The outcry against coercion is foolish. It is contrary to the universal habits and necessities of civilised life. It is contrary to the practices of the anti-coercionists themselves. The enforcement of law is coercion disguised, and not quite disguised; and without the enforcement of law, the world would be in chaos in less than 12 months. Violence would have the upper hand everywhere, and the works of even what civilization we have would disappear. Until the world is “coerced” by the strong hand of Omnipotence, we shall never see that universal deference to righteousness which is promised in the “good tidings to Zion,” and which will become the order of the day when “Yahweh shall send the rod of Messiah’s strength out of Zion, and he rules in the midst of his enemies.” There is therefore a very natural sequence in the next declaration of the prophecy: “Behold the Lord God will come with strong hand and His arm shall rule for Him: behold, His reward is with Him and His work before Him.” The Spirit of God in the apostles identifies this with the second coming of Christ. Jesus himself says by John: “Behold I come quickly and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be” (Rev. 22:12). It is impossible therefore that we make a mistake in concluding that the event contemplated in Isa. 40:10 is the coming of Christ a second time, in power and great glory, from which it results that that coming is a coming, not only for individual judgment, but for the political coercion of the world of which we have been speaking — a coercion to which Jesus himself makes reference in saying: “To him (the overcoming one) will I give the power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron. As the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to pieces, even as I received of my Father” (Rev. 2:26).

There may not seem much connection between this and the next statement in Isaiah’s prophecy: “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.” On reflection, there will appear to be the deepest and most natural connection. When the world is politically coerced — when the power of human governments everywhere is broken, and the Kingdom of God established over all, what is the next phase the divine administration assumes but just this very one: feeding, tending, guiding mankind everywhere, especially that portion of them directly related to him. We read that “many nations shall be joined unto Yahweh in that day, and shall be His people” (Zech. 2:11). The nations, then, will become “His

flock," whom He shall feed like a shepherd — "like a shepherd." We would require to know the ways of shepherd life in the East to appreciate the full force of this. A shepherd in Western countries is little more than a drover — a rude, unsympathetic possessor and driver to market of animals reared for the slaughter. In the East, according to what we learn, shepherds are on affectionate terms with their flocks. The sheep know its shepherd, and he looks well after them. Such is the relation that will exist between the government of Christ and the nations of mankind. What a consoling prospect is this for the world — for the realization of which we may well sigh and cry. The world is not guided by "a shepherd now" by any means, but with the rude, unfeeling action of machinery. So much is this the case that, outside the family circle, the world is felt to be cold and desolate and dangerous. The authorities cannot listen to woe, however crushing, and appeals to reason or mercy or consideration, are addressed to deaf ears. "Law" and routine govern the action of the social machine, though hearts and bones break in the process. But all this will change when God, by Christ takes the world in hand. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd." This applies pre-eminently to the saints and to Israel, but also to "all families of the earth," who will then be associated with them in the long-promised blessedness which, as rain on the mown grass, will descend on all mankind.

Then follows an appeal which is not at all superfluous or out of place, but that, on the contrary, comes in with peculiar logical power and appropriateness. I refer to the description of the greatness of God from verse 12 to the end of the chapter. To some this may seem to come in as a "pious" effusion that might as well have appeared among the psalms. If we will but consider the way in which the Gospel of the Kingdom is received by most people, we may see this in a different light. What is that way? Do they not say it is "too good to be true," "utopian," "idyllic," and the rest? And how are such suggestions to be met? Does not the answer lie in this, that "the mouth of Yahweh hath spoken it?" If He has declared it, must it not come to pass? "Is anything too hard for Yahweh?" It is as if the rest of the chapter said "Consider! Behold the measureless waters of the ocean. Contemplate the awful arch of heaven's unutterable height. Realise the incomputable magnitude of the earth's vast body. What must be His power and wisdom who holds and measures all as a man deals with the limited quantities of merchandise?" To whom can this power and wisdom be attributed? "Who hath directed the Spirit of Yahweh, or being His councillor, hath taught Him? With whom took He counsel? and who instructed Him and taught Him in the path of judgment and taught Him knowledge and showed to Him the way of understanding?"

And if all this power and wisdom belong to Him, is it not a small thing for Him to manifest His glory before the eyes of all flesh, and with strong hand to bring down man's power and greatness, and take mankind in hand



Himself with the beneficence and gentleness of a shepherd? Is it not merely a question of whether He purposes such a thing? And has He not purposed it seeing "the mouth of Yahweh hath spoken it?"

It follows most naturally and impressively from this line of thought that man is nothing in the reckoning, one way or other: "Behold the nations are as a drop of a bucket and are counted as the small dust of the balance. Behold He taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before Him are as nothing; and they are counted to Him less than nothing and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto Him?" The purpose of God may appear to be a thing of opinion and sentiment just now. It may seem the most inconsequential and inoperative of all the forces and elements at work among the calculations and affairs of men. But the course of time will show it is linked with the power that accomplishes the mightiest of operations in the universe. "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold! Who hath created these things? Who bringeth out their host by number? He calleth them by names — by the greatness of His might. Not one faileth because He is strong in power."

Why, then, should men think their way hid from God, or their systems beyond the power of His interference? "He bringeth," that is, He will bring, "the princes to nothing: He will make the judges of the earth as vanity. Yea, they shall not be sown: yea: their stock shall not take root in the earth. He shall blow upon them and they shall wither and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble." He purposes this and He has declared His purpose; and when the Yahweh of hosts purposes, who can disannul? "The everlasting God, Yahweh, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary, and there is no searching of His understanding." It is no mere "pious" flourish that pronounces blessedness on all who believe His Word and trust His promises. It will yet be seen that such are trusting One who has power to perform His will to the uttermost; and goodness to devise the best that loving-kindness can conceive; and faithfulness that cannot fail in the fulfilment of His covenants. Their trust is therefore not a vain trust. Trust in man is truly a vain thing, for man has no power to perform anything of any vital moment, and little reliability as to the performance of even what he can do. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in Yahweh, and whose hope Yahweh is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green," but, "cursed is the man that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from Yahweh. He shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh." This will be manifest to all at last. Wisdom lies in discerning it in advance. We do this on the understanding, and belief, and obedience of the gospel in all things. We are here this morning as a company of those who make a profession of these attainments. We realise

a blessedness even in the profession of them; but how great will be our gladness when, having finished our course, we are included among those who receive the promises with which the chapter concludes: "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might, He increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon Yahweh shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint."

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## The World Disobedient to God

*Calamities upon Israel for disobedience — a warning to us — men now despise and disobey God — He will not hear their prayers — false prophets — truth a minority.*

In Jeremiah 14, as in many parts of the prophets, a calamitous state of things is depicted as prevailing in the land of Israel. It is a picture of dearth — no rain, the ground chapt, the gates languishing, a black aspect on everything; Jerusalem and the country round full of mourning — the children of the nobles themselves on the outlook everywhere for water. If we enquire the meaning of it, we are led straight into the heart of instruction. We do not require to go far to get the meaning. It is asked and supplied in the chapter. The question is put why God should thus neglect His people — why He should be as a stranger in the land — why He should let it seem as if He had no power to save. The answer is straight and strong, and it is an answer from God. "Thus saith Yahweh unto this people." What saith He? Why, that they have loved to wander from Him, that they have forsaken Him, that they have forgotten Him. What then? "Therefore Yahweh doth not accept them: He will now remember their iniquity and visit their sins." This then is the explanation of the evil things that befell Israel in their land. It was as Moses told them when they came out of Egypt. "Beware that thou forget not Yahweh thy God in not keeping His commandments and His judgments and His statutes, which I command thee this day... If thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God... Yahweh shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust... Thou shalt not prosper in thy ways" (Deu. 8:11; 28:24).

It may be said, this is all ancient history, what has it to do with us? A moment's enlightened reflection will bring the answer. It is ancient history written for us. It is among the "whatsoever things 'that' were written for our learning," of which Paul speaks in Romans. Paul says the same thing even about the incidents that happened to Israel on their way from Egypt to Canaan. Referring to such unlikely things as their murmurings and God's manifested displeasure, he says, "all these things happened unto them for example: and

they are written for our admonition" (1Cor. 10:11). If this is true of the events of the Exodus, how much more of the messages of the prophets. They are intended to convey instruction. It is not difficult to see that they do so. If God was displeased with Israel for wandering from Him, will it be any different with us? It is the great crime of the present age that God is ignored and forgotten. It is a crime we were once guilty of. It is a crime into which it is very easy to relapse. Hence the wisdom of reading and studying the prophets, as well as other parts of the Scriptures, that we may come quite into harmony with God's views of human actions, and be preserved from those wrong views which only bring misery and destruction at last. In the case of Israel, it was the Law of God by Moses they neglected; in our case, it is the same voice speaking from heaven by Christ and recorded in the apostolic writings and nowhere else. It is this that the whole world neglects and leaves out of account as entirely as if it had never been delivered. It is this that we may be drawn into forgetfulness of, by the influence of other things, and the supreme power of universal example.

How serious a matter it is to forget the Law of the Lord and act in opposition to its prescriptions, few men in our generation realise. How serious a thing it is we may learn from what God said by Nathan to David, when he sinned in the matter of Uriah. "Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house because thou hast despised Me" (2Sam. 12:10). David had no thoughts of despising God when he sinned the sin which God condemned. He merely yielded to pleasant desire in the first instance, and then sought to screen himself from shame in the second. David feared God exceedingly and had not changed his mind towards God at all. Yet this was God's construction of his act: that in going contrary to the commandment God had given for the guidance of human action, David had "despised God." Men do not think of this when every day in their lives they do the things God has forbidden to be done, and leave undone the things He has commanded to be done. What a fearful accumulation of guilt lies upon the children of disobedience! What a fearful crime for men to despise God. Those despise God who despise His Word; and those practically despise His Word (in God's estimation) who neglect it or disobey it. They do so with impunity now. No harm seems to come to their negligence. It would be foolish to be misled by appearances. It was so with Israel for a long time. It did not seem to matter whether they observed the law of Moses or not. The sun rose, the rain came, the harvest matured, prosperity reigned as much as when the first generation of their fathers feared the commandments. Yes, for a while; but mark the expression in this chapter. "He will now remember their sin." Look out upon their calamitous history and see what this means. Look at their desolate land; look at their wandering and downtrodden race; look at their scattered polity, headless and powerless. Now make the application. It has an application in other directions. See what is said of Rome, respectable and respected Rome which notwithstanding her sins, which have "reached unto heaven," rears her head in complacent and

prosperous authority among the nations of the earth. "Great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath." There are things long past — deeds and transactions which are ancient and forgotten history with the world — to come up again in divine reckoning and be made the basis of terrible acts of retribution — just as with Israel of the 42nd generation of whom Jesus said that upon them would come "all the righteous blood shed upon the earth from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zecharias" — an imprecation so terribly fulfilled in the destruction of the Jewish state by the Romans. Men may individually insulate themselves from the guilt of a generation in which they live. Hence Peter exhorted those who were responsible to "save themselves from that generation." But men who drift with the stream, partake of the guilt of their generation and may find themselves involved in the whirlpool of judgment that will destroy the present wicked world when the time for "remembrance" arrives. This remembrance acts both ways. Forgotten deeds of evil will be remembered and so will forgotten deeds of obedience to God. We read "a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared Yahweh and that thought upon His Name; and they shall be Mine saith Yahweh of Hosts in that day when I make up My jewels." What encouragement we have in view of these things to continue patient in inconvenient well doing and constantly avoiding convenient evil doing. The day of the issue of things, which is as sure to come as the next eclipse, will show the supreme wisdom of such a course and the supreme folly of those who allow themselves to be cheated into forgetfulness of God and disobedience of His commandments.

There are some people for whom God will not be prayed to — people that are in a nominal sense His people. Thus concerning Israel — God's own people — He says to Jeremiah in this chapter "Pray not for this people for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry. When they offer burnt offerings and an oblation, I will not accept them." The reason of His severe attitude, we have already seen. Israel had forgotten God and discarded His law. Consider in this light the community among whom we live. Jesus said, "I pray not for the world." It is a parallel case. Prayer is only acceptable on behalf of those who fear and love and obey God. The world does none of these things. It is in the position of Belshazzar to whom Daniel said, "The God in whose hands thy breath is and whose are all thy ways hast thou not glorified." It is therefore in a position of great wickedness, with all its education and refinements; and it has not ceased to be true that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God." We have stood aside from the world: are we acceptable with God? Yes, if we fear and love Him, and listen to Him in the daily reading of His Word, and serve Him in the observances of the "all things whatsoever He has commanded us by Christ." If we do not these things, but merely mind earthly things like all the world around us, in what are we better than they? In that case we are worse than they, because we know better and have promised differently. To be

“condemned with the world” — to have part in the “judgment that will devour the adversary” is the destiny divinely written beforehand, of all who are in this relation to these things. Here the matter comes home to us. We have been separated like Israel, to be a people, but God’s pleasure in us depends upon our faithfulness to Him. If we hold our position in the gospel, merely as a man holds a policy of insurance or a deed of conveyance — that is, as an instrument of personal advantage in a futurity for which we find it our interest to provide, God will have no pleasure in us, and we shall find the gospel of no advantage. Christ will refuse to pray for us, and we shall go to his judgment seat at last to find our sins unforgiven, and our path closed by condemnation. Looking at Israel as exhibited to us in the Scriptures of truth, we learn what is pleasing to God and what is not.

Jeremiah’s words were very unpalatable to the people — at which we cannot wonder. The words of another class were quite acceptable. These were the false prophets, but who were not discerned to be such by the people in general. Their words were pleasant words — assurances of peace, where Jeremiah was warning them against the coming calamity because of their sins. Such words were naturally very powerful with the people, and Jeremiah found their influence a great barrier to the work God had sent him to do. Of this he makes complaint in the chapter before us: “Oh, Lord God! Behold the prophets say unto them, ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place” (v. 13). What was God’s response to this? It is most worthy of note: “The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them. They prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought and the deceit of their heart.” What is most noteworthy of all is the fact that these pleasant-spoken, people-misleading false prophets were tolerated side by side with a true messenger from God. What are we to make of it? God could have paralysed them all in a moment so that no doubt could have been left in any one’s mind as to their true character, and all would have seen that Jeremiah’s message was from God. He did so manifest his discriminating power on important occasions, as when the envious Korah, Dathan and Abiram were supported by a phalanx of the most influential of the congregation against Moses, and as when God answered one man by fire on the top of Carmel, and ignored hundreds of sycophantic priests whom he left to slaughter. But in the case before us, He left the false prophets to say their say unmolested. The people had to exercise their judgment as to which represented the mind of the Lord. It is an illustration of the wise principle that there is a time for everything. There is a time for God to place the seal of His open reprobation upon wickedness, so that men may have a basis of test in other times and matters. But there is a time when the false is allowed to flourish with absolute impunity and even with prosperity, and when the true is allowed to be under a cloud, in order that the minds of faithful men may be exercised and proved.

God expects and requites that we have "senses exercised to discern both good and evil." This capability could not be developed by a situation in which evil did not have a chance. For this reason, these false prophets were allowed to have all the weight that came with numbers, influence, and unanimity, while the Truth was with one meek man against whom all were speaking (15:10). May we not from this gain consolation for our own position? God has allowed the Truth to come into the most humbling circumstances, having scarcely any friends among men, while error is organized with great and respectable and wealthy and educated systems with multitudes of supporters. Judging by appearances, men would judge wrongly. Judging by the Scriptures, we are enabled to judge clearly and strongly and boldly, and to maintain the Truth against the whole world in arms against it. The situation is one calling for and compelling an almost violent exercise of judgment. God requires this at our hands. By the mouth of Christ he says, "Beware of false prophets" — and false prophets are necessarily the numerous, popular, and well-to-do. How are we to discern them? "Ye shall know them by their fruits." Are they like the true? Oh yes; you would think they were the genuine sheep: they have got sheep skins on. How are we to distinguish them from the true? You must "try" them. "Believe not every spirit: try the spirits whether they are of God." How are we to try them? God Himself tells us: "By the Word." "If any man speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them." There is no other form of God's Word in the earth at present but the Bible. Therefore, it comes to this: the Bible is the standard. Every claim must be judged by this. But before men can judge by the Bible, they must be acquainted with it; and before they can be acquainted with it, they must study it — not reading a chapter now and then, as a pious, conscience-soothing performance, like the orthodox people, but reading it in a daily, regular, earnest manner, at stated times set apart for the purpose. By this method, a man becomes so acquainted with the Scriptures as to be able to make that practical application of them in judgment that qualifies him to discern the things that are of God from those that are only so in name and appearance.

Jeremiah was instructed to utter the sentence of God against the plausible men who were stealing the hearts of the people away from a divine allegiance. They were saying, "Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye see famine." God commanded Jeremiah to say, "By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed; and the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword, and they shall have none to bury them." Here was a direct issue between one man and many, as to whether good or evil was in store for the God-neglecting inhabitants of Jerusalem. The people who heard the one contradicting the many, had to wait to see which was right, so far as actual realization was concerned. We are not in that position. We look back and see that the Truth was with Jeremiah and not with the community who were opposed to him. In terrible reality, sword

and famine came and desolated the country, almost destroying the whole population for the time being. The application to ourselves is plain. The Word of God by the prophets has been proved true over and over again. Therefore what they have written concerning the future will come to pass. On this we stand, however much appearances may be against us. It is written, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is set in them to do evil." This is our experience. Because the declared purpose of God seems to tarry, the bulk of men hang back or turn away from the testimony, and give themselves entirely over to "the desires of the flesh and of the mind." Here is the trial of faith and patience. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." The purpose of God will surely be accomplished, and happy will they all be who hold fast their confidence to the end. We know what God says, "If any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him."

One more point in the chapter before concluding. Because of impending judgment Jeremiah was instructed thus: "Therefore shalt thou say this word unto them: Let mine eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease; for the virgin daughter of my people is broken with a great breach and with a very grievous blow. If I go forth into the field, then behold the slain with the sword, and if I enter into the city, then behold them that are sick with famine." There are two features about this deserving of notice. One is obvious, and will be allowed by all who receive the Scriptures, and that is that it is according to the mind of God that we have such sympathy with all things pertaining to Jerusalem as to mourn for her in the day of her desolation. A sorrow on this account is not on the list of the world's virtues by any means. It belongs notwithstanding to those mental states which are unto God as a sweet smelling savor. Probed to its root, it is a sympathy with all things that are truly divine and wise and true and good; for Jerusalem represents the work and purposes of God in the earth as distinguished from the mere likes and schemes of man which are all destined to perish. The other point which might not perhaps catch attention so easily is the light incidentally thrown by this prophecy on the subject of inspiration as affecting some portions of the Scripture that would not seem by their form to be inspired. Jeremiah is commanded to use words that would appear to be a mere personal lament of his own: "Let mine eyes run down with tears." The words so written were the words of God, though apparently the words of Jeremiah. God made use of the expression of Jeremiah's feelings as the form in which His own mind concerning Israel was to be expressed. Study shows this to be the case in hundreds of cases where it is not expressly stated to be the case. For example, the Psalms of David are all in this form, so much so, that some have a difficulty realising that they can be the words of the Spirit. Yet the Psalms of David are repeatedly quoted in the New Testament as the expression of the Spirit. The

case of Jeremiah before us may show us how this can be; for of David, as of Jeremiah, it is true that the Spirit of God was the moving power of his utterance, though these utterances took a personal form. As David declares: "The Spirit of God spake by me, and His word was on my tongue." A recognition of the all-prevailing presence of the Spirit is essential to a right estimate and a right use of these inestimable writings. By this, we are enabled to read them with the result that Paul tells us they were given by the inspiration for viz.: "That the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works and so be prepared for "entering abundantly" the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

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## The Terror of the Lord

*God a consuming fire, as well as love — flood, Sodom, and Canaanites examples — resurrection to future judgment — knowledge brings responsibility — Christ brings terrible punishment for disobedient.*

"THE terror of the Lord" is an expression of Paul's in connection with the judgment seat (2Cor. 5:11), and one which we ought to fully estimate. It is the natural companion idea to "the joy of the Lord"; for whatever goes to constitute this must in the absence or deprivation thereof become "the terror of the Lord" in the public enunciation in the presence of the person affected. Personal presence is the essential part of the idea, for there can be no terror without conscious relation to the matter inspiring the terror. Deprivation without this would not be terror. "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." An illustration of this we have in the case of Paul's efforts to persuade Felix. As he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled (Acts 24:25). There must have been something terrifying in Paul's exhibition of judgment to come to make Felix tremble.

The forbearance of God makes men forget that He is "great and dreadful and terrible" as well as "humble and gracious and loving," and that after a time of patience and long-suffering He breaks forth like a devouring fire (Isa. 42:14). It is part of a scriptural ministration of the gospel to declare that there is "a fearful looking for of judgment and a fiery indignation," which shall devour the adversary (Heb. 10:27), as well as a looking for the blessed hope of receiving "the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Titus 2:11; Eph. 2:7). It is part of the Truth proclaimed by the apostles, not only that God will give eternal life with glory, honor and peace, to those who obey Him, but that He will render indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish "to them that are contentious and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness" (Rom. 2:6-9).



“Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.” Having the same knowledge, we ought to do the same — reminding one another that “our God is a consuming fire” as well as a refuge of peace and comfort; and pressing upon men around us that vengeance awaits also “those that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”...the prospect of which caused Felix to tremble.

There has always been a terrible side to the ways of God, after a time of unappreciated peace and patience. Adam and Eve found the moment a moment of terror when, for a very slight deviation (as men reckon) from the revealed will of God, they were expelled from the delightful enclosure of Eden, and sent into a desert of sterility and labor to dishonor and death. Cain found the vagabondism and universal enmity enforced upon him for his unbrotherly executiveship, a punishment greater than he could bear. The frantic crowds on the morning of the Flood in Noah’s day petitioned in vain against the devouring terror of the Lord in the relentless waters that overwhelmed them. Sodom, in “pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness,” having treated the warning words of Lot as the words of “one that mocked,” awoke in startled agony when the sun had risen on that fateful day, to find, in terror, escape cut off from the burning storm that consigned them to “the vengeance of everlasting fire.” The populous community of the Amorites, who, in seven nations, rested voluptuously in the days of Canaan’s plenty, all heedless of the God that made and owned them, swooned in courage-killing terror in the presence of Joshua’s advancing host, with sword in hand, on a mission of extermination, because of the overflowing cup of their iniquity. Then, think of the terror after terror that befell that very avenging host in their subsequent generations, when, because of their forgetfulness and disobedience of God, “the sword without and terror within destroyed both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of grey hairs.” Behold, Jerusalem herself, at last stricken in silence by the terror of the Lord fallen upon her, multitudes within her dying in speechless misery from want of all friendship and all food, and other multitudes perishing in screams as the ruthless flames laid the doomed city in ashes. The terror of the great day of retribution that comes with Christ will exceed and combine all the terrors that have gone before. It is “the time of the dead” which no other time has been before. There has been resurrection before, but not for judgment. “Women received their dead raised to life again” more than once during the times of the Law. Many cases of resurrection occurred in connection with the Lord’s work at his first coming, including that of “many bodies of the saints which arose” at his resurrection (Matt. 27:52); but none of these cases could earn for the day of their occurrence the description of Christ as “the time of the dead.” This is a description applied alone to the epoch introduced by the sounding of the seventh trumpet following hard after the second woe whose echoes (French Revolution) have hardly subsided in the world’s history. Why it should be so applied is perfectly clear when all the testimony is placed together. “At that

time many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake." This is what the angel said to Daniel (Ch. 12:2), "All that are in the grave shall come forth" is what Jesus said (John 5:29). "There shall be a resurrection of the just and of the unjust" is what Paul said (Acts 24:15), who also said that Christ would judge them at his appearing (2 Tim. 4:1).

The Apocalyptic phrase is, "the time of the dead that they should be judged" (Rev. 11:18). This tells us there is no judging of the dead till Christ returns again to the earth; but it also tells us there will be a judging of them then. And so general and so large is the event as to justify the description of the epoch that witnesses it as "the time of the dead." "Many of them that sleep" shall come forth. Many means not a few; it also means not all. When we ask why not all, the Scriptures give but one answer and that answer is a reasonable answer: namely, that all have not knowledge of the divine requirements, and therefore do not stand upon the basis upon which condemnation in judgment will be rendered. "Men that have no understanding are like the beasts that perish (Psa. 49:20). "This is the (ground of) condemnation that light is come (John 3:19). "If ye were blind ye should have no sin" (John 9). "To him that knoweth to do good, but doeth it not, to him it is sin." (James 4:17). "He that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not" (Matt. 7:26). "Who, knowing the judgment of God that those who do such things are worthy of death, etc." (Rom. 1:32). "Times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth" (Acts 17:30). "The words that I have spoken shall judge" (John 12:48). "Preach the gospel... he that believeth not shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). "The servant that knew his Lord's will shall be beaten with many stripes, and the servant that knew not... few stripes" (Luke 12:47). "Received mercy because I did it ignorantly" (1 Tim. 1:13). "Though thou knewest all this" (Dan. 5:22). "Whosoever will not hearken to My words which he shall speak in My name (which implies that he knows of them) I will require it of him... the same shall judge him in the last day" (Deu. 18:19; John 12:48).

Knowledge or the absence of knowledge is always affirmed as the determining condition of responsibility, which is in accordance with the most elementary conception of justice afforded to us in the Scriptures, and suggested to us by the mental constitution God has given us. There are divine things in which it is lawful to ask: "Doth not even Nature itself teach you?" (1 Cor 11:14). Because, therefore, the mass of the dead were ignorant in the days of their life of the revealed will of God by which men will be judged at the resurrection, we may understand why "many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth," and not all of them, shall awake in the time of the dead.

But the number of them that so awake will be sufficiently great as to be stupendous, seeing that even the small section of them accepted will be "a multitude that no man can number." The prospect of such an event as this resurrection affords a theme for the most stirring reflection. The dead are soon forgotten by the living. With few exceptions ten or twenty years are sufficient to blot them out of contemporary memory. Fifty years certainly, and as for a

hundred years, who is there here that remember those who died a hundred years ago? When we go beyond that, how profound is the silence that has fallen upon past generations. The fact comes home to us when we visit old churchyard burying grounds; or ancient cathedral burying grounds: where we can scarcely make out the time-eaten inscriptions which tell us of persons that died centuries ago... who knows anything of these persons?... Every vestige of their affairs has disappeared from the face of the earth; "Their love and their hatred and their envy is now perished."

If we take the process back to the apostolic age, it is only to find the obliteration more complete; except as to one or two, not a name, or a trace can be found of the men who honored or disgraced the name of the Lord in their day and generation. As for the days of Abraham, the living of our day have a kind of feeling that the dead of those ancient days really never had an actual human life at all, or at all events, that they are as clean out of the reckoning of things as if they had never existed. Forgotten,... utterly forgotten of men. Are they forgotten of God? The answer is, "the time of the dead" comes on. This is no myth or imagination. We have his pledge, "Christ has risen," "God hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men in that He hath raised him from the dead." Though this covers large dispensational ground, it includes "the time of the dead that they should be judged, and that Thou shouldest give reward unto Thy servants, to the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear Thy name, small and great, and shouldest destroy them that destroy the earth."

Christ is the pivot and instrument of this whole work; God has given him "power over all flesh" for its execution. He "hath committed all judgment unto the Son;" and a day is appointed for its execution. That day is the day of his coming when the dead will answer his summons and come forth; "they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and those that have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation." The living busy with their ephemeral business have not only forgotten the dead, but they have forgotten Christ, "the Lord both of the dead and of the living." But he has not forgotten one or other. He has not died or changed since his resurrection. He sent the message afterwards. "I am he that liveth and was dead; behold I am alive for evermore and have the keys of the grave and of death."

When he reappears on the scene he will find the living very busy as now. They will think him and his work "out of harmony with the spirit of the age." He will have his thoughts about them. Which set of thoughts will prevail? We know. It is the foolish generation now upon the earth that will be in the way, and they will have to be brought into fit with the eternal rationalities incorporate in Christ in order to be tolerated at all in the new order of things. How wise to get into this harmony now. Christ is at the door, as all the signs of the times tell us; but even if he were not, it would not make the current folly wise. He is at the door in every generation, since from every responsible

generation death divides him consciously from them but for a moment, however long chronologically; and it always has been the most egregious folly on the part of the living to forget the righteous judgment of God which in the time of the dead will cause every responsible man to find according to his ways. "God is not mocked." "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." How great will be the terror of the Lord in the time of the dead for those who are convicted of the crime of deliberate rebellion against the God of the spirits of all flesh. It is a disgrace that enters the soul for a man to be dishonored in the presence of his fellow-men, whether in an educational competition or in a public meeting, or in a law court, or in the public Press, or at the hands of royalty; but who shall measure the humiliation of the man whom Christ refuses to acknowledge in the presence not only of the mustered dead of all ages, but of the attendant hosts of the angels who accompany Christ in his work? It is a terrible thing to be involved in public or private calamity of any kind; but what mortal experience of evil can equal the misfortune of those who are ordered to depart from the presence of Christ with the wailing multitude, who will appeal in vain to a clemency which they despised in the days of grace, and who leave him for a life of vagrancy and destitution to end their days in a dishonored grave? It is looked upon as the most calamitous of human experiences to sink in poverty, neglect, and be the victim of painful and incurable disease; but what lot can compare with the portion of those who awake from the slumbers of ages (in many cases) to find themselves strangers in a strange time, and to receive the due reward of their deeds in the "tribulation and anguish" that will be decreed to "every soul of man that doeth evil," in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Christ Jesus?

There is a time for everything. There is a time to look these solemn eventualities of the future in the face. We naturally seek relief from the effect they produce in our mind. The only safe relief lies in the remembrance that for the obedient "God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep we should live together with him," and that this salvation, when conferred, means just the reverse of all the evil conditions that will befall the rejected: honor from God in the presence of a multitude of admiring friends; physical and mental capacity of the utmost strength and sweetness in the bestowment of an incorruptible nature that will never wear out, but manifest the brightness and joy of life for evermore; a place in the exalted community of the friends of God who, after these times of trial and states of evil, will be placed in possession of the earth in power and glory, and immortality. It may well be said "Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life and enter in through the gates into the city."

# Divine Glory – In Symbol and Reality

*Ezekiel's "living creatures" a symbol of future glory — Divine forsaking of Israel for iniquity — "Ichabod" — punishment but restoration to come — the return of Divine glory in the future Temple.*

TO the casual reader of the Bible, the books of the prophets seem very much alike. There seems no discernable difference between one and another as regards either matter, structure, or style. To some extent, this view is correct, and necessarily so. The Spirit of God is the author of them all through various human instrumentalities, and therefore there is a uniformity of character in them which distinguishes them from the products of diverse human authorship.

At the same time, there is a difference that becomes manifest to the close and constant acquaintance of loving study. It is not the difference of a different authorship, but the variation of excellence in which the wisdom of God delights, as in the diversified works of nature, or the differing spirit-gifts which that "one and self same Spirit" bestowed on the governing eldership of the apostolic age. Ezekiel is before us in today's reading as a distinct illustration of this difference between one prophetic book and another. There is a method in the construction of this book that imparts to it a character of its own, and that character, one of peculiar distinctness and interest. There is a beginning, middle and end to Ezekiel, in a spiritual as well as in a literary sense. He is a witness of the glory of God in a special form, with a special meaning at three different times.

First, we find him a captive among the first batch of captives that went forth to Babylon with Jehoiachin and his queen-mother, and a number of the principal men and inhabitants of the land about twelve years before the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, at the time Nebuchadnezzar made Jehoiachin's uncle Zedekiah, king in his place. He is "by the river of Chebar," one of the tributaries of the Euphrates. He is a young member of a priestly family, and presumably one of those who were an exception to the prevalent temper of the land, in pleasing God by his faith and obedience. At this time and place, he is appointed a prophet to the house of Israel. The process of his appointment begins with his seeing something, as was frequently the case in the calling of the prophets. What he saw he describes elaborately. His general summary of it is that it was the "appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" (Ch. 1:28).

He saw in the heavens, approaching from the north with whirlwind like velocity, "a great cloud and a fire enfolding itself" and suffused with electric

brightness “as the color of amber.” From the heart of this self-feeding glowing fire-cloud, there emerged and came near to him a wonderful apparatus of wheels and living creatures, surmounted by a throne occupied by a shining human figure, and over-arched by a bow of intense prismatic hues. The living creatures and wheels were full of eyes and quivering with light and flame, and the whole ran and returned with the rapidity of the lightning flash. This “appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord” was one of “the similitudes” which God tells us by Hosea (12:10) He made use of in “multiplied visions” “by the ministry of the prophets.” It is therefore full of significances most interesting to search out. Dr. Thomas has given us the clue to their import which ordinary intelligence is able to trace out. The self-feeding fire-cloud stands as the symbol of the Eternal One: the throne-surmounted living creatures and the wheels represented to us the Israelitish form of the intended manifestation of His self-evolved glory upon the earth in His chosen sons and daughters, when they shall have acquired, in their change to Spirit nature, the added powers of divine locomotion and omniscience. The throne stands for the Kingdom, and the occupant thereof for him under whom it is His purpose to gather together all things in one (Eph. 1:10).

But there is place for a supplementary thought. Symbols may be symbols, and yet may have reality as literal accessories. Nearly all manifested power is by means of symbols which, though having only a symbolic meaning, are nevertheless literal realities. The throne room of any monarch exemplifies the point. The coat of arms surmounting the throne is a symbol, and only a symbol, yet it is a real thing as well. The throne itself is a symbol... (for any other seat would do for literal sitting purposes). But though a symbol, it is a literal reality as well. So with the numerous badges of honor among men... ribbons and medals and crosses... they are all symbols and understood to be such and only valued as such, and yet are realities first. May not this truth hold good with the manifestation of the divine glory? What was the flaming sword at Eden’s gate; the pillar of fire in front of Israel’s marching host; the chariots of fire escorting Elijah and surrounding Elisha... the dove form of the anointing Spirit at the baptism of Christ... what were these but symbols, yet realities as things used with symbolic import?

May it not be that there are divine insignia... actual symbolic things of Spirit form and substance that attend and express to the highest intelligence the inscrutable and incommunicable attributes of the Eternal? We do not know. We must wait and see. Some things like Ezekiel’s vision seem to favor the idea. We must not limit our conceptions of the Eternal Father by our experiences and impressions as earth-borns. The universe is too vast and too diversified in its manifested power and glory to justify narrow views on the subject. The Father dwells in heaven, and must have actual surroundings... bright and incorruptible but real, and therefore having form. It may be that

“the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord” seen by Ezekiel on the plains of Chebar, while displaying truth in symbol, forms part of the real garniture of the divine glory when literally manifested to the eyes of men. On the other hand, it may be on a par with John’s “seven golden candlesticks,” and “ten horned” seven-headed monster... mere mental pictures having no real existence beyond the impression produced on the mind of prophet or apostle. It is a point on which judgment must be held in suspense. The absolute illimitability of the forms of power and wisdom displayed in the universe forbids dogmatism on the subject. There are heights and varieties of divine glory and power which offer a boundless prospect of intellectual gratification in the day when, if happily accepted, “we shall know even as we are known.”

The object of this manifestation of the glory of God to Ezekiel on the plains of Chebar was to make him known (and to communicate to Israel) the reason of God’s impending departure from them. This reason is stated and reiterated in a variety of forms. The pith of it is contained in the following: “Jerusalem: I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her. And she hath changed My judgments into wickedness more than the nations and My statutes more than the countries that are round about her: for they have refused My statutes and My judgments: they have not walked in them... Therefore thus saith the Lord God, behold I, even I, am against thee and will execute judgments in the midst of thee, in the sight of the nations... and the whole remnant of thee will I scatter unto all the winds... I will make thee waste and a reproach among the nations that are round about thee in the sight of all that pass by” (ch. 5:5-14). This purpose and the cause of it were dramatized to Ezekiel and by him to Israel in the most striking manner. He was first told by God that the people to whom he was being sent were a rebellious people... “impudent and stiff-hearted” (2:3-4), but that he must deliver the Word to them undismayed by their threatening looks, and “whether they will hear or whether they will forbear” (3:4-11). “Behold,” said God, “I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant, harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house” (3:8-9).

He was commanded to make a representation of Jerusalem — a sort of model — and to conduct against it a mimic siege — as if it might be in the market place in the sight of the people, and to explain to the people that God purposed the destruction of the city because of their iniquity. “I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem, and they shall eat bread by weight and with care, and they shall drink water by measurement and with astonishment... and pestilence and blood shall pass through thee, and I will bring the sword upon thee. And the slain shall fall in the midst of you and ye shall know that I am the Lord. Yet I will leave a remnant that ye may have some that shall escape

the sword among the nations when ye shall be scattered through the countries. And they that escape of you shall remember Me among the nations whither they shall be carried captive... They shall know that I am the Lord, and that I have not said in vain that I would do this evil unto them."

This may be called the first part of Ezekiel's prophecy. The glory of God is in it, as we have seen. In the second part, Ezekiel is himself made to see the reason of God's displeasure with Israel, and is shown the departure of the glory from their midst. He is brought "in the visions of God to Jerusalem," and shown a variety of abominations enacted in secret places in the city, under the idea on the part of the transgressors that "The Lord seeth us not: the Lord hath forsaken the earth" (8:12). "And behold the glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the vision that I saw in the plain." But the glory had ascended from its usual cherubic resting place, and stood on the threshold of the house (9:3). In this position, it summoned six armed men, and commissioned them to go through the city and "Slay utterly old and young, both maids and little children and women." They were not to touch certain men on whom a mark was first to be placed, viz.: "the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof." As regards the rest, the command was: "Defile the house and fill the courts with slain: go ye forth." And the command was obeyed in Ezekiel's presence. Ezekiel was painfully exercised at the scene and interceded with God. The answer was: "The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great and the land is full of blood and the city full of perverseness: for they say, 'The Lord hath forsaken the earth . . . and the Lord seeth us not?'" "Mine eye shall not spare neither will I have pity: but I will recompense their way upon their head."

Then the full glory of the wheeled cherubim was displayed: and "the glory of the Lord departed from off the threshold of the house and stood over the cherubim, and the cherubim lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight... The glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city." From this point onward, the prophecy of Ezekiel has mostly to do with the desolation in Israel and other lands, consequent on the departure of the glory of God from His people. This is appropriate enough. The time of the Gentiles were just commencing. They set in a few years afterwards with the overthrow of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. Since then with the exception of the Word communicated to Daniel in Babylon to Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi in support of the feeble restoration and to the closing revelation by Jesus and the apostles which may be compared to the last rays of the setting sun, the state of Israel has been one of darkness. "Ichabod" has been written on all things Jewish. "Dry bones" indeed are the fitting symbol of the Jews since God departed from them.

The departure of the glory of God from their midst is the explanation of



all. But if there was a departure, there was something to depart. The glory of God was in their midst before it went away. And this is the rock on which we stand — that God did truly in time past speak unto the fathers by the prophets, and last of all by His Son. The dreadful past in its fulfilment of the dreadful prophecy foretelling it, is the proof that the prophecy is true, and, therefore, the guarantee that what is not yet fulfilled will be so in due course.

And this introduces us to the third and last stage of Ezekiel's prophecy — the glory of God at the end, as well as at the beginning and the middle. It comes in at a very significant place, namely, when all the desolations spoken of in the intervening portions of the prophecy have culminated in the Gogian invasion of the land of Israel, in "the latter days," when God brings the armies of the Gentiles against the Holy Land, that a situation may be created in which the interposition of His mighty hand may be visible to all the world, preparatory to the setting up of His glorious Kingdom. That the final vision of the glory of the Lord should come in here, is most fitting. That Ezekiel's prophecy should end with it is beautiful. Its description occupies the last nine chapters. These chapters describe a vision seen by Ezekiel fourteen years after Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, and nearly twenty years after he saw the vision of the departing glory of the Lord. It is a vision of returning glory — never again to depart, for the last word of this concluding vision is, "The name of the city from that day shall be, the Lord is there." In this vision, Ezekiel tells us that he was brought "into the land of Israel" and set upon a very high mountain from which he beheld "the frame of a city on the south." Being conducted near the city, he was met by a man of striking appearance, furnished with a measuring reed of nearly 12 feet in length, and a line of flax, who told him he had been sent to show him the place and all things connected with it, in a detailed manner. The man then proceeded to measure the wall and the east gate and its belongings and the court inside and another gate on the further side of the court leading into an inner court, crossing which, after sundry perambulations, they entered the inner house, the further limit of which introduced them to "the most holy," being the top of the mount encircled. Having seen the immense building throughout, a city in its vast extent, yet one edifice in its entirety — the sanctuary of the Lord — whose construction, and character, and uses, the brethren will now very shortly have the opportunity of learning in detail from Bro. Sulley's plans and exposition, he was then permitted to behold the glory of the Lord in the different character already referred to. "Behold the glory of the Lord came from the way of the east and His voice was like the noise of many waters, and the earth shined with His glory. It was according to the appearance of the vision I saw when I came to destroy the city: and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar. And I fell upon my face, and the glory of the Lord came into the house by way of the gate, whose prospect is towards the east. So the Spirit took me up and brought me

into the inner court, and behold the glory of the Lord filled the house. And I heard Him speaking unto me out of the house (and the man stood by me) and He said unto me, Son of Man, the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever, and My holy name shall the house of Israel no more defile" (43:2-7).

The Truth enables us, not only to understand but to contemplate with rapture this exhibition of what God purposes to do in the end of His dealings with the house of Israel. That he has not made the earth in vain — that He means to fill it with His glory at the last — He has declared from the beginning. Here in Ezekiel, we are permitted to see the means of its establishment and the form of its manifestation. — A Kingdom established in the land of promise, with dominion over universal man, and having as its central feature a temple of extent and capacity never equalled in the dreams of man, acting as a pivot and purifier of universal life, diffusing blessing where little else than misery and the shadow of death now prevail. It is a matter in which we are practically interested. We have been called to be heirs of the Kingdom, and this is the Kingdom in manifestation. Nothing that has ever been on earth can be compared to it. It is a glory that is as certain to come as the desolation which long foretold has prevailed so long that men's hearts are sick and their faith in coming goodness nearly dead. Let not our faith die. The grimy and oppressive surroundings of the present dispensation, though they seem so permanent, are as transient as the disturbed dreams of night. The hour will come when they will have disappeared from our view, and when nothing will be visible on the earth but the blessedness in Abraham and his seed — long promised and come at last.

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## God "Will Avenge" Gentile Disobedience

*Prophets speak God's words, therefore oracles of wrath because men sinners —  
God's proprietary rights ignored — Gentiles as guilty as Jews — retribution  
sure to come.*

**A**T the beginning of Ezekiel's ministry, he was called on to eat a symbolic roll, representative of the message to Israel with which he was entrusted. The contents of this roll you may remember were described as "lamentation and mourning and woe." The sequel of Ezekiel's prophecy is in complete accord with this description of its character. It is, with slight intermissions here and there, a continual exhibition of coming calamity because of iniquity. In this, Ezekiel is no exception to the other prophets. They are all of them deeply tinged and charged with this element

which is so repugnant to human feeling. They are all of them burdened with wrath and evil — all of them full of depreciation and condemnation of Israel to whom they were addressed. This is a fact worth pondering. How comes this to be the case? Why should the Bible differ from all other books in this? The public writers of other nations — of whatever age or country — indulge in terms of patriotic complacency and congratulation. They praise the race and the land to which they belong, whether it be Greek or Roman, British or French, German or American. You do not find a Frenchman running down the French, nor a Briton disparaging the English; nor do you even find a Jew lowering the race of Israel. The Jews are like man universally. They boast of their stock, and will even give an egotistic interpretation to their dispersion. They will tell you that God scattered them that they might be made a blessing to the world — that the excellence of Israel might not be confined to a narrow country like Palestine!

Why do the prophets differ from the Jews and universal man in this? One reason we know: that, in writing these Scriptures, they wrote not according to their own, but according to divine impulse. As Peter says: "Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." This is a great difference, and a sufficient explanation of the literary and moral difference between the Scriptures of the prophets and the writings of merely natural writers of all ages. But why should the difference take this shape? Why should the fact of the Spirit of God being in a man give a morose turn to his communications? Why should not the Spirit of God express itself in lightsome, good-natured, amiable terms? There is a reason. The messages of the prophets came in the main because Israel, to whom they were delivered, had set God aside. "They have estranged themselves from Me: they have not hearkened to My commandments." This is God's own explanation. But, again a question: why should this be a reason? Why should not man be at liberty to choose his own way, and follow his own bent? Why should his doing so be a cause of divine anger? The answer is at once of a boundless depth and of Sunday school simplicity. God has made all things for Himself, and especially man. The earth is not for man, except man fulfil the end for which God placed him on it, which was that he might glorify God and taste the true sweetness of his own nature in rendering to Him the submission of a loving obedience and the homage of a sincere worship. If we ask why should God make His glory the governing consideration in the regulation of human destiny, even to this, reason has a clear answer. God is the essence of all things: He is the fountain of life, the beginning of being, the means of universal subsistence. Any life we now have is His and by His permission. Any life we hope to have in the resurrection state is His and by His permission. Without Him, there can be no life and no anything. God only has life and wisdom and power in Himself. All substance, all organisation, all beauty, all excellence of adaption, whether in the

constitution of small objects like plants and animals, or in the arrangement of the gigantic bodies and movements of the universe, are due to Him, and of Him, and in Him. It is, therefore, most reasonable that His will should be law. What man who had laid out a fine estate and built a palace on it and filled it with adjacent houses for dependents to live near by his favor, would not desire his will to be the law of the place? What reasonable tenant would demur? And if it would be considered reasonable that a man's will should be law in such a case, though the man made not the ground, nor the stone, nor the people invited to live near him, how much more reasonable is it that God's will should be law, who has made heaven and earth, and sustains all things and creatures in being by His power?

This being so, look at the circumstances evoking the condemnation of the prophets. Israel had set aside His Law. They had done so from the beginning. It was of the Lord's mercy they were allowed to live at all. God Himself sets the case before them in yesterday's reading. He presents to them their history as it appeared to Him, which is a Jewish history of a very different complexion from that written by Jew or Gentile in our days. He told them that from the beginning they had gone astray. "This city hath been to me a provocation of Mine anger from the day that they built it." Even before Jerusalem's history began, they angered Him by their continual non-compliance with His revealed requirements. "While ye were yet in Egypt," he says, in effect, in the chapter we had yesterday (20), "I was minded to destroy you for your stubborn rejection of My ways: but I refrained for My name's sake" (not for your righteousness), as even Moses told them (Deu. 9:5). "After you came out of Egypt," God proceeds to say, "I would have destroyed you in the wilderness for your perpetual refusal to walk in My law. I did destroy a generation of you when ye refused to go up into the land, and after 40 years your children went in. And I said to the children, Be not like your fathers, but harken to My law and walk in My commandments. But the children were no better than the fathers, and turned aside to the ways and the gods of the heathen round about them. And thus it has been with you time after time till the present day. And now you wish to enquire of me? I will not be enquired of by you. I will number you to the slaughter, and give you over to the sword. The land shall be cleared of its inhabitants and shall lie desolate." And so it came to pass.

There is an application of all this which is not apparent at first, but becomes very apparent on second thoughts, and is not far-fetched at all, but the manifest truth. All these things, Paul says, happened to Israel "for ensample," and were "written for our admonition." Israel for a time is cast off, and now the Gentiles have their turn. They have diverged as constantly from the divine law as Israel did. Yet, like Israel, they are on very good terms with themselves, and if we were to judge by appearances, we should think as they think. But if we could hear their history portrayed by a divine hand, as Israel's

was, we should see a very different picture from that exhibited in the thousand-voiced histories that pour from the press at the present time. Nay, we do not need to wait for such a portrayal: we have it in the precepts of what they ought to be. God had patience a long time with Israel, so much so that they misunderstood it, and concluded that God took no notice, and was unconcerned at what was passing in their midst (Eze. 8:12). And so it is with the Gentiles. They have been so long left to themselves that God has become mythical with them; His deeds in past times a legend: His judicial ways a smile. They practically say, and often say it in very words, "God is very negligent of us if there be a God." The appearance of things seems to confirm their view. Day slips away after day without any visible indication that God takes any notice, or regards with any displeasure the universal dishonor of His name, and setting at naught of His commandments. Let us not be misled by appearances. It is only a repetition of what happened in Israel's days. God's own history of their course shows that His anger was burning slowly against them all the thousand years they were in the land, notwithstanding that He allowed them to enjoy His bounty, and loaded them with His goodness. He was not inattentive, but He was long suffering. He keeps not His anger for ever, yet after so much forbearance, the suppressed flame bursts forth and devours all before it. Read the history of the last Jewish war — the war of Rome against Jerusalem — the invasion of the Holy Land in the first century under Vespasian and Titus. Get a full view of the devastations, and the horrors, and the slaughters, and the ruin that overwhelmed the land. God in His Providence has given us the opportunity in the narrative of an eye-witness and performer — Josephus. We ought to read this once a year. It enables us to see and to feel what the outburst of a long restrained divine anger means. And it qualifies us to read aright our own times. On the surface "all things continue as they were from the beginning." Men with impunity follow their own God-disregarding ways, think their own proud thoughts, and speak their own masterful and irreverent words. It seems not to matter whether a man pray or blaspheme. Let us not be misled by appearances. We have God's own Word about this as well as about Israel. "The indignation of the Lord is upon all nations, and His fury upon all their armies." "The world lieth in wickedness." "He is angry with the wicked every day." His anger is destined to come to a terrible head in the last days of the Gentile dispensation. In a figurative sense, we may say the storm is on its way. Thus it is written, "The whirlwind of the Lord goeth forth with fury — a continuing whirlwind; it shall fall with pain upon the head of the wicked. The fierce anger of the Lord shall not return until He have done it, and until He have performed the intents of His heart: in the latter days, Ye shall consider it!" — in the latter days, Ye shall consider it!! It will be considered in the latter days, because in these days it will be manifest, as it is written, "At that time (in "the time of the end," when the northern hosts overrun the

Holy Land and encounter an unexpected and unknown antagonist in the Prince that standeth for the children of Daniel's people, Dan. 11:40; 12:1)...there shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time." Or as it is in the symbolic language of the Apocalypse. "Voices and thunders and lightnings, and a great earthquake such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake and so great" (16:18) — "the nations angry, Thy wrath come, and the time of the dead" (11:18).

Consequently, we walk not wisely unless we walk in full view of what is impending. We are walking on the crust of a slumbering volcano. The world is on the verge of a time of devastating judgment. Look abroad and see the tokens of its approach. See the tempestuous aspect of human affairs everywhere. The Irish question presses on English people as a nightmare, but this is nothing compared with the stormy blackness gathering on the continent. What is the meaning of all the nations of civilization straining their utmost resources to get into fighting readiness and staggering under the weight of their preparations? Is it not exactly what was spoken of long ago: "Prepare war: wake up the mighty men... gather the kings of the earth and the whole world to the war of the great day of God Almighty?" (Behold I come as a thief). Men of a certain kind of education laugh it all off. But the gathering elements of calamity will not be laughed away, but go on gathering from year to year. They will at last reach the bursting point, and then what desolations will be wrought in all the earth, as saith David by the Spirit in Psa. 46.

"Be wise now therefore, O ye kings," saith the same Spirit in another Psalm. If kings in general are so exhorted, how much more is the exhortation addressed to God's own kings and priests who are destined to be manifested in the heart of the coming storm, and to reign in peace when its fury has wrecked all human thrones and caused the glory of the world to pass away. "Be wise." Walk in patience, in faithfulness, in obedience, in fear. Be sober. Refuse the moral inebriation which fills all hearts with frivolity and heedlessness. Let the time past of our lives suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. What says he by our reading this morning? "Men ought always to pray and not to faint." Prayer and frivolity are mutually exclusive conditions. Trouble is good in helping us to take refuge in the one and abandon the other. It is as an antidote to fainting — mental fainting — that Jesus prescribes it. What he means he exactly illustrates. He speaks of a widow woman who wearied out an unjust judge by her importunity and got him to attend to her to get rid of her. Jesus does not suggest that such a principle is at work with regard to God, but rather argues that if a human judge can be moved by importunity, how much more the unerring judge of heaven and earth? "Shall not God avenge His own elect that cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them?"

I tell you that He will avenge them speedily." Cry unto God in your trouble "day and night." It is what Jesus recommends. God will at last avenge — though he bear long and appears to take no notice of your words. "He will avenge." Mark the words. He does not propose the everlasting triumph of injustice. Are you defrauded, injured, defamed? Bear it. God bears. "He will avenge". "Avenge not yourselves." If you avenge yourselves, you leave Him nothing to do. If you leave it to Him, He will do it thoroughly and sweetly. Christ's promise to the Philadelphian brethren is an indication. "I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie — behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." This was written for all who have ears to hear, as the postscript to the message shows. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Ecclesias." Therefore, it is an assurance to every man that if he will only wait God's time, he will not be put to shame at last, but will be vindicated in the most glorious style. Only we must wait. We must take it patiently, if we do well and suffer for it. We must not render evil for evil, and railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing, doing good to them that hate us, as opportunity may serve, praying for them that despitefully use and afflict us. All this is commanded; and it is only the obedient that will be divinely befriended in the day of recompense, whose shadow is already over the world, and whose advent will shortly be the sudden fact of the hour.

There is a world of meaning in James' words, "Be patient, brethren; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." The kind of patience that is meant is not the mere sluggish passivity of a creature of dull feeling. Such was not the patience of Jesus and the prophets. They were all men of the keenest feeling. The patience that is acceptable is defined as a "patient continuance in well-doing;" a quiet, persistent, inextinguishable industry in the keeping of the commandments of God (for this, and this only, is the standard of acceptable well-doing). It may be hard work for flesh and blood for the time being; but the hardest of work can be done when there is a good reason. We have the best of all reasons in this case. The present will certainly pass away; the future of God's purpose will certainly come. His judgment will be poured out; His Kingdom will be established; His chosen, though dissolved in dust for ages, like Abraham, will stand before Him "with exceeding joy" as if at the end of a single night's refreshing sleep. Then shall the righteous be glad and all the upright in heart shall glory. They will no longer be checked and restrained and mortified by the unreflecting, unrighteous deeds of a godless generation; and no longer burdened to the earth by the weakness of a sin-clogged and mortal nature. On the contrary, they will be refreshed and gladdened by wisdom and righteousness and praise on the right hand and on the left. They will be joyfully established in the presence of the righteous everywhere in the strength and freedom of the Spirit-nature. "Children of the day," to them the

day will have come at last, when the Sun from the unclouded azure of the dawn will pour his bountiful and healing beams over the land and ocean, filling the earth with life and praise. In the prospect of this, may we not say with Paul, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

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## "My Word Shall Not Pass Away"

*Words of a poor carpenter indestructible — God's power and his resurrection the reason — the Truth is regardless of our state — love the Scriptures and God and nothing will offend or stumble — hold on — glorious future.*

OUR meeting this morning is one illustration of an extraordinary statement made by Christ when he was upon the earth. He said "My word shall not pass away." In the 19th century, we take these words as a matter of course, many, many great and apparently durable things have passed away since Christ uttered them, but his words remain — both as matters of record, and as matters of influence and power. It is very profitable to go back to the time of their utterance, and to realise how unlikely from appearances and natural probability it was that they would prove so true.

Consider who he was that said them — a quiet private carpenter, repudiated as a demented person by the influential people of his country. If he had been a king — if he had been such as David was — God's accepted captain of the tribes, with all wealth in his control, and willing scribes and servants ready to preserve his words; if he had even been such as Herod was, or the high priest of his own day — with power and popularity on his side, there might have seemed a chance that his words would last. Men in such a position have it somewhat in their power to command the hearing of posterity. But Jesus had none of these things. He was a poor man of no social standing — a man hated of the people's leaders — a man whose friends were illiterate fishermen: a man who had no schemes of human ambition: who looked to early death as the finish of his work, and who lacked, in a word, every human power or opportunity to secure the perpetuity of his words. And yet here they are in our hands and hearts this morning. The words of the great people around him are all lost in oblivion in connection with the narrative of this man. But the words of the "despised and rejected of men" are among the indestructible records of the earth and among the most powerful influences that move mankind. How is this? There is an answer which most powerfully strengthens our faith. The answer is furnished by the history of the



case. The enemies of Christ crucified him; and had he remained dead, is it possible that his words could have survived? Would not his disciples in that case have been scattered to the winds, and his work forgotten like a thousand other personal episodes of history which have come as bubbles on the surface of the stream of time and burst? On the contrary, his disciples presented a bold front to the nation that killed him. They asserted that he had risen from the dead: that they had often seen and eaten with him since his resurrection: that they had had his company for six weeks: that he had taken formal leave of them: that he had commissioned them to preach his name to the faith of men for the remission of their sins and the attainment of everlasting salvation at his coming again; and that he had vouchsafed to them, since his departure, in fulfilment of the promise made before his departure, the power to work miracles as God's confirmation of the truth of their testimony to his resurrection. They could have no object in asserting such things except the truth of them, especially as the authorities made it a penal offense to preach the name of Jesus. Thousands believed them, and "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods" at the hands of the authorities. Thus the foundations of "Christianity" were laid: and thus it came to pass that the words of Christ, instead of passing away, became one of the abiding institutions of the earth, and have come down to us with the power they exercise in every heart that opens to them.

This is what we may call the circumstantial explanation of the fact that the words of the carpenter of Nazareth have not passed away: but see what it involves: that Christ rose and lives; for had he not risen, there could have been no apostolic testimony; and were he not alive, there could not have occurred that shedding forth of power on the day of Pentecost, that qualified the apostles to perform miracles in attestation of their work. And had there been no apostolic testimony, and no miraculous confirmation of their word, there could have been none of that faith produced in the Roman Empire, which, at the close of the first century, extended to the farthest provinces and embraced many thousands of believers. There would and could have been no New Testament such as has been in the hands of all believers from that day to this, and which forms the foundation of our faith. In a word, the words of Christ must have passed away. But they have not passed away: and it is because they are divine, as he said, "the words that I speak unto you are not my words but His that sent me." Heaven and earth may pass away, but his words will not, cannot pass away.

We build on a great and strong rock when we build here. It is a rock that embraces the whole Bible, as when he said, "Search the Scriptures... they are they which testify of me... The Scriptures cannot be broken." How wide a sweep does this give to the breadth of our confidence. What is written will be fulfilled. We have seen it in the past. See the course of empire as foreshown to Daniel — Persia, Greece and Rome. See the destiny of Babylon, Nineveh,

Egypt and other countries as predicted by the prophets. See the history of the Jews in their dispersion, and of their land in its desolation, and their city in its destruction as all so plainly foretold by Moses and the prophets. See the first appearing of Christ in harmony with the prophecies of his birth, rejection, death and resurrection. And if the past give such confirmation to the declaration of Christ that his words shall not pass away, shall we falter about the future? Let our watchword be, Hold on. He is faithful that hath promised. He cannot deny himself even if we should give in to the insanity of denying him. Hold on, in spite of all the world. The world has always been wrong toward God in the past, and the testimony declares it will be in the wrong when Christ comes — and what is more, we can see it to be in the wrong when we try it by the Law and Testimony which God commands us to do. Noah was not afraid to be singlehanded against the whole world in his day, and why should we? — Hold on in spite of the learned. The wise of this world have always been against divine truth. They were against Christ. They were against Paul in his day, and they are against Paul's gospel in ours. Why should we fear their opposition? They are opposed to one another. Their science is a changeable thing. Their conclusions are mostly speculations. Their system is mostly a jargon of pretentious souls. What of truth they have consists of a few grand simplicities which are as difficult of abstract conception as the deepest things of God. And, of course, if we hold on in spite of all the world, and in spite of the oppositions of its learned classes we will surely hold on in spite of our small friends who would pull the standard down, or impede the battle of the Truth, or make the commandments of God of none effect through their traditions. Above all, we must hold on in spite of ourselves. We shall often have to reason sternly with our own weak and foolish hearts. We are liable to have a feeling that the matter depends in some way upon us. If we are well and lively and bright, then the Truth seems very real and true; but if we are down and dull and depressed, we are apt to feel that the Truth is not so true then. Let us say, Away, away with all such illusions. The truthfulness of the Truth depends in no degree upon our feelings. It was true before we were born, and it will be true if we moulder in the dust. It is as true at this moment as when Israel were emerging from the trough of the Red Sea upon the other shore; or as when God caused His voice to be heard from the cloud capped summit of Sinai; or as when the walls of Jericho fell; or as when the fire consumed Elijah's water-drenched sacrifice on the top of Carmel; or as when Daniel stood unharmed among the lions; or as when the angelic host rejoiced on the plains of Bethlehem; or as when the crucified Jesus rose triumphant on the morning of the third day. It is as independent of us as the shining of the sun. Do we fear that the sun will not rise if we oversleep ourselves? Will the ordinances of heaven and earth go wrong if we forget? No more will the purpose of God miscarry through our infirmity. Christ will come again, and the dead will rise, and the Kingdom

will be established if we were to become unable at this moment to think another thought or speak another word.

In this connection we can enter into the language of the Psalm that has been read "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord." In the depths we may often be. There is a need for it. It is only in the depths that we fully learn the lesson of our own insignificance; and until a man has learnt this, he is not fit for a place in the everlasting with God. But there is a danger of being overdone in the process. We may be squashed out of all shape but the pressure of affliction. We may come to the conclusion there is no mercy, no hope, no salvation, because we feel so low and weak. This can only happen if we are trusting to ourselves. We may have to be brought very low to have this folly killed out of us: for it is folly. We are only created beings, and creatures of conditions. We depend upon our bread and water. We can control nothing. No wonder that the proud and lofty are an abomination to God. Tribulation is useful in bringing down high and unreasonable thoughts. It is good if it does not destroy. It will not destroy if our trust is in God. It will rather help us to trust more and more in helping us to realise that creation in no sense belongs to us, and the purpose of the Creator in no sense depends upon us. When we get so far as this we have peace — real peace. We can then say with David in this Psalm, "I wait for the Lord: my soul doth wait and in His word do I hope." Our waiting will be both the waiting of patience and submission, and also the waiting of expectation and desire, as the Psalm goes on to express: "My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning." As the other Psalm has, "As the eyes of servants look unto the hands of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God until that He have mercy upon us."

In this state of enlightened experience, we shall know the truth of that other axiom of the Spirit: "Great peace have they that love Thy law: nothing shall offend them." There is a great deal of offence in the world, whether we take offence to mean a hurt state of mind or a stumbled course of life. We may be quite sure where offence prevails, it is for the reason inferentially expressed in this statement: The Law of the Lord is not loved. We may take the term "Law" in this case in the wide sense given to it by Jesus when he asked the Pharisees on one occasion: "Is not so and so written in your law," meaning something written in the Psalms. The whole Scriptures are "the Law of the Lord," for they are "all" given by inspiration "for instruction, for reproof," etc. A writing for guidance is a law: and because the Scriptures are this, from God, they are the Law of the Lord. Where this law is loved, "nothing shall offend." The verse declares it: experience teaches it: reason requires it. A man may know the Scriptures, and not love them. Offence happening in that case does not contradict what is declared. A man who loves the Scriptures is the man who loves the things presented in them rather than the document that

presents them, though he loves that, too, because of the other. A man might love the document as an original, striking and beautiful literary production without much taste for the things set forth. Many scholars love the Bible in this way; this is not what is meant by loving the Law of the Lord. Men love Bible localities, the Bible original languages, and Bible translations, and Bible criticism, who have no love, but a dislike for Bible Law. It is the lovers of Bible Law that are in question, and such lovers as the Bible gives us example of. Jeremiah, to wit: "Thy words were found and I did eat them and they are to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart;" or Job, "I esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food;" or David, "Oh, how love I Thy law... how sweet are Thy words unto my taste: yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth." These words are not the effusions of sentimentality, but the expression of a genuine appreciation based upon discernment.

Where this discerning appreciation exists, then as the Scriptures declare, offence is impossible. We can see the reason when we consider the cause of the offences in connection with the state of mind generated by the Word. People become offended from a great variety of causes. Perhaps they are not taken notice of. Perhaps they are slighted: perhaps they are spoken against: perhaps they are slandered: perhaps they are injured: perhaps trouble arises: perhaps hatred, strife, division, ruin. The root of the offence in all cases lies in the fact that persons offended are great in their own eyes, and indifferent to the well-being of others. Self-important people are easily slighted, and are mortally hurt by injury or insult, and are effectually driven out of the way of duty by trouble. The reason is that self-gratification is the inspiration of their life, and whatever interferes with this interferes with their peace and purpose. With those who love the Law of the Lord, it is otherwise, because the state of mind is altogether otherwise. Those who love the Law of the Lord, love the Lord Himself, and cannot in consequence think highly of themselves. God is so inconceivably great: they are so very small, they think humbly of themselves. "Humble and contrite in heart" is God's own portrait of them. It is not a forced humility like the mock solemnity of hypocrites. It is not the long faced moroseness of sunless fanaticism. It is the reasonable, and even cheerful recognition of the fact — the fact that they are but flesh: dust and ashes: a wind: a vapor, as the grass that grows and withers. And of another fact that they are sinners — forgiven sinners and reformed sinners, but still sinners, permitted by favor to live: "contrite in heart," sorry they are not better than they are: thankful they are what they are. And such also are men of faith: men who believe what God has promised — that He will at last fill the earth with His glory and banish death. And such are also men of obedience, who therefore act habitually on the command to consider their neighbors; to do to them as they would be done by; to look out for opportunities of helping, rather than chances of being helped; prone to love and honor others rather than hungering and thirsting for love and honor.

It is not in the nature of things that such men should be offended. You cannot offend them. You may inflict pain: you may cause grief: you cannot embitter them so that they shall stand apart and become vindictive. You cannot turn them out of the way. They love the Lord and His Law, and are waiting for His salvation; and they will outride all trouble and all injury as the cork in the storm. Where men become offended and vindictive, and slink into a corner or disappear from the field of duty, it is a certain proof that they are "lovers of their own selves," and not lovers of the Lord and His law. "Great peace have they that love Thy Law: nothing shall offend them." If the righteous smite them, it is an excellent oil that will not break their head.

We live in an age when all this has become obsolete, and when wisdom has scarcely a chance. Self-importance has been blown into gigantic dimensions. Human pride has budded and blossomed into a stupendous tree. Nations bursting with so-called patriotism, and individuals assiduously cultivating much-commended "self respect," "in duty to myself," and strutting forth on the stage of life with high-sniffing lordly gait erect, and estimated by a foolish generation according to the height of their own self-estimate — have set heaven at defiance. It is for the children of God to hold fast their integrity in the midst of a "crooked and perverse generation. We know where the brazen folly will end. We know who has proclaimed concerning the very epoch in which we live. "The harvest is ripe: their wickedness is great." We know what came of a similar state of things in Israel and in the Roman Empire: disaster and woe swept over the face of society and laid the pride of man in ghastly ruin. We know what is revealed concerning the great finishing: "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day."

It is for us in the midst of the general craze to hold fast to truth and wisdom. Hold on to the Bible: hold on to the daily reading of the Bible: hold on to the precepts of the Bible: hold on to the duties and assemblies commanded by the Bible: hold on to the Spirit, and the maxims, and the principles, and the hopes and the loves and practices of the Bible. And we shall have great peace — even now; now, when the enemy is in the gate; now, when the storm is abroad; now, when iniquity abounds and the love of many waxes cold, and brother with hatred stands ready to betray brother to death. Even now, in times of evil and stress and affliction and dishonor, great peace have they that love Thy Law; but, oh, when the storm is past, when judgment has uprooted wickedness, when mercy has established the throne in righteousness, when compassion has forgiven our iniquities, when pity has wiped the tears from our faces, when the God of Israel's power and love hath healed all our diseases and strengthened us with immortal life, and spread the pavilions of His everlasting Kingdom in the land of promise and peace, who then shall measure the peace that will be the portion of the loved of God. God's own word can alone adequately describe it: "In a little wrath, I hid My

face from thee for a moment: but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee... Ye shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace: the mountains and hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands... Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders: but thou shalt call thy walls salvation: and thy gates praise... Thy sun shall no more go down: neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light and the days of thy mourning shall be ended."

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## "Watching & Waiting" — Not for Ever

*Long waiting, nearing end — signs — Israel's persecution and Return — God's purpose carried out by nations, unknowingly — prophecy fulfilled past and present — "wait for the Lord."*

"NOT for ever," said a Jew in foreign accent, in a recent conversation in a railway train on some preaching appointment at the synagogue. It was his way of expressing the difference between a permanent and a temporary arrangement. We may use it with comfort in the matter of our weekly assemblies for the breaking of bread. We come here, week after week — week after week; and it seems as if there would be no end to it. We can say with the fullest assurance, "Not for ever." We shall not always be called upon to celebrate Christ as a memory. We shall do so for the last time one of these days. We shall do so without knowing it is the last time; within the succeeding six days, the arrival of Christ on the earth, or something in our own experience, will end "the watch we've long been keeping, waiting for the promised day."

There have been many generations of watchers since the Lord said, "Hold fast till I come." If there has been long waiting, it is because the thing waited for is so stupendous. What so great as everlasting life, and a permanent place among men, when the earth shall have been glorified and filled with the glory of the Lord! The goal will be reached at last, and we shall be more than satisfied if permitted to receive the prize.

The signs that we are nearing the goal increase as the time goes on. Look at the threatening democratic sea, made rough by the storm-winds of socialist doctrine. Hark, the roar of the breaking waves as they dash themselves against the shores of capital and vested interests. Behold the threatening ranks of countless hosts of armed men prepared for battle; and what sanguinary thing is this that we see in the background of the situation, but slowly moving to the front? Israel in terrible affliction in Russia, where the bulk of Israel is to be found in this latter day. Israel has been, more or less, in affliction for 1800 years

past; but nothing has affected so vast a body of them as these Russian edicts which aim at the extermination of the Jewish race. That there is a special significance in the spectacle, we may gather from Israel's experience in Egypt before their deliverance by Moses. Stephen says (Acts 7:17), that "when the time of promise drew nigh," the Pharaoh of that day "evilly treated our fathers." The testimony of Moses is that "the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigor and made their lives bitter with hard bondage," and finding that it did not have much effect in checking their growth, they finally resolved to order the destruction of every man child. Such affliction would not have seemed to human methods like a symptom of the time of the promise having drawn near. Yet such was the fact. The sufferings of Israel were a sign that the time was at hand for their deliverance, and this too though Israel's state was not such as to entitle them to deliverance, but far otherwise. What their state was we learn from Ezekiel 20. It was such as to lead God to say (v. 8) that before they left the land of Egypt, he felt moved to accomplish His anger against them, and only refrained on account of His object in delivering them.

In our age of the world, we have reached another time when the time of the promise has drawn near. Israel in all lands, but especially in Russia, is in as dark and bad a state as their forefathers in Egypt. We might think this an obstacle to the fulfilment of His promise if we did not have the Egyptian example. In reference to the Egyptian affliction, God said to Moses, "I have seen the affliction of My people: I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them." So in reference to the current affliction, we may realise God's attentive sympathetic notice, and anticipate His interposition on their behalf. We know that in this case, the interposition will first take a natural form, because there is a partial settlement of things in the land before the Lord's hand is visibly shown. It is therefore reasonable to anticipate some natural arrangement for Israel's relief before the Lord appears. In this connection, the movement in America cannot but seem a step in the right direction, and may indeed lead to large and mature measures. There is a request influentially pressed upon the President of the United States, that he should ask the governments of Europe to consider among themselves the best way of solving the Jewish Question, and recommend the settlement of the Jews in Palestine as the best way. Dr. Thomas, somewhere in Eureka, expresses the opinion that the pre-adventural settlement of Israel in the Holy Land would be the result of an international arrangement among the Powers. It looks very like as if this might actually be realised.

Meanwhile, the Russian measures against the Jews are being carried out with merciless thoroughness. The continental telegrams contain recitals of heart-rending expulsions of whole crowds of Jews in a state of destitution. In evident anticipation of such a time, the words of prophecy in Jeremiah, says (30:5): "We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear and not of peace. Ask ye now and see whether a man doth travail with child. Wherefore do I see every

man with his hands on his loins? and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble: but he shall be saved out of it... I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity: and Jacob shall return and shall be in rest and be quiet and none shall make him afraid."

In the process of return, in its initial stages, it is evident that the governments are used. "Thus saith the Lord, behold I will lift up My hand to the Gentiles and set up My standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet" (Isa. 49:22). A beginning to this work may be the result of this American proposal to the Governments to settle the Russian Jews in Palestine as the best solution of the Russian Jewish problem. Russia is evidently anxious to let them go. She may favor a scheme for their wholesale departure and resettlement in their own land. If so, the part she performs afterwards will complete the analogy between her and Egypt. Having let them go, Pharaoh pursued them and met his destruction in the Red Sea. Having let them go, Russia pursues them and comes to her end on the mountains of Israel on the great day of the Lord's manifested presence.

It is highly encouraging to see all these things steadily developing before our eyes. As some have remarked, we live almost in the age of sight instead of faith. Some of us can look back forty years and see what strides have been made. There was nothing in the shape of Jewish colonies in those days. We talked of them, under the instruction of Dr. Thomas, as things likely to be. Now, they are realities. We do not depend even on such a large arrangement as the Americans propose. The work has begun quite independently of that. The Jews are steadily, though slowly returning to the Holy Land; colonies are springing up one after the other; Jerusalem is rising; the Jewish population and influence increasing in the Holy City. Just as the tide, when once it begins to flow, advances first in little pools of water and then streams over the stones, and finally covers the shore with all-prevailing waves, so the Jewish movement which began years ago in the return of one here and another there is advancing from strength to strength, and in due course will be a thing that all the world will see and (perhaps) talk about. It is bound to be so; the Word of the Lord cannot fail. This is shown in everything that has been subject of prophecy, those only know who are daily and affectionate readers of the Scriptures. Prophecy is not confined to the political visions of Daniel and John. It is inwoven with the whole texture of Bible history. It is like the gold thread running through the fabric of the veil of the Holy of Holies in all its parts. At all stages of the work that God has wrought in the line of Abraham, and in many matters, great and small, personal and political, the unveiling of the future has taken place. And in reference to all these, it holds good that the



Word of the Lord has not failed. There is no case in which the things that God said would come to pass have not come to pass. The words of Joshua are applicable to the whole range of divine foreshadowings: “There hath not failed one word of ought that the Lord hath spoken.”

Israel’s dispersion and Palestine’s desolation may be taken as a leading example — one so palpable as to defy being overlooked. A man must be in the deepest depths of ignorance and darkness who does not know of the scattered Jews and their down-trodden land. And it does not require a very wide range or acquaintance with human life to know how impossible it is to forecast the fortunes of a land and people: and how peculiarly improbable it was that a land situated so advantageously and constituted so favorably as the Holy Land should experience the “desolations of many generations.”

This is a matter known and read of all men. There are many many others, not so generally known and read, but all exhibiting the same illustration of perfect fulfilment of what God has made known by the prophets. But they are all of a class requiring a loving and docile attention for their full and convincing discernment. They are not of the kind that sceptical criticism would demand. They are not a string of dates and particulars in advance. They are not an almanac of disconnected items. God could have given us a complete calendar of futurity to the minutest detail; but such would not have been consistent with the objects of His dealings with a race of sinners. Those objects require that He should advance as far as is necessary for Him to be found by modesty and reverence and faith — and no farther. This He has done in many condescending and kindly ways, though with majesty and firmness. Among those ways has been the disclosure of futurity in a variety of matters that leave no room for doubt when attention is adequately applied.

The position of the Jews is not a more signal illustration than the fortunes of the Gentiles. These, as you know, were outlined long in advance in the sure Word of prophecy: and all those outlines have been filled in, except such as belong to the era of Christ’s reappearance, now hard upon the world. We have seen (historically speaking) the rise and fall of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. We have seen the desolation of Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Egypt, and other neighbors of Israel whose overthrow was foreshown. We have seen the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ in harmony with other features of the prophetic writings. We have seen the establishment of a false church in the imperial European arena, in fulfilment of that apocalyptic “Testimony of Jesus which is the spirit of prophecy.” We have seen the fortunes of the Truth during the long interval of Christ’s absence run in the very channel marked out for them in the Revelation from God sent by Jesus Christ, “that his servants might know the things that should shortly come to pass;” and all this in addition to scores of foretold personal particulars scattered through Bible history from the beginning.

All these things form a background against which the prophecy-fulfilling

events of our own generation stand out with but one significance to the mind of enlightened reason, and that is, that the Word of God is true, and that the purpose of God, unseen and undiscerned of man in the midst of his distractions, is on the march with the centuries, and will shortly reach its appointed culmination in the revived interposition of God's powerful hand in Israel's affairs, according to the word spoken: "According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I show marvellous things. The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might....And they shall fear because of the Lord our God.

With this prospect, our meeting this morning is in harmony. We "do this" — we break this bread and drink this wine — "until he come," who is to accomplish all these things. In thus doing we "wait for the Lord," as he has required; and he has said: "They shall not be ashamed that wait for me." He did not mean that they would not have shame for the time being. On the contrary, such are put to shame now: the confessing of Christ before men means the incurring of shame now. There is no more infallible method of getting into low esteem with men, for faith in Christ, in the Bible sense, has long since become inconsistent with a true enlightenment in the estimation of the world of our era. The "shall not be ashamed" has a future bearing; and its bearing then will be striking and thorough; for the world, everywhere, will shrink with craven fear in the presence of God's manifested power in the earth. When Christ re-appears, "all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." But those who love his appearing and are waiting for him will not be affected thus. They will be sent for and acknowledged by Christ as his faithful servants, and gladdened by that investiture with his nature and placed by his side in safety, and glory and joy for evermore. Such are the promises of the Word of God that cannot fail. May it be ours to experience the full measure of their fulfilment in the great and terrible day of the Lord which is about to dawn.

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## "O Send Thy Light Forth and Thy Truth"

*Darkness covers earth — Bible light and Truth only guide — will keep from worldliness — love and obedience through evil will "bring to God's holy hill" — the Christ-Altar and affliction necessary.*

“O H, send Thy light forth and Thy truth:” this is the fulness of the desire and the prayer of the spiritual man. Darkness not only covers the earth, but broods on the pilgrim's way. He is a son of light and walks by faith in that light, but his walk is in darkness, as saith the prophet: "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of

His servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon his God.” (Isa. 1:10). We trust in God who dwells in light and is the Light, but our trust is exercised in a time and in a place of darkness. The darkness is oppressive. God has spoken, but His hand is hidden: His voice is silent: His power is quiescent. Men do as they please without interference. “The righteous perish: the godly man ceaseth.” “He that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey.” Men do evil a hundred times with no evil consequences: “therefore the hearts of the sons of men are set in them to do evil.” The lovers of God and man are, in such circumstances, like the hart that David speaks of: the hart panting in a dry and thirsty land. They long for the refreshment that will come with the manifestation of the power and presence and authority of God. They exclaim with Isaiah, “Oh, that Thou wouldest rend the heavens and come down... There is none that calleth upon Thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of Thee, for Thou hast hid Thy face from us.”

This is only another way of saying “Oh, send Thy light forth and Thy truth.” It is the consuming desire of those who love God and are waiting for Him. It may be said He has already done so. Yes, in the partial form that faith requires. His word is a light to the feet and a lamp to the path in the midst of the darkness. This is something exciting intense gratitude, but it is not enough to meet the desire of those who “wait for God more than they that watch for the morning.” They have heard of the glory of the Lord and this is gladness to their hearts; but there is no satisfaction to them till they see the glory of the Lord in the land of the living, — even filling the earth, as God has promised, even “as the waters cover the sea.” For this they pray continually: and their prayer is not vain. It pleases God to be asked for the things He has promised. “The prayer of the righteous is His delight.” Their very conversation is a sweet odor to Him. We learn this from Malachi, that “The Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon His name: and they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels.”

“The Lord will fulfil the desire of the righteous: He will hear their prayer.” Their prayer is “Oh, send Thy light forth and Thy truth.” “Blessed are they,” says Jesus, “that hunger and thirst after righteousness: they shall be filled.” God’s manifested light and truth will burst upon the path of their darkness. The sun will rise and the darkness will flee. There will be healing in his pure beams. “Let them be guides to me,” “Let me be delivered from this body of sin and death wherein a law is at work bringing me into captivity through weakness. Let me share the glorious light and liberty of the spirit-body wherein I shall be controlled by the Spirit and guided by the Spirit in every thought and motion of my being. Now, I see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. Now I walk by faith with trembling steps: then I shall stand in

the full vision of the glory of God unabashed. Now I serve in tribulation, in weakness, on probation — in the fainting and failing of the flesh which is but a wind that passeth away. Then I shall stand in His presence and see His face and serve with His servants in the full light of the Holy City “having the glory of God like a stone most precious, even a jasper stone, clear as crystal.”

The present application (“let them be guides to me”) is in preparation for this. It is of vast importance to us at present. If we are not guided by the light and the Truth now, to the extent to which they have already been “sent forth,” we shall have a poor affinity for them in the day of their greater intensity. It is the men who are “guided” by the Truth now that will be sharers of the glory then. What is this state of being guided by the Truth but a submitting to the direction of the Truth. The dictates of the Truth are repugnant to the mere children of nature. Paul says, “The carnal mind is enmity against God.” We see it in society around us. What is this carnal mind but the mind resulting from the operation of the brain flesh without enlightenment. We see this mind in every variety of development — mere natural mentality acting upon the objects of nature — upon what can be seen, felt, tasted, and physically enjoyed: mentality not open to the deep reason of things: insensible to God’s existence: shut off from all knowledge of what God has already done in the management of the earth, and from all faith of the glorious purpose He has revealed. To a mind so moulded, the things of the Spirit are distasteful — worse, they are hateful, while the things of the flesh are congenial. The service of God is a hateful myth: the service of natural desire, a delightful reality. Christ’s description of the case is as pithy as it is simple and true: “They savor not the things that be of God but those that be of men.” Paul’s description is almost similar: “They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh: they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.” The two classes necessarily find themselves mutually incompatible. “The world will hate you,” said Jesus. It is inevitable. The world loves its own set, those who live and work by the world’s loves and principles. It has nothing but detestation for those whose separation is a reflection on its wisdom. Christ’s words in prayer to the Father define the situation exactly: “I have given them Thy Word, and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”

There is a constant natural tendency to chafe and wince under this incompatibility — a constant tendency to get rid of the disagreeableness by conformity to the world in which we live. This is a tendency with which the man of God is at constant war. The warfare is arduous, but there is no surrender. “Let them be guides to me” is the spiritual man’s motto. The words of David are the words of every son of God: “I thought on my ways, I turned my feet unto Thy testimonies. I made haste and delayed not to keep Thy commandments... I am a companion of all them that fear Thee, and of them that keep Thy precepts... Depart from me, ye evil doers: I will keep the

commandments of my God... I am thy servant. Give me understanding that I may know Thy testimonies. It is time for Thee, Lord, to work: for they have made void Thy law. I love Thy commandment above gold. I opened my mouth and panted, for I longed for Thy commandments. I have longed for Thy salvation, O Lord: and Thy Law is my delight.” How could men animated by such sentiments be in league with a world that knows not God and cares not for His Word, and has no faith in His purpose, and no regard for His proprietary rights in the universe? It is a moral impossibility. Any attempt to blend the two must end in failure. It is far better for our few days on the earth to be “strangers with God” (to use David’s expression) and find everlasting inheritance therein with Him, when the hour of His promise arrives, than to be friends and citizens with the world for a short time, to be blown away with the chaff in His indignation when the day comes for the judgment appointed.

“And bring me to Thy holy hill, even where Thy dwellings be. Then will I to God’s altar go, to God my chiefest joy.” We may take this as broadly as the subject admits of. The full breadth is of the Spirit’s own indication. Christ is the altar in the final significance of that Mosaic institution. So we learn from Heb. 13:10, and other places. On him we lay ourselves for offering and consumption by Spirit-fire — morally now; physically afterwards. The flesh changed by Spirit is the process at both stages; but the completeness of the process is not realised till we stand before him in the joy and glory of the final transformation — when, no longer flesh, but one spirit with the altar-Christ, we come to God in the full rapture of an actual reciprocal communion through Christ, “the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” This will not be till His holy hill is manifested as the place of His dwelling, in fulfilment of Moses and the prophets from the beginning. The ecstasy of communion in that day must remain an impossible experience till then. We see it afar off, so far as sensation goes; but faith contemplates it as a reality that will be attained in due course. And this contemplation is a present source of strength. The sense of joy to come is a cordial amid our present drearinesses. That David should speak of the harp in this connection is natural: “Yea, God, my God, Thy name to praise, my harp I will employ.” David in this attitude may be taken as a type of the great multitudes seen by John in vision “harping with their harps” — of whom David will be one. John heard their voices as if it had been the roar of many waters and the sound of thunder — “the voice of harpers harping with their harps.” They sang “a new song” which none could sing but the members of the 144,000 standing on Zion’s hill. The reason was that none but they were the subjects of the salvation which their song celebrated. The chief ingredient of their joyful song was the very feature standing forth so prominently in the Psalm before. It was not mere gleefulness at escape from danger and pain. There was all the joy that could possibly animate human breasts on this head; but above and below and around it was the all suffusing prevalence of a pure and bright and ennobling sentiment unknown

to mere human satisfaction — rapturous gratitude to the eternal God, springing from a clear and strong discernment of His relation to the deliverance accomplished. "Salvation and glory, and honor and power (be ascribed) unto the Lord our God." A voice came out of the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all ye His servants, and ye that fear Him both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Hallelujah! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth." Thus to praise God is the climax of the high calling in Christ. It is not mere sound: a crowd of barbarians can make a great and jubilant noise when they are glad, though no such crowd ever made such a joyful tempest sound as the multitude "redeemed unto God from the earth." It is sound as the appropriate and measured and perfect expression of the sentiment filling all hearts in that assembly: praise resulting from clear discernment and hearty love. This clear discernment and hearty love find in this praise the "chiefest joy." This joy is the salt and flavor of it. Sinners find stimulus in brass bands, and the stir of public occasions. In that case, it is the mere excitement of powerful self-contemplation. In the case of the "musical festival" that John saw in vision — which was the revelation of a coming reality, the finest raptures will be blended with the highest flights of reverence and admiration directed to the only reverend and the admirable — the undervived power and life, and wisdom, and goodness of the Creator, upholder and possessor of heaven and earth. But it will never be unconnected with the altar: the altar will always be the central idea. Christ the head and the medium of approach — Christ in whom alone forgiven sinners stand accepted with the Eternal who is too terribly great to surrender an atom of his prerogative: though too kind to forget that we are dust. It will always be a memory to the forefront that in him sin was condemned: that through him, we have access by favor through faith: that in his blood, we stand washed from our sins. Therefore it will always be in place to sing "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, who hath redeemed us to God by his blood, out of every kindred and tongue, and people and nation."

Thus on the (mystical) hill of God, "even where His dwellings be," will we "to God's (mystical) altar go" — to God, our great, and thrilling and everlasting "joy." In Him is the fountain of light and life. In His light we shall see life. We shall drink of the rivers of His pleasure, and be satisfied for ever. Why, then, should we be troubled during these few days of trouble and probation. This is the application David makes of the facts. "Why art thou then cast down, my soul; what should discourage thee: and why with vexing thoughts art thou disquieted in me? Still trust in God for Him to praise, good cause I yet shall have: He of my countenance is the health. My God that me doth save." This is making a reasonable and profitable use of the Truth. It is a necessary use. So long as we are in this frail and fainting nature, we need rallying. We need reminding of the Truth. We are liable to sink in the "slough of despond." We are liable to forget that the weeping and present distress

endures but a night: that songs come with the morning: that our light affliction is but for a moment, and is not worthy to be considered in view of the weighty glory which will have no end.

One consideration more, and the relief is complete: the affliction that presses on us so heavily in the days of probation will not only end and never return, but it is a necessity for the time being. Such is the fact whatever difficulty we may have in feeling it while the shoe pinches. It “worketh out for us” the glory that is coming. Such is Paul’s expression, and such experience shows to be the truth. Men can only be fitted for divine use by trouble — not that trouble alone will do it, but trouble will do it when the other conditions are right. Where God is known and believed, and loved, trouble acts the humbling and the chastening part. How long the action is needful, God is Judge. There is nothing for it but to submit ourselves to His hand, prepared heroically to do our part in all circumstances, at the same time ready to accept whatever affliction he may permit, or cause to spring in our paths, knowing that “He doth not willingly afflict;” and that the end of all His dealings with us will fill our mouths with laughter, gratitude and praise.

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## Causing Men to Hear His Words

*Jeremiah’s message of “woe” — not his own, but of God — false prophets and pleasant things then and now heard by majority — Truth unpalatable but will prevail — believers must proclaim it faithfully.*

HOW beautiful is the light that is in the Bible, wherever we peep in. Some cannot see it for the words and verses and chapters; they see these and not the things that the words and verses and chapters represent. This is failure. The light lies in the things represented and not in the words; yet, of course it is by the words we see the things and seeing the things, we see that which gives light and truth and joy. Let us try the process on the chapter read this morning from Jeremiah.

At the first rough glance, we see three things strongly, that suggest many other things. We see Jeremiah speaking unpleasant things. We see him in the land of Israel, over 2,400 years ago. We see him in the midst of the Jewish nation. On this we have to ask. How came there to be a Jewish people? and what led Jeremiah to take up so unpopular an attitude in their midst? The question has a practical present day interest, because the Jewish people are prominently before the notice of mankind at the present hour, and because they are no longer in the land where Jeremiah addressed them, but dispersed

among the nations in the circumstances of suffering that Jeremiah predicted. The first of these questions need not detain us on the present occasion: because we all know that the history of the case has but one answer — namely, that God specially formed the Jewish people for Himself by the various circumstances narrated in the Scriptures — the call of Abraham from Chaldea, the settlement of his family in Canaan, their migration to Egypt and multiplication there, and their exodus from that country under Moses by whom (after miraculous deliverance) they were organized into a nation, on the basis of a law direct from God. They had been settled in the land for nearly a thousand years when Jeremiah appeared in their midst.

What has he to say to them? and why? It is the answer to this question that yields so much that is of importance to us. What he says is complex in character, but all extraordinary. The first word of this chapter is a volume itself: “woe.” This is the foretelling of evil. Almost the whole of his prophecy is in this key. What is the explanation of this? How was Jeremiah able to foretell evil? If any man in our day say “Woe to Britain,” we attach no weight to it. We instinctively feel it is the voice of fanaticism: it is a querulous egotistical human voice, and a human voice can tell us nothing of the future. But we cannot read “woe” in Jeremiah without feeling that it is a very different voice from any modern voice that may say “woe.” The surrounding circumstances make us feel the difference, as well as the fact that the “woe” has all come to pass. The surrounding circumstances show us a timid man who has no pleasure in messages of evil “Oh Lord, thou knowest I have not desired the woeful day” (Jer. 17:16); who was almost scared into silence by the public scorn. “The Word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me daily, therefore I said, I will not speak any more in His name, but His Word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay (17; 20:8,9): who was sick of life through the bitterness of his work: “Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth. I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury. Yet every one of them doth curse me” (15:10), “Cursed be the day wherein I was born... wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labor and sorrow, that my days should be consumed in shame? (20:14-18) who was finally overwhelmed with sorrow at the public calamities: “Oh, that my head were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people” (9:1; and all Lamentations).

“Woe” comes heavily from the lips of such a man. What was its cause — what its explanation? Jeremiah himself was called upon to make a declaration on this point under very extreme circumstances.

He was arrested in Jerusalem during the siege of that city by Nebuchadnezzar, on a charge of intimidating the defenders in the interest of the Babylonians. His captors, backed by an infuriated populace, said, “Thou



shalt surely die.” They demanded of him, “Why hast thou prophesied... saying, this city shall be desolate without inhabitant? (26:9). Jeremiah’s answer was, “The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard... As for me, behold I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you, but know ye for certain that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth, the Lord hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears” (26:12-15).

Here, then, is a specific statement on the most important of all questions, viz., whether we are to trust in the glorious things written in the Bible or not — whether God or man speaks in the case. If man speaks, we have nothing to trust to; for man knows nothing of futurity. He may amuse us with beautiful fancies or beautiful jingle, like “the poet”: but he knows nothing and can tell us nothing of eternal truth. But if God is the speaker, it is a very different matter indeed. That God is the speaker is alleged not once or twice, but many hundreds of times everywhere — in all parts of the Bible — beginning, middle or end. As a specimen of the Beginning, you may take Moses: “I have not done things of mine own mind” “the Lord said unto Moses” (Num. 16:28; 17:1): the Middle: “The vision of Isaiah... the Lord hath spoken” (Isa 1:1): the End: “These sayings are faithful and true: the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show unto His servants the things which must shortly be done” (Rev. 22:6).

This fact that the messages of Jeremiah, like the messages of all the prophets, “came not,” as Peter declares (2Peter 1:21) “by the will of man, but holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit,” imparts the utmost moment to what we read in them.

Let us return to Jeremiah 23 and ponder God’s comment on the public opinion of Jerusalem that we may get a little guidance for the day in which we live. People attach great importance to the “comments of the daily press,” though it mostly amounts to so much gab. Public opinion and the public press generally drift together because they are part and parcel of the same thing. One or two of the public get pens in their hands and scribble what as members of the public they think: that is the public press. The rest of the public that read what one or two of themselves have scribbled in harmony with their own thoughts: that is the public. In the case of what we read in Jeremiah, the case is very different. It is the case of one man uttering against a whole community thoughts of God concerning man, not shared by the public, not conceived by Jeremiah, but communicated by the Spirit of God direct, and blown into a red heat in Jeremiah’s mind, as we might say, so that he could not resist their utterance, as he says in one of the verses quoted. Now, he has something to say about the public teachers of the city. He says “They speak a vision out of their own heart and not out of the mouth of the

Lord ” (v.16). He says “they make you vain.” “They cause My people to err by their lies” (v.32). “They strengthen the hand of evil doers, that none doth return from his wickedness... They say still to them that despise Me, “the Lord hath said ye shall have peace: and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you” (vv.14, 17). What does God say concerning these corrupting teachers? “I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken unto them, yet they prophesied” (v.21).

Now, this is interesting and instructive for us to consider because we live in an age when the most prominent figures in public life are the men in what are called holy orders, and who claim to be sent of God and to have authority to speak His Word. We have the archbishops, and the bishops, and the canons and the deans, and the vicars, and the curates, and all the other grades of the clerical army “as by law established.” — None more respectable; none higher in the world’s honor and esteem: none whom it seems more presumptuous to call in question. But as we listen to Jeremiah’s exhibitions of God’s estimate of the public teachers of Jerusalem, we are greatly strengthened to consider whether these modern prophets may not be in a like case. Is it quite certain that God has sent these modern prophets who are so quick to run about on their professional errand? Is it quite certain that God has spoken to them? Is it not within the bounds of possibility that they speak a vision out of their own heart and not out of the mouth of the Lord? Is it not indeed a demonstrable fact that they cause the people to err by their lies, and strengthen the hand of evil doers by smooth words to all and sundry? Saying to every one that walketh in the imagination of his evil heart, “No evil shall come upon you?”

In the providence of God, through the possession of His Word, we are in a position to decide these questions. This very chapter indirectly supplies the text. Although God disowns the prophets who fathered their misleading vaticinations upon Him, saying, “He (the Lord) saith” when they were but using their own tongues (v.31), yet He points out a way in which they might have been of service to Israel though He had not sent them. He says (v.22), “If they had caused My people to hear My Words, then should they have turned them from their evil way.” There was a written Word in Israel’s hands, the Scriptures of Moses and the prophets, so far as developed up to Jeremiah’s time. Concerning this work (so far as developed), it had been laid down abundantly in the Psalms that it was a “lamp to the feet and a light to the path.” “The entrance of Thy words giveth light.” So practically was this the case that it was a matter of direction to Israel that they were to use this Word as a test-standard in trying the claims of any man professing to speak spiritual things. “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, It is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20).

Now, if in God’s own nation, and to the leaders of God’s own appointing

(for it was by divine appointment that the Levitical class assumed to be prophets and teachers), the written Word was to be used as a test in determining all spiritual claims, who shall forbid us applying it in a nation that God has not created except in a providential way, and to a class of men who are self-elected and man-appointed altogether? It must be manifest that in a day when God is silent (as pre-arranged and predicted beforehand), there is no other method of determining such claims. The application of this test disposes of the claims altogether. Nothing is more certain than that the clergy have no authority from God whatever, and that they cause the people to err by doctrines that are the mere outcome of human thought and imagination in various dark ages past, and whose tendency is to strengthen the hand of the evil doer, and to cause the whole wicked world to sit still in a fool's paradise.

There is no hope but in the wholesale appeal that God Himself makes to scriptural enlightenment in this chapter (v.18): "Who hath stood in the counsel of the Lord and hath perceived and heard His Word? Who hath marked His Word and heard it? It is for those who answer to this appeal to stand forth with confidence. The Bible is the Word of God; and those who have "perceived and heard" it, who have become enlightened in its teaching or "counsel," who have to come to an understanding of it and are in affectionate submission to its authority, are here rallied by God Himself, as distinguished from the impotent mass of the community who are in bondage to the traditions of men, and who know not what is truth. God appeals to them on the score of knowledge as to what is coming on the wickedness that is tenderly patted on the back by all kinds of false prophets. "Who hath marked His Word and heard it? Behold a whirlwind of the Lord is gone forth in fury, even a grievous whirlwind; it shall fall grievously upon the head of the wicked. The anger of the Lord shall not return until He have executed and till He have performed the thoughts of His heart. "In the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly" (23:18-20).

If God would have been pleased with the false prophets for using their position to enlighten Israel with reference to His written testimonies, although He had not sent them, it is easy for us to perceive an acceptable sphere of service for any man or woman in a similar situation in a different age. God has not spoken in a personal sense to any mortal man living in our age; but He spoke to the Gentiles by the apostles, who though long dead, still speak in their written message. Their word is God's Word, for so Jesus instructed them — that whosoever listened to them listened to him and to the Father who had sent him (Matt. 10:40). Therefore in "causing" any one to "hear the words" that God spoke by the apostles, we are doing that which has God's recorded approval, in this chapter even though we may have had no personal delegation. This is according to common intelligence. God has addressed mankind in general: "Look unto me all ye ends of the earth" (Isa. 14:22). "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden" (Matt. 11).

“Ho everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters... Hearken diligently unto me and eat ye that which is good. Let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear and come to me. Hear, and your soul shall live” (Isa. 55:1-3). “The Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17).

But these “great and precious promises” though beautifully written, have no power of self-proclamation. They require a living agency to arrest attention. They depend in great measure for their efficacy on the faithful activity of those who believe. Hence the direction: “Let him that heareth say, come.” This is where our opportunity lies. God, as He looks down from heaven, humanly speaking, and surveys mankind in their million-fold occupations and activities, sees a man doing a thing that is according to His mind, who busies himself in “causing men to hear His words.” Our ability may be small; our opportunity less; so much the more reason for making the most of what we have. There are many ways of doing this work. If a man have covered his private circle, let him get at what public circle he may, and if he have no public circle, then let him operate through those who have. Whoever helps the work of those who have a public field of labor in this matter becomes a partner in that public work. It is in the power of many private people to thus extend the sphere of their own labor. Some “know the day of their visitation” in this matter, and act according to knowledge, some are blinded by jealousy or other derangement of nature, and let their opportunity slip till it is too late.

And the gospel lies here that God is the Rock and the Foundation that has promised to do certain things for us if we believe. His promise standeth sure and his threatenings, too. His Word in this sense is a fire and a hammer. It will break and destroy all that is opposed to His will. He told Israel this, in quiet words, concerning their land and nation; and next day and next year, it seemed that there was nothing in it when the sun rose and all things continued as usual. But in due course, the state of the case appeared. “I will make this city into ruinous heaps!” said the still small voice of prophecy — “without man and without beast;” the valley of Hinnom, in which the inhabitants gloried for its beauty, shall be called the valley of slaughter. There will be dead bodies there till there is no room to bury.” It seemed very unlikely: but let us take our stand by Titus, on the day of the capture of the temple: hearken to the hurrahs of the soldiery massed around him as the ensigns of Rome are planted in the holy place: what see we as we glance around? smoking heaps; wide pools of human blood; piles of corpses. The same Word, in the chapter before, promises restoration, rebuilding, restitution and joy. It will all come as assuredly as all the woe, and happy shall we be if, having waited patiently for the salvation of God in a day of contradiction, down-treading and darkness, we are there to see and to share in Zion’s glad morning.

# A Coming Festival of Song

*Singing in an upper room — an outstanding human rendition of “Messiah” — the incomparable superior future ascription of praise to God — eye witnesses, miracles, prophecy testifies to Truth — love-feast and song after judgment.*

WE have just been singing. It belongs to the business that brings us together that we should sing. In doing this, we give thanks: we pray; and we rouse memory concerning “things not seen as yet.” It is, therefore, as the scriptures declare, “a good and pleasant thing to sing praise.” It is a matter in which Jesus left us an example, as in many other things. When he instituted this memorial ordinance, we read that with the disciples, “he sang an hymn.” That singing by 12 male voices in unison would be a different singing from what we have had this morning. It would be a sad kind of singing for the men were sad. Jesus himself had said, “One of you will betray me.” Of the disciples, he said, “Because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your hearts.” But though a sad singing, it would lay hold of the joy latent in every expression of the Truth. The joy of the Truth is of that nature that sorrow itself is sometimes needful to bring it out.

Our singing this morning is a very different singing from what will be heard in the Crystal Palace, London, tomorrow, when 4,000 trained voices, assisted by several hundreds of stringed instruments, flutes, oboes, drums, and trumpets, will unite in the performance of Handel’s Messiah. That will be a melodious tempest overpowering in its suggestions to every enlightened mind that may be present among the 20,000 listeners. But our apocalyptic reading brings before us a performance that will as much outstrip performances as the Crystal Palace performance outstrips our puny effort. John heard 144,000 performers, whose performance could only fitly be described as the roar of many waters and the sound of mighty thunderings. In point of magnitude alone, think of the difference between 4,000 and 144,000 — not that we need to suppose the number limited to 144,000. That is a mystical number expressive of completeness in the Israel of God, on the basis of the root-number 12. The assembly will likely be incomputably vast, in view of the numberlessness of the attendant angels, and the numberlessness of the locust and horse agents employed under the earlier trumpets. But suppose the symbolic number were literal — suppose it were only 144,000. Where is the Crystal Palace performance in comparison with it? This is even supposing the 144,000 were mortals like the Crystal Palace performers. Instead of that, they have been subjected to a change that transformed their nature. They are no longer corruptible and weak. They have put on immortality, and therefore have experienced the unspeakable emancipation implied in the terms of contrast employed by Paul when he speaks of the present earthy nature as

weakness in comparison with power; dishonor in comparison with glory; a natural body in comparison with a spiritual body.

This difference involves so many differences that we do well to ponder them a little for encouragement: for by the truth, we stand related to that coming festival of joy which will wipe out for ever the bitter memories that belong to the present wilderness of our probation. Let us try and realise them so far as a very one-sided experience can enable us to do so.

The Crystal Palace performance will be very impressive to the beholder — very picturesque, very striking: but take it to pieces, what is in itself? Mere sound and millinery. The well-dressed performers perform with an inflating sense of the public presence, and having sounded their sounds, and spent their strength, they disperse to their houses and their closet skeletons, and their anxieties and their envies, and the thousandfold vanities that constitute human life as it now is. — How different with the 144,000! — picturesque truly as no human conclave ever approached, but how much more than picturesque. Think of the reality, the sincerity, the worth, the fervid appreciation in every individual performer. Think of it as an assembly of picked men and women — picked on divine principles — and picked out not merely to take part in a musical performance, but to occupy a position and perform a part of which the musical performance is but the public and formal expression. The Crystal Palace performance will end, and its elements disperse; it is an ephemeral beauty, like the prismatic bubble. It is over and done with when the admittance fees are duly counted, and the doors closed, and the gas turned off. It has nothing in it of substantial blessing for a living soul. It is a mere luxury for the well-to-do who can afford to be sentimental. Whereas, the orchestral celebration of the 144,000 will be but the top branch of a tree of blessedness under which all nations will rest, and all woes be healed: for the performers are the assembled heads of mankind, who are heads not for their own glory but the glory of God and the good of mankind.

Consider the contrast as regards what we might call the internal structure of the thing. The Mount Zion festival is pinned together at the centre. The multitudinous assembly has a head towards whom all the interest of the performance converges; as the root from which the whole has sprung. There is a history in the case which fills every heart with enthusiasm. "Thou art worthy to receive power and riches, and wisdom and honor, and glory and blessing." We all know the difference between a meeting convened to discuss a resolution, and one summoned to welcome a hero. Even a political meeting at which a popular leader is present has a color and a snap, and a fervor entirely lacking when only an abstract question is in hand. Personal feeling and personal affection are roused in the one and dormant in the other. If this is the case with politics, how much more with mere music. A music meeting is a very mild kind of meeting — exciting human gratification on the surface only. There is none of the personal enthusiasm that is excited by touch with

men and measures that affect the deepest interests. In this respect the Crystal Palace festival has but the coldness of moonbeams in comparison with that of Mount Zion. At the Mount Zion festival, Christ, the loving head of all God's children, is present as the centre of the proceedings, the subject of the music, the object of the rapturous sentiments expressed. It may be said that Christ is the subject of the Handel performance; truly so, but in how different a way — merely as a nominal theme, exciting no more personal feeling than if it were Adonis or Apollo, or any other mythical conception. It is not the greatness of Christ that is felt by the audience, but the "genius" of Handel, and the cleverness of the performers. In the Mount Zion performance, the all-prevalent sentiment is that which fulfills the Scripture: "To him every knee shall bow and every tongue confess." Every man and woman in the assembly will be a lover of Christ in no feigned manner: a lover whose love will have been fanned into a bright flame by the change to the incorruptible; whose immortal strength will preclude fatigue in the exercise; and whose everlasting place in the House of God as a companion king with Christ and possessor of all things, will ensure a devotedness which there will be no competing pre-occupation to weaken or dim.

Now, brethren and sisters, this is no fancy picture. It is the anticipation of reality. It is the joy set before us in connection with the service — the mortifying service, to which we are called in this age of evil. The truth is guaranteed to us in every way the subject admits of. Peter tells us that he and the other apostles had not followed cunningly devised fables in promulgating the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. "We were eye-witnesses," he says. Peter was an eye-witness. If an evil heart of unbelief suggest that Peter may have been mistaken in what he thought he saw when he saw Christ work miracles, and Christ alive after his crucifixion, then we have the other apostles. "At the mouth of two or three witnesses," testimony is accepted everywhere. Twelve men were not likely to be all the subjects of delusion. If the doubting heart says, "Perhaps it was even so," perhaps 12 men were all the subjects of inexplicable delusion, then there are the seventy disciples to fall back on. They all saw what the 12 saw, and they all worked miracles in his name, for they all worked miracles in his name, for they "returned with joy" to the Lord after a journey in two and twos all through the land. As if that were not enough, God has given us the testimony of "500 brethren at once," who saw the Lord after his resurrection. And as if to put a top stone to the structure of personal testimony, we have Saul of Tarsus, turned from a persecutor to a faithful apostle by a personal vision of the Lord and commission from him. What other historical occurrence has such a multitude of personal witnesses?

The guarantee does not stop there. God allowed for the possibility of men saying the witnesses were crazed. He therefore "confirmed their words with signs following" — signs and wonders, real miracles, none of your pretended feats in which malice tries to class them. The witnesses tell us this was the

case, and not a single good reason can be given why we should reject this testimony. Paul knew whether he spoke with tongues more than all the Corinthian believers, and so did the Corinthians to whom he makes the assertion (1Cor. 14:18). Did he declare a falsehood? If so, it is inconsistent with the whole character of the man. He declared falsehood without a motive, of which even a hypocrite is not guilty. If he did not declare a falsehood, then behold the guarantee in the miraculous gift of languages, for what man by natural power can speak languages he never learnt? Besides, the wide-spread reception of the apostolic testimony, in the teeth of authority, tradition, and self-interest compels us to believe the assertion of the witnesses — that God worked with them and confirmed their word with signs following; for if that statement is not true, it is utterly impossible to account for the incontrovertible historical fact that before the apostles were in their graves, thousands upon thousands throughout the Roman empire believed their testimony.

And God has given us another guarantee in addition to all that. Fulfilled prophecy is proclaiming in trumpet tones from day to day that the word of God is true. Men may not hear the sound through having their ears stuffed with various materials, but the sound is there. The sound has gone out unto all the earth and the Word “to the ends of the world.” If there was no other prophecy than the one read this morning that would be enough: the prophecy of Christ’s first appearing. “He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, as a root out of a dry ground. He hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men... we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted... He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken” (Isa. 53). This is an exact picture of what happened when Christ presented himself to Israel, as everyone knows, and an exact foreshadowing of the character which the death of Christ assumed in the preaching of the apostles. It was written 800 years before Christ appeared. On this there is no difference of opinion even among the hostile critics. How, then, are we to account for its fulfilment. There is only one principle that yields a satisfactory answer. God gave the prophecy by the Spirit, and therefore God was in the events foreshadowed. You know this is only a single case in which the same evidence arises. You know that prophecy has been fulfilled in hundreds of events, ancient and modern, and is fulfilling now, before our eyes, as it has been for forty years past.

Now if men will not believe the testimony of a multitude of eye-witnesses, nor surrender to the divine attestation which that testimony must have



received in the shape they allege; nor discern the evidence of a long stream of fulfilled prophecy, what are we to say? They are not so insensible to evidence in other matters. Their insensibility in this case must be due either to the want of fulness of sight as to the facts, or a want of susceptibility to conviction in the direction of the facts. It is probably owing a little to both. Men as a rule do not take the pains necessary to know all the facts upon which conviction is based: and as a rule their inclinations bias them against conviction. They feel that they would prefer the Bible were not true. Well, brethren and sister, if we are in the happy position of knowing and believing, let us not boast or even give way to the least feeling of complacency. Humble gratitude is the only sentiment befitting true intelligence.

It may be asked why there should be this continuous reference to evidence? Answer, because there is a continuous assault on faith. The air is full of opposition to the Bible; and between the onslaughts of hostile polemics without, and the active vitality of an evil heart of unbelief within (for ignorance is native to every human brain, and unbelief is the result of ignorance in the case of any matter that is true), there is danger in a passive attitude. The command to assemble together has this as its reason d'être, that we may "build one another up in our most holy faith." This is a mental process accomplished by mental implements. To edify is to make conviction strong. Make a man's conviction strong, and this will do the rest.

As we look, then, on this spread Table, we behold the converging point of past and future in relation to Christ. It is a pledge and memento of the sad meeting at which he said "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer," and at which he sang with them the earnest hymns without those helpful accessories which we are permitted to enjoy this morning. It is also a token, when rightly interpreted, of that coming meeting of so very different a character when, surrounded by the joyous 144,000, he will be able to say with some meaning, "In the midst of my brethren will I sing praise." Personally, we may look forward to that time with a directness of interest that cannot pertain to any other public occasion. It is not only a festival of praise: it is a feast of love, based on approval. Every man and woman in that assembly will be an object of personal affection to the Lord who is at the head of it. In their totality, they are his bride; but in their detail, he is each one's particular lover and friend. Such a delightful relation of things would not be possible in mortal nature. Mortal power is too limited to allow of personal friendships beyond a certain number; but to the Spirit of God, there is no limit. It will be possible for each individual saint to feel that he has Christ all to himself without coming between Christ and any other member of the one body. So also will each saint feel to saint. Love will go round without stint and without the reserves imposed by the known imperfections of present experience. It will be love based upon harmony — based upon identical minds.

The prelude to such a true “love feast” is necessarily, the judgment at which the Lord presides before the Mount Zion festival. There must be separations and harmonisations before such a love feast is possible. It is that we may rightly adjust ourselves beforehand to this searching and impartial process that the Lord has favored us with so many indications of the principles on which it will be conducted. He presses these upon us when he says “I judge no man, the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him at the last day.” That is, his judgment will not be an affair of personal partiality as among human judges: the facts in each man’s case will determine the results. He will make the facts manifest: and herein his judgment lies. In a sense, the verdict is self-recording. He tells us beforehand in the messages to the seven ecclesias, read this morning, that the coronal wreath is to “him that overcometh:” this is the work accomplished now, but perhaps not discerned now except by divine eyes alone. The fact will be made manifest then, pro or con, with joy or sorrow. Hence the present force of the counsel with which each message concludes: “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the ecclesias.”

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## The Multitude Against God’s Truth and People

*Elijah alone on Carmel — “fear of the people” a dangerous principle — Jeremiah alone, but “woe”-prophecies came true — evil-doers prosperous, for a time — Truth unpopular but will prevail.*

THE Word of God has been called precious in our hearing this morning. It is truly so. It is more so than we know at our first acquaintance. We discover its value when we wake fully to the actual state of things. Life without it is under a shadow that nothing can dispel. Many people live without discovering the shadow, like rats in a dungeon, but it is there all the same. All knowledge lacks its true interest and interpretation, apart from the meaning imparted to it by the revelation contained in the Bible. We can never read it without getting some guidance if we read it with our eyes open. Guidance is always needful in the darkness that now prevails. Let us take what we get as it comes.

Our three readings are alike in one important particular this morning. They contradict the vox populi legend. They show us the mass of people against God, and not on the side of God; and only a very few acceptable with Him. We have Elijah on the summit of Carmel, single-handed against 800 sustained clergy and the great body of the people. We are so accustomed to that as having been a fact that we are liable to miss the lesson. We think of

Elijah as a strong-minded and inspired servant of God, and we think not wrongly: but we are apt to leave out the other side supplied by James (v.17), that "he was a man subject to like passions as we are." Had we been there to see him, we should have seen a man who lived by breathing and eating as we do: a man with eyes, nose, mouth, hair, and a form like ourselves: a man who knew the fatigue of conflict with opposition, and the stress of disappointed hopes: for what does he say under the juniper tree? "It is enough: now, O, Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers." Here we have him, then — one human being against a multitude — the multitude strong in each other's countenance and encouragement, but all wrong: the one man in the right and divinely endorsed by the blinding flash from heaven, consuming the sacrifice and licking up the drenching water that had been poured upon it.

In our second reading (about 300 years afterwards) we have the same situation in the case of another prophet. We have Jeremiah in the midst of a turbulent assembly in which brazen-faced women took a prominent part. The assembly were of one mind in the wrong way, and Jeremiah alone maintained the will of God in their midst. There are more details in this case, and we have a complete picture of patriotic character, on which it may be profitable to dwell for a little.

Jeremiah had for a good while predicted the downfall of Jerusalem. He said Nebuchadnezzar would come and overthrow the land. The popular prophets opposed his prophecies, and said there would be peace. When Nebuchadnezzar came and settled down with a powerful army before Jerusalem, Jeremiah said to the people, "Where are now your prophets that said Nebuchadnezzar would not come." Now that Nebuchadnezzar was come, Jeremiah was instructed to recommend a most unnatural measure of safety. God commanded him to tell the people to go out to Nebuchadnezzar, saying that every one who did so would save his life, while all that remained amongst the defenders of the place would perish. The faithful in the city took the course recommended, but the bulk remained behind the walls and assisted in the defence of the city. The king was evidently impressed with the fulfilment of Jeremiah's words so far, and sent to him for advice. Jeremiah advised him to go out to the king of Babylon, assuring him, by the Word of the Lord, that if he did so it would be well with him and with Jerusalem, but that if he did not, the city would be taken and destroyed by fire. God was bringing his long-threatened judgment on the land, but offered them this way of escape, which in its essence was an opportunity of honoring Him by faith and obedience. Zedekiah hesitated, he said "I am afraid of the people." This is a dangerous principle of action. On the whole he preferred to try natural means of escape. He sent an appeal to Egypt whose king sent an army of relief. Hearing of this, Nebuchadnezzar broke up the siege and marched south to meet Pharaoh. The inhabitants then breathed freely again, and thought

after all Jeremiah was mistaken. Fresh messages arrived from God, that Nebuchadnezzar would certainly return and that God's purpose against Jerusalem was so fixed that even if the defenders succeeded in repelling the besiegers, and wounding every man of them, the wounded men would rise in the trenches and advance to the assault and carry the place. There was another opportunity for faith, and escape, of which doubtless some would avail themselves. Among others, Jeremiah himself tried to get away into the open country, but was recognized and arrested as he was passing out of the gate of Benjamin; brought before the rulers of the city and cast into prison — the worst kind of prison they could put him in — a dungeon without sanitary comfort — a pit of which the floor was mud and mire deep enough to allow of Jeremiah sinking in it up to the arm-pits.

In due time, Nebuchadnezzar, having headed off the Egyptians returns to Jerusalem and resumes the siege. Jeremiah's word is again proved true, and he is taken up out of the pit and put in a more comfortable prison. The siege ends as Jeremiah foretold. The city is taken and burnt to the ground. There are multitudes of slain and multitudes of captives, and trouble of the sorest kind for all concerned. In the settlement made by one of Nebuchadnezzar's captains, the poorest of the people are put under a provincial governor and Jeremiah is left with them to bewail the sorrows of the land. "How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people!... She weepeth sore in the night and her tears are on her cheeks; among all her lovers, she hath none to comfort her. The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts: all her gates are desolate... her adversaries are the chief; her enemies do prosper, for the Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions."

But trouble had not yet touched the lowest bottom. There might have been respite and recovery had the survivors accepted the new order of things and loyally served the king of Babylon. Instead of this, the hand of the assassin upset everything. A member of the royal family, who had fled to a neighboring country, hearing of a Jewish governor having been placed over Judah, evidently thought he might open the way for his own elevation by getting rid of the said governor. So Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, slew Gedaliah, son of Ahikam. On this, a panic naturally seized the people. They imagined that Nebuchadnezzar, on hearing of the murder of his lieutenant, would be sure to return and wreak vengeance on the miserable remnant of the people that had been left in his charge. Their plan, therefore, was to get away and go down to Egypt, which had shown friendship to them, and which they reckoned would be sure to give them a friendly welcome and a safe asylum from the distractions of war. But before carrying out their plan, they thought they would consult Jeremiah whose words had so signally come to pass. They therefore applied to him, telling him of their ideas, but professing their willingness to be guided entirely by what commands he might receive from the Lord. Jeremiah submitted the matter to God, and in ten days he received an answer, whereupon arose a controversy in which was

exemplified that curious perversity which, with the most surface show of reason, contends for an outrageous conclusion.

The message was that they were not to go down to Egypt, but to stay where they were. To this, the whole assembly demurred. They were bent on going down to Egypt. "There," said they, "we shall see no war nor hear the sound of the trumpet nor have hunger of bread." It was natural for them to take this view. But then there was this plain other side: they had the divine assurance: "If ye will still abide in this land, then I will build you and not pull you down: and I will plant you and not pluck you up... But if ye say, We will not dwell in this land, neither obey the voice of the Lord our God... then it shall come to pass that the sword that ye feared shall overtake you in the land of Egypt, and the famine whereof ye were afraid, shall follow close after you there in Egypt and there ye shall die." It was a case of natural fear against divine assurance: a case of faith verses unbelief, in which, as usual with Israel, the scale went heavily down in favor of unbelief, alias worldly wisdom. The whole congregation marched to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them.

When they came to the Egyptian frontier, at Tahpanhes, there was another message from the Lord of the most interesting character. Jeremiah was commanded to take large stones and bury them in the presence of the Jews under the brick-work at the entrance of Pharaoh's palace at Tahpanhes: and to say, "Behold I will send and take Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon my servant, and I will set his throne upon these stones that I have hid, and he shall spread his royal pavilion over them." Tahpanhes has lately been recovered through the excavations of Mr. Petrie. Pharaoh's palace has been found, and under the paved work about the entrance has been found stones which there seems every reason to believe are the very stones that were buried there by Jeremiah. What Jeremiah said, duly came to pass. Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt, encamping at Tahpanhes, and no doubt fixing headquarters on the very spot where the hidden stones lay under the ground.

But before the event came to pass, Jeremiah received a further message to the people — a sort of last appeal, leading to the controversy already referred to. The people had scattered and settled down quietly in various parts of Egypt and appeared to be getting on. As regards the idolatry and other wickednesses which had brought such calamities on them, though for a moment they had desisted, they had now returned to their old ways under the shadow of Egypt's protection. They were "burning incense unto other gods in the land of Egypt" (Jer. 44:8). The message that came to them pointed to the desolation that had come upon their own land in fulfilment of the threatenings of the prophets. "Ye have seen all the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem and upon all the cities of Judah: behold, this day they are a desolation and no man dwelleth therein. Because of their wickedness which they have committed to provoke me to anger in that they went to burn incense and to serve other gods... I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, saying, Oh do not this abominable

thing that I hate. But they hearkened not nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness. Wherefore my fury and mine anger was poured forth and was kindled on the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem and they are wasted and desolate, as at this day. Therefore now, thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls... burning incense in the land of Egypt wither ye be gone to dwell? Have ye forgotten the wickedness of your fathers and the wickedness of the kings of Judah and the wickedness of their wives and your own wickedness and the wickedness of your wives? They are not humbled even unto this day neither have they feared nor walked in my law."

Nothing could be more forcible or more touching than such an appeal, but how was it received? Not at all in a favorable manner. Jeremiah having apparently convened the people for the purpose of delivering the message, of which these are only quotations, the people at its conclusion said, "We will not hearken unto thee. We will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the Queen of Heaven and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, for then had we plenty of victuals and were well and saw no evil. But since we left off to burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and to pour out drink offerings unto her, we have wanted all things and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine." What could Jeremiah say in response to such a piece of sophistry, but meekly recite the facts as he did, — viz., that the plenty that they had before Jerusalem's destruction was not the result of their idolatry, but the consequence of God's long-suffering; and that the trouble they had been in since, was not the effect of their momentary abandonment of idolatry, but of their prolonged indulgence in it during former years. However, his words had no effect. The facts on the face of them could be twisted into harmony with their contention. We often see this ingenious perversity. There is always room for stumbling if people are not sincere in their quest for truth. Truth itself becomes a snare to such.

Fearful was the divine rejoinder in this case: "Hear the Word of the Lord all Judah that dwell in the land of Egypt. Behold I have sworn by My great name, saith the Lord, that My name shall no more be named in the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt. Behold, I will watch over them for evil and not for good: and all the men of Judah that are in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by the sword and by the famine until there be an end of them, yet a small number that escape... shall know whose word shall stand, Mine or theirs." This ended Jeremiah's work with them, so far as we have any record. Tradition says he was shortly afterwards murdered by the rebels. God allowed His messengers thus to be prevailed against because of the recompense reserved. The victory is theirs at the last in the most triumphant form. What we have to note is that till that time arrive, it is not the fortune of divine truth

to be popular or to have multitude on its side. The time is near for God to show His hand: but it has not yet come, and therefore we have to submit to the experience that has been common from the beginning. The multitude are leagued against the Truth, under influential leadership. It is not possible that they can be brought to listen. Shall we grow weary of the hopeless battle? If we were aiming at a present result, we should not be the brethren of the prophets. We are aiming only at what they aimed at. We are aiming to be faithful to the Truth in our day and generation, and to achieve a place at the last among the chosen of God. Therefore we cannot be discouraged by a whole lifetime of a whole world's opposition. To be on God's side is to be on the winning side, however unpromising the appearances may be for the time being. We are on His side in being on the side of His Word. We have His own cheery rallying cry to trust to: "They shall know whose word shall stand, Mine or theirs." This was of local application at the time, but it applies wherever God has spoken. The men of Judah living at Tahpanhes, Migdol, and Noph in Egypt found out how bottomless was their sophistical expectation (that the practice of idolatry would secure their peace in Egypt) when Nebuchadnezzar's army descended like a storm on the country, and spread terror and desolation before them. And so it will be with all who place themselves in antagonism to the revealed will of God. They may nurse their prosperities and congratulate themselves on the peace they are permitted to enjoy for the time being; but God's Word will come to pass and root them out of the land of the living when His salvation will fill the earth with glory. Whenever we hear men glorying against the Truth in any way — whether it be patronising, agnostic or the blaspheming atheist, or the inebriate sectarian — let us call to mind God's last words to the men of Judah: "they shall know whose word shall stand, Mine or theirs." We know how such an issue must end. Every voice that is raised against the Word of God is certain to be hushed in the silence of the dust at last: And as certain it is that the Word of God and all who obey it will be triumphantly established in all the earth in the long-promised and endless coming day of joy.

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## Reasons for Thankfulness

*Thankful for Sunday cessation of work — for the enlightening Word — for peace engendered by knowledge — for religious liberty and accessible Bible — for the recovery of the Truth — "for all His benefits" — a working gratitude.*

**W**E have much to be thankful for — we do not always realise how much. It is well to stir ourselves up in this matter. David sets us the example in the beautiful 103rd Psalm, and in other places. He calls upon all that is within him to thank and praise the living and eternal source

of all things. "Forget not all His benefits," exclaims he. Recall them to memory. It is good to do this, both for our own comfort and God's glory. It is not the gush of mere pietism as some esteem it. It is an act of reason, conferring benefit on ourselves and yielding pleasure to God.

What cause for thankfulness we have in being able to be here. We feel this when something happens to interfere with it. We might be like the brother who last week was well and hearty and going about his daily vocations, but today languishes on a bed of pain from the effects of accidentally putting his leg through a hole in the floor. How thankful he would be to be here this morning in his usual way. So thankful ought we to be without the languish and the pain. How thankful we ought to be that the Lord required this weekly memorial of his death at the hands of his disciples "until he come."

How difficult it is to keep him in memory in the midst of the hubbub and turmoil of secular life, we all know. How impossible it would have been, if there had been no coming together, to call him to mind in this special way. The longer we live, the more clearly we see this. There are few faithful believers now with all the helps we have, but had it depended upon individual memory from individual reading, there would scarcely have been a Noah. If we are wise, we shall be among those who prize the weekly memorial of the Lord's death, and who allow nothing controllable to prevent their presence. It is a bad sign when attendance is slack here. Spiritual death has commenced when a man can easily excuse himself for being absent from the Table of the Lord. Give it a high and honorable place in the economy of your lives. We may be sure it is pleasing to the Lord, who sees everywhere, that we thus confess him before men, and thus render him the homage of our hearts and lips. Labor to make it a time of refreshing — a season of comfort. Banish all questions that lead the mind into secular or debatable channels. Rigidly exclude business from the Sunday meetings. Let the day be devoted to those high and holy things, on which it is difficult for our earth-gravitating minds, in the best of circumstances, to lay hold.

And how thankful we ought to be that the Lord has so arranged that we can have his own very words to feed on at such times. Consider how poorly off we should have been had we had to depend upon church and clerical utterances for our ideas of Christ. We could not have known him; we must have remained ignorant of his will. Hope must have been quenched in the fog and darkness that prevail in the world; character must have been dwarfed and blighted, either by the deadening effect of superstition or the sterilising effects of mere secular activity. There is nothing to feed or enlighten in the effusions of the pulpit platform or press under clerical control. We would have starved to death on the miserable husks served out to the public on the right hand and on the left.

Instead of this, we have God's own Book — Christ's own words — the Spirit's own undiluted and unadulterated ideas, which fatten the soul and



mind as with marrow, and gladden the heart as with wine. To this feast of fat things God Himself invites in words of powerful appeal: "Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters: and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk, without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." To those who are not enlightened in the matter, this will sound mere rhapsody. The fault is in themselves — perhaps incurably so, for there are those whose hearts are "waxed gross and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed," as in the case of Israel. Either they have no discernment of man's true need, or they have no appreciation of the Bible scheme of things as a remedy, or they have no faith in that scheme from having no knowledge, or they have no love for knowledge through the love of other things entering in, or they have such a love of themselves and such a love of "pleasure" as distinct from wisdom and duty that their mental atmosphere is as a dense yellow fog through which the light of truth cannot shine. In all such cases, the ardent language of divine invitation will not only seem over-wrought, but without value or meaning.

Well, we must arm ourselves against the influence of such. If we cannot open their eyes to the glorious light, let us at least refuse to allow them to put any bandages on our eyes. As Peter says, "Beware lest we be led away with the error of the wicked and fall from our own steadfastness." There is no exaggeration in the words of divine invitation and assurance. We do not require to see the happy, cloudless day of God's promise to be sure on this point, or to feel the goodness of the feast that God has spread for us in the Word of His Truth. All men will see it then. But we are made to feel it now in the perfect satisfaction that comes with the Truth believed and obeyed. It is what Jesus calls "my peace," which, also he says, "The world cannot give." Some people add, "and which the world cannot take away." This is not true. The world cannot give "the peace of God that passeth all understanding, filling the heart and mind," but it may take it away, as many have found in the generations since Christ's days who have been "overcome." If we tire of the battle and give in to the world's assaults, or, otherwise, its seductions, our peace will flee, and we shall be "pierced through with many sorrows" — "the sorrow of the world which worketh death." But if we prove victors in the conflict, then the peace that God gives is an enduring peace — not necessarily a peace that excludes trouble. Jesus expressly discriminates here: "These things I have spoken unto you that in me ye might have peace; in the world ye shall have tribulation." But the peace we have in Christ is so great and deep that it enables us to endure the tribulation. Its power is all needed sometimes. Tribulation is often very sore. Paul himself speaks of being "pressed above measure, despairing even of life, troubled on every side..."

perplexed... persecuted... cast down." Even the Lord said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." All the prophets are more or less examples of the same thing. Their experience of the Word was fitly symbolised by the figure in which Ezekiel and John ate a little book which was sweet in the mouth, but bitter and vexing to the spirit in its after effects. It is the experience of all who, to any true purpose, embrace the Word of God as their true portion in life — first sweet, then bitter without the sweetness departing. The Truth itself is a pure and perfect and good thing. There is nothing but sweetness and rapture in its relation to our understanding and hope, and to our standing with God. This sweetness cannot depart. Where the bitterness comes in, is in the effect it produces with reference to the state of things at present prevailing among men. It creates antipathies in our own mind where there were formerly affinities. It makes us strangers where we were formerly at home; it excites enmity where we formerly had esteem and love. The language of the Psalm exactly defines the case: "I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien to my mother's children. For the zeal of Thine house hath eaten my up; and the reproaches of them that reproached Thee are fallen upon me." These things are not pleasant but the reverse. But they are inevitable and have to be borne and will be borne by all true men as part of the process by which divine wisdom is preparing sinful men and women for the perfection of the Spirit state. It is only for a short time. It can only last a lifetime, and that is soon over. Endless time went before; endless time follows; our human life is but a tick of the clock by comparison. It is easy to endure when the mind is open to the facts of the case as they are, and when we realise that the endless time that is coming is a time for the glory of God in perfect effulgence, in which we shall bask in everlasting delight in the joy of God and all His perfected children.

We have not exhausted the causes of thanksgiving. Not only have we this priceless treasure in the contents of the Word of God, but we have liberty to avail ourselves of it to the fullest. Our long usage of freedom may have taken off the edge of our gratitude somewhat in this respect. It is helpful to remember that there was a day, and that not so long ago, when we might not read the Bible as we now do, when we might not even possess the Bible. It seems incredible to us that there ever could have been such a day in England, but so it was. Such meetings as we now hold would have been impossible. We should have had to steal a furtive assembly in the woods or some hidden place, with the constant danger of our meeting being broken up by dragoons. As for the things we teach, they would have exposed us to certain imprisonment and death at the hands of a cruel clergy. Even Calvin, in another land, burnt Servetus at the stake for doctrines that were more like the Truth than his own. How thankful we ought to be for our liberty.

Let our thankfulness take the right shape. We may fall into the mistake of many of our shallow-minded nineteenth-century friends, who imagine that

the possession of "religious liberty" is due to the superiority of the current generation. We are indebted to the providence of God direct, and not to the excellence of contemporary man at all in the matter. If the clergy had the power, they would do now as they did then. As a class, they manifest the same arrogance and malignity towards objectors that led their forefathers to imprison and burn heretics. God has put limitations on their power in the operations of His providence, and to this only are we indebted for our freedom. He has set class against class, faction against faction, as the time has drawn near for the undermining of the position of the Man of Sin in Europe. He has so regulated the antagonisms and collisions of the various political and ecclesiastical parties, and especially in England in recent centuries, that they have been obliged to come to a compromise of mutual toleration. "Religious liberty" has come to be a war cry with politicians; and by this has been secured a breathing time for the Truth. In this the earth has helped the woman as appointed long ago. To God be the praise, and not to "our glorious ancestors" or our "splendid constitution" at all. "God ruleth in the kingdoms of men," and will in due time set them all aside when they have served His purpose.

How thankful we ought to be for an unchained Bible, and for liberty to "keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus Christ" which we read therein. Does the ground of thankfulness stop here? Far from it. This is a land of Bibles without being a land of light. Multitudes have no knowledge of it, though it is in their houses, or, at least, within their reach. Other multitudes know it a little without having any care for it. Others know and appreciate, but do not understand. Some understand a little without much thoroughness of knowledge or appreciation. If in any degree, we know, understand and love this emancipated and freely circulated Book of God, have we not in this one of the greatest causes for gratitude? Here, also, let us take care how we think about it. Let us not make the mistake of supposing it is owing to any discernment or deservings we possess above our neighbors. If we have attained to the enviable position of understanding the most wonderful and most precious book under the sun, it is the result of circumstances with the ordering of which we had nothing to do. If God had not raised up in this century such a man as Dr. Thomas, our generation would have been stumbling on in the inherited fogs which have entirely hidden the teaching of the Bible from view, while glorifying the Bible itself in a certain sentimental way. It does not appear that the understanding of the Bible has been attained in any other channel. There is a deal of writing about the Bible, and a deal of smattering in connection with separate and scattered points involved in Bible things; but where, outside of his work in our day, is to be found that complete mastery of the whole Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation, which renders the work of God through Israel from the beginning a consistent, connected, and progressive thing, which not only does not require the help of human philosophy, but which cannot endure the

admixture of it without being spoiled? We know not its like in any current system or movement, or in any library treasures, ancient or modern, or in the hands of any teacher or institution of modern life anywhere. If others know of it, we should be delighted to be introduced — with the liberty, however, of thorough independent inspection. We know enough of shams and echoes and abortions to make us very chary.

We have to be thankful, then, that God has not only given us an unchained Bible, with liberty to read and follow it, but that in the providentially-regulated work of Dr. Thomas, he has removed the mountains of tradition and fable which had gathered over it, and made it possible for us to attain an understanding of it. We have to be thankful also that we have been brought into contact with that work. We might have remained outside the circle of it. We might never have heard of it. We might have wandered on in the endless bogs of pulpit theology, to drown in the turbid waters of worldliness, or perish in the brain-softening malaria of benighted pietism, or sink in the quagmires of agnosticism, or dash our brains out at the foot of the precipices of atheism. If we have been brought into saving relation with the hope of Israel, it has been the result of some apparently trivial circumstance of personal experience. We have met a friend, or seen a book, or heard a conversation, or attended a lecture. The trivial circumstance has ended in our complete enlightenment. Ought not this to excite our gratitude?

And what shall we say about the Truth itself? What about the hope that enlightens our dark future? What about the ennobling power that lifts us day by day out of our inferior selves, and draws us upwards to the eternal archetype of all excellence? What about the solution it supplies to all the distracting problems of this evil state, which bootlessly excite unenlightened men or draw them on to vain enterprises, or overwhelm them in dark billows of disappointment and despair; and, at the last, deprive them of all noble incentive, and shut them up to the mercenary refuge of individual pleasure? How inexpressible is the light shed by the Truth on the darkness of individual life. There may be tribulation with it, but there is hope and joy, and resignation and peace. "What thanks can we render to God for all His benefits?" This is Paul's question, and best expresses the enlightened sentiment generated in the bosom of reason by the contemplation of the wonderful position we occupy this morning when thus displayed in all its elements.

A working gratitude is the most logical and best appreciated form of thankfulness everywhere. An idle thankfulness is comparable only to the "fruitless branch." It is odious both to God and man. Let us show our gratitude in "the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name," "for this is the will of God concerning us;" and let us not forget to "do good and communicate" (that is, convey to others), "for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." And let us do this acceptably, not in fits and starts, blowing hot and cold, but with the steadiness recommended by Paul when he says, "Be ye

steadfast, unmovable, *always abounding* in the work of the Lord," especially knowing that our labor in the case is not in vain, however much it may appear so.

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## Salvation Through a Narrow Channel

*God's past Word confined to one Race and one Land — sin alienates from God — submission, belief, obedience, forgiveness essential to salvation — sole prerogative of God to define terms and scope of salvation.*

THE geographical unity of the Bible is remarkable. This breaking of bread was instituted in the Holy Land. The prophets, from whose writings we have read a portion this morning, prophesied in the Holy Land. The kings of Judah, whose proceedings are exhibited in the first of our three daily readings, reigned in the Holy Land. To the Holy Land Moses led Israel in the beginning of the wonderful works of God upon earth. In the Holy Land is always laid the scene of consummated salvation.

What is the reason of this adherence to one place in the unfolding of the divine plan? Why, for 1,500 years, were the communications of God confined to one people and one spot of earth? Why did they not extend to China, to Libya, to Hindostan, to Greece, to Rome? Why did God, as Paul testified to the crowd at Lystra (Acts 14:16), "suffer all nations to walk in their own ways?" This question touches the roots of things. There is no answer to it if men are immortal souls. In that case, all men in all countries, in all ages, are in danger of eternal perdition, and as much in need of salvation as the descendants of Jacob. Why, then, were no steps taken anywhere for ages but in the narrow channel of Jewish national life? This is a hard problem for those who believe in popular theology. It is for them one of the most formidable of atheistical objections. I remember being staggered by its force before I knew the Truth. When I learnt the Truth, it vanished like smoke.

That truth is a humbling truth, but one that we can see with our own eyes to be a truth, as well as attested by the words of truth. It is that man is a mortal being, as ephemeral as the flowers of the field, though a little longer lived for the time being. Why he should be mortal with such adaptations to a perfect state, nature can tell us nothing. Nature exhibits only facts; it has nothing to do with the meaning or destiny of facts. The fact of man's perishability and relative insignificance it plainly tells. On the question how he came to be in this position, or how long it is likely to last so with him, it is necessarily silent. We can only learn this from God who placed man upon the earth and subjected him to his present lot, and this we do learn with a

simplicity that is too plain for the wisdom of this world which delights more in the prestige of facts than in facts themselves. Man is mortal because sin has entered, and sin is nonconformity to the revealed will of God.

We live in an age when the very idea of sin is disappearing. It is written that "fools make a mock at sin." This is receiving enlarging illustration on every hand in this day of increased knowledge. The notion of "sin" is marked off as an exploded notion — as the narrow conception of an age of ignorance and bigotry, at least in some directions. It is still allowed you may sin against your neighbor. You may hurt a man's interests; you may break the law; you may injure the State. You may even sin against yourself by violating the laws of health, or running counter to the conditions of well-being, but as for sinning against God, that has come to be regarded as a mere vagary, a fantasy of speech inherited from dark ages. The cause of this is doubtless to be found in the decline of faith in God, and this decline of faith is the result of increase in superficial knowledge. Bacon well said that a little science made a man an atheist, but that much science took him through to the opposite shore of everlasting faith — or some such saying. In this sense, a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Fulness of knowledge, including a knowledge of the true teaching of the Bible as distinguished from the fables of theology, will lead to the sublimest and most indomitable faith. It will lead a man to prostrate himself with the humility of a little child in the presence of eternal facts, one of which is the existence of sin.

The very object of God's dealings with Israel through the Law of Moses for a thousand years was to establish this conception of sin as the cardinal element in the present relations of God and man. We find Paul saying, "I had not known sin but by the law," and again, "The law entered that sin might abound," and again, God "hath concluded all under sin that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." Hence we must either bear a reverential attitude towards the central fact, or take our place among the fools who, saying in their heart "There is no God," make a mock at Him. There is no rational middle ground. Which of these two positions is the position of reason and truth, we have settled for ourselves in assembling round this Table; for this Table has expressly to do with the subject. This bread and this wine, on this occasion, have to do with nothing else; for when Jesus said, "This is my body," "this is my blood," it was with reference to the offering of the body and blood in sacrifice. And why offered? "For sin." To what intent? "That sin might be condemned in the flesh." With what effect? "That he might 'put away sin by the sacrifice of himself' — that the body of sin might be destroyed — that henceforth we should not serve sin." All these things are apostolically testified as you know. It was for "the sins of many," that we might be forgiven because of our faith in what was accomplished in Christ in this matter. We show our faith in having been "baptized into his death," and thus assuming "the fellowship of his sufferings," we receive

forgiveness of sins for his sake, and stand justified in him, in hope of eternal life to which otherwise we had no access. Forgiveness is at the root of the whole transaction — forgiveness by favor, yet not relaxing the law of God's supremacy. Christ died that God might forgive; yet forgiveness in the case is an act of favor — not of claim. Christ did not substitutionally pay a debt for others, from which they might then claim freedom. He submitted to the "righteousness of God" in crucifixion that God might be just, and, at the same time, exercise the prerogative of forgiveness without the compromise of His supremacy. "Sin hath reigned unto death;" even so "grace (favor) reigns through righteousness" in the death and resurrection of the sinless Jesus, who partook of our nature for the purpose. It is all an operation of righteousness (there is no unrighteousness in it), and it is all an arrangement of favor (there is no debt in it, either as regards the ransom or the ransomed). The triumph is fittingly celebrated in the song put into the mouths of those who are saved at last: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by his blood." The matter is high and holy, and has no benefit for those who treat it in a flippant or indifferent spirit. God's own declaration governs all. "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word."

It may seem as if all this had very little to do with the limited nature of the divine operations in the earth, I mean as affording an explanation of that limitation — at which the "learned" stumble. It really has everything to do with it. If God cannot look on "sin," if "the wages of sin be death," and if all men are sinners, does it not follow that whole nations of mankind are really to Him as He declares — "less than nothing and vanity?" The masses of barbarous human life as we survey them, say in China, in India, in Africa, in Russia, or even in our own country, may oppress human imagination as a nightmare problem; but what are they in relation to God? As they are here, is how they really are. If they were immortal beings, the problem would be great and distressing, but as the mere propagation of mortal life, with many gratifications while it exists, and disappearing from creation in the painless grave that waits it, the problem is far otherwise. They come without a right to come; they go without a claim to stay, it is an evil state while they are in it. Manifestly the only question is, what is the meaning of the phenomenon from the Creator's point of view? This is the question which human wisdom is not asking, will not ask. They look at the matter from the creature point of view; this is the wrong end to lay hold of! Endless stumble must be the result of this method of treating the problem. It cannot be understood from this end. How could it? The march of reproduction is endless as an affair of mechanical capacity; and if the question is to be debated as to how it bears on the creatures, the point would constantly press — which set are we to specially consider? — those that have been, those that are, or those that may come if fathers and mothers are not drowned. If it is those that have been,

that are to be considered, why should they be considered? They are gone, they are nowhere, they are mere memory. If it is those now living that are to be considered, why only those that are living now, seeing that those who are gone had a "now" once, and therefore an equal claim? If those that are to come, how can we apply the problem, seeing they will only come as long as they have a chance of coming, and will never come at all if some great catastrophe should sweep the present inhabitants from the face of the earth?

It is evident that the question cannot be debated from the creature end. It must be considered from the Creator's point of view alone, and from this point of view, it is simple. He has formed a purpose which He has revealed, of which the human race is but the raw material, and the purpose is of that character that but a very small proportion of the human race can be finally utilised in harmony with it. That purpose is to people the earth with an immortal race that will recognise His headship and heartily accord to Him the deference and praise which are reasonable towards Him as the author of all things and in which He delights. This race He produces, not by direct creation (which would exclude experience of evil), but by a preliminary education of faith and obedience during an evil state, brought on by sin. This process involves the development of character, which contains within it the highest excellence of ultimate result, inasmuch as those who have been faithful and submissive during evil, are by that very experience better qualified to enjoy the blessedness of a perfect state, and to afford to God the satisfaction in His works which He desires. This being the purpose, we have a key to the present state of things, and to the procedure God has adopted in bringing it about. "All flesh is as grass," who can deny it? It is a matter of painful experience. No theory gets rid of this; but here is a view that reconciles us to it. Though subject to evil, the human race is on its way to beautification, yet only in God's way, which will limit the result to those operated upon and chosen at last because fit and faithful.

The nature of that way we see when we look back, for the work is largely advanced. We see Abraham chosen, and the land of his pilgrimage promised to him for an everlasting possession. We see his posterity chosen under a covenant of works, and organized into a nation under a law given through Moses. We see the nation as a whole disobedient, but a remnant in all their generations found faithful. We see the prophets sent generation after generation to prevent absolute failure. We see the Lord Jesus at last raised up in their midst as a protest against their evil works; as a declaration of God's readiness to forgive; as a manifestation of His power and love; and as the opening of the way of life eternal through death and resurrection for all who should believe on him, and submit to him as the Lord and Master appointed for law-giving now and judgment hereafter. We see this opened way afterwards proclaimed to the world in general, that "whosoever will" might enter into it



and secure the covenanted blessings. As the centuries advance, we see the way corrupted by human gloss, human opinion, human tradition and fable. We see it concealed from view by the spreading growth of a time-serving political ecclesiasticism. But we see the Bible preserved in the midst of all the confusion, and we see the beams of its beautiful light shining out again and again on the prevailing darkness — purifying life and inspiring hope.

The course of the matter — the channel of this revelation — has all lain within the boundaries of Jewish national life. This is no accident. It is a thing declared. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth;" "Salvation is of the Jews," "To them pertain the glory and the promises." The very Saviour is "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." This is the plan — to work from a chosen centre. It is a reasonable plan — may we not say a necessary plan, seeing it has been chosen? "They are not all Israel that are of Israel, neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children;" but though they are not all Israel, some of them are, and in the end, these are all that will be needed. It must have been the same if any other nation had been chosen, only a selection would have proved suitable, the rest would have been as the decayed leaves of autumn. Why quarrel with the plan? Has not God a right to make a plan? And is not any plan made by Him sure to be a wise one? Is it not our part to simply recognise and accept His plan, whatever it is?

The learned of this world speak disparagingly of the Jewish conception of things as a "tribal" one — a "tribal" history, a "tribal" religion, a "tribal" God. They think they have condemned and dismissed and disposed of the matter by calling it "tribal," as against "racial." What if in this they are simply defining the fact of the matter? What if "the whole world lieth in wickedness?" What if mankind by nature are "strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world?" What if death has passed upon all men, for that all have sinned? Could salvation in that case approach us in any other character than a "tribal" character? Must it not be a thing outside of us, fenced off from us, narrowed into a line of things to which we have no natural access? What is gained by calling it "tribal?" If it professed to be cosmopolitan, and were found to be tribal; if it proposed a benefit for every member of the human family and were found to restrict it to a few, there might be something damaging signified by this learned outcry of "tribalism." But seeing it expressly limits its proposals, and expressly affirms the ineligibility of the human race in general, it is a curious discovery to convict it of being in harmony with its own professions. "But," it may be said "it proposes to bless all the families of mankind." So it does; and give it time enough, it will show you the blessing accomplished. "No more curse" is written at the end of its work; but you must allow it to get to that end before you cry "failure."

Brethren and sisters, let us not be laughed out of the hope of Israel, nor reasoned out of it, nor coaxed out of it, nor cajoled out of it, nor frightened out of it, nor moved out of it at all. There is not an objection to it that is founded on true reason. All objections have their root in incomplete knowledge on some point or other. They mostly originate in pride and sentiment, acting with much knowledge of natural things it may be, but in much ignorance of what God has revealed to His apostles and prophets by the Spirit. How vain are the thoughts and theories of men in the darkness that waits us all at last. How enlightening, and ennobling, and uplifting are the promises of God in that same hour. Christ is not only proclaimed the Light of the World; he is proved to be such by a history that cannot be overthrown, by words that cannot be matched in human utterances. His words ring through the world though heard only by ears attuned, "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." "I will give to him that is athirst of the water of life freely." Where among the million-voiced babble of the world can you find a voice like this? Let us adhere to it and follow it to the very end, however dark and bitter may be tribulation's road. The tribulation is no accident. It is part of the plan. Out of it victoriously we shall at last come if we cast not away our well-founded confidence. At last we shall stand in the assembly of the tried men and women of all ages, who will stand on Mount Zion in the strength of immortality, in the gladness of acceptance, and in the rapture of praise that will only find fit expression in the song that John heard them sing in vision with a sound like mighty thunderings, and the roar of many waters.

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## Drawn of God by The Word

*Such small results apparent — God able to convert all men — His objects served by the Gospel "taking out" a few — heeding the Bible His means of "drawing" — tribulation right preparation for reward.*

IT is curious to think of the line of connection that stretches away from the Table we surround this morning to that other Table at which 1,850 years ago, the Lord said, "Do this in remembrance of me." This meeting is a direct off-shoot of that. If that meeting had not been held, we should never have been present at this; and if there had not been a connecting agency all the while, between, this could never have taken place. Our never having held this meeting would have mattered nothing to those belonging to the other end of the line. It would have mattered much to us and those who may be influenced or affected by what we do. It belongs to the chain of causation that brings us from darkness to light, and prepares us for a place in the system

of things beyond, when the glory of the Lord will fill the earth, through the acknowledgement of an enlightened and immortal population.

It is more curious to think how little, comparatively speaking, has come from the powerful cause that was at work when the Lord, in the midst of his disciples, instituted this simple memorial. The authority of God was present to speak; the power of God was present to heal and to do great things, yet after 1,850 years, this is all as yet that has come of it, the patient obedience and cheerful hope of a few persons in the midst of a very numerous population in some countries white, in some countries black; in some, busy and prosperous; in others supine and stagnant; but in all heedless and unbelieving. Such a scantiness of result after such a lapse of time, might perplex and distress us if Christ himself had not prepared his disciples for it by such express intimations beforehand as we have been reading this morning from Paul's letter to Timothy. "The Spirit speaketh, expressing that in the latter times, some shall depart from the faith." Concerning this "some," Peter informs us by the same spirit that "many shall follow their pernicious ways" (2Peter 2:1-2). How "many," the visions shown to John in Patmos of "things shortly to come to pass," give us an idea of: "All the world wonders after the beast... power was given him over all kindreds and tongues and nations" (Rev. 13:3-7). This beast had to do with upholding of the Romish "woman," "with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication." These particular foreshadowings were all blended in the general prophecy of Isaiah, "Behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people." We discover from other Scriptures that this state of things would last till put an end to by the Lord's actual return to "take to himself his own great power, and to reign."

Consequently, that which at first sight seems an extraordinary and staggering failure of this Divine institution becomes at last apparent as the normal and the right state of things. It would not have been in harmony with the foreshowing of the Scriptures had the world at this time been full of the light of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. Such a state of things would have been pleasant to the friends of God, but it would not have been in place, and for everything there is a time and a place. It would have been easy for God to have established an institution in the place of the absent Christ that would have put and kept the world in the path of true enlightenment. He could have appointed an immortal Melchizedec at Jerusalem with power to suppress error and rebellion in the way they were stamped out in the camp of Israel in the wilderness, at the beginning; and in the way they will be kept at bay on the earth under the powerful reign of Christ. But He doeth as pleaseth Him in His wisdom. He knows what He is aiming at, and the best method of

getting at the object aimed at. If, therefore, He has appointed this breaking of bread — a perfectly voluntary compliance with His will, following in the wake of the enlightenment which the Scriptures, and the Scriptures alone, are capable of conferring — an enlightenment forced on no one, and which, humanly speaking, we might say, is left to take its chance among the frictions and fermentations of human whims and fancies, it is because such an agency is sufficient to accomplish the work proposed in the present stage of operations. That work has been defined by James, and is illustrated in every scriptural description, and every scripturally recorded operation of the gospel, namely, to “take out from among the Gentiles a people for His name.” This people, when taken out, will be sufficiently numerous to rule the world with Christ in the happy day of promise; and sufficiently interesting to be an acceptable present to Christ, who will present them to himself in their collective capacity, as “a glorious ecclesia, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.”

We have had the happiness to be included in the call that takes this people out. The coming of the gospel to us, in the hearing and understanding thereof, is proof of our inclusion in the call. That all the sons and daughters of God are known to Him from the beginning does not in the least interfere with the fact that when the time comes to bring them to Himself, it is by the hearing and understanding of the gospel that they are so brought. All God’s ways are in harmony one with another, and all truth agrees. We need not trouble with the question: “Am I among the elect?” The question for us is: “Are we among those who believe the gospel, and desire the salvation of God with all our hearts, and strive to conform in all our ways to His expressed will?” This is a question to some extent within our knowledge and our power; and if we are able to say “Yes,” then are we justified in looking forward and upward with full assurance of hope; because the word of Christ is most plain in this connection. “Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.” Now if we “come,” that is enough; it is proof that we are among those of whom he speaks when he says, “All that the Father hath given to me shall come to me.” Again, “Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.”

Some are troubled at that other saying, “No man can come unto me except the Father who hath sent me draw him.” They need not be troubled. No part of the Word can contradict any other part. Some imagine that they must become the subject of an invisible, irresistible, miraculous “drawing” that will impel them independently of their wills and independently of their understanding. This would be to set the Word against experience and against the Word itself. No man ever comes to Christ as the result of “taking into his head,” as we might say, through an occult and divine influence operating there. No man ever yet submitted to the requirements of the gospel without

hearing the gospel and learning in a natural way what those requirements are, and if any man will reasonably consider the connection of Christ's words, when he speaks of the Father "drawing" those who come to Him, he must come to the conclusion that this is the process that Jesus had before his mind when he so spoke, for what does he say immediately: "Every man, therefore, that hath *heard* and hath learned of the Father cometh unto me." How do men hear and learn of the Father? Is it not by the word spoken? Is it not written: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God?" And is this not in completest harmony with the whole apostolic work of preaching the gospel as "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth?" Is it not in harmony with Christ's own words "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved?"

It may be asked, Why should Jesus speak of this process of hearing and believing the gospel as a drawing? Brethren and sisters, because it is a drawing. Have we not felt its power? Have we not been drawn to Christ? Have we not been attracted to him? What has done it? Is it not the Word heard, understood, and believed? It is even so. We must recognise the facts of the case. As rational beings, we are influenced by reason. Men drawn by knowledge are drawn much more thoroughly and permanently than men that are influenced by a feeling of which they can give no account. Let a man know that the house is on fire, and you will get him into the street much more effectually than by trying to mesmerize him into it.

But why should Jesus place the Father so prominently in the drawing as the Actor in the process? Here again, because it is even so. Salvation is the Father's work. It is "of His own purpose and grace," conceived "before the world began." The gospel is the instrumentality by which He is pleased to work it out. If He had not made known His purpose; if He had not issued the invitation to the marriage feast of His Son, who could have come to Christ? Must not all men have remained in the apathy and stagnation of native darkness? It is even so. Christ meant to emphasize the fact that men have no room for the glory in which it is so common for them to indulge — in matters of mind and matters of futurity, as well as matters of personal strength and rational power. Salvation is "not of works, lest any man should boast." It is altogether God's plan, of God's initiative, of God's grace, "that no flesh should glory in His presence." If we come to Christ, it is God's drawing, and not the result of our superior discernments and choice. If it had depended on this, we never should have emerged from our native mud of ignorance and hopelessness. What Christ said to his disciples is true of all his people. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you."

But then the gospel does not draw some? True. There must be an intelligent and responsive ear before the communications of intelligence can

be effectual. Whence come these? My friend, all things are of God, in their proper relation. If God have not given you capacity to understand, then no amount of wisdom-teaching will enter your heart; but if you have the capacity, then the gospel is the Father's voice addressed to that capacity; and if the two are brought into connection, the Father by the one draws the other, and the result is as appointed. If a man believe and love the gospel, and subject himself to its demand, then he has the proof in himself that he is called and drawn. Let him rest on the words of Christ: "Let him that is athirst come and take of the water of life freely."

That is our blessed position this morning. We are hungering after the good things of God's revealed purpose. We have heard of them; we have believed them; we have embraced them; and we are seeking to subject ourselves to the Father's requirements; why then should we hold back in the least from the full and perfect consolation? Why should we not heartily rejoice in hope of the glory of God? Is it not so, that "being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have access into this grace wherein we stand?" (Rom. 5:1).

Brethren and sisters, these things cannot be gainsaid. Let us act on the confidence of them. Let us not be perturbed at the darkness that reigns around us as if it were some strange and unaccountable circumstance. Let us not be intimidated out of our joy and confidence by the cry that it is uncharitable to be sure about the Truth, and that "no lie is of the Truth," as John says. As men and women who have attained to a knowledge of the Truth, we are addressed by Paul when he says — "Ye are all the children of the light and of the day. Therefore let us not sleep as do others. Let us who are of the day be sober." Let us "not cast away our confidence which hath great recompense of reward."

The knowledge of the Truth is not without its drawbacks. It puts us out of fit with the people and the state of things around us. This is far from agreeable or advantageous for the present time. Nevertheless, it is a privilege when rightly estimated. It is precisely the experience of the first disciples. Jesus said in prayer "I have given them Thy Word and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world even as I am not of the world." Jesus plainly said to them, "The time cometh when whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." It is a privilege to fare as Jesus and the apostles fared, even to take no higher view. But there is a higher view. It has pleased God to appoint trial as the preliminary to exaltation. We may not like it, but we may be quite sure it is wise. Our judgment in the matter can only waver in the actual hour of suffering. With a sufficiently wide sweep of the eye, it is impossible not to see that tribulation is a splendid preparation for glory. Does it not make us more humble and sensible than we should be if we had nothing but that which is agreeable in our experience? Does it not enable us more easily

to realise that in ourselves we are nothing, and that God only is inherently wise and good and strong and everlasting? Does it not prepare a sweeter salvation than if we knew nothing but sunshine? What more odious than to see the pampered child of prosperity pass on from promotion to promotion with an air of satiety and disdain? Tribulation will chasten and purify and beautify and ennoble so that men and angels will acquiesce in the exaltation of a tried and modest faith. God's plan in this respect is beautiful, in that He is creating beforehand a reason for conferring an honor that we could not earn for ourselves. He has said: "Them that honor me, I will honor." What opportunity could we have of honoring God except by being allowed to live in an evil age, when human honor is the great mainspring of action, and God is everywhere in works denied? If the greeting, "Well done, good and faithful servant," is waiting, it is because, meanwhile, the Master is gone and his service condemned as a worthless and a dishonorable thing. The time will come when we shall look back upon such a time as a time of great opportunity. If we did not have an opportunity, we should be dissatisfied now in proportion as we are earnest lovers of Christ, and we should lack the chief joy that will be ours when we have got through the long conflict with darkness and dishonor and pain and weariness and fasting that is the inevitable lot of saints in the present evil world. Hold on, brethren. "Cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward." "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." "It shall be said on that day, Lo, this is our God. We have waited for Him. We shall be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

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## Themes of Bible Prove God-Inspired

*Avoid extremes — Wisdom balances — "perilous times" — reproof and condemnation main theme of God's prophets — adversity teaches human nothingness — leads to free-will adoration of God.*

**W**E all know what Paul says, that the Scriptures are contrived and intended to "thoroughly furnish" the man of God "to every good work." Thoroughly furnishing means furnishing on every point. A man might be furnished on some points and not in all. Wisdom requires a place, for every truth and every duty. Now, there is a place for the advice of Solomon: "Be not righteous overmuch." It is not a large place but still it is there. Where we are earnestly exhorted hundreds of times to follow after righteousness, we are only once told to "be not righteous overmuch." This

shows the danger of being righteous overmuch is not great, while the danger of neglecting righteousness is very great. Still, the danger of being righteous overmuch does exist for some, and, therefore, there is a time to look at it.

I have known cases — not many — where this danger has shown itself. I have known of too much reading and not enough walking; too much praying and not enough living; too much faith and not enough works; too much Bible and not enough of the other works of God; too much mortifying of the flesh and not enough personal cleanliness, and personal health and personal joy and thanksgiving to Him who has made all things “to be received with thankfulness of them that believe and know the Truth.” The liability to these extremes is distinctly due to the necessity that exists for pushing hard in right directions; but wisdom will enable us to do this hard pushing without carrying things right over the top of the hill. There is an equilibrium with all things that is beautiful. It is hard to get at, but it is possible. Extremes are to be avoided in everything. They tend to destruction. All giving and no getting, all waking and no sleeping; all working and no resting. All study and no eating; all talk and no doing; will tend to emptiness and death, though all of them are right and healthful in their own place. Wisdom is a nice balance of many things; and children of wisdom will aim at this balance. The world is all out of balance one way, there is a possibility of being out of balance in the other. If we obey all the commandments God has given us, we will never be out of balance, but for everything find a time and a place — except for disobedience of God. There is never a time for this. The disobedience of God is wickedness.

Some people think that when Solomon said, “Be not overmuch wicked,” he implied that the children of God might be wicked a little. Never. He is not speaking to the righteous in that saying, but to the wicked. You will see that, if you turn to the verse before. He introduces the case of the righteous and the wicked, and he has a word of advice to each. His advice to the righteous is not to carry it too far, because even righteousness carried too far will tend to destruction. His advice to the wicked is a little the same but in a different line of things. The wicked have to die, but Solomon says they may die “before their time” if they don’t take things in moderation. If it be asked, what had he to do in giving advice to the wicked, we have to remember that he was “King in Jerusalem,” and wrote for the instruction of the whole nation, of whom the greater part were wicked. That there should be a word for them as an actual element in the situation was according to wisdom.

Paul foretold that “perilous times should come.” They have come. They have been with the world for many centuries. It may be said that time have always been perilous. So they have, but they were not so perilous when the voice of divine authority was in the earth and the hand of divine power was visible. There was then an obvious standard of appeal which made the children of God at least feel strong, and enable them to speak strongly on behalf of righteousness. But in our day, there is no such standard of appeal. There is the



Bible, but the power of this is weakened in a hundred ways. Enmity has undermined it; professed friendship has betrayed it; man-deferring learning, has thrown clouds of elegant sophistry over it, and the shallow public mind has eagerly endorsed the fictions that have liberated it from the irksome restraints of divine command.

“Perilous times” implies a something put in danger by them. What is it that is endangered? When we read the Bible we see. God’s favors now and salvation at last are predicted upon our conformity to the will of God therein revealed. The foremost feature of which is belief in His Son and submission to His commandments. Now, whatever tends to obscure that will or to weaken the authority of its revelation interferes with our fitness to yield the submission required, and, therefore, imperils the results associated with it. This is the nature of the present situation pre-eminently. The world is nearly unanimous in its rejection of the “way” revealed in the Bible, and in the adoption of another way of its own invention or guess or imagination. It discards the way of life that has come direct from the throne of light, and sets up a way of its own choosing, which can only end in death. Because nearly all are agreed on the subject, they all feel very strong, and this strength is the peril of the times. It acts as a powerful barrier in the way of those who are disposed to seek and to follow the right way. They look up and see the great and the learned in favor, a “broad” and “liberal” feeling to the effect that it is quite immaterial whether a man obey the commandments of God or not, provided he have a “sincere” religion of some kind. They look down and see the swinish masses wallowing in a moral corruption and in an intellectual benightedness, compared to which indifference is respectable; countless millions of them in all countries, yet all reckoned by the popular teachers to have a hope of landing on some “other shore” in a fabled “sweet by and by” (if there be such, say they, under their breath), and they look around among their friends, amiable and well-to-do it may be; nice, sociable, and well-meaning people, but utterly indifferent to the way of God, or to the question whether there is such a way or not. What is the combined effect of such a situation but to dishearten and paralyse and deter all individual enterprise, and, therefore, to imperil the eternal life which was offered by the apostles in the name of Christ, and which is not to be had in any other line of things?

“Perilous times” are indeed come, and lie with a great and heavy shadow over all the world — a shadow that amounts almost to the darkness of impenetrable night. Prophecy is true and prophecy has been fulfilled. “Darkness shall cover the earth.” Shall we lie down in despair, then; supine, lethargic, and hopeless? If God had not spoken there would be nothing else to be done. But He has spoken; and He has preserved and circulated His Word and we have it; and the words of direction we read in this chapter that foretells the perilous times (2Tim. 3) are no vain words. “Continue thou in the things which thou hast learnt and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast

learnt them." It is a matter of knowledge and historic fact. It is not an affair of speculation or myth. "We have not followed cunningly devised fables." The bridge of our hope is hung on the solid buttresses of authentic fact that cannot be got rid of however much it may be scorned.

It rests not on the apostles alone, though that is a strong foundation, considering that they tendered themselves as "eye witnesses" of the things they testified, and guaranteed their integrity to all succeeding generations by spoliation, imprisonment, and death, on account of the testimony they gave; it rests on Christ, like whom none ever appeared on earth for character, deportment, teaching, or achievements; who foretold division and war on earth as the result of his appearance, though he was only a private mechanic; his crucifixion, though he went about doing good; his resurrection, though no power existed among men to bring such a thing about. And it rests not on Christ alone, though he is a great rock-mountain, around whom the waves of captious criticism surge and break from age to age in vain. It rests on the prophets who flourished century after century before his appearing. I mean to maintain that the mere existence of their writings, as a piece of literature, is a monument to the fact of God having spoken. It must needs so appear in the eyes of reason when these writings are thoroughly known, and judicially estimated with reference to human nature and other books. Consider them. The popular impression is that the prophets are foretellers of the future, and that prophecy consists mainly of glowing pictures of good times to come. The prophets truly foretell the future, and there are glorious visions of the age to come; but this is not the essential character of their writings. Their essential characteristic is to be found in their expostulations with Israel on account of their departures from the divine Law. The prophets were the messengers of God to bring Israel back to obedience. They are so styled by the writer of the chronicles (2Chr. 36:15, 16), and by Jesus in his lamentation over Jerusalem (Matt. 21:36; Luke 13:34). God Himself defined the work of the prophet thus: "I have sent unto you all My servants the prophets, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way and amend your doings and go not after other gods." This was their true errand; the foretelling of the future was accessory to it. Now, consider the significance of that errand. Their words are all impeaching words, condemning words, denouncing words. Even Isaiah, who foretells so much of glory and comforts opens in this strain. Here are his very first words: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for Yahweh hath spoken. I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters. They have forsaken Yahweh: they have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger, they are gone away backwards."

This is the strain all the way through the prophets right to the end of Malachi — fault-finding, — reproof, — condemnation. What is the explana-

tion of this quality of the Jewish national writings? In all other nations and literatures and ages it is otherwise, the leaders of the people compliment and flatter, and speak at all times in a conciliatory strain. Even the Pope whitewashes the rascally minions of power when he has occasion to address them or refer to them. Men would have no chance of being popular and influential if they did not speak to please. Here are men who did the reverse, and who were not popular, but so unpopular as to be objects of popular vengeance. As Stephen said in his speech before the Sanhedrin: "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted"? (Acts 7:52), or, as Jesus exclaimed, "O, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee." What is the explanation of it? It cannot be attributed to the proneness of the priests to maintain their influence over the people as some would fain suggest: for the priests were as much the object of reproof as the people. Take, for example, our reading a day or two ago (Mal. 2:1). "And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you: if ye will not hear and if you will not lay it to heart; to give glory unto My name, saith Yahweh of Hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings."

If you will but think it out, the more this is pondered, the more it will be perceived that the mere existence of the prophetic writings is a proof of God having spoken, quite apart from the stupendous and convincing theme of fulfilled prophecy. It is not according to human nature at all to write as the prophets wrote. Therefore, an impulse outside human nature had to do with it. This would stand as the unassailable conclusion of reason even if it were not formulated for us by inspiration in the apostles. "Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." On this, then, after Christ and the apostles, we rest as a strong foundation of faith; but the foundation does not end here. There remains Moses, whose history in its details, and whose sublime writings in their spirit and construction cannot be pondered without yielding up to docile reason the powerful conviction that God was with him, laying the foundation of a work on the earth, of which Christ is the topstone. And, even then, the topic is not exhausted, for there is such a perfect adaptation between the Bible plan of things and the need of man, as well as between the Bible and the conclusion proclaimed by the whole universe, that the intellect is overborne by the conviction that the Bible is only the complement of nature in revealing God and opening before us the prospect of everlasting good.

Strong in this conviction we draw continual comfort from the study of the Scriptures, and continual profit. They are no words of empty sentiment that say, "Thy word is a light unto my feet and a lamp unto my path." It is so in many, many ways — sometimes in very unexpected ways. Before concluding, let us glance at one of the many ways that at first is by no means obvious. In our young days, we see no particular use in the mournful psalms from which a selection has been read. In older days, when trouble and suffering fall to our lot,

we begin to feel very differently. We see a value in the Psalms we never saw before; which way will presently appear. The effect of trouble of any kind by itself is depressing. It seems for the time being to cut us off from divine relations. There is a kind of logic in the mind that seems to say that we are out of joint with the divine plan of things to be in such distress. It is here where the Psalms come in with such reassuring effect. There are bright and joyful psalms. But they are not all bright and joyful. Look at the one we heard read this morning (6:2-7): "Have mercy upon me, O Lord: for I am weak. O, Lord, heal me, for my bones are vexed. My soul is also sore vexed... I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim. I water my couch with my tears. Mine eye is consumed because of grief; it waxeth old because of all mine enemies." Now, it matters not how we estimate the speakership of this psalm, whether we take it as David's, which it undoubtedly was in the first case; or Christ's, which the Spirit by the apostles instructs us it was; or the collective Christ's of which Jesus is the head — it brings before us this fact, that the friends of God are permitted to come into deep trouble as part of their experience. The same thing is apparent in another way in the discourse of Christ's, which we have read from Matthew 5. He pronounces certain classes of Israel "blessed." Note who they are: the poor in spirit, they that mourn, the meek, they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, the persecuted, the reviled, etc. Here is a recognition of afflictedness appertaining to the friends of God in the present state. There is instant comfort here for us, quite apart from the reason of it. Companionship always brings solace, even to misfortune. If there are others in it, you bear it more easily. To consider that the loved of God in past ages have been sufferers, if only by permission, reconciles you to your own part of the common lot. But we go a step further, and see that it is not only by permission but by arrangement. "Yourselves know," says Paul to the Thessalonians, "That we are appointed thereunto, for verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation, even as it came to pass as ye know." Peter speaks to the same effect: "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you as though some strange thing happened unto you."

And now, there is a purpose in it, which completes our reconciliation to what would otherwise be a hurtful experience. The cloud shines with the light of heaven. Some have expressed the idea that it is very extraordinary there should be this necessity for tribulation. They have asked why God could not get at His ends with man by a straighter and a simpler road. Surely, if nothing is impossible with God, He could usher His children into perfect being without all this stew and trouble. So they reason. But they reason not well. If there were no answer, it would be sufficient to say that the mode in the case being God's mode, it must be the best, since with perfect power there is also perfect wisdom and goodness with Him. But there is a closer answer than this. Any course adopted appears wise or foolish, according as we apprehend the object aimed

at. What is the object aimed at in this case? It is the solution of the very delicate problem of how to bring man into the etiquette of heaven without interfering with the perfect liberty which is the glory of rational existence. We know the etiquette of the earth where majesty is concerned. How much obeisant ceremonial — how much deferring; how much humble compliance, and personal abasement on the part of those approaching royalty. All this is very beautiful in a certain way; but there is little true reason in it, because king or queen is a fellow-mortal and as dependent on air and food and sleep as the meanest subject. But consider God, out of whom are all things — “in Whose hands our breath is, and Whose are all our ways.” How great and terrible the Being in whose hands centre the lines of universal power and wisdom and presence. How greatly to be revered; how worthy to be served and adored. Now He exacts this service and love and adoration, and He purposes to permanently people the earth with those only who accord to Him this reasonable exaction. That we may learn to render it is the object of tribulation. The lesson cannot be learnt in prosperity though it may be retained there after it has been previously learnt. We are brought into trouble that we may thoroughly realise what it is not enough to know as a theory, and that is, that in ourselves, we are nothing, and that the only true wisdom of a created being is to lay his free will and all his powers on the altar of divine service as a voluntary and reasonable sacrifice. The angels thus fear and serve, and mortals who are to become their equals in nature, must become their equals in reverence. This is where trouble — regulated trouble — helps. It extinguishes the mere sense of natural sufficiency and self-dependence, and forces on us the recognition of the evident fact that man neither made nor sustains himself and has no part in the control of this splendid universe, which exists by almighty power. With lessons like these, we learn patience, and patience waits the slow evolution of mortal experience in the certain confidence that they will have their issue at last in the day of everlasting sufficiency and life and glory.

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## God Now Silent, But Not For Ever

*Revelation from God necessary — God speaks, glory results — Zion the future centre — God now silent because of sin — speaks soon to destroy sinners — God invites all men into covenant — on His conditions — Judgment.*

“**H**OW precious are Thy thoughts, O, Yahweh.” So David exclaims. So we learn more and more clearly to discern. But what are Yahweh’s thoughts, and where shall we find them? It is written, “Yahweh knoweth the thoughts of man that they are vain.” We know where they are.

They are with us and around us — felt and whispered and shouted in a thousand forms — in private, in public, in conversation, by pulpit, press and platform, and we know they are vain; that is, they are futile. They come to nothing in the long run of things. They are shallow, incorrect and ephemeral. How different are the thoughts of God. He tells us, "My thoughts are not as your thoughts." They are deep and high and true and lasting.

The thoughts of God are not accessible to us in our age except in the writings of God, which the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures undoubtedly are. They have been given "by inspiration of God" for this very purpose, that the thoughts of God may be known. The things contained in them "came not by the will of man, but by the movement of the Holy Spirit," as Peter declares in 2Peter 1:21. It was necessarily so. How else could the thoughts of God be revealed? "The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God" (1Cor. 2:11). It was, therefore, needful that God should reveal them by the Spirit, and that, too, "not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth" (1Cor. 2:13). The result is a true Spirit-writing, which is "able to make us wise" in the instruction it imparts concerning God.

The Psalms of David are no exception. It is expressly testified that the Spirit of God was with him (1Sam. 16:13; 2Sam.23:2) and Jesus and the apostles both of them identify his Psalms as the voice of the Spirit (Matt. 22:43; Acts 4:25). Consequently it is the voice of God that addresses us in the 50th Psalm, which has been read in our hearing at this time. Let us spend a few moments in the contemplation of what it declares.

"The mighty God, even Yahweh, hath spoken." This is the one glorious fact of human history. Where should we be without it? In darkness. We might have escaped the fool's conclusion. We might have discerned and accepted the manifest truth that heaven and earth must have originated in power and wisdom adequate to their production, and that God possessing these must be one; but where would have been the practical value of this theoretical conclusion without a revelation? How could we have known the relation of our own life to God? How could we have known whether there was any purpose in earth's history, or any goal to earth's strife, or any meaning to earth's sorrow? How could we have known whether God regarded individual man; whether He had any wish or will with regard to individual action, or any futurity for individual life? We must have been without knowledge, and without even the power of inference. To have known that God existed without knowing these things would have been to know a terror, a mystery, a mockery. It was necessary that God should reveal Himself. It was necessary that He should speak. And He has spoken. The fact that He has spoken is manifest to observant intelligence. There are monuments and mementos of the fact on every hand. Our meeting this morning is one of them, for it is very certain we should never have been thus assembled if Jesus had not appeared and wrought and suffered and risen and said "Do this in remembrance of me."

The chain of causation running away behind our present meeting into the past, ends only in the fact that God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake unto the fathers by the prophets, spoke in Israel's last days by His Son. The Bible, from which we have been reading, is a greater monument, for it occupies the most commanding position in all literature, both as regards antiquity, constitution, authenticated authorship, style, and contents. It is a literary phenomenon that cannot be rationally accounted for on any principle but its own, namely, that it is true, and that it was given by inspiration of God to 40 different writers in widely-separated ages, in all stations of life. The existence and dispersion and sufferings of the Jews is another monument, for not otherwise is their extraordinary position to be accounted for but on the principle that the Bible, which tells of their origin and their sins and their predicted scattering, is the true and divine document it claims to be. European history, in Church and State, is another monument, for not otherwise is this to be understood than that the apostolic work 1,800 years ago was a historic reality, and that the Book which foretold the course of human affairs in that connection is a divine Book.

We have, therefore, every cause to rest and rejoice in the fact that God hath spoken; because the certainty of that fact in its historic aspect means that it will be carried to its completion. For it is not yet finished. It will not be finished till the whole earth listens and is enlightened. The Psalm says, "He hath called the earth from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same," — that is, He hath called the attention of the earth, the whole earth, universally. The purpose is universal in its bearing — "The whole earth shall be filled with My glory," "All families of the earth shall be blessed." It may be said there is nothing like this visible yet but the reverse: "darkness covereth the earth," "the whole creation groaning and travailing together in pain." Yes — as yet. There is a time for everything. Affliction before deliverance. What we have to note is deliverance begun. The process commenced when God spoke, and His speaking has been coeval with the presence of man upon the earth. He spoke in Eden at the beginning; He speaks in Eden at the finish when the last Adam is manifest in His glory. This Psalm, as an oracle of God, treats the matter comprehensively. It looks back, so to speak, from the point of view of the accomplished future, and speaks historically. God speaks, and glory is the result. It is an extended process, and it is connected with locality. "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined." This is the whole matter stated historically, as it will be at the finish. It is "out of Zion" all the way along. Zion is the centre of operations. It is needful there should be a centre in the orderly evolution of things. God does not operate over all the earth at once. He could do so if He pleased, but His method is much more interesting than this. He chooses a central point from which He gradually operates upon the whole. "He hath chosen Zion: He hath desired it for His habitation. This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell, for I have desired it"

(Ps.132:13-14). "The law shall go forth from Zion," as the prophets tell us concerning the final effectuation of the work — Zion "the perfection of beauty." The force of this expression will be manifest in the Age to come. Zion, in her degradation, cannot give us the illustration. "God shall comfort Zion." Then shall we see the applicability of the description, as regards both situation and condition and architectural garnishing and the living accessories of divine glory and of joyful and illustrious citizens, and the perfect beauty and beneficence of the influences for the whole earth, of which she shall be the centre. It will be a lawful theme of gladsome boast — "Out of Zion the perfection of beauty God hath shined."

The future bearing of the fact is made plain in the next statement. "Our God shall come and shall not keep silence." This implies absence and silence in the meantime, and these are indeed the great and painful features of the present dispensation. "Where is thy God?" is the taunting question that has been thrown in the teeth of the children of God in all ages — even in David's. God's absence from the situation, so far as manifestation goes, is the great desolation of the age of sin, causing the famished experience described by David: "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night while they continually say unto me, where is thy God?" (Psa. 42:1-3). This absence of God and silence of God is no accidental or inscrutable thing. It is stated and foretold and recognized and explained in the Bible. "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God." "I will hide My face." "I will hold My peace." "There shall be no answer from God." It is all very painful but quite intelligible. The learned in their pride will not accept the explanation, but there is no other. God is silent because the attitude and condition of mankind are not such as to admit of communion.

But He is not inattentive or forgetful. He proposes to break the silence, and to break it with astounding effect, as we learn, going back to the Psalm: "A fire shall devour before Him: it shall be very tempestuous round about." By another prophet, He says: "For a long time I have holden My peace: but now will I cry out and devour at once." By another: "Yahweh shall roar from on high; He shall give a shout as they that tread the grapes against all the inhabitants of the earth." What all this literally means we learn from the apostolic testimony for Christ. God, who spoke in Israel's last days, by His Son, will speak again by him in the day of his second appearing. "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with flaming fire taking vengeance on those that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power when he shall come to be glorified with his saints, and admired in all them that believe." When this happens, there "shall be a time of trouble" such as the earth has never witnessed. Part of the



trouble will consist of the waking of men from the dead to judgment; for "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." Men will then awake to the terrible bearing of their actions, to which now they are insensible — "asleep." Let us not sleep as do others. There is mention made of these things in the Psalm: "Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother, thou slanderest thine own mother's son. These things hast thou done and I have kept silence." This is at the root of most of the ill-doing that goes on. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecc. 8:11). When God no longer keeps silence, then men will see and fear and unavailingly lament their folly "with weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth." But it is possible to see these things beforehand, to understand the reason of the present silence, to discern and submit to the divine voice that has already at sundry times and in divers manners spoken with such enlightening effect; and to be thus prepared with joy and gladness for that breaking of the silence that will strike terror into all the world.

The dread crisis has a special bearing on those who wait for God in the keeping of His commandments: "He shall call to the heavens from above and to the earth, that He may judge His people. Gather My saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice." The day of judgment is emphatically a day for the gathering of the saints; for, though many will be gathered who are not saints — even the unjust and the disobedient who have known the way of God and refused it — yet the gathering of all others is a mere episode — a gathering for rejection, for scattering, for destruction. The gathering of the saints is for ever — for joy and glory and life everlasting. Who the saints are is defined: "Those who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice." This is their description in all ages, from the worshippers at the gate of Eden to the last sons and daughters called and justified in the time of the end. Only by sacrifice can sinners come back to God. It is the appointment of God, and no man can disannul it. At first in shadow, in the offering of animals, and then in the prefigured substance — the sacrifice of the last Adam. Men have from the beginning been invited to enter into covenant with God. The wisdom of this world spurns the invitation. They prefer to rest on human performance of some kind which they variously glorify by high-sounding terms of human invention — "morality," "conscience," "virtue," etc. True reason would tell them that nothing can avail with God but what He Himself appoints. Mankind — all of them are already sinners and condemned. How can their "virtue," even if it were a more respectable thing than it is, save them from their sins? They not only have no abiding portion in the universe, but the way is barred against their obtaining a title unless God make special consent and covenant. He offers this, but it is covenant by sacrifice. He presents the fact of the

sacrifice, and all that is connected with it, as a subject for faith; and He asks identification with the sacrifice and ratification of the covenant in the way He has appointed — baptized into the death of His beloved Son, the appointed sacrifice whom He has “delivered up for us all.” If men refuse conformity with the divine requirement, they are outside the covenant and there is no hope. They may resent it but they cannot alter it. “He that believeth not shall be condemned.” Christ is the “author of eternal life to all them that obey him.”

Being gathered, God will judge them. This is the affirmation of the Psalm and the testimony of all the Apostles. The Psalm says: “God is judge Himself.” This is not in conflict with Christ’s statement that “the Father judgeth no man,” because he immediately adds, “but hath committed all judgment into the hands of the Son.” God judges by Christ and not directly. It is a judgment to which we may resign ourselves without fear, because a judgment true and unerring, and a judgment in which “mercy rejoiceth against judgment.” It is a judgment which decides whether forgiveness is to be granted, and not whether we have earned eternal life by a spotless righteousness which Christ alone of mankind was able to evolve. Nevertheless, it is a judgment according to our works; for if our works are not such as commend themselves to the Judge our sins will not be declared forgiven, and we shall be undone.

The finish of the Psalms introduces other but not disconnected topics, yet topics that would require separate consideration. They relate to Israel’s false idea that the offering of sacrifices to God was pleasing as presents might be pleasing to a man, or as sacrifices were supposed to be gratifying to the heathen deities. “Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?” enquires He. “If I were hungry I would not tell thee, for the world is Mine, and the fulness thereof.” What then? “Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High, and call upon Me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.” It is the mental attitude and its faithful carrying out in life that is well-pleasing to God. Sacrifice under the Law — baptism and the breaking of bread under Christ — are the appointed and appropriate expressions of our submission to God; but their employment, apart from the mental state which they are designed to express, is an odious mockery, as God plainly told Israel by Isaiah (1:13) and other prophets afterwards (Hosea 8:12, 13). This is according to reason, and will be noted and acted on by everyone earnestly desirous of acceptance with God at the last. “But unto the wicked God saith, what hast thou to do to declare My statutes, or that thou shouldest take My covenant in thy mouth, seeing that thou hatest instruction, and castest My words behind thee.” This also, is according to true reason. What can be more nauseous than to see or hear a man handling scriptural things whose life is not in submission to the scriptural commandment? What further comment can there be than God’s own words by Hosea, “Who is wise, and he shall understand these things?”

prudent, and he shall know them; for the ways of Yahweh are right, and the just shall walk in them, but the transgressors shall fall therein."

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## Behind Jesus Crucified are God's Claims

*Building on the right foundation — expressed mind of God — Jesus crucified repellent to natural mind — but assertion of God's rights — must carry cross to inherit Kingdom — "we should not serve sin."*

WE meet here this morning on a foundation that cannot be taken away. It is a great thing to have a foundation in an age like this, when men are building on all kinds of floating and flimsy structures which are certain to drift on Time's ceaseless stream away into the ocean of oblivion. Many are building on the mortal life of present experience, with no care or pretence for anything beyond. We know where that will lead: they die and are forgotten. Others build on human philosophy of a future state. That must end in the same way if the philosophy should happen to ignore Jesus Christ, which almost all philosophy does. Others accept the dreams of an Emmanuel Swedenborg, the hallucinations of a Madame Blavatsky, the speculations of a Herbert Spencer, the optimistic agnosticisms of a Tennyson, the scientific guesses of a Darwin, the cosmic vagaries of a La Place, or, failing all else, the traditions of hereditary piety or the dogmatism of Papal pretensions.

Wherein do we differ from all these? We build on the foundation of Moses and the prophets. To this foundation we adhere with all the indomitable tenacity that is born of reason. It is not the choice of taste or the bias of sentiment that leads us to prefer the Scriptures above every form or phase of human thought. We are compelled by the force of truth, generated by facts, discerned as all facts are discerned over the world-wide, and through all the ages of which we have record. Let us take the small illustration before us. Here we have in our hands a letter written by the apostle Paul, as every canon of criticism and reasonable principles of evidence compels us to recognise. In this letter Paul urges Timothy, the young man to whom he was writing, to "continue in the things which he had learned and had been assured of." Why? He answers: "Knowing of whom thou hast learnt them." Who were those of whom he had learnt them? The apostles: "Of me among many witnesses." How was that a reason for holding on to the things learnt? Because the things so learnt were not matters of opinion or report, but matters of fact and knowledge at first hand. "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ but were eye-witnesses of his majesty!" "Have I not seen

Jesus Christ our Lord?" "Last of all, he was seen of me also." "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you."

Well, that was a good reason why Timothy should continue in the things he had learnt; but Paul adds another reason: "And (knowing) that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures." How was this a reason for holding fast? "Which are able to make thee wise unto salvation." Why have they this character? Why are they able to do this great thing? "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for reproof, instruction, etc."

Here we stop to consider what is meant by inspiration of God, not as to how it acts, but as to what it is when it acts. We do not need to consider long when we realise that the mind of man is one thing, and the mind of God quite another. As God Himself says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways." Inspiration of God is therefore a putting into a man's mind what is not there of man's own power or gift, as defined in the express words of Peter. "Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." It must have been so, for how otherwise could man know the things of God? Paul states a self-evident truth when he says: "The things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God," and these things man could not be trusted to define. The Spirit of God had to find the words as well, as Paul adds "which things we speak not in words that man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth." Hence it is that the extraordinary phenomenon is presented to us by Peter of inspired men not understanding the words written by themselves under Spirit impulse: "The prophets searched and enquired diligently... searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow." It was the Spirit that "testified beforehand." How could the prophets "testify beforehand," as natural men? Prophecy is no gift of human nature.

This view, so clearly enunciated by Peter and Paul, is constantly sanctioned by Christ, as we should expect in view of his saying concerning the apostles: "He that heareth you heareth me." He told the Pharisees to "search the Scriptures." Why? "They are they that testify of me." If the Scriptures of Moses and the prophets testify of Christ, they must have been given by inspiration of God, for how could men not inspired of God testify of events to happen hundreds of years after their own time? Again Jesus said "Moses wrote of me." The same question arises: how could Moses have done this if he had not been inspired? Moses, like the rest of men, knew nothing of futurity by human power. Again Jesus said to those who imagined he had come to make an entirely new start and to override Moses and the prophets: "Think not that I am come to destroy Moses and the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." How could Jesus have spoken of "fulfilling" Moses and the prophets if they had not been the inspired Word of God? Again, he

plainly says, "The Scriptures cannot be broken," and again, "The Scriptures must be fulfilled." The conversation after his resurrection with his disciples on the road to Emmaus affords perhaps the most interesting of all illustrations of the estimate in which Jesus held the scriptures of the Old Testament. He found fault with them for not believing "all that the prophets had spoken." "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." Having afterwards made himself known to the eleven, and referred to the circumstances of his death, he said: "These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and in the Prophets and in the Psalms "concerning me."

In standing, then, upon the Scriptures, we stand upon that which is authenticated to us by Christ and the apostles as the Word of God, and are able to enter into the idea expressed by Paul in his parting words at Miletus: "I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified." Now, are we not safe in building on such a foundation? How can we be safe in building on any other? If God have spoken by Moses and the prophets and by His Son, then, in listening to any other, we are rejecting God and turning to man, unless those to whom we turn speak in harmony with the Scriptures. That is another thing. Peter says: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God;" and God says "If any man speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in him." The world around us is all astray on both points. They do not speak as the oracles of God, and worse, they freely indulge in thoughts and speeches that are in direct opposition to the law and the testimony. We must be on our guard against being drawn into their folly. It is for us to hold fast to what is taught in the Scriptures, however strongly the current of human thought may run against it.

Now, Paul says, "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." Here is one of those things in which the thoughts of man and the thoughts of God are at variance. "To the Jews a stumbling block: to the Greeks foolishness;" to all men an unattractive conception. Who finds pleasure in the thoughts that centre in "Jesus Christ and him crucified"? Look around among friends and neighbors, are they not repelled, one and all, amiable and cultured as they may be, by this subject which Paul said was the only subject he would know among the Corinthians? The news of the day, music, art, science, books, men's doings, — these are all in good relish; but Jesus Christ and him crucified? well, it is to them monomaniacal rubbish. How is this? Do they say there was no Jesus Christ or that he was not crucified? Not they. There would be some consistency in their aversion if this were the position they took. They have simply no taste for the subject: they are not at home in it. Worse, it is nauseous to them. How is this? Paul gives us the reason in a certain form when he says: "The natural man receiveth not

the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned." This is true in its extreme form among the absolutely unenlightened; but it is true in degree all through the different shades that divide darkness from light. We are all barbarians at the bottom; and in proportion as we are under the power of natural bias (which is the bias of ignorance and mere instinct) we disrelish the things of the Spirit of God. This disrelish is no part of true enlightenment. It gives way entirely before the appreciation created by the knowledge of God. "Jesus Christ, and him crucified," instead of being a barren formula or a repellent theme becomes the symbol of light and hope and the foundation of comfort and joy.

Jesus Christ is Jesus Anointed, Jesus Messiah, Jesus King, Jesus the coming head and shepherd of the human race, whose revelation will bring the supply of all the political and social and individual conditions that are requisite to transform the earth from a scene of dull and dreary misery into an active, joyful, beautiful world of light and joy for all. This is the Gospel of the Kingdom, the constant contemplation of enlightened hope; rooted and founded in God's own purpose and promise — apart from which, there is nothing in prospect but endless vanity and darkness.

But Paul's theme — Paul's standing subject among the Corinthians, was not only Jesus Christ but "him crucified." This is another phase. This has to do with the insides of things. This touches those aspects of the truth that are totally uncongenial to the natural mind, but full of delight to those in whom the natural mind, but full of delight to those in whom the natural mind has been revolutionised by the knowledge revealed by the Spirit of God. Many can think of the Kingdom with pleasure that have no heart for the things involved in the cross. The Kingdom, as the most ravishing poetical idyll ever exhibited to human thought, naturally appeals to the human love of beauty and rest and well-being, irrespective of its co-relations. Mere poets and idealists are not saints. Sentimentality is not godliness. The Kingdom is but a flower whose root is God and is only for those who take the root with the plant. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." Jesus calls this "the first and the great commandment." There must be compliance here before there can be possession of the delights and glory of the Kingdom.

What has the cross to do with this? We see when we ask — why was Christ crucified? Some say, because the Jews hated him. This is only part of the answer. This is the human side of the event. There is a divine side. This is exhibited in Acts 4:27: "Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined to be done." The crucifixion of Jesus was divinely pre-ordained, with what object? "By him, to reconcile all things to himself... in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable and unprovable in his sight if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Col. 1:20, 23). But

what had the crucifixion of his body to death to do with this result? There are several apostolic definitions that explain this. Putting these three together, we get the answer "Condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3) "to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God (3:25); "that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (6:6).

God required that our sinful and condemned nature should be federally put to death in one who had done no sin, through whom, after resurrection, we could come, in baptismal identification with his death, for forgiveness and friendship with God, "if we continue in the faith grounded and settled." It was our very nature that was put to death in him. It was righteously so done because of his physical participation in the results of Edenic transgression. His resurrection was in righteousness also; for "he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." Forgiveness on this basis is by grace (favor) and not of debt; for the death of Christ is not the payment of our debt but the declaration of God's righteousness, on our recognition and submission to which, He is pleased to pass by our sins, of His own kindness and forbearance.

It is evident, then, that behind Christ crucified, is God and His claims on us. He claims our love; He claims our obedience. Both are the claims of the highest reason, for when reason opens to the origin of all things in God, we feel the utmost rousing of admiration at the perfect wisdom and goodness which they show to exist innately in Him. And when we realise that "It is He that made us, and not we ourselves," and that we are merely so much of His stuff in a certain form by His permission, the idea of disobedience seems madness. To "delight in the law of God after the inward man" becomes the elementary act of reason. Any other state is aberration, due to ignorance. Its visitation by death is both reasonable and beautiful, for how could we imagine rebellion tolerated in a permanent state of things? And how could we imagine the misery of sin to be allowed to be endless?

The death of Christ is the assertion of all these beautiful truths, and the laying of the foundation-stone of salvation in righteousness. But it has a powerful and urgent application now to all those who are baptized into his death and in the enjoyment of the forgiveness predicated upon that submission. Paul supposes the question: "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" His answer is energetic. "God forbid. How shall we that have died to sin (in taking part baptismally in the very death that Christ died) live any longer therein?" "Our old man (our old nature) was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." So that there was a dramatic lesson in it. Every time we look at Christ crucified, we see a reason why we should not be guided by the mere instincts of the body we now possess, for that body was put to death on the cross that we might be told that rational life is not to be found by obeying the impulses that are native to that body. Those impulses are the law of life in the world, they are not the law of

the sons of God. They are not a safe law. Followed by themselves, they lead to every hideousness and ruin. Regulated by law (that is, by God's commands), they are beautiful, as fire is, under control. But the world loves not the law. Naturally, we revolt at it. "The carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." But when the power of the Spirit enters our minds, by the Word of the Spirit understood and believed, the darkness of the carnal mind gives way before the light, and we "put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him."

The restraints and self-denials and disciplines implied in this process may be irksome to flesh and blood; but there is another side. Even in systems of human wisdom, the value of "training" (whether physical or mental) is recognized; but what training can compare in results to that which hews us into the divine image while yet in the flesh; confers peace in a world of unrest and trouble; gilds the future with the glory of infinite hope; and at last confers the priceless gift of an incorruptible nature in which God will be our open vision and His whole universe our sphere of joyful life for ever?

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## God Everywhere

*The Bible point of view alone true — God all through — Psalms full of God — powerless man — Creator also wise and good — God is Spirit, but not formless — personal Father-form the Archetype — reproduced in myriads on earth shortly.*

“WEARY, faint and sore”; this is the natural result of our conflict with the evil of the present state. It comes upon us all because of weakness. With the physical strength of the incorruptible nature, conflict would not be so painful, it might even be exhilarating. With the actual nature we have, the labor is difficult, the fight is hard. We need the renewal of strength that comes with the renewal of acquaintance with the great things of God. We get this renewal of acquaintance in the collective participation of the bread and wine in which the Lord has asked us to unite in remembrance of him. It is of the first importance that we look at these things as they are in themselves, rather than as they may seem to the dim and limited eye of man. It is not looking at these things as they are in themselves to think of mere “doctrines,” as we call formulated points of truth. That man is mortal, that Christ died for sin, that the Kingdom is coming, is but the outer vesture of truth that roots in God. Our particular vocation as men and women called to be saints is to grow in that knowledge and love of God which is the first principle of all spiritual life. We must more and more aim to look from the point of view supplied in the Bible, because in the end this will turn out the only true and permanent point of view. That point of view



is God. Human things do not lead us here. The Bible never leads us anywhere else. It might be compared to a great wheel of which every part of the circumference leads by a straight line to the centre. If it gives us creation, it shows us God as the pre-existing Creator. If it shows us Israel marching out of Egypt, it is that God who brings them out may be visible. If it detail the system of law and worship, promulgated in their midst by Moses, it is God we see in every enactment, even as we see Him represented in the tabernacle of the congregation in the midst of the assembly. If we look at Israel's history, it is God obeyed if they are prosperous, and God set aside and angered if the tide of adversity sweeps in. If it is Christ we look at, who but God in him who said, "He that seeth me, seeth Him who sent me." If the apostolic labors strike attention, it is as that of men who say "Be ye reconciled to God." Even the misery of man upon the earth tells us of God, for it is the work of Him who hath subjected them to vanity because of disobedience and neglect. If we cast our eye forward to the promised age of glory, it is the "tabernacle of God with men" and the glory of God filling the earth that banishes grief and tears. It is God wherever we look in the Bible. In this respect the Bible differs from all other books; and where it works effectually, it produces men different from all other men in producing men who have the fear of God before their eyes and His love in their hearts all the day long. This is the standard to which the Gospel invites us. To the Bible's type and model we must conform if we are to become incorporate at last in the House of Yahweh that is to be established in the whole earth. Men of any other type would neither be fit for, nor at home in, the state of things that is to prevail upon the earth in that happy day. In that state of things, the glory of God will be the first sentiment and the highest pleasure and the rallying point of all occupations, "even as it is in heaven," and even as it was with David, the man after God's own heart, whose Spirit-inspired Psalms give us the right cue in this matter. These Psalms are far from being the mere homilies and moral dissertations that are associated in the popular mind with religious writings. The spirit of morality, so called in the world's talk, and the spirit of these Psalms, are two totally different spirits. Popular morality is a poor and colorless thing. It amounts to no more than a tolerable decency in our behavior towards man. Godly men behave well towards man, but this is only an ingredient in their godliness. Their godliness consists mainly of their own state of mind towards God. Him they fear, love and worship as the first attitude of their mental being. He is the sun of their heavens. David is their type in this respect. He was a man after God's own heart, grievously though he erred in the matter of Uriah's wife. His Psalms give us the right guidance. They furnish a true test. The merely natural man finds nothing in them to his liking. They have no charm. He wonders what people see in their simple phraseology. They are sweetness itself to the childlike men with whom the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom.

Let us refresh ourselves in the Psalms read this morning. Let us measure ourselves and correct ourselves by them. Let us examine ourselves in their light as those who are seeking to walk as children of the light. How full they are of God. The very first verse strikes the chord three times. "Praise ye Yahweh: praise ye the name of Yahweh: praise Him, O ye servants of Yahweh." To those who are out of harmony with the theme, this enthusiastic repetition will appear in the light of mere rhapsody. It is far from being so. It is the exaltation of reason in its highest discernments. The reason is stated in the Psalm. Not only is it that "Yahweh is good" but "whatsoever Yahweh pleased, that did He in heaven and on earth, and in the seas and all deep places." Realise this. What can man do in heaven and in earth? He can make a great racket with gun-powder or dynamite in the ears of his fellowman when it suits him in business or battle, and it seems a mighty affair for the moment, but, on the broad bosom of the earth, what is it? Go up in a balloon but a couple of miles, and you learn the puny nature of man's utmost effort in the awful silence of space. His greatest deeds are more insignificant in their effects on the great globe than the depredations of the invisible mite on the cheese. But Yahweh can do what He pleases not only on earth but through the vast realms of heaven. How is this? The answer is given: "Yahweh made the heavens." "Praise ye Him, sun and moon, praise Him all ye stars of light. Praise Him ye heaven of heavens, for He commanded and they were created. He hath also established them for ever and ever. He hath made a decree which shall not pass. He telleth the number of the stars: He calleth them all by their names. Great is Yahweh and of great power." "Great and terrible," indeed, as Daniel said in his memorable prayer; terrible in the vastness of His being, terrible in the might of His power; terrible in the fulness of His presence which fills and embraces all space, so that in Him all live and move and have their being. Yet terrible again in the majesty of His concentrated presence, from which in the highest heaven the darting rays of His radiant Spirit penetrate to the utmost bounds of immensity. "O Yahweh my God, Thou art very great. Thou art clothed with honor and majesty. Who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment, who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain... who laid the foundations of the earth that it should not be removed for ever." Who can compare with Him? Then to think that "Yahweh is good" and that "His mercy endureth for ever," is not the contemplation of His power and His everlasting days in this alliance with beneficence the fit inspirer of rapturous admiration and praise? "He hath not dealt with us after our sins nor rewarded us according to our iniquities: for as the heaven is high above the earth so great is His mercy towards them that fear Him." If these things are true, does it not follow that "it is a good and a pleasant thing" to give thanks and to sing praises to His name? Will anyone dare to suggest that these things are not true? Is it not a matter of necessity that the formative energy at the centre from which the cleverly-constructed system of the

universe has been evolved should concentrate in itself all the attributes of wisdom and goodness that we see in the evolved system? "He that hath planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that hath formed the eye, shall He not see?" Brethren, it must be so, and the Bible, and all that is connected with the history of Israel and the establishment of Christ's name in the earth, is evidence that it is so. It is not an open — a debatable question. The scientific speculations of the age have banished God from the public mind and the public talk of England, still more from that which is private. The science is all right, but the speculations are wrong when they would exclude an adequate cause from the sublime phenomena, great and small, that we see. The scientific record, as the noting of God's clever workmanship, is valuable enough, but the scientific inference that because God has so excellently constructed things as to make it unnecessary for Him to be always interfering, therefore He is not there, is quite too far down on the "Topsy" level of common sense. Modern wisdom has come to this: "I 'specs they growed." The words of Paul are still applicable to the wise of this world: "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."

Let us open our eyes and hearts to the great and terrible God that made heaven and earth. He is the all-sufficient explanation of all things and the full supply for all our needs. He is a fountain of unfailing comfort in the midst of the evil now temporarily brooding upon the earth; a Rock of Strength in the morass of human futility and weakness through which we have meanwhile to thread our way; a Spring of unquenchable hope for the endless vistas of time that stretch before us in futurity. He is our Father in Christ, as well as our Creator in Adam. He is the Light of our lowly life as well as the Hope of immortality for the days to come. He is the Guide of our mortal footsteps as well as the Controller of the mighty movements that take place in the spangled heavens overhead. Shall we not praise and magnify His name — not only with the song of our lips but the obedience of our lives?

The Psalm says: "The idols of the heathen are silver and gold, the work of men's hands." This suggests something. Our God is not silver or gold. He is more real than silver and gold, for silver and gold are but the concretion of His invisible Spirit. Spirit is more real than all created things. It is natural folly to compare the cause of all things with anything caused. As Paul said to the men of Athens — "Forasmuch as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold or silver or stone, graven by art and man's device." All substance of that kind is secondary. It depends upon the will of the first substance out of which all things have come, namely, Spirit, which is God. As Jesus said: "God is Spirit." "By His Spirit, He hath garnished the heavens." This Spirit becomes His Word when set in formative motion by His will. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And by Him all things were made, and without Him was not anything made that was made." But are we to

conclude that God, the invisible Spirit, is nowhere to be seen more palpably manifest than in this room, say, at this moment? The Spirit of God is here, but the glory of God that shone around about the frightened shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem and blazed in dazzling brilliance from the tabernacle of the congregation — that is not here. Is God only an invisible Presence, nowhere to be seen more directly than here? This would be a great and blighting mistake. It is excluded for ever by the case of Christ, who was the Word made flesh. See him when glorified, as by Paul near Damascus, “a light above the brightness of the sun.” How then of the Father? Greater glory still. “He dwelleth in the light that no man can approach.” Suppose we were to draw near to that effulgent glory, what should we see? Constituted as we are, we could, of course, neither approach, nor see if we approached; but suppose we were able to approach like the highest angels of His power, of whom Gabriel is one, what form should we see as the kernel of the glory? In pictures where the divine glory is the subject of representation, the form seen in the heart is a combination of Hebrew letters. We may be quite sure it is not this that we should see. The glowing kernel of Eternal Glory must have form; for everything that is an entitative something has form. It would be a form expressive of the highest wisdom, for, ramifying all through creation, we find the strictest correspondence between form and quality. There are endless forms. Which of them all could express intelligence? No geometrical form has this quality. The circle, the square, and the triangle are absolutely void of expression, so with all their combinations. What form among plants or minerals could express the divine attributes? We instinctively answer, Not one. There is only one form under the sun that comes near the aspect of divine intelligence, and that only in a few cases. It is the form affirmed in the Scriptures to be the divine form — the form of man, who is “made after the similitude of God,” even the Father (James 3:9). This is the “form of the sons of God” (Dan. 3:25) and the form of the angels, who are also spoken of as “the sons of God” (Job 38:7). Their designation as sons would point to a Father-form, even He who “dwells in light,” and where lies the seat of that will power which through the Spirit has created all things, and from which the commandment “comes forth” to the angels for the execution of various purposes as in the case of Dan. 9:23. Here is the living God of Israel, the Creator of heaven and earth, With this in view, we can join in David’s words with fulness of meaning: “To Thee lift I up mine eyes, O Thou that dwellest in the heavens,” and in the prayer that the Lord taught his disciples. “Our Father who art in heaven.” We seem to need a conception of this sort to obtain a proper objective for our prayers. It does not interfere with the sense of God’s presence when we remember that there is no distance to Spirit, and that we are in an immediate touch with the Father at the furthest bounds of the universe as we could be near His glorious person. The marvels of electrical communication have enabled us to receive this.

This revelation of a personal Father gives also great point to David's contrast of Him with the idols of the heathen. He is the living God, whereas they have no life. He can do as He pleases in heaven and earth; they have done and can do nothing. They are destitute of any power, whereas Yahweh made the heavens. "They have mouths but they speak not, eyes have they but they see not. They have ears but they hear not, neither is there any breath in their mouths." The God of Israel is a contrast to them in all these particulars. It has staggered some that the Bible should attribute eyes and ears to God. It need not. The feeling of surprise arises from the tacit assumption that Eternal Power must be formless. This assumption is without foundation in reason. We cannot know what form Eternal Power ought to have. It may be anything so far as any necessity known to us is concerned. We have but to enquire what it is. The Bible revelation on the subject is full when all parts of it are put together; and it is beautiful. It is in perfect harmony with our mental constitution and the constitution of the universe. If the idea of His form brought with it the idea of His being what we are in detail — stomach, lungs, blood, muscles, etc., then, indeed, the idea would be repugnant and unreceivable. He is not "an image made like to corruptible man." He is the Spirit-form at the centre of the Spirit universal: Spirit corporealised; Spirit condensed; the glorious substantial nucleus of the eternal unity of eternal power, having a form which He has reproduced in myriads of sons throughout His universe. The earth will be peopled with a race of such by and by. Meanwhile she is travailing in birth, in much pain and much groaning. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." Deliverance is at the door; and when it comes the sorrowing earth will no more remember her sorrow, for joy of the children born into the world — first born of water, as we have been: and then born of the Spirit as we hope to be in that happy day when sorrow and mourning shall flee away.

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## Trouble Necessary to Form Character

*Hatred by world necessary but depressing — faith needs appearances against — obedience needs opposing circumstances — world passeth away — humble and contrite - not to fear for God forgives — fight on.*

“WHY art thou cast down, my soul,” David enquires, “why with vexing thoughts art thou disquieted in me?” All of us, when we have been long enough in this world, know something of vexing thoughts and of being cast down. It is inevitable, even with those who say “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” How much more with those who

have accepted the divine invitation to “come out from among” such, and to “work out salvation” in the refusal of “all ungodliness and worldly lusts,” and the endeavor to “live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world.” This class, to which we are aiming to belong, will certainly find the words of Christ true if they are at all faithful to the part that belongs to them as the friends of God. He said, “Ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake.” “The world will hate you because ye are not of the world.”

We naturally try to preserve the good feeling of the world, for no man likes the bad feeling of any class. We cannot succeed if we act the part of those who know God and obey the gospel in all its requirements. And our failure means the experience of much that is intensely disagreeable — painful. Who likes to be regarded with aversion?

Now the dislike entertained by worldly people for those who are in earnest about Christ is a prolific source of “vexing thoughts” and “cast-down” moods. At the beginning of the journey when the blood is young, and fancy roseate, it may act the other way. We have all seen the tip-toe enthusiasm of the man who glories in being a martyr. But the time comes with the “patient continuance” in a course where all is faith and nothing sight, and when the energies of flesh and blood begin to flag, when we have to rally ourselves, as David did, and to remind ourselves that we have no real cause for the vexing thoughts or the cast down state which oppress us. The things that cause these experiences are all right in their place.

We have been reading, “For everything there is a season and a time.” There is a time for the darkness and the confusion of mortal experience that causes the vexing thoughts. This is the time, at this present moment, with us.

“There is a time to be born,” says Solomon. Certainly, we have had that. “There is a time to die.” Yes, that will come in due course, if the Lord’s coming intervene not. Meanwhile, we are in the interval between, and this interval is designedly one of evil. This is “the present evil world.” We cannot get away from the evil of it. “In the world ye shall have tribulation.” Let us accept this. There is great power in recognizing the nature of the time. We can bear it better than if we lose hold of reasonable discernment in the case. We are liable to be too much depressed by the evil if we lose sight of the place it has in the Word of God. For it has a place, it has a mission. There is a time for it. The day will come when this time will be no longer, but when the earth will be a universal habitation of light and joy. But at present that day has not come. It is the time for evil.

There is a need for evil. How else can we be prepared for the beyond? Consider. The beyond is a state of perfection based upon character first — such character as is acceptable to God. How can character be developed without circumstances of evil? Take the leading features of the character with which God is well pleased. “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” How could faith be developed except by a time when there is nothing to be

seen? Faith cannot be exercised when sight is present. Faith needs darkness. It needs a time when the appearances are all the wrong way — when it would seem as if there were no God, and as if man were master of the world; when it would seem as if there were no Kingdom coming, but as if life on earth would be an endless round of buying and selling and building and planting and eating and drinking and marrying and sleeping. Just now is such a time. It is our opportunity. Faith will no longer be possible when God breaks silence, and causes His glory to appear in the coming of Christ. Faith will be a precious thing to be found in possession of when that joyous moment arrives, but how could we have it without the very state of things which time and again fills our souls with sadness, causing us to exclaim with David, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul?”

So in the matter of obedience. We could not be exercised in this, without the circumstances putting its reality to the test. The value of obedience lies in that decidedness (as we might call it) which triumphs over both forgetfulness and difficulty. Eye-service is obedience, and there is a certain value in eye-service, but it is not very great. It is a far way below the kind of obedience that is to be the basis of exaltation to immortality. The obedience that is to give us a place in creation for ever, has to be thorough. For that reason the circumstances of test are severe. It could not be tested, or even developed without them. The formation of character requires the evil that we meanwhile find so grievous. The character that God approves is the choosing of the good in the midst of the evil. For example, in the matter of truth, we are commanded to speak every man the truth to his neighbor. How can our obedience in this matter be put to the proof except by being placed in circumstances where the truth is inconvenient and where a lie is to our advantage? A liar will speak the truth when it is a matter of indifference. He will speak truly as to the weather or the persons he has seen in the street; but when he wants to buy, he cries down a good article; or sell, he will speak falsely as to where he got it and what is its value. It is in the latter instances that his true character is made manifest. So we require to be placed in circumstances where the truth is against us to be proved in the matter of this command, and these circumstances must in their nature be disagreeable. But in view of what is aimed at, a wise man will hail the circumstances, and will not suffer truth to depart from his mouth.

So also with the command to be merciful. How should we ever have a chance of our character being formed on this point if all were always joyful and well with everyone? It requires evil — sore evil — and perfect liberty of choice on our part. We must be left just entirely to ourselves, face to face with suffering people, with no apparent eye to oversee. Things must be of such a grievous complexion that it will seem of no profit to us, but the reverse — no pleasure to us but the other feeling, to exercise “the quality of mercy.” The man who has God before him — who acts on the command, “Be thou in the

fear of Yahweh all the day long” does not forget Him at such a moment, but shows mercy as he hopes to obtain mercy. The world thinks this a weakness; and, if we forget that the world is a foolish world, we may be influenced by their opinion and catch up their feeling. Let us be on our guard. The world passeth away, as John says. Its impressions are not worth a wise man’s consideration. There is no greater truth than this, and there is no more astounding obtuseness than the universal inability to realise it. Every day the little bubbles that go to make up the common froth-life of the world are collapsing here, collapsing there, one after the other, every day, and will go round them all, and yet the rest live on as if no such finish were waiting them. In a hundred years they will have all gone out, and the world has passed away. If it be said: “He that doeth the will of God” passeth away too, we have to say: “Not so, friend, it appears so for the moment, but it is only an appearance. The man who does the will of God stands related to a law that will cause him to re-emerge from the temporary death-collapse and stand forth again in a new world, from which all the things that vex him now will have disappeared. In this, he will abide for ever, and his translation from the collapse of death to this glorious re-emergence will appear but as a moment to him.” With the world, it is not so. They die and are gone, and any waiting in reserve for them in the event of their being responsible will be to find (apparently as soon as they have gone) that the God they forgot is a reality, and that the judgment they laughed at is a terrible truth, and that the great salvation which they had treated as an idle tale in the day of light and opportunity is a matter of fact, so glorious that “eye hath not (yet) seen nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive it.”

The day of our trouble, then, will be a day of trouble. We cannot change it into anything else while it lasts; and it will last as long as its mission requires it to last. But there is a possibility of getting through it lightly and getting through it heavily. The way to get through it lightly is just to expect it and to recognise the work it is intended to work in us, and the opportunity it is intended to afford us. This will enable us to bear Paul company when he said: “Wherefore we glory in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience,” and again: “Our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” The way to get through it heavily is to forget that life is now a transient and an evil thing: to set your affections on things that are now on the earth; to look on and love the things that are seen for the time; to forget the things that are before, and to press with the worldly throng toward the prizes of the present world, looking unto your various successful neighbors who, having gained them, carry a high head and appear to flourish as the green bay tree. The attempt to combine any such policy as this with “the high calling of God that is in Christ Jesus” will be found not only a failure, but a grievous failure — a failure bringing grief now and woe at the finish. “Ye cannot serve God and



mammon." "He that saveth his life shall lose it." The words of Christ are true, however much men may forget them. The part of wisdom is to accept them and work them out at whatever sacrifice. Let us never forget that Christ finds the world at his coming "as it was in the days of Noah." There were not many "found righteous" then. "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" These things the Word testifies and enquires, as you know.

But now a sense of our deficiencies may call for the Scripture that is suitable in other directions. Some of us may be liable to fear too much. It is safe to fear; but it is possible to fear too much. God Himself stoops to us from heaven in this matter. "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong; fear not: Behold your God will come... and *save you*." "He will save all the meek of the earth." You feel distressed at your shortcomings. This is right, but don't let it go the length of despair. Remember that Paul felt thoroughly out of love with himself on account of the evil that was present with him. "The things that I would not, I do... O, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" Remember that "there is forgiveness in God" for them that humble themselves before Him in love and thanksgiving and obedience. "As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy towards them that fear Him." It is the express voice of the Spirit that says to us: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

This has no reference, of course, to the indifferent or the negligent, or the disobedient. God will not look to such. He tells us to whom He will look. "To this man will I look, to the humble and the contrite and the broken in spirit." To this class He will look, and this is the class that is sometimes liable to fear too much. We are commanded to be perfect; we are commanded to sin not; yet it is not in human nature to be perfect, and "there liveth not a man that sinneth not." What then? "If any (such) man sin, we have an advocate with the Father," "who ever liveth to make intercession for us according to the will of God." But why are we commanded to attain the unattainable? Because the higher we aim, the higher we reach. We put copper-plate at the head of the child's copy for the child to copy; but do we put him out of school because his imitation is poor? No; we have patience, we know he will do better by and by, and that if he makes no progress, he will punish himself in the low place he will fix for himself afterwards. So the Lord commands high things, "even our perfection," but He forgives our failings if our endeavors are in all docility and earnest perseverance. "We have an high priest." We must never forget this. In this both Adam and Jesus were differently placed. They had no intercessor. They were face to face with the strict demands of law, failure in which in the least would be fatal; but we have a glorified high priest, "by whom we have access by faith into this grace (favor) in which we stand." By grace we are saved. It is a matter of favor, and therefore of forgiveness, for

Christ's sake. What we have to look to is the conditions of the favor, for favor has also its conditions. Faith is its first condition. Our faith is "counted for righteousness." Ye fearful ones, forget not that God is pleased with your faith, and esteems you righteous on this account alone. Wherein His poor, loving children fail, they sorrow and make confession, and are helped, for, "like as a father pitieth his children, so Yahweh pitieth them that fear Him."

"Wherefore lift up the hands that hang down, and confirm the feeble knees and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way." Our fight with evil is only short in each individual case. It is long for the whole family, because, in the barren state of the human race, it takes a long time to develop a multitude that no man can number, who, out of great tribulation, will victoriously come at the last. But the battle of the whole exists not for any one member of the body. We have only our own day. The head alone is contemporary with the struggles and prayers of the whole multitude of his brethren; and he is made strong for the shepherd work. The others fight their own fight and win their own race — a brief conflict of three score and ten at the outside — and then lay down their burdens and their toils, with the sweet consolation that the Lord will take care of his own glorious work, and wake them from the sound and short rest of the grave to rejoice with him on the arrival of the morning of the salvation which will usher in eternal day.

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## Paul "Sent" by Jesus

*"Apostle" means "one sent" or commissioned — Paul "saw Christ" and was sent by him — believing Paul means standing on God — forgiven, therefore love much — a model young man — grow in grace and knowledge.*

HAVING an unbroken continuity of descent in Paul's letters from the day of their production down to the present day, we are justified in reading them with the attention which we should give to his voice, telephonically transmitted. What we have read this morning, is, in fact, equivalent to having Paul in our midst to utter the words. Let us consider them in this light, and see how much is involved in the very first sentence of the chapter read (1Tim. 1). "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God;" here is the character in which he introduces himself — the fact he alleges concerning himself — an apostle of Jesus Christ. Realise what this means. In our day, the word apostle, like a great many other words, has been shorn of its force by diluted meanings. You hear of the apostle of free trade, the apostle of temperance, the apostle of this, that, and the other; by which is meant the leading advocate of a particular set of ideas. This

understanding of the word carries nothing with it of weight as to the truthfulness of the things advocated. It leaves a wide open door for respectful dissent. You touch your hat as it were, to, say, Richard Cobden, as the "great apostle" of his particular political theory, without allowing that his theory is necessarily a true or binding one. So when people hear of Paul an apostle of Christ, they think of a leading advocate of Christian doctrines, without any idea that his recognition in that character commits them to the reception of what he taught as being necessarily true from the fact of his apostleship. This is as far away as possible from the true understanding of the term in this case. An apostle means "one sent." To be an apostle of Christ, is to be one sent by Christ. And if sent by Christ, then the question of truth is not debatable. It is equivalent to the term "messenger" in its official relations. The Queen's messenger is a messenger from the Queen. The authority of what he has to communicate is not open to question. It does not rest on his opinions, or views, or good-will or intentions in any way. It rests on the fact that the Queen has authorised the message with which he is charged.

That this is the state of the case with regard to Paul's apostleship must be apparent to anyone acquainted with the facts of the case. The objects of apostleship and the qualifications for the office are defined in a manner that leaves no room for the treatment of Paul's teaching as an affair of Paul's opinion, which is the common way of treating it. When a successor to Judas had to be appointed, the qualifications specified as essential consisted of personal knowledge of the facts to be declared. See what we read in Acts 1:22: "Of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us... must one be ordained to be a *witness with us* of his resurrection." Now though Paul cannot be brought precisely into this category, in so far as he did not "company with" the disciples during the Lord's ministry on earth, yet as regards the essential feature of personal knowledge, and personal delegation, he was "not behind the very chiefest apostles," as he says, "Last of all he (Christ) was seen of (or by) me also." "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" he enquires. In the same breath he enquires "Am I not an apostle?" (1Cor. 9:1). He did not become an apostle as the result of a change of conviction. There was evidence enough to produce change of conviction if it had been fully under his notice. The twelve who had been the Lord's companions before the crucifixion were before the public with their testimony to the fact of his having risen, and their testimony was accompanied by works of power which were inexplicable except on the principle of divine co-operation. There were also the 500 witnesses of whom he speaks in 1Cor. 15, the bulk of whom were alive when Paul wrote. But it was not on grounds of this kind that Paul changed from being a destroyer to being a preacher of the faith of Christ. It was because Paul saw Christ himself under the circumstances described several times in the apostolic writings. These circumstances were not in any sense of a private

or secret character. They were as public as the nature of the times admitted. They transpired in the presence of official and unfriendly witnesses in the full light of day, and with the effect of leaving marks on Paul of their having occurred. Paul informs that the Lord who appeared to him in the midst of the brightness that struck him down and blinded him outside Damascus, said to him, "For this purpose I have appeared unto thee, to make thee a minister and a witness both of those things which thou hast seen, and of those things in which I will appear unto thee, delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles unto whom now I *send thee*" (Acts 26:16, 17).

It follows that Paul gives expression to a very solid matter of fact when he describes himself in the chapter we have read as "an apostle of Jesus Christ." He is not merely defining his opinions or describing his profession or his status, as a man might now do who might call himself a minister of the Gospel. A man might be a minister of the gospel, and the gospel might be a complete myth so far as his ministership had to do with the truth of it one way or other. But a man cannot be an apostle of Christ without having seen Christ and without having been sent by him, nor therefore without the whole system of teaching that centres in Christ being a matter of truth and fact that cannot in reason be called in question. This is the rock on which we stand. Paul was sent as directly to us by Christ as Lord Dufferin was sent to Paris by Queen Victoria the other day as British Ambassador, This invests the faith of Christ with a terrible reality — a glorious reality. Men may glaze and doze over it in a dreamy way as if it were an insignificant matter of opinion. It is our part as wise men to keep awake to the fact of its reality, that we may in the present time be controlled by it with all the power which its reality will exert in every logical mind; and in the future time be incorporate with the blessed developments which will attend its manifestation at the second coming of the Lord in power and great glory.

Consider the second part of his statement: He not only declares that he is "an apostle of Jesus Christ," but that it is "by the commandment of God our Saviour." What a great rock is here! Standing on the apostleship of Paul, we are standing on God. It is "by the commandment of God." Is it possible that our generation can recognise this, who speak so lightly of the work of Paul? Impossible. "Much learning" has dazed their minds and excluded "the words of truth and sobriety." The air is full of views and theories that make completely void the Word of God in this respect. Human opinions and philosophies, served up with vague and elegant dogmatisms, fill the columns of the religious press with smooth things which, "with excellence of speech and wisdom," draw people away from the simple truth that Paul proclaimed, namely, that we are condemned because of sin, but that it hath pleased God by what learned men consider the foolishness of Paul's preaching to save them that believe and obey the gospel. Well, brethren, we have the honor of

standing against the whole world of irrationality in this matter. It is very inconvenient, it is very difficult, the tide is against us on every hand. Everywhere and in every shape, publicly and privately, with deadly animosity or with the sweet beguilements of personal friendliness, the natural mind is acting as a disintegrating force against the stand we maintain on the basis of the apostolic work. There is a universal revolt against the thoughts of God and the ways of wisdom. What are we to do but act on Paul's most reasonable advice: "Watch ye: stand fast in the faith: quit you like men, be strong." Our loose friends will advise differently. Their motives may be good, but their judgment is at fault. We shall do unwisely to listen. The unwisdom will be apparent to all when too late to be reversed. Our lives are flitting away like shadows across the plain. Once off the field of vision, our day is done. Life must be shaped by wisdom now to be used by wisdom afterwards. The only voice of wisdom sounding among men is in the Bible; and however odd and odious it may make us, or however much inconvenience subject us to, there is no other course of true wisdom than to stand with invincible purpose in the midst of the universal folly of mankind, giving to God that position in our lives which is His due, and to His purpose that place in our aims which its unspeakable value and uncontradictable truth entitle it to at the hands of true reason.

Paul laments that he was not always in this line of things, but "was before, a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious." As to which, he says: "I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." We may all have circumstances in the past that afford no satisfaction as we look back upon them. The use we should make of them is the use Paul made of his mistakes; he felt them as a constant spur to make up for lost time. We have been sinners, as Paul says here, but "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." And Jesus recognizes the amount of sin forgiven as a reasonable measure of subsequent service in the case of the woman who "loved much" and was "forgiven much" (Luke 7:41). This is the best way to use a bad past; not to allow it to depress and hinder and obstruct, but making it a reason for specially redeeming the time that remains, by diligent and devoted service, "and so much the more as ye see the day approaching." This was Paul's policy: "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto the things that are before, I press towards the mark." This is a perfectly reasonable and enlightened policy which we are not only allowed, but commanded to imitate; for Paul informs us here that Christ had others in view in dealing with him in the way he did. "For this cause I obtained mercy that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." The people, therefore, who deprecate the endeavor to imitate Paul do not speak according to wisdom, and must be left alone to what they themselves will discover to be

their folly when the time comes to measure up and classify things according to Bible principles.

In these utterances, Paul was unbosoming himself to a young man. He not only declared himself a pattern for others to follow, but he advises this young man, Timothy, to make himself the same. "Be thou an example of the believers." He specifies the points in which the example was to be shown: "in word, in conversation (i.e. behavior), in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." Hence, we are safe in keeping close to Timothy, however antiquated he may be considered by a polished generation that considers itself oh, so wise, but is, oh, so foolish, even according to the discernments of their own wiser prophets (e.g. Carlyle). Now this Timothy was much given up to the faith of Christ and all that was related to it, according to Paul's description of him in Phil. 2:19-22: "I have no man likeminded who will naturally care for your state: for all seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's, but ye know the proof of him that as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel." This is a pretty graphic though briefly drawn portrait. It is according to Paul's advice to him in the epistle we have been considering: "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them, continue in them; for in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee." Again he says, "Put the brethren in remembrance of these things."

It may have been outside the bent of an ordinary young man to follow this cue. What then? Are we bound to take the ordinary young man, or the ordinary man at all, as a model in such things? What do men do in art and literature? Do they copy the mediocrities? Do they not aim at the masters? Why should they be less wise in much more important things? Christ has given us Paul and Timothy as illustrations of the kind of men in whom he finds satisfaction, and, however uncommon it may be to work by these illustrations, it is the thing that will be done by all who have their eyes open to the actualities exhibited in the Scriptures of truth. These men "exercised themselves unto godliness;" which, considering what godliness is, is a form of activity highly befitting rational beings to cultivate. They "gave themselves wholly to the things which were Jesus Christ's," which considering that Christ is alive and immortal, and appointed head of the human race and the only access to God for man, either for favor now or hope in the day when he will be the visible proprietor of the entire planet, was not more than a very reasonable thing to do, and which men in our day are guilty of the highest form of unreason in not doing. This being the example shown, it is not for us to be content at aiming to do less. It is a matter of what people call common sense. To this common sense the Creator Himself appeals when He says: "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear and come

unto me, hear and your soul shall live and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David."

If, in disregard of this irresistible appeal of common sense, we throw in our lot with the frivolous and scornful generation around us that despise wisdom and seek delight in folly, we may have in much bitterness yet to know the truth of those other words of divine warning that say: "Behold My servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry; Behold My servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty; Behold My servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed. Behold My servants shall sing for joy of heart but ye shall cry in sorrow of heart and shall howl for vexation of spirit. And ye shall leave your name for a curse to my chosen... I will number you to the sword and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter because when I called, ye did not answer; When I spake, ye did not hear, but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not."

"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom be glory both now and forever, Amen.

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## Why God Sends Trouble

*Extreme of sorrow now, extreme of joy hereafter — tribulation appointed — prosperity not conducive to wisdom — "seek the Lord and follow after righteousness" — comfort and rectification to come.*

THE system of truth exhibited in the Scriptures differs from all other systems in vogue among men. It differs from them in many things, but especially in this, that it presents extreme adversity and extreme well-being as the assured experience of all who bring themselves into subjection to it — the extreme of sorrow now; the extreme of joy hereafter. No other system proposes suffering, and no other system guarantees the perfection of happiness. In this we may see an evidence that the Bible system is not of man. That, however, is not our point this morning. The thing we look at this morning is the relation of the two things to the house of God, to which we are striving to finally belong.

The two sides are represented by the two chapters read this morning. We will take the suffering first, as it is first in our experience. We have it in these prophetic chapters of the Apocalypse. You have the woman who is alleged to represent those "who keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." She is persecuted by the dragon; she flees into the wilderness, she is nourished there from his face. She exists as a testifying

community, but by another figure, in chapter 11. "It is in sackcloth" that her testimony is given. In chapter 13, her papal persecutor receives power for 1260 years — "Power to continue," our translation says; but the verb in the original means "to do;" to do what? Verse 7 answers: "It was given unto him to make war with the saints and to overcome them."

Here is a remarkable thing, that a revelation given to John for the information of believers in Christ concerning their experience during the centuries of Christ's absence should foretell power and prosperity and success for their enemies, and misfortune and reverses and death for themselves. It is not usual for a party to indulge in prophecies of its own defeat. The reverse is the rule, they anticipate and foretell success; but here is a prophecy of woe and disaster and downtreading for the friends of Christ for many centuries. How has the prophecy been fulfilled? They say in our day that it is dangerous to prophesy unless you know — a true saying, certainly. This prophecy of the Apocalypse has been fulfilled to the letter. Read ecclesiastical history. It is drenched and dripping with blood — the blood of saints. John truly said: "I saw the woman (the other woman; not the chaste woman that fled into the wilderness, but the harlot woman that was mounted on the back of the scarlet-colored beast — the false church upheld by the European State) — "I saw the woman drunken with the blood of saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." This has been the spectacle presented by European history for many centuries until quite a recent date. It has ceased to be so almost within the lifetime of the present generation. There is no shedding of the blood of saints by the ecclesiastical power seated at Rome now. The power to continue the enormity came to an end exactly 1260 years from the final legalisation of the papal claims and pretensions in AD606-608. How is it that a prophecy so unlikely for John to indulge in as a national partisan has been so signally fulfilled both as regards the occurrence and the duration of Rome's persecuting ascendancy? The answer is, because it was not John's prophecy, but the "revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to him, to show unto His servants the things which must shortly come to pass." This invests both the suffering and the deliverance with the indescribable zest of faith. The suffering must have an object required by perfect wisdom, seeing it is appointed. It is no accident. "Yourselves know," said Paul to the Thessalonians, "that we are appointed thereunto; for verily when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation, even as it came to pass and ye know." It is something for the sufferers to know this, for the suffering is not yet over, though the special form connected with Rome's legalised ascendancy is at an end. The Lord himself was before us in the matter. "It pleased the Father to bruise him." "The cup which my Father hath given me to drink shall I not drink it?" "He was made perfect through suffering." If God has appointed suffering, we may be sure it is necessary. "He



doth not willingly afflict." He has no pleasure in trouble for its own sake. It is because of what it accomplishes. We may not like it, and we may not always see what it does for us, but it seems impossible to shut our eyes to the need for it, and to the beauty of the results that spring from it where it is effectual. We have all heard of the people born with silver spoons in their mouths. We all know that prosperity does not conduce to wisdom. Wisdom is an affair of mental discernment in the highest directions. Men who are enjoying themselves don't care to ask what God made them for. They do not care to take into account what may please God. The idea of man living not for himself is distasteful to them. Duty, obedience, sympathy, worship, affection and reverential subordination to God as a continual attitude, are all outside their purview and foreign to their inclinations. How is a rational frame of mind on these points to be induced? Obviously, by trouble. The trouble has to be severe sometimes before we are able to realise our true place in creation as the mere products of divine power. Some could not be made to realise this by any amount of trouble, and so they are let alone, but neither could the best endowed know it otherwise. It is truly said that we are creatures of circumstances; those who know nothing but pleasure, can never know their own insignificance and the fleeting nature of present life, God's terrible greatness, and the reality of His claims and His purpose with man. God requires us to have open eyes on these things before He can have pleasure in us. Jesus counselled the lukewarms of Laodicea to "anoint their eyes with eyesalve that they might see." What is this, but taking pains to understand the will of the Lord in these things? The human side of a man's case and the divine are two different things. It is the divine side that will ultimately govern all. A man may be satisfied with himself, but what does God think? This is the important question to which a man is now indifferent. God will think well if the man think wisely, but to think wisely is to think in harmony with God's wishes and intentions. These are revealed, and wise men will seek to know them and to conform to them, and God will help them by sending trouble. "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." Therefore, "despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him." There is a loving aim in it all. Israel as a nation was subjected to trouble in the wilderness on this very principle. Supplies were shortened; diet was reduced to the lowest point compatible with life; the comforts of settled life were denied them expressly that they might learn the wisdom of subjection to Him. Moses told them this: "Yahweh thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness... humbled thee and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with the manna which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know, that He might make thee know that man does not live by bread only, etc."

The same rule has been uniformly observed in the development of the special family to whom He purposes to entrust the government of the whole

earth at the last. Their case is typified by Joseph in affliction in an Egyptian prison, and David chased like a wild rabbit on the mountains before exaltation. It is expressly testified of the saints of the Maccabean era that their "fall by the sword and by flame and by captivity and by spoil many days" was that they might be "tried and purged and made white for the time of the end" (Dan. 11:33, 35). Of the saints historically viewed, it was said to Daniel that in preparation for the finish of God's purpose on earth "Many should be purified and made white and tried" (Dan. 12:10). "Blessed," says James, "is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life." Now, it is tribulation that tries a man, and not prosperity. Hence, when John sees the accepted in their glorified totality, their description is, "These are they that have come out of great tribulation." As Paul told the brethren, "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

Now, brethren and sisters, many of you are in trouble — trouble so deep and terrible, in some cases, that you are beyond the help or even sympathy of man. Is it not some consolation to know that it is a matter of appointment and that it is intended to work a result in you that cannot be accomplished without just the terrible suffering you are going through? It will all end shortly. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

This is the fact exhibited in the other chapter, which presents to us the extreme joy that this is the appointed sequel of the hour of sorrow. The chapter is the 51st of Isaiah, which is addressed by God Himself to a particular class. The description of the class deserves attention as the only class to whom its consolation is applicable: "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness *Ye that seek Yahweh,*" and again, in verse 7, "Ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is My law." The first anxiety is, do we answer to this description? There are millions upon millions of human beings upon the earth. The tendency among men nowadays is more and more to think that all are more or less eligible for the divine favor. If we are guided by the Scriptures, we shall certainly not entertain this thought. They both declare to us expressly and illustrate to us dramatically the low estimate in which the mass of mankind are divinely held. The dramatic illustration is such as a child can understand. It involves the whole population of the earth at the time. "The flood," says Jesus, "took them all away." The declaration is in various shapes identical with John: "The whole world lieth in wickedness." "Yahweh looked down from heaven to see if there were any that did seek after God."

We shall do unwisely, brethren and sisters, if we rest on any human thought on these subjects. Let us try ourselves by God's own Word. The Word in this case is explicit: the people that follow after righteousness — that seek God — that know righteousness — that have the Law of God in their hearts.

How many among the people around us have any taste for righteousness or any care for God? I ask the question for the sake of fortifying ourselves against their influence. We are liable to be impressed by their number. If we are rationally exercised, we shall resist their influence. They do not follow after righteousness — they do not seek God. He requires of us that we think not our own thoughts and speak not our own words, but “choose the things that please Him;” whereas there is nothing that the common run of people care less for than the thoughts and words of God; and nothing that they delight in so much as their own unenlightened thoughts of every complexion. Such of them as are feebly religious may care to hear of God’s love for them: but how many of them can speak like David of their love for God? Love towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ is the first qualification of those who find favor with God. If we are of those who follow after righteousness and seek God, it is because we have “come out from among” those who do not; and ourselves “follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart,” as Paul commanded Timothy. It is because we give ourselves to reading, as he further commanded, meditating on these things, and giving ourselves wholly to them — which can be done in connection with the ways of common life, though in all cases, it is more or less of a conflict. If such is our case, the chapter is for us. God does not say “Hearken to me, ye who are indifferent to righteousness, who have no thought of God, the people in whose heart is their own law.” He addresses Himself to those who are in reverse condition on all those points. What He has to say to them is most cheering. They are usually hated and spoken against. He says, “Fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be afraid of their revilings, for the moth shall eat them up like a garment and the worm shall eat them like wool.”

Are they often depressed and distressed and melancholy at the utterly insane and ungodly state of things around them? He says: “I am He that comforteth you; who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man who shall be made as grass and forgettest Yahweh thy maker that hath stretched forth the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth.” Are they sorely tried in patience while human folly stumbles on in the perpetually futile effort to make human life what it ought to be or might be, while they wait amid scoffing for God’s promised management? He says: “A law shall proceed from me and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people. My righteousness is near; My salvation is gone forth; Mine arms shall judge the people. The isles shall wait upon Me, and on Mine arm shall they trust.”

Are they sick at the desolations, moral and physical, that prevail upon the earth? Are they parched and pining and downcast and often broken-hearted at the wide desert waste through which they find themselves trudging with

footsore and weary footsteps towards the goal of divine promise and purpose? His words of comfort are these: "Yahweh shall comfort Zion. He shall comfort all her waste places, and He will make her wilderness like Eden and her desert like the garden of Yahweh. Joy and gladness shall be found therein: thanksgiving and the voice of melody... The redeemed of Yahweh shall return and shall come with singing unto Zion: and everlasting joy shall be upon their head. They shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away."

These are the beautiful things representing more beautiful realities than tongue can tell, which God says in this chapter to the people who follow after righteousness, who seek God, and the people in whose heart is His law. They are such as our suffering case requires. They are such as meet all our needs. They inspire the heart with a renewal of courage and resolution; they strengthen the faltering steps of weary pilgrims. For the joy set before us, we can endure the cross and despise the shame, and even glory in a tribulation that is humbling us in preparation for that unspeakable exaltation that awaits all the accepted children of God.

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## "Never Despair"

*Ardor of David's sentiments towards God — David's extreme adversity — his earnest supplications — God answers prayer, in His time — obedience essential — state of "inner man" open to God — shun human thoughts.*

THE 22nd chapter of 2nd Samuel, which we have read, is the composition that appears in the book of Psalms as Psalm 18. Its occurrence in the historical connection of Samuel imparts to it a suggestiveness, perhaps, that we may not feel so readily in the reading of it in its detached form. It was written by David, we are informed, "in the day that the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul." It is, therefore, the expression of David's individual feelings in the circumstances leading to its utterance which we can recognise without in the least detracting from its character as a writing "given by inspiration of God, for when the Spirit of God uses men as it used David, it uses their feelings as well as their words in the accomplishment of its own aims through them.

Our present purpose is to turn David's words to practical account. For this purpose it will be profitable to take what we may call David's side of them; that is, to consider them as the expression of David's thoughts and feelings, without reference, for the moment, to the fact that they are the words of inspiration. Our safety and advantage in doing this lies in the fact that David

was a model of the kind of man whom God esteems; and an example of how God deals with the men who are objects of His regard. First of all then, we have to note the strength and ardor of his sentiments towards God. The Psalm begins as with an outburst as it were: "Yahweh is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer... my shield and the horn of my salvation, my high tower and my refuge, my saviour." We are familiar with these epithets as features of the Psalms of David. Let us try and get into the state of mind they express. They are figures, and figures of great boldness and strength, the feelings they figure must have been of corresponding intensity. Any one of them alone would express the strong idea that David had concerning God. "My rock," for example, nothing could more graphically convey the sense of stability and confidence and safety, but he piles figure upon figure; "my fortress, my shield, my high tower, my refuge," varied by the literal descriptions, "my deliverer, my saviour." It seems as if David did not know how strongly enough or how extravagantly enough to give utterance to his admiration of God. The language suggests the idea of a man in a revel, in an abandon of enthusiasm with the subject before his mind.

God has vanished from polite literature or the talk of society, because He has vanished from faith. As a people striving to conform to Bible thought, we have to choose between the world fashion and Bible fashion in this matter. There can be no hesitation where the eyes are fully open and undimmed by the blowing dust of the world's highway. "The fashion of this world passeth away," as John says; the fashion of the Bible passeth not away. God was before the world, and will be after it, and the fashion originating with Him will "persist." His ideas will dominate mankind when the present era and all its ways will be a forgotten memory; for His glory will fill the earth with a glorified remnant of the human race when the glory of man will have descended for ever into the open mouth of the Bible hell. The present evil world is but a transient episode in the history of God's work on earth. It has no more of the elements of permanency in it than the antediluvian era. Who now knows or cares for what went on among the men that lived before the flood? We make the simple choice of wisdom when we choose to be on the side of David's God, who is from everlasting to everlasting, who made the earth for His own uses, and of whom we read in this Psalm: "Thou wilt save the afflicted people: but Thine eyes are upon the haughty that Thou mayest bring them down."

The next thing to consider is the occasion of David's jubilant outburst. It was deliverance from evil. He had seen dark and terrible times. He had been so low as often to despair. His language in this Psalm paints extremest agony of distress: "The waves of death compassed me; the flood of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me." The usefulness of looking at this lies here: we may often find ourselves in similar circumstances of extreme adversity when it seems

impossible to hope, when the beauty of creation and the consolations of divine truth are veiled in a horror of great darkness; when we seem cut off from all good and the sword pierces to the very soul and marrow. The lesson of this Psalm is "never despair." "To the upright there ariseth light in the darkness." "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." David was in greater trouble than we are ever likely to be. He was more than once overwhelmed in spirit, for the flesh is a weak thing and cannot easily penetrate beyond the aspect of the moment. But he came out of the storm and tempest, and entered at last the desired haven of rest and prosperity and peace and joy.

"In my distress," he says, "I called upon the Lord and cried to my God." If David did so, may not we? If David inspired and David anointed found it necessary to throw himself upon God in earnest supplication "with strong crying and tears," can it be unnecessary for us who have not these special pledges of divine regard? Brethren and sisters, we may suffer from the chill that blights all spiritual life in our unbelieving age if we are not on our guard. It is a matter of command and the behest of reason, that we "pray without ceasing," "that in everything we give thanks and make our requests known unto God," that we "cast all our care upon God who careth for us," and that we "come boldly to the throne of grace to find help in time of need."

David says, "He heard my voice. He sent from above and took me: and drew me out of many waters." Did God hear David, and will He turn a deaf ear to David's brethren? Is He, then, a respecter of persons? In no wise. "Whosoever calleth on the name of the Lord shall be saved." God Himself says: "Offer unto God thanksgiving and pay thy vows unto the Most High, and call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify Me" (Psa. 50:14-15). But you may say, "I have called upon Him in my distress, times without number, and there has been no answer." Well, David had sometimes to say this. We must not be premature in our conclusions. We must wait. God's ways are great, slow, and involved though He can deal short and decisive strokes when the case calls for it. The work of developing the right attitude towards Himself on the part of His children, and the work of preparing an effectual and appreciated deliverance for them, is a slow work. His deliverances are not instantaneously vouchsafed. He does not run at the instant like a mother to her baby's cry, that belongs to the lowest plane of things. He waits the full issue of things, and comes in at the ripe moment when His children have waited for Him. It was so with David. For a long time the tide was against him. He concluded it might be always so. He said, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul." But the deliverance came at last, and came in the most bountiful fulness. There came a time when "his soul was delivered out of all distress," as he said to Bathsheba, when his enemies were no more, when he was surrounded with hosts of friends, when the wealth of the land was at his disposal, when the tribes of Israel were at

his feet, and when even of the very heathen, in all the neighboring countries, he was head.

So it will be with us — other conditions being equal. These conditions refer to David’s conduct while in adversity. He did not, like Saul, impatiently diverge from the ways of God. On the contrary, as he says in this Psalm: “I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God: for all His judgments were before me, and as for His statutes, I did not depart from them... Therefore the Lord hath recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness in His eyesight.” — And then he proceeds to lay down the very rule of judgment defined by Christ when he said “With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” David’s words are, “With the merciful, Thou wilt show Thyself merciful: with the upright man, Thou wilt show Thyself upright; with the pure, Thou wilt show Thyself pure, and with the froward, Thou wilt show Thyself unsavoury.” It is therefore a condition of acceptable petition that we submit ourselves obediently to God in all His commandments while enduring the evils from which we pray to be delivered. If the evils are very sore, we may be sure they are sorely needed; and it is the part of obedient children to say with Christ, “The cup which my Father hath given me to drink, shall I not drink it?”

Here, a sense of discouragement is apt to set in. We see the brightness of David’s confidence, the fervor of his devotedness, the thoroughness of his submission, and we are apt to say to ourselves, “We come so far short of David in all respects that we cannot hope to share his deliverance. We cannot pray with his ardor, or serve with his completeness. Therefore we cannot hope to stand with him in the experience of divine favor.” — In this line of sentiment it is possible to go too far, and afflict ourselves too much. The Word provides an antidote. It is a rule of God’s dealings with men that, “To whom much is given, of them shall much be required.” The reverse of this is, “To whom little is given, of them less will be required.” David had the privilege of direct communication with God. All his life long, the Spirit of God was upon him, and he could ask how and what to do in all the emergencies of life. He could “enquire of the Lord,” and receive answer “by Urim and by Thummim” (e.g. “Shall I pursue after this troop? Shall I overtake them?” “Pursue, for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all.”) Under such circumstances, it was as natural for David to take God into account as a reality, as it is for us to take British authority or the midday sun into account. Both his prayers and his praises and his obediences were, in a sense, easy because of this. With us it is different, it is our lot to live in a day when there has been a suspension of visible divine manifestation for many centuries, and when we can only get into touch with God through His written Word. It is not so easy for human nature to see God through a book, and through its correspondences and fulfilments in the affairs of men now and for ages past,

as it is when He is "a factor" in the current situation, a living intervening intelligence, as actual as the reigning sovereign. If, therefore, our apprehensions of God are less realistic and less powerful than David's, there is a reason to which the divine compassion that was evinced to the sleeping disciples in Gethsemane will not be insensible. "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Merciful is the Father to all who love Him in sincerity and in truth. We may have many reverences, many aspirations, many sorrows of a godly sort, deep desires towards God to which we cannot give articulate expression. God knows and notes them all, and interprets them for us. This appears to be Paul's meaning in Rom. 8:26: "Likewise also the Spirit helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." By this I understand that the state of our inner man is so reflected to the Father by the Spirit that we are "naked and open" to Him even when we cannot express ourselves, and that our unutterable groanings are, as you might say, telephoned and interpreted to Him, through Christ our living representative and high priest, and accepted as the basis of that forgiveness and favor and blessing without which no mortal man can prosper.

How important in this aspect of the case becomes what we may call "the preparation of the heart." We may not be able to express ourselves or even to formulate our own spiritual thoughts to ourselves; but if we can present ourselves before God and say, with Peter, "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee," or with David, "Search me and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting," we may rest in the assurance of His favor. It is evident that before we can do this, we must "prepare our hearts before Him." That is, we must subject ourselves to such studies and influences as will put our minds into harmony with His. There is only one class of study that can have this effect. The Word of God has been given us for this very purpose. Let that Word, says Paul, "dwell in you richly." Our endeavor ought to be directed to furnish the mind with all knowledge of what God has done, what He purposes to do, what He aims at therein, and what He requires of us. If we line the inner walls of this earthly house thus, with pictures derived from His own Word, so to speak, we shall become temples in which He will delight to dwell at last. Some people hang up their own pictures in their houses, a curious taste, which is a little unintelligible to enlightened reason. Does it gratify you much when you see this? Now, suppose God, who knows what is in a man's heart, see the man's own picture hung on the inner walls, is that a furnishing in which He can delight? But suppose He sees His own portrait, as we might say, hung up on the inner walls of the mind, will He not be pleased to take up His abode? Now, there is



nothing that will place God's picture on the walls of the temple of the inner man but the reading of the Bible. In the Bible He is revealed in His character, in His work with Israel, in His purpose with man, and a thousand other things. The daily and affectionate reading of the Bible will transfer the Bible revelation of God to the walls of the mind: and we are then in a position, even in hours of infirmity, to just submit ourselves to God as the work of His own hands, asking Him to delight in His own image and to forgive our blemishes and shortcomings. But if, instead of thus furnishing the inner man with the knowledge of God, we stuff it with the frivolous and shallow thoughts of man, as embodied in the ephemeral literature of the stalls, or the daily babble of the foolish millions, our minds will be no fit place for God to look into. Our business then will be like the business of Josiah: Cleanse the temple, pull down the idols, burn the groves, cast out the rubbish and the defilements, and then offer to God the sacrifice of a broken heart; with such a sacrifice, God is well pleased, and in due time, He will enter the temple in His glory, to dwell for evermore, and heal the sorrows of His people with His own everlasting joy.

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## A Life That Pleased God

*Invisible things that are real — God's covenant sure — "steady and ingenious enterprise for the Truth" — avoid worldly people, literature, pleasures, etc — celebration of God's praise aim of life now and in future — sowing time now, reaping future.*

IT must have struck us all, some time or other, how feebly men are moved by the idea of pleasing Christ — even some men professing the Truth. Some matter of life or course of conduct is in dispute, you suggest, perhaps, that such and such a course will be well-pleasing to God, or in harmony with the will of Christ. How flat the suggestion seems to fall. It evokes no response and stirs no feeling. Very likely your words will be received with ill-concealed disgust or contempt; as if you were appealing to a chimera. Brethren, there is drawing near a time when what Christ thinks will be a matter of supreme anxiety to everyone, a thing of great weight and urgent practical moment. Our Bible readings and meetings are preparing us for that moment. Their joint effect is to bring us under the power of things that are not seen but actual.

We stand related to many invisible things that are very real. What more actual and essential than the air we breathe? What more invisible? What more invisible than the life we live, the thoughts we think, the feelings we have; take these away, what reality would be left for us? People can see the

force of the thought in these cases. Why should they be insensible to it in other things, as much out of sight for the time being, but more real in their bearing upon present and future well being? Christ is out of sight, God is out of sight; the things that have happened are all out of sight except in so far as they have left traces. The things that belong to the future are "not seen as yet." But their reality is a prevailing fact with intelligence. It is only ignorance or forgetfulness that are insensible to their power. Ignorance and forgetfulness are vulgar qualities. They belong to a state of low development. This is the state of the world at large around us. They are uninfluenced by the invisible things of the Truth because their feeble mentalities are overpowered by the impressions of the passing hour. The greatest facts to which they stand related are hidden from sight by the images of the proximate ephemerality.

We are all liable to be the victims of this deception. It is a struggle between the impressions of sense and the discernments of wisdom. When the latter get the upper hand we obtain the victory of faith which overcomes the world. There is nothing mysterious about the faith or its victory. It is a "faith that comes by hearing the Word of the Lord," as Paul defines in Rom. 4:17, a confidence in the things testified by it. This Word of the Lord is extraneous to ourselves. It has been spoken to us by the men in past times whom God employed as the vehicle of its utterance. It has been preserved for us in writing by the same wisdom and kindness that originated its giving in the first instance. The practical result is the Bible which we read at all our meetings, and much oftener when there are no meetings. By its means we get into contact with many invisible things that are very powerful to bless us. The invisible God and the invisible future are brought near us in the invisible occurrences of the past of which we read.

David is invisible for the time being. As Paul has it, "Having served his own generation, he fell asleep and saw corruption." As Peter said, "He is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us to this day." But in our reading we see him as he was in the busy days he lived when he "served his own generation," and we get something worthy of study, because it is the spectacle of a life that pleased God, which we cannot always be sure of when we look upon modern ways and models in a godless age like this. What do we find him busy in? Busy with the things pertaining to God. He had risen from a very humble station to the position of king. He had triumphed over all his difficulties and all his enemies. He found himself securely seated on the throne of Israel, and in a position of great personal comfort and exaltation. What does he exercise himself with? Not with hunting, not with schemes of further personal aggrandisement, but with the promotion of the honor of God and the development of the divine service. He bethinks himself that the Ark of God which had been in exile in the country of the Philistines, and had only just returned after a twenty years' absence, was hid away under curtains, while he dwelt in a cedar palace. He contemplates great things to remedy this

inequality. He will build a house for God. Pondering his idea, he receives a message to forbid his purpose: "Thou shalt not build an house for Me." It was not fitting in a typical system of things that a man of much bloodshed should provide a permanent resting place for the Holy Name and Presence, but it was acceptable that his thoughts should be running in that direction. "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart." It would be the work of a typical son — a man of peace and promise: "He shall build an house for my name... Furthermore I tell thee, I will build thee an house. Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations."

David is overpowered with the magnificence of the prospect opened before him in the covenant. "Who am I, O Lord, and what is my father's house? Thou hast regarded me according to the estate of a man of high degree. Thou hast promised this goodness to thy servant. Now, therefore, let it please Thee to bless the house of Thy servant, that it may be before Thee for ever, for (whom) Thou blessest, O Lord, shall be blessed forever." Out of this covenant springs Christ, whom we remember by the emblems on the table. We rest on no plausible opinion in holding this view. It is the interpretation of God's own spirit by the mouth of Peter, "God hath sworn with an oath to David that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne." God had not forgotten the oath of the covenant 1,000 years after it had been given, for at the end of that time and over, He sent Gabriel to Nazareth to Mary, David's descendant, to announce to her that the time had come for the promised son. "And the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end." And He has not forgotten it now, more than 1,800 years further on. This same Jesus, the born son of David and Son of God (transcendent combination) remains in the heavens only "until the times of restitution spoken of by the prophets." These times are now nigh at hand, and we shall soon see the practical reality of those "sure mercies of David," which God has offered to every heedful son of Adam, and which have come within our range in the hearing of the Word. Christ in the earth again is Christ here to build again the tabernacle of David that is fallen down, and to give David himself that abiding place with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets of which he spoke when on earth. All the world will then see what intelligence may now easily become persuaded of, that "we have not followed cunningly devised fables" in having placed our trust in the refuge set before us in the gospel.

David having received this crowning mercy of the throne-covenant in recognition of his faithful solicitude in the affairs of God, did not sink supinely in the delicious lethargy which it might have produced in some men. He busied himself more actively than he even appears to have done previously in the matters connected with the divine service and honor. He

pitched a tent for the ark in Jerusalem, and organized an extensive and regular service of the priests, and set himself to collect a vast store of materials for the building of the temple which he understood Solomon, the man of peace, was to build. In this David is an illustration to us of what Paul means when he not only recommends them to be "steadfast and unmovable" but to be "always abounding in the work of the Lord." Not that we can make opulent arrangement for the public honor of God as David was able to do: but we can "always abound" in the measure of what is possible to us. There are some who are full of steady and ingenious enterprise for the Truth's service in all its departments, and there are some that pour cold water on this class of activity. It is not difficult to decide to which of the two classes David's case belongs. David's true brethren will want to emulate David's spirit. If we cannot render an official and resplendent service, there is all the greater reason why we should do what we can. The very smallness and poverty of our day is a reason for turning what opportunity we have to the very best account. Men are very energetic and capable in the promotion of temporal enterprises, and, when successful, receive all sorts of encomiums for their talent, their public spirit, etc. Why should the sons of God be behind the children of this world in the doing of the work that belongs to them? David was not behind contemporary kings in personal capacity or "go;" he was much before them. And we may all feel that it is permitted to the children of light to go as far as they can in the much higher line of things to which they stand related. "They do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible." It is all a question of faith. When a man's faith is robust, his devisings and doings are not lagging or feeble. It is feeble or uncertain faith that weakens the hands and kills the work. The public weather at present is not good for faith. There are all sorts of winds and chills, and all sorts of "microbes" that infest the air and diffuse spiritual debility and death. It is useful to be on our guard and to take precautions and make a liberal use of disinfectants. Abstain from debilitating beverages. Tone up your spiritual nerves with the tonics and antidotes that the Bible furnishes, and which history, the Truth and wisdom in general will more or less contribute. Do not herd with the fools of our generation. The reading of frivolous literature is baneful, indulgence in various polluting pleasures, provided for the polluted public, is killing to the spiritual man. Friendly association with those who know not God, and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the sure way to fail in the endeavor to walk as the sons of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of Yahweh and in His law doth he meditate day and night." "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but the companion of fools shall be destroyed." It is best to "come out from among them and be separate." It is best either to let the Gospel of Christ alone altogether, or to

throw our utmost zeal and heartiness into its service. The high calling is too stupendous a thing to be handled in any middle way. The hope of the gospel is the best thing under the sun within the range of mortal attainment, and it ought to have the best and heartiest service it is in the power of mortal man to render. This will be all very apparent when the spell of present illusions is broken, and the world stands nakedly in the presence of the judgment of God at the appearing of His Son.

There is a beautiful analogy in the particular transactions in which David appears before us in the portion read from 1st Chronicles. "When David had made an end of offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of Yahweh; and he dealt to everyone of Israel both man and woman, to every one a loaf of bread and a good piece of flesh and a flagon of wine" (16:2-3). Regarding David as the type of Christ we may trace in this transaction the outline of the coming development of things in those "ages to come" of which Paul in Ephesians speaks as the ages in which God will show us the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus. It will be when David's Son makes an end of the priestwork in which he is engaged that he will bless all the people in the name of Yahweh, and he will then deal to every one a bounteous portion of the fat things to which the Eternal Spirit in the prophets invites the perishing sons of men (Isa. 55:2).

And what is the sequel? Even that which is typified in the next recorded act of David's (v. 4): "He appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the ark of Yahweh and to record and to thank and praise Yahweh, God of Israel." When Christ has taken sin and death from the world, he will organize the life of earth's inhabitants on the basis of praise to the Lord God of Israel. This is represented in the vision of the Kingdom seen by John in Patmos, wherein the four living ones (heraldically significative of the whole commonwealth of Israel), "rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty which was, and is, and is to come... Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for Thou hast created all things: and for Thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:8-11). Such a prospect has no attraction for the mere children of the flesh.

It is a mode of self-test to ask ourselves how far the prospect of an endless life devoted to the celebration of God's praise appeals to our sense of pleasure. In a state of fully-developed and enlightened reason, the prospect is a ravishing one, of being clothed with power, and endowed with capacity to open out our faculties in the lucid contemplation of rapturous and sustained admiration of the inherent and supernal excellence of eternal wisdom and power. No privilege or joy of created existence can in the nature of things come near to this — none so purely sweet, none so lasting and inexhaustible. The delights of human friendship are great, the pleasure of personal gratification is something, but who shall measure the joy of reciprocal

communion with the Eternal Father, "of Whom and through Whom and to Whom are all things?" It is written, "In Thy presence is fulness of joy;" and, again, "Strength and gladness are in His place." To be linked in unity with Him must be a noble ecstasy, burning with the steadiness of eternal glory, with an intensity that does not diminish its power, and a gladness that does not interfere with its dignified and perfect symmetry. "To drink of the rivers of Thy pleasures" must of necessity be the highest possible joy, and a joy that does not pall or exhaust itself because fed by the inexhaustible supply of the Spirit.

"On that day," therefore, we may recognise a special significance in "David having delivered this Psalm... to thank Yahweh; give thanks unto Yahweh; call on His name; make known His deeds among the people. Sing unto Him, sing psalms unto Him, talk ye of all His wondrous works. Glory ye in His holy name. Let the heart of them rejoice that seek Yahweh... Blessed be Yahweh God of Israel for ever and ever."

This attitude of the mind to God is the essence of the whole system of the Truth. The severe lesson of Eden enforced it; the Law of Moses enunciated and illustrated it; the Law of Christ recommends and inculcates it in every sentence of the apostolic epistles and in every word that came from the mouth of Jesus. The mission of the Truth in all its applications is to bring us to it. The Truth is a lifeless skeleton apart from it. How unwise to jeopardise it by conforming to the ways of folly around us which are to perish. How prudent and expedient to depart from iniquity and to cultivate "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord," as commanded — "following righteousness, faith, charity and peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

That this course involves self-denial, even to the extent of self-mortification and self-crucifixion, is not to be contradicted. But there is another side. This is but a sowing time — soon gone, though leaving the seed of permanent results. After the sowing comes the reaping. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." "He that goeth forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." This is no mere sentiment, but a matter of fact. It is esteemed sentimentality now only by those whose eyes are blinded by the visible ephemerality. The day of harvest will show things as they actually are. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." It will not be always a matter of talk and hope. It will be such only so long as that phase is needful to prepare us for what is coming. It is limited to the days of our probation. These are few, and will soon be over, and when once gone, we will have the unspeakable satisfaction of thinking they will never come back, and of discovering at the last that they will have been instrumental in working out for us an upshot of glory unspeakable.

## Culture Valueless – God Supplies Everything

*Secular culture does not produce “fruits of Spirit” — God through Jesus supplies standard of righteousness and motive of reward — Jesus alone can solve earth’s problems — Future unknown to man, Bible reveals — wonderful prospects should generate enthusiasm.*

WE have assembled here this morning for two reasons — first, because we like to come, and second, because we have been commanded to come. If we ask why we like to come, and why we have been commanded to come, we open out a very wide field of contemplation, in which it may be profitable for a short time to roam. The answer centres our thoughts directly on Christ, and from this centre, we find them radiate to the entire circumference of human interest and human life. There is nothing interesting to human culture or important in human life but what has its full effectuation in him and him alone.

Men of mind are concerned about three things: character, human condition, as involved in politics and economics, and the question of a future life. In all three, Christ is the only solution. Character results from the regulation of the various impulses and capacities of which we are naturally composed. Man has no system of thought equal to the regulation of these. Philosophy, so called, is powerless to supply the needful motive and control. It produces a certain kind of culture; but it lacks the warmth and fulness and beauty of the mental and moral results that spring from the faith of Christ. Consider these results as defined by Paul when he speaks of “the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” Take these separately: “love.” Human culture does not bring this with it. It may teach it, but it cannot induce it. A refined selfishness results from all its experiences and maxims, whether you take them as exemplified in the philosophy of Greece and Rome, or the cynical agnosticism of British caste. But with Christ it is a matter of command and living constraining example. In him we have eternal wisdom concrete in a lovely personality, who comes near to us and says, “I have loved you.” This I command you, that ye love one another.” The love he enjoins goes further even than this: “I say unto you, Love ye your enemies: do good to them that hate you.” It might seem at first sight as if love could not be induced thus by command; but the fact is different from the appearance. With Christ clearly in mental view, we can do and feel what he commands us, if for no other reason than that he commands. The result is seen and felt in a general and cordial beneficence that springs up within the character — a beneficence of a warmer and more enduring type than is possible with the mere man of

nature — a kindliness and a sympathy that depend not on advantage, and are not partial, and that can outlive insult and injury.

Then "joy." What is there in secular culture to compare with the faith of Christ in its power to produce the pure exultation we mean by this? Joy results from the action of the superior faculties — veneration, benevolence, faith, hope, conscientiousness, acting with the collateral vibrations of gratified approbateness, acquisitiveness, and all the other faculties which are good in their right relation, though so evil as ruling powers. Human wisdom, shutting out God and His promises is cut off from the power and possibility of bringing these higher powers into full action. Veneration has no adequate leverage without God presented for worship; faith has no object apart from revelation believed; hope has nothing to stir it if confined to anticipations limited by mortal life and frailty. In Christ, all these powers have their fullest scope; and the result is joy — a joy not only not dependent upon favorable human conditions, but that can act in the face of the worst conditions, because of the confidence of God working in all things and using the most calamitous circumstances sometimes to further His highest ends with us. Thus it is that Paul says: "We glory in tribulation also," and James exhorts the brethren to "Count it all joy when they fall into divers trials, knowing that the trial of your faith worketh patience." Human wisdom can show nothing like this. It has no cause to be joyful in tribulation, and, as a fact, is extremely the reverse.

Then there is "peace." This, Jesus plainly says, "the world cannot give." But this he gives: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." The conditions of peace are wanting from the wisdom of this world. Peace is the absence of anxiety and the presence of that serenity that comes with the assurance of good, and from the conviction of being in harmony with the right and the true (which can only be ascertained by revelation from God). The world is away from peace on all these heads. It trusts in itself without the power to control the issues of things. It has no guarantee of good or ground of faith in the future, and it concerns itself very little with the question of righteousness. It has truly no standard of righteousness, for the will of God, which it ignores, is the only standard of righteousness. How complete is our position in Christ on all these points: "Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God: believe also in me." This double belief is a great bulwark of peace. God has sent Christ to offer friendship in the forgiveness of our sins now, with perfect blessedness in prospect. As Paul so richly expresses it in his epistle to the Ephesians: "God who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace are ye saved — it is no affair of human contrivance or human claim), and hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us



through Christ Jesus.” When we look away from this towards human wisdom, it is all dark and cold.

And so with the other items that go to make up “the fruits of the Spirit.” As features of character they are beautiful. Contrasted with “the works of the flesh,” they are as the beauty of an angel to the hideousness of the gorilla. They have this manifest beauty to the eyes of all; for even the children of wickedness can admire the beauty of holiness. But though man can admire them, he cannot produce them. It requires a class of truth and a force of motive that can only be found in connection with Christ.

Turning from moral culture, what, in natural order, is the next subject of solicitude with superior minds? The state of man as affected by social and political arrangements. The world is ringing with agitation on this subject in various shapes and forms. Here are millions of poverty-struck human beings, with indefinite capacity for multiplication, and not power to lift themselves out of the brutalized state in which incessant labor has sunk them. Even if they could improve their lot a little, what lies before us in a limited earth and a population with boundless possibilities of increase? A hell of confusion at last. The higher minds begin to see it and to despair. The other day, Professor Huxley lamented the slender grounds for hope, and said something to the effect that if the present state of things was to continue, the best thing that could happen would be for some kindly comet to come and sweep the whole arrangement off the face of the planet.

Turn from this to the prospect we have in Christ. Carlyle said that what was wanted was that one strong man should make his advent, and lay hold with strong arm on universal affairs and compel men to submit to what was good for them. This is precisely what the purpose of God provides, as proclaimed in the Gospel of the Kingdom. “God hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men in that He hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). “Out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword that with it he should smite the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron” (Rev. 19:15). With such a prospect, the believer in Christ can survey with calmness the political deadlock into which the world is drifting. He can afford to wait, for he waits for God, and it is naturally true that “they shall not be ashamed that wait for Him.” God, who made the earth, has made no mistake in the working out of its affairs. He purposes a regulation and administration of human life upon the earth that will realise the highest possibilities of existence. It will be an administration through a king. The foundation is laid in Christ as a head centre, through whom the Creator’s own headship will be enforced. A preparation has been made in the most interesting way imaginable. First, in Christ, the root mischief that has put things wrong upon earth is rectified. Matters have gone wrong between God and man. The first principle of submission — absolute submission — on the part of man to what God commands has been violated. Death has reigned by

sin, and mortal man has vainly turmoiled for generations in the awful confusion resulting. In the coming King, as nucleus of a new development, this has been put right. Possessing the very nature we inherit from Eden, sin has been condemned, and the supremacy of God enforced in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, and in the proclamation of his name to mankind as the only acceptable way of approach to God.

Then sinful mankind have been left to manage their own affairs, with the double result of subduing the earth and getting it into order for the new race, and, at the same time, of convincing themselves of their utter inability to rule themselves. At the ripe moment, the new king stands forth, in a second appearing, "in power and great glory," to "break in pieces" the governments of sinful mankind, and to take unto himself his own great God-given power, setting up a Kingdom in which his friends will shine, the glory of God prevail, and that will rule over all the world for the blessedness of all the families of the earth, as promised in the beginning. Here is a perfect provision for the political needs of the world, and a perfect solution of the problems that present themselves to the thoughtful student of the human state. In what other direction is there hope? None, absolutely none. Those who think otherwise — those who entertain roseate views of human prospects in the natural order are not the thinkers and statesmen of the world, but men of limited horizon and conventional view — men of contented personal circumstances, who have not embraced all the elements of the problem, and who find gratification for their personal ambitions in the little spheres of public life. All men of mental breadth and full information recognise the darkness of the prospect for which the gospel alone provides the needed light and relief.

What next concerns superior minds after the questions of moral culture and human condition? Is it not the problem of what is known as the future state? Is there another life? Or is human life but a transient bubble on the ocean, shining in the sunlight with prismatic beauty for a moment, and then collapsing for ever? Does death wipe out all personal relations to futurity, or is there a sequel in another state to the toils and hopes of individual mortal experience? And if there is, what principles affect its issues and determine our relations to it? Many are the speculations in which mere human thought indulge on this most interesting theme. Where shall we look for light? Where shall we find knowledge? It is more and more being felt and recognized that as a problem of nature, this question is in utter darkness. Agnosticism is the growing temper of the age. "We do not know" is the frank admission of superior candor. Another class go further and say, "We cannot know." This is a different attitude. It is an indefensible attitude. Ignorance is one thing; but to glorify ignorance by parading it as the superior and only accessible knowledge is going quite unwarrantably far. What is knowledge? It is acquaintance with what is. The truthfulness of this simple definition will be apparent when we contrast a man's mental state when he first appears in the

world and when he is thirty years of age. There is a great difference between the two states. When he is a baby in his cradle, he knows nothing — absolutely nothing. His brain is a blank on the commonest things. Slowly he takes in knowledge. How? By eye and ear and sensation. First he becomes acquainted with the light, then with the face of his nurse, then with the form of other objects. Slowly his impressions form as he grows. He makes the acquaintance of the walls of the room where he is, then he learns to look out of the window and to know that there is a street outside, then that there are other houses and streets; by and by, that there is a country beyond the town where he is; then, that there are other towns; by and by, that there are other countries, and then slowly in detail, that there have been men before him; that kings have reigned, and battles been fought, and history been enacted before he was born. Many other things he gets to know, but all on one principle — the principle of becoming acquainted with what is. Does the agnostic say that we cannot become acquainted with what is? He would convict himself of being a fool were he to take this position. What is it then that he is so agnostic about — so unknowing about? — for this is all the high-sounding epithet means. As to future life, why should he be unknowing? Has there been no revelation? Has Christ not risen? Here he may say, “I do not know;” but this is mere ignorance. Let the evidence be considered, and there is but one answer. A man might take the position of saying, “I cannot be sure there was such a man as Charlemagne, as Alexander, as Cyrus, as Nebuchadnezzar;” but such a position would only earn for him the contempt of common sense in all the world. Such is the sentiment with which a man is entitled to be regarded who says “I do not know if there was such a man as Jesus Christ. I do not know if he rose from the dead.” He might be honest enough to say it, but it is the honesty of mental incompetence, fog, or ignorance. The evidence exists, and it cannot be confuted. It cannot be touched. It cannot begin to be doubted or impugned in the application of true logic. Christ stands before the world as the solution of this engrossing problem of a future life. He proclaimed himself the Light of the world. “He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” “He that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” “This is the Father’s will who hath sent me, that of all that He hath given me I should lose nothing, but raise it up again at the last day.” “I am come that they might have life.” “I am the living bread that came down from heaven, whereof if a man eat he shall not die, but have everlasting life.”

The validity of these claims Jesus proved in the performance of works to which he appealed as his witness, and by the crowning marvel of his own resurrection. Men may be ignorant or unbelieving of these things; but the things themselves stand in their own invincible truth and power. We are happy in being united this morning in such a glorious faith. Unworthy of it shall we be if we hold it loosely or lukewarmly. Men are admired for enthusiasm and enterprise in behalf of various movements of human

origination and scope — politics, philanthropy, temperance, reform and what not. Why are we not to be allowed some enthusiasm for him “in whom are filled up all treasures of wisdom and knowledge?” for whom Paul said, “I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ and be found in him.” The question has but one reasonable answer. It is only the dim eye, the stolid heart, and preoccupied mind of ignorance that are impervious to the glory of Christ. When “the eyes of our understanding are enlightened, and we know what is the hope of His calling and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe,” intelligence only finds suitable relief in a fervid “Amen!” to the exhortation of Paul when he says, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving... and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto men, knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for ye serve the Lord Christ.”

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## In Prison For Righteousness' Sake

*An old, but authentic letter — conversion by evidence, not excitement — transfer Scripture ideas to own minds — independent of flesh relationships — righteousness towards God every day — “the will of my Father” above all things — death no terror to godly.*

**W**E have been reading a short letter written a long time ago by Paul. That we should be doing so is an extraordinary circumstance if we could but see the circumstance as it is in itself, and not as it appears through the hazy atmosphere of custom. How comes it that a private letter written so long ago should be in public hands everywhere at so late a day as this and should possess for those who read it as powerful an interest and as great a value as for those to whom it was addressed in the first instance? When that question is truly answered, we are in the presence of matters of very mighty moment. Let us get into their presence. It is the very object of our assembling this morning to do so, to call to remembrance and see with the vivid eye of enlightened memory the facts related to Paul's work, which did not die when Paul died, and which remain to this hour “the power of God unto salvation to every one which believeth.”

We require to make an effort to achieve this mental feat, because we live at a time when it has become quite unfashionable to have Paul and his

message in remembrance, and also because our own affairs always make demands upon our attention which make the achievement difficult. The achievement is not impossible, because we are commanded to perform it — to “have these things always in remembrance.” We have the means of its performance in our hands. We are not dealing with vapors and shadows. We are in contact with facts in the case in tangible shape. Here we have Paul’s actual letter, “the salutation of me Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle,” that is, it was his habit to subscribe every epistle with his actual sign-manual as a guarantee of its authenticity. Why he did not write the whole epistle with his own actual hand, instead of dictating it to an amanuensis, we may gather from the brief apologetic remark he adds in another case: “Remember my bonds.” He was a manacled prisoner in most cases and therefore incapable of extended literary effort. The little bit he wrote with his manacled hand, after dictating the letter to another, would be poorly written as compared with the body of the letter. He would not be able to bring his hand flat on the table, and therefore the writing would be clumsy which made him add, “Remember my bonds” — as much as to say, “Excuse a bad pen.” Was that inspiration? enquires a short-visioned friend. My friend, inspiration did not leave Paul while he wrote that bit. It was even a bit that the wisdom of God might require him to add, as a living lineament of reality for those who should come after Paul, and who would only have the written words of Paul and not the living apostle to lean on.

Consider this other extraordinary fact that the letter which we have read and profited by this morning, and which is printed and in every city all over Europe at the present day, is the letter of a prisoner. We know what prisoners are as a rule, and what prisoner’s letters are like; was there ever a prisoner who wrote from prison like this: “I endure all things for the elect’s sake that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory... wherein I suffer trouble as an evil doer even unto bonds, but the Word of God is not bound... follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience... with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” How came he to be a prisoner, a man who could pen such communications? This is an urgent question because it touches momentous facts. The history is clear and authentic. We have it in Paul’s own letters and speeches; “I am appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher of the Gentiles, for the which cause I also suffer these things; nevertheless, I am not ashamed... Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord nor of me his prisoner.” He was arrested at the instigation of the Jews because of his assertion that Christ had risen from the dead and had commissioned him to proclaim the forgiveness of sins in his name. “For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple and went about to kill me.”

Now this assertion of Paul’s, which gave such offence to the Jews, did not rest on a mere conviction on his part. He was not argued into an opinion on

the subject by some one else for reasons however good. This would be a very poor foundation for us to build on. The matter was communicated to him by revelation. He is careful to put the matter on this footing "I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which is preached by me is not after man. For I neither received it of man neither was I taught it but *by the revelation of Jesus Christ.*" It is not only that Paul alleges this, but his account of the mode in which the revelation was communicated is such as to bring proof with it that his statement is true. As he said to Agrippa, when arraigned as a prisoner before him, "This thing was not done in a corner." It was a public transaction in the presence of witnesses. Christ showed himself to Paul in the open air in bright noon day on the public highway as he and his retinue were approaching Damascus to put Christians under arrest by authority. The light of the vision was "above the brightness of the sun." All saw it, all were felled to the earth by it: Paul was blinded by it and remained blind till cured by the principal believer in Damascus. He had to be helplessly led the rest of the journey. The communication made to him was of a character that could leave no doubt as to its origin. "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest... Rise and stand on thy feet, for this cause I have appeared unto thee to make thee a minister and a witness... to the Gentiles to whom I now send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among all them that are sanctified through the faith that is in me."

It is therefore no mere pious flourish of words that Paul employs when he describes himself so frequently in his epistles as "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour." It is a sober, literal, legal fact; and his apostolic work is only truly and precisely defined when he says it is "in hope of eternal life which God who cannot lie promised before the world began, but hath in due times manifested His Word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to *the commandment of God our Saviour*" (Titus 1:3). The whole matter is therefore rooted in God. Paul's whole work is divine. The modern disposition to humanise — to Paulize it — is treason against the Truth. He might well exclaim now, as he said to the Corinthians "If any man among you think himself to be spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord."

Let us then, brethren, get as close to Paul's mind and Paul's ways as possible, for they are according to the mind and will of the Lord. He said to Timothy, "Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience." We cannot so fully know these things as Timothy who had the advantage of personal intercourse; but we may know them with wonderful fulness if we act on the advice he gave to Timothy. "Give attendance to reading — meditate on these things; give thyself wholly to them." What we have to do is to transfer the ideas that are enshrined in Paul's letters to our own minds. This is what he enjoins: "let the Word of

Christ dwell in you richly." "Put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him."

We shall have to be very determined in following this bent, for we shall have very little help from the people around — even from many who are called brethren. We shall even encounter obstacles. It is not only that our own minds need dragooning, as it were, in spiritual directions, because of the native aversion of the ignorant mind of the flesh to divine thoughts, but among many with whom we may be thrown in contact, we shall have to fight against the passive resistance of friends which is sometimes more chilling and obstructive to spiritual life than contradiction. On what is this passive resistance founded — this want of relish for divine things? It is founded on unbelief. No man heartily believing the testimony of Paul could show the indifference and aversion that are prevalent in modern society towards the mighty matters he had in hand. Belief always produces its logical effect in minds not absolutely insane. We have therefore to resist the influence of all manner of people who are dead towards Paul's matters, but who are wonderfully alive to the "things that are seen." They would drag us to worship at their carnal shrines. We say, No; we believe in Jesus who appeared to Paul, and therefore accept the manner and aims of life growing out of that, which are totally different from those that are congenial to the children of the flesh. Jesus had to ask the question: "Who is my mother and my brethren?" when his natural mother and brethren were pressed upon his attention. He had to define the relationship that he would own: "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father, the same is my mother and sister and brother." So Paul had to say, "I know no man after the flesh." Like causes produce like effects. The Truth that reigned in Jesus and Paul, when reigning in men in the 19th century, will render them equally independent of the relationships of the flesh, and equally unintelligible to those who judge after the flesh.

To those who "judge after the flesh," whether they profess the Truth or not, the principles exemplified in Jesus and Paul, will always appear impracticable and inapplicable to modern life. We must not consider this class too much. If we cannot take them with us, we must leave them, as Lot did his married daughters. We must not go with them. If we do, we shall get into their state of mind, in which the words of Paul will have so little meaning, that they might as well have never been written. We must beware of that most inconsistent state in which while professing to accept the gospel, some live in total alienation from its principles. To some, the gospel is a mere affair of futurity. The gospel is an affair of futurity truly, but it is much more than this. It is an affair of present actual life from day to day. No one can read the epistles of Paul without feeling this. They are mainly directed to pointing out "what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness," to use Peter's expression. This goes much deeper than most people recognise. It extends to the affections as well as to the manners. It means

more than amiability, a great deal, though it includes that. We might be amiable towards man without being zealous towards God. We might be correct according to the human code, and far from godliness in divine estimation. Ponder Paul's definitions: "Ye are not your own." "Glorify God in your body and your spirit which are His." "Ye are the temple of God." "He gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people: zealous of good works" or hear Peter to whom Christ said "feed my sheep;" "ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."

These things have to do with our life from hour to hour. "Follow after," is Paul's injunction, "give thyself wholly to them," is another of his expressions. Follow after what? "Righteousness" is his first item always. But what is this? Our acquaintances have a very inadequate idea on this head. They have a dim idea that it means just dealing and truthful speaking. It comprehends these, but it goes as much higher than these as God is higher than man. It is what Paul calls "God's righteousness." He elsewhere says of the Jews that "being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, they had not submitted to the righteousness of God." This righteousness, he says, is revealed in the gospel (Rom. 1:17) "even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe;" in illustration of which he says (Rom. 4:3) that "Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness." Here is a righteousness consisting of an act and attitude towards God. There is no true righteousness, according to divine reckoning, where God is not before the mind and heart. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God," says Jesus, "and His righteousness." Seek the state of mind and life that is acceptable to Him. To do this is to "follow after righteousness" in the sense of Paul's exhortation. Here there is a daily quest. How is it to be conducted? Not by listening to sermons or reading religious books, which are all the diluted thoughts of men, but by bathing the mind in God's mind, as brought within reach for us in the Bible. Here is a matter in which we shall have to part company with our secular friends. They have no relish for this. "Righteousness," in this connection, is an unknown word to them; but to those who are circumcised in Christ, it is far otherwise. These are all of David's mind, "How sweet unto my taste, O Yahweh, are all Thy words of truth; Yea, I do find them sweeter far than honey to my mouth."

So with the other items of Paul's exhortation: "Follow after... godliness, faith, love," etc. Godliness is a thing of God — a thing of daily state and daily habit. It is the affiliation of the mind to God in all His ways, as revealed. It not only gives employment to the mind, but congenial employment — pleasant employment — daily employment. Paul tells us that "those who are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, and those that are after the



Spirit, the things of the Spirit." This is the palpable distinction between the two classes. "The natural mind is enmity against God." This was the secret of the enmity shown to Christ. Christ was all for God, while the people around him were mere hunters after their own gratification, in mutual honor-seeking, and otherwise. Therefore they could not coalesce. Those who loved God loved him, and those who loved God did what God commanded. These he claimed as his friends. "He that doeth the will of my Father, is my brother and sister and mother."

Here is another simple rule of judgment in the case. What is the Father's will? It is amply revealed in all the Scriptures. He wills that men first of all know Him, and love Him, and worship Him, and give thanks to Him in everything, and do these other things as between man and man that are pleasing in His sight. Now, in these things, the common run of men have no delight, whereas to the friends of God, they are as their meat and their drink. They afford them a daily delight, so far as their opportunities allow of their exercise. They "follow after faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." To the other class, these things are an aversion, to which they may submit out of accommodation to friends, but with no heart. It is a pure sadness that this should be so, but so it is, and it only remains for us to make the best of an evil time. It is better that the children of the flesh should accommodate themselves to the ways of God for the sake of peace, than that the friends of God should forget their calling and strike their colors to please father, mother, husband, wife or friend.

It is a battle, but it is a winning one. It will soon be over. We shall be in the Father's house of light and holiness and love, by and by. We shall not have much longer to trudge in this dreary wilderness of unreason and unfaith, and all manner of moral and intellectual ugliness. The tokens increase of the coming of the day when the darkness that covers the earth will flee before the manifested glory of the Lord. If men could but see things as they are, they would see that there is absolutely nothing to attract us from the way of godliness, which is the only way of life and well-being. We look into the earth, and behold darkness and sorrow in all its ways. Vanity and death are written on its every lineament. There is more joy and peace even now for those who follow after godliness, than for all the children of pride with all their radiance and their glee. Death which waits to quench their glory has no terror for those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Rather is it to them, if it come, an angel of peace to guide them to glory by a swift short cut, from the darkness of this suffering time to the glad general assembly and ecclesia of the firstborn. This happiness belongs to the saints... the Lord is waiting them not far off, to receive them with open arms, and to say "Enter into the joy of thy Lord."

## Beginnings That Vitaly Affect Us

*Some beginnings — a regulated intelligence — inspired record of Creation — cannot measure God, but can trust and believe Him — a message from God, practical as any mortal experience — beginning of Gospel in Jesus of God, undeniable.*

**T**ODAY we begin a new year. The fact is suggestive in a variety of ways. We stand related to various beginnings, all of which are more or less important to have in memory. Our own life had a beginning. There may not seem much in that. There is more in it than may appear. We are liable to forget that we appeared on this scene only a few years back, comparatively. It is in the natural order of things we shall disappear as entirely as if we had never existed. When we distinctly and habitually remember the fact, it is a great help in the wise direction of our steps; we bear evils more lightly, and burdens less heavily, and honors more modestly when we remember that "we are but of yesterday," and that "our life is but a vapor that appeareth but a little while and then vanisheth away." The semi-unconscious feeling that we have always been here, and that we shall always be here, makes the task of life in an evil time much more difficult every way.

Then we have to remember that our race has had a beginning — that the procession of human life, generation after generation, has not always been a visible phenomenon upon the face of the earth — that the time was when there was not a human being to be met throughout this wide-lying, moon-lit planet. This fact has to be admitted by every class of speculator. Some may take the beginning of the human race further back than others, and may have special views of how it came on the scene, but the beginning itself they cannot deny; if they are bound to admit. And with this incontrovertible fact in view we are bound to have special thoughts — it may be special surmises and special sadnesses, if we were among those unhappily unable to receive the Bible information, that the present race of man appeared upon the earth about 6,000 years ago in the creation of the first human pair Adam and Eve. The special sadness would arise from this reflection, that if the appearance of man on the earth was otherwise than the Bible relates, we have a noble race with the unhappy future before them of finding themselves at last too numerous for the globe they inhabit, and without means of easing the press by emigration elsewhere. This is a mathematical certainty if there be no reigning and superintending power at work, since we have here a race with indefinite capacity of multiplication on an earth of fixed limits of food-production and habitable space. These two blind facts must come into collision some day if the wisdom that has produced man entertains no plan

for the regulation of his destiny in the ages to come. The philosophy of our day would deny the existence of this regulating intelligence in creation, and would compel us, either to shut our eyes to the manifest issue of things, or to give ourselves up to the grievousness of inevitable disaster. While admitting the wisdom that has contrived the wonderful planet we inhabit, and the certainty that our race had a start a while back, it denies that the same wisdom has made any provision for the avoidance of inevitable cataclysm.

But we are under no necessity of listening to such unhappy doctrines. They are the outcome of speculation on limited facts. Even if the facts taken into account were complete, speculation is never a foundation to build on, though some people eagerly build on speculation if the speculator excludes God and leaves man sole master of his own actions. Speculation is a guess, a plausible guess it may be, but only a guess, and therefore uncertain, with almost the certainty that in the stupendous matters of a measureless universe, all human guessing is likely to be wrong. But what shall we say to speculation that omits one of the principal elements of the problem? The existence of the Bible and all that pertains to it is a fact that cannot be ignored in the operations of true intelligence. This Bible gives us an account of a beginning for the human race which both fits the state of facts we find upon the earth at the present time, and admits the reasonable presumption arising out of the past, namely, that the power and wisdom that placed man upon the earth has provided also for the endless future that lies before. And the Bible that does this is not a thing of theory or of poetry or of any flimsy character whatever, but a thing of stubborn historical facts and unsurmountable intrinsic character, both in a literary and ethical sense that cannot be set aside. The Bible absolutely cannot be disposed of at all. Particular men or classes of men may neglect it, or may forget it, or may affect to leave it entirely out of account; but the thing is here as an astounding fact of which there is no rational explanation at all, in rigid and accurate process of reasoning, except the explanation that what it testifies of itself is true, that it is a book recording things that really happened and given by inspiration of God.

Among other things, it tells us of the beginning of human affairs upon the earth which no other book upon earth professes to tell or can tell. Its very first phrase is "In the beginning." It requires an inspired book to tell us of a beginning when there was no man present to witness it. The beginning of things on the earth about 6,000 years ago is suggestive of that other beginning to which the mind cannot help occasionally turning, as it contemplates the measureless ages behind us and the vast immensities of space around us. With this beginning we have no power to grapple. We are stunned and paralysed by the least glimpse of it. That there must have been a beginning to the universe as we see it is manifest from the marks of progress and development everywhere visible in heaven and earth, and that there is a plan and coherency in it all is equally apparent, for the immensity, though we

talk of it as infinite, is made up of measurable parts, and each part is characterised by rational plan down to its smallest fibre or atom. But beyond the conclusion that it is all in the grasp of an intelligent unity, we cannot get. We have no faculty at present for dealing with such magnitudes of time and space, and therefore they stagger us. But let us be on our guard against too much staggering. Some people turn the terrible greatness to quite an illogical use. Because they cannot measure God, they cannot trust themselves to believe in Him. Because the earth is so small a part of the infinite whole, they cannot receive the idea that God should attend to it and provide for it in the way revealed in the gospel.

This is the mere illusion of human weakness. It is the result of arguing from how the universe strikes small man to how it must be to the interpenetrating strength and wisdom of Him who fills heaven and earth. It is a total mistake of reason. We might just as well leave off attending to our business and neglect to provide our daily meals, because the universe is so vast. Men do not make this mistake with regard to their personal affairs. Usually, the greatness of the universe has the reverse effect when realised. The man is driven to stick all the closer to his personal affairs. He is liable to say, "Well, the universe is very grand and indeed truly tremendous, but the only part that affects me is this little part which is called the earth, and even on the earth it is a very little part of it that affects me. I will look wisely after that little part and use the rest merely as an occasional diversion of mind." This is a wise attitude so far as it goes, but why should men not be equally wise in other matters that are equally practical and personal though for the moment a little more remote? Why should men attend to the meat that perisheth and neglect "the living bread that came down from heaven, whereof if a man eat he shall live for ever?" Why should men allow the greatness of the works of God to interfere with their attention to a message from the Maker of the works, and who is greater than all His works, who can attend to the minute details of His works as well as sustain them in their universal vastness? If they say, Where is the message—the answer is in every man's hand. It is not an idea — a guess — a supposition — a dream. It is an affair as practical and matter of fact as our being born, and sowing seed and reaping harvests and attending to the routine of our present mortal life.

This suggests another beginning which has been brought under our notice in the reading of the opening chapter of the New Testament, "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," as Mark expresses it. This thing had a beginning. We are accustomed to the phrase "the gospel" from the cradle. We are accustomed to the name of Christ from our earliest consciousness. We are so accustomed to it that we may have a difficulty in realising distinctly that it had a beginning. The fact that it had a beginning is most important, for it brings with it the question — How did it begin? How is it that Europe, which was once an overgrown thicket of barbarous races, is now a community

calling itself Christendom? How came it that the cross, an instrument of torture and the emblem of infamy, should have come to be the favorite ornament with millions, and the most honorable mark in all market places and on all public buildings? This actual present state of things had a beginning. Men did not start without a reason giving honor to the name of Christ, even if in ever so dim and conventional a way. They began to do it at a certain time for a certain reason. Men did not begin using the cross as a spontaneous fantasy for which they could not account. They began to do it as the result of palpable circumstances. When the matter is investigated, we are taken away back to the generation just before Tacitus and Pliny, for they found the thing in full operation with all the zest and momentum of an immediately recent origin. We find Paul at work. Just before him (though slightly contemporary with him), we find the apostles and their companions at work. Just before them, we find Christ himself at work. We have it in our power to judge of their work, in two ways, firstly by the effect it produced, secondly, by their own account of it in authentic documents which have been in the hands of the christian community uninterruptedly during all the centuries which have since elapsed. That it produced an effect is beyond question, for christendom is a continuation of that first effect. You cannot recognise the existence of christendom without recognizing that the apostolic work produced an effect so strong as to revolutionize the beliefs and habits of civilised mankind in the beginning of the Christian era. Now it is but a very primitive act of reason to argue that so strong an effect must have had a strong cause; what was it? If you guess any other than the one alleged by the apostles in their writings, you guess a cause unequal to the effect, and inconsistent with the character of the work as evident in their writings, for their work was self-evidently a work of intelligence and of righteousness.

The testimony of Paul is that Christ crucified by the Jews was raised from the dead. His testimony is based on personal experience. "I have seen him."

The testimony of the apostles is precisely the same, but on different grounds. They were companions of Christ during his work on earth. They believed on him before his crucifixion on the ground indicated by Nicodemus, "No man can do these miracles except God be with him." They were staggered for a moment by the fact of his crucifixion, but they believed more firmly than ever after his crucifixion, for he appeared to them alive after the event, and talked to them and ate with them on a variety of occasions, lasting over a month and a half, and formally took farewell of them on the summit of the Mount of Olives, ordering them to proclaim the fact of his resurrection to the world, assuring them they would do so in the face of the deadliest opposition, but telling them not to begin the work till he should qualify them to make a convincing testimony by sending them power to work miracles in confirmation of their word.

The testimony of Christ himself is of the most unanswerable description,

the testimony of his works. He said, "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not; but if I do, believe me for my works sake... The works that I do bear witness of me, that my Father hath sent me." What works were they? Truly works "that none other man did," as he said, "Go tell John what ye see," said he to John's messenger when he sent from prison to ask if he really were the Messiah, "the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them." Besides these things, he walked the water; he multiplied a few loaves into sufficient food for thousands; he rebuked wickedness; he preached righteousness; he foretold his death, but said his death would be by his own consent because of the commandment received from the Father and that he would rise again the third day.

The joint testimony of the whole agency was that Christ was the divinely begotten and divinely sent Saviour of the world; the propitiary for the sins of mankind; the abolisher of death in harmony with the principles of God's supremacy, and the bringer of life everlasting through righteousness to all who should obey him; that in a word "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." Such an explanation of the origin of Christendom is a reasonable one. Any other will be found irrational in the working out, or must deny the facts, and must therefore be a lie, however beautiful. The apostolic account of the beginning of the gospel is not only a reasonable account of the facts we see with our own eyes, but it brings with it, from the throne of the Eternal, the needed ground and guarantee of hope for man, that not only has the earth been formed by divine power and wisdom, but its affairs are so regulated by plan and beneficence, that the future, notwithstanding the clouds and darkness of its present sin-stricken state, is a future of cloudless sunshine and everlasting glory, with which we may humbly hope to have a portion if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.

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## The Inside of the Truth

*Distress because of sin — means of knowing God — industry required to know God and His Word — justification, faith, peace, depend on God — essentiality of God to mediatorship and reconciliation — through Jesus alone — peace, grace, forgiveness, from God of His mercy.*

**O**UR readings this morning (Psa. 51, Rom. 5 & 6) take us to what we may call the inside of the Truth. The Truth has many outsides; and many people see only its outsides. Those who see it only from the outside and stand outside are not the children of its inner temple, who alone will be associated with its final triumph upon the earth. All the world sees its

outside in seeing christendom, which is a historic monument of the fact of its having been placed in the world. Coming nearer, Jews and infidels see its outside in seeing the memento of the cross everywhere, which has been placed in the earth and diffused in the earth by the work which God did by Christ in the first century. Nearer still, friend and foe see the outside of it in seeing the Bible everywhere. Nearer still, those see the outside of it only who see only its rudimentary doctrines. That man is mortal, that the Kingdom of God is coming, that the end of the age draws near, are all outsides of the Truth, comparable to the pillars and facades outside the temple which concealed the glory of God.

There is an inside to which we draw near in a special manner in the breaking of bread. It is an inside showing through the Psalm read and in the beautiful chapter from Romans. What is the essential characteristic of the Psalm? Distress towards God because of sin: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness, according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin, for I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me." Now, what does this state of mind arise from? Its very kernel, without which it could have no existence is this: the belief in God, the recognition of His living power and presence, the sense of His personal acquaintance with all our ways, and of His supreme and sovereign proprietorship and authority over us as His creatures. How could a man have any distress towards God because of sin who had any doubt as to the existence of God? Still less, how could such a man be animated by the love that David expresses towards God in all the Psalms? It is manifest that the first condition of this state of mind is knowledge. Love always comes after knowledge; never before. The same with fear. Who ever loved or feared a person they did not know of? It is morally impossible. To know God, therefore is the first thing. To know Him and to love Him, as the scribe said whom Jesus approvingly pronounced to be "not far from the Kingdom of God," is better than all burnt offerings or ceremonial or technical compliances of any kind whatsoever. This is the inside of the Truth, the knowledge, and love, and worship of God, without which all knowledge and attainments are vain. Those who are not yet in harmony with "the first and the great commandment" — "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and all thy soul, and all thy strength, and all thy mind" — have not made a beginning in the course of real and acceptable godliness.

But it may be said, "How can I know and love a Being I have never seen and can never see, and of whom I can form no conception?" The answer is: by making His acquaintance in the ways that are accessible, availing yourself of which will end in imparting to you the palpable and satisfactory conception which you may desire. There are two methods of acquaintance which require to be conjoined to give a satisfactory result. They may briefly

be defined as His works and His word — His works in creation, His Word in revelation. The former we can see — in small measure, it is true, but still in measure, we see one another, we see the earth and its varied products: we see heaven over our heads and its awe-inspiring grandeur of magnitude and order and glory. All these things pondered in their detail will lead us by intellectual induction to Him. They are reducible to invisible energy; once they were not; they have come out of invisible power and wisdom. They could never have come without the initiative and impress of supreme intelligence. Whatever name men may choose to describe this efficient force, they are face to face with God, as Paul declares in Romans 1: "The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and godhead, so that they are without excuse." Men have only to use their reasoning faculties upon what they see to know that God exists. The eternal cause must be greater than the things produced. The intelligence out of which man's wonderful intelligence springs must be greater than man's intelligence. It is only the fool that says in his heart there is no God. A man of real brains could not be guilty of such intellectual folly.

But it is the Word of God in revelation that is the principal access to acquaintance with Him. Without this, we should only know that He must be; we should know His stupendous greatness and His terrible self-existent majesty: but what He might be, or what His purpose with us, or His wish concerning us, we could not know. With the attested Word of His revelation in our hands, the case stands entirely different. We have it in our power to make His full acquaintance. The history of His whole work with Israel, from Moses to Christ, and the full evolution of His mind and character in the numberless communications He sent to them by the Prophets, put it in our power to know Him so thoroughly as to come into touch with Him, to confide in Him, to pray the prayer of faith to Him, to love Him, and to find in His worship and in His praise our fullest joy, as David did.

The contemplation of nature causes us to know that it is pervaded by a unity of power, inscrutable but as real as gravitation or any other invisible force at work around — a unity containing all unities, a force embracing all forces. Revelation comes to the hungry intellect and says this unity of powers which the senses discern, is "One Being, of Whom, and through Whom, and to Whom, and in Whom, are all things" — even the God revealed to Israel and manifested in the Lord Jesus Christ, who "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will," taking counsel and direction of none, and finding strength in Himself alone. By the two foundations of knowledge, we make the acquaintance of God as really as we become acquainted with any fact or friend; and He becomes with us a living power, dwelling with us and walking with us, inspiring our love and engaging our fear, not on any principle of a nursed imagination, but on the principle of manifest truth assimilated, and absorbed into the mental structure and condition.



Such a result implies and requires application of mind. All mental growth requires this. It is stressful enough often times, but it has its full reward, even in natural departments of study. To "grow in the knowledge of God" is a matter of constant command in the apostolic epistles. Its attainment is the sweet result of which Paul speaks of as "the peace of God that passeth all understanding, filling the heart and mind."

Popular theology has spoiled most of us in this matter, by representing the knowledge of God as a thing of easy accomplishment, and in no way depending upon our own exertions. It is true that no exertion of our own would ever have enabled us to know God if God had not revealed Himself; but it is not true that He having revealed Himself, we require to make no effort to lay hold of the revelation He has given us. The very reverse is a truth constantly insisted on throughout the New Testament writings. The phrases are varied, but the inculcation of industry is uniform. "Strive to enter;" "Come unto me;" "Be zealous and repent;" "Give attention to reading;" "Occupy till I come;" "Take heed that your hearts be not overcharged;" "Put on the new man;" "Crucify the old man;" "Always abound in the work of the Lord," etc. The Spirit of Wisdom in the Old Testament exhorts us continually in a similar strain: "Attend to my words;" "Incline thine ear unto my sayings;" "Apply thine heart to understanding;" "Keep my words: lay up my commandments with thee;" "Take fast hold on instruction: let her not go: keep her;" "Say unto wisdom, thou art my sister;" "Get wisdom: with all thy getting, get understanding;" "Seek her as silver, search for her as for hid treasure;" "Forsake the foolish and live and go in the way of understanding."

These counsels must commend themselves to us as based on the highest reason. How do men learn anything but by applying their minds? We are naturally ignorant of everything. Only those who study a matter become acquainted with it. If this is true of natural things, how much more true is it of spiritual to which we are naturally averse. Wisdom is truly the principal thing, as Solomon avers; and yet what scarcity of taste there is for wisdom. Even in the comparatively low form of intellectual taste, the population is a wide waste of barrenness. There is little relish for anything beyond the mere sensationalism of eating, drinking, gossip fun, nonsense, wearing fine clothes, listening to frivolous music, or reading silly stories. There is little disposition to enquire into the reason of things; next to no capacity for appreciating and admiring wisdom in the constitution of all things in heaven and earth; and all the while life is so real, and every throb of the heart and thrill of the brain, and every phenomenon in nature has such a terrible earnestness of cause and effect underneath it all. If there is a lack of delight in wisdom on this low plane, no marvel the almost entire absence of it in the things pertaining to the knowledge of God. It is no extravagant statement in the Scriptures that says "Yahweh looked down from heaven to see if there were any that did understand, or that did seek after God," and lo, "They were all gone aside; none that did good; none that were righteous, no, not one."

Like Enoch, let us, “walk with God,” though surrounded by a population ripening for judgment and destruction. Like Noah, let us be “found righteous” (that is, in harmony with God’s requirements), though it involve us in a desolating minority of one to millions. The end will justify the course that conforms itself to eternal wisdom.

The same general line of reflection is before us in another way in Rom. 5: “Being justified by faith we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” How impossible to enter into the thought of this comprehensive statement apart from the realization of God. Its whole essence lies here. Almost every word of the sentence involves it. “Justified” means made just or right before Him in the forgiveness of our sins: how could such an idea arise apart from God Himself who justifies? “By faith,” means, by the implicit reception of the testimony which He has caused to be delivered concerning Christ (1Jn. 5:10-13) — a faith which Paul tells us comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), which concerns things hoped for, and without which it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:1-6). How could there be such a thing as this justifying faith apart from God, whose spoken Word supplies the possibility of its exercise? “Peace with God:” what an empty phrase apart from God. How could a man value it who was in any doubt concerning God Himself? “Have you made your peace with the plaintiff?” would be an idle question, if there were no plaintiff. With a real plaintiff at work, it is very different. Peace with him represents a result for which perhaps you are willing to pay. “Peace with God” is beyond all price in view of God’s existence and displeasure with sin. It would not be likely to be thought much of by the man who doubted the one or the other.

“Through our Lord Jesus.” This is where Christ stands in the apostolic scheme of things — not merely as a teacher of excellent duties, but as an effectuator of peace between God and man. As Paul says, in Eph. 2:14, “He is our peace who hath made both [Jew and Gentile] one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having abolished in his flesh the enmity... that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross.” The systems of human wisdom around us that would reduce Christ to a moral reformer, however eminent—the urger and exemplar of excellent principles of action for men—would give us a Christ that is not the Christ that Paul preached. He was all and ten times more than moral philosophy could ever ascribe to him. He was “the way, the truth, and life” in the sense defined in Paul’s preaching. “We,” said Paul, “preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness, but unto them who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1Cor. 1:24): “by him, all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses” (Acts 13:39). In this conception of Christ as the “One mediator between God and

man," we see also how essentially God is the root of the whole scheme of the gospel, for where could mediatorship arise, either as a valuable or a conceivable institution if it were not for the eternal God, the Creator of all things, who appointed the ministry of reconciliation, "to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them?" (2Cor 5:19).

"By whom (our Lord Jesus Christ), also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." By Christ, and in no other way. "No man cometh unto the Father but by me" so Christ declared. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" so the Father demanded. "There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" so the apostles testified. And this is what we Christadelphians offend our neighbors by re-echoing and earnestly contending for, as against the easing and pleasing thoughts of our day and generation, which more and more tend in the direction of making everybody right and everybody safe — Mohammedans, Brahmins, Confucians — and none in such danger as those who maintain "the narrow way (proclaimed by Christ and the apostles) that leadeth into life."

Two more thoughts by way of conclusion. "Peace with God," to be of any value, must be peace from Him towards us rather than peace in our own hearts that may not be reciprocated by Him. A man may think well of his own case when God thinks otherwise. As the Scriptures say, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." The only peace of final value is the peace that God feels towards those with whom He is well pleased. He has made known how we can please Him; and it is for us to conform to what He has required, whatever men may think, or whatever we ourselves may feel. It does not depend upon our feeling at all. We may be in much tribulation, and in much fear and trouble; but if we conform to the revealed Word of God, we shall please Him and have peace with Him through our Lord Jesus Christ. This will be better than having happy and glorious times at revival meetings, to discover at last that we have displeased God by refusing His testimony, and neglecting the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The last thought is the one suggested by the words, "Access unto this grace wherein we stand." "Grace" is favor. The whole arrangement is one of favor, and not of claim or obligation at all. It is based on forgiveness — "forgiveness freely by His grace." God was not obliged to forgive because Christ died. He required Christ to die that His righteousness might be declared, and His name exalted; and that man might be thoroughly humbled before He felt at liberty to exercise the prerogative of mercy unto eternal life. But being dead, it was of grace that He raised him, and it was of His grace that he caused repentance and remission of sins to be preached in his name to all who should submit in the broken and contrite heart in which he takes

pleasure. We are “justified freely by His grace” in the whole arrangement. Through Christ, we have access to it, in the assumption of his name in baptism, and in communion with him all through a life of faith and obedience. When we have done all, we have only obtained access to a favor. Men who talk of “claiming” eternal life as a right, have not learnt the way of God. “By grace we are saved through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.” By grace we rejoice in hope of the glory of God, to be manifested upon the earth when “the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him.”

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## Regarding God, and His Works

*Fighting unbelief within self — “We believe and therefore speak” — learned guesses v. Christ — Jerusalem in the dust, soon to be exalted — men care not for God — “delighting greatly in God’s commandments” — charity, obedience, etc. because God requires them.*

WE all know that life in the Truth is a battle. I do not mean a battle with error in others, but with unbelief in ourselves; by unbelief I do not mean an unbelief that we would affirm or own to, but the latent unbelief that belongs by nature to the unenlightened human brain on every subject — the passive feeling that belongs to ignorance. We are all ignorant at the start — ignorant of everything. Knowledge comes slowly from without. It has to be “sought for” as the Scriptures represent: and when found, it won’t stay unless we take means to retain it. Human memory is weak, and soon forgets, — especially with regard to the class of things that constitute the Truth. They are all things “not seen,” whether past, present or future; and some of them are things for which we have not much natural liking and therefore forgetfulness and consequent unbelief become very easy, unless we are on our guard. We have constantly to remind ourselves that the truth of a thing does not depend upon our seeing it — whether past, present or future. Have we seen the ancient Britons? Have we seen the Czar of Russia? Have we seen the men of the next generation? Yet who doubts the reality of these “things not seen.”

There are different kinds of “things not seen” — different kinds of truth — some unimportant — some important. It is with the latter we have to do. It is the latter we desire to bring to mind. It is the latter which will enable us to overcome the mere bias of native ignorance, and walk as children of light. “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” This faith lays hold of things — is persuaded of things that we cannot see, but which are true. It does so by the means God has given us for the purpose. We need to avail ourselves of these means in the amplest measure, or faith is liable to

wither and die. We need strengthening in the fight or we may be overcome instead of overcoming.

The meetings are for this purpose. The meetings bring the readings and the readings bring the things, the conviction of which imparts the power that overcomes. How directly, how powerfully is this result produced sometimes. Take our case this morning. Here we have had a reading to us from a letter of the apostle Paul's. The letter is actually in our hands — a visible actual matter of fact — this very living day. It has been a matter of fact during a long yesterday of 1,800 years. It has been in men's hands all that time. Of this there is no manner of question. Thus we stand in a mental sense on an unbroken line that goes right away back from where we stand in Birmingham in 1893 to the time and place where Paul was a living breathing man, writing to the Corinthians (2Cor. 4). With that come mighty conclusions, and another line that takes us right away back to David and to the Psalms we have read (Psa. 110, 111 and 112).

For, what do we find Paul saying? That he is "troubled," "perplexed," "persecuted," "cast down" (vv. 8-9). We ask why is he in this state? Because of the course he is pursuing in preaching Christ, "wherein," he says "I suffer trouble as an evil doer even unto bonds" (2Tim. 2:9). The trouble is so keen that he says "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." Why doesn't he stop the preaching that is bringing such unwelcome consequences? He tells us in the chapter read — v. 13. "We believe and therefore speak." Paul then, is convinced of the truth of what he declares. What is it that he declares? That "Christ is risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (1Cor. 15:20). And now, Paul, why do you believe this? His answer in brief is this: On the testimony of many witnesses and on the evidence of my own senses. He refers to the testimony of the witnesses thus: "He was seen many days (after his crucifixion, that is) of them that came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses to the people" (Acts 13:31) and again thus: "He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve, after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that he was seen of James, then of all the apostles" (1Cor. 15:5-7). To the evidence of his own senses he thus refers: "He was seen of me also" (v. 8). "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" (1Cor. 9:1). "At midday, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun... I could not see for the glory of the light" (Acts 26:13; 22:11).

It was, therefore, not without very good reasons that Paul persevered in the course that led to the troubled, perplexed, persecuted, cast down state described in this chapter. It was a case of seeing with the eyes and handling with the hands on the part of many righteous witnesses. On such an impregnable foundation as this does the faith of Christ's resurrection stand. And now if Christ rose, see where conclusions ramify; Christ quotes this 110th Psalm which we have read this morning, and says "David by the Spirit

saith." Further than that, he says, David by the Spirit saith thus and so concerning "Christ." Thus we have Christ for a "commentator" on the 110th Psalm, establishing a few things greatly called in question in our day. He vanquishes higher criticism in saying "David saith" where higher criticism says, David saith not, but somebody else later than David saith. He sweeps away the "human element" school, who number millions, and who say the Psalms of David are the offspring of David's genius, and not the work of inspiration; and he settles the quibble of poor Israel after the flesh by which they seek to divert this Psalm from the Messiah, and make it the complimentary effusion of some court poet in honor of David. Who would not prefer the verdict of the resurrected Son of God who "knew what was in man" to the opinion, however unanimous (which it is not) of a whole host of so-called learned men of our far-off age, who know nothing about the matter personally, but grope about among musty manuscripts and mander over obscure and open questions of composition and style, and come to conclusions which are mere suggestions and probabilities, but which the common world, eager to disbelieve, snatches up and runs off with in triumph as matters of demonstration? Even Mr. Gladstone says to them, "Wait." But, oh no, it is quite too sweet an affair to have the authority of "learning" for discarding the authority of the Bible. They cannot afford to wait. They pass the learned guesses triumphantly round as so many truths unquestionable, and pity the simple souls that hold on by Christ. But we will hold on by him. The babble and the dust alter nothing. Christ is the Truth.

We follow Christ to these 3 Psalms and dwell on them for a few moments. They each seem to have a central idea. The first, Christ; the second, God; the third, the saints. All these belong to us and are germane to the purpose for which we meet around this Table. On the first of the three, we need not linger, having so recently had to look thoroughly into it. On Christ's authority, we are close to Christ in it. He sits at the Father's right hand till the rod of his strength is sent forth "out of Zion." This has not occurred yet. His presence in Zion 1,800 years ago was in weakness and dishonor; "He came to his own but his own received him not;" he was oppressed and afflicted, despised and rejected, and slain. The cry prevailed, "We will not have this man to reign over us." God removed him from the scene for a season; and Zion has become a scorn in the earth — both as to hill, land, and people. Jerusalem sits in the dust. She has sunk to the position of a mere archaeological curiosity — a place of mild interest to be visited by tourists. Oh, what a change shortly! When the rod of Messiah's strength goes out of Zion, the world will tremble, and "many nations shall go and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh" — not to gratify a tourist curiosity but to learn the Law of God in fear and trembling — to worship. "He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths; out of Zion shall go forth a law" — the rod of strength — a rod of iron.

It will affect things and governments and people in a very preeminent manner. "Yahweh at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of

His wrath." There will be short work with the demurring human beings in any quantity. "He shall fill the places with dead bodies." "They shall go into the holes of the rocks and into the caves of the earth for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth" (Isa. 2:19). God "will bring distress upon men that they shall walk like blind men because they have sinned against Yahweh; and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung; neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of Yahweh's wrath" (Zeph. 1:17).

As for Christ and his people, it will be a day of the lifting up of the head: "He shall drink of the brook by the way; therefore shall he lift up the head." Whether we take this drinking of the brook as a figure of the sufferings of this present time, or of the taking in of God's strength in the sense of Micah 5:4 ("He shall stand and feed in the strength of Yahweh in the majesty of the name of Yahweh his God"), the lifting up of the the head is the same. Hanging down the head is the order of the day just now with everything connected with Christ; it is the day of probation, the day of suffering — so much so that we are liable to have a feeling that it will never be anything else. Cast this feeling away as an utter illusion. "Light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart." Lifting up of the head awaits Christ in head and body. Nothing but joy and honor and gladness is contemplated in all God's dispensations to His people. "Weeping may endure for a night (and that night is necessarily a short one to every individual saint) but joy cometh in the morning." The morning when it comes is the morning of a cloudless and everlasting day.

The second of the three Psalms places God before us. He can be placed before us in many ways. In this it is as an object of admiration and search. "The works of the Lord are great, and sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." Suppose we are not in this category; suppose we are insensible to the wisdom and greatness and glory of the works of God, and have no proneness to the searching of them and find no pleasure in them, what then? Is it a matter of indifference to God whether we care for Him or not? On the contrary, another Psalm speaks thus plainly: "Because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of His hand, He shall destroy them and not build them up." Here is a point calling for the closest attention. It is not the characteristic of our generation to care for the works of God at all. The whole universe is made in wisdom — the adaptation of means to ends in the superbest manner; and yet most men are mere triflers — caring only for sensationalism or folly, having no taste to study and discern and admire the wisdom of the works of God at all. If this is the case with regard to nature, how much more is it so with regards to God's procedure towards man through Christ, which is the highest form of His wisdom in relation to us as individuals. For this, almost all men have an absolute disrelish. The day is dark. Night reigns: what then? Shall we give in to the universal infatuation, and become fools like the multitude? Paul did not; why

should we? He said "We are not of the night nor of darkness: we are all the children of the light and of the day. Walk as children of the light." The night will soon be past. When the day fills the world with joy and light, and those are rejoicing there who have overcome in the dark struggle of the night that now prevails, it will be practically manifest to every man how true is the concluding statement of this Psalm: "The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do His commandments."

The third of the Psalms (that is, Psa. 112) has something to say concerning this class, which is very much in agreement with all that we read in the apostolic writings concerning the saints — both as regards present characteristics and future results: "Blessed is the man that feareth Yahweh and delighteth greatly in His commandments." Fear and delight may seem an incongruous combination. It is natural, chaste and beautiful in the class described. How precious is the man or woman so characterised. In the wilderness of human life as it now is it is pleasant to meet with those who are a little interested in the ways of God — who mildly delight in them, but think of the man who "greatly delights" in them! He is a treasure to God and man. He is blessed in himself now and in the future that waits him: for God to whom all things belong intends to bestow everything at last on those who fear Him and delight greatly in His commandments. "Wealth and riches," as the Psalm says, "shall be in his house;" "surely he shall not be moved for ever." Darkness now may be his lot, but "unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness." "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in Yahweh."

And now consider what such a man is towards others. For here is the glory of true godliness, that he not only fears God, but shows kindness to man. An unkind man fearing God would not be acceptable to God: "A good man showeth favor and lendeth." "He is gracious and full of compassion and righteous... He hath dispersed: he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever." We need to ponder this. It is exactly what Christ commands. The stream is all against our conforming to this standard. Everything within us and around us will paralyse our hand unless we look to God in the matter. We will say with the world, "He does not deserve it." We will say with the world, "There are so many of them, it is no use." We will say with the world, "It will pauperize me to give them." A wise man — the man who truly fears God will not be swayed by these maxims. He will say, "I practise kindness, not because the people around me deserve it, but because He has commanded it who says, 'Be kind to the unthankful and to the evil.' I give when I can, not because I hope to heal the world's woes by philanthropy; but because God requires it, and you ask me if it is any use. I say 'No, not as regards the world, but I consider it of great use to please God.'" This is the right way to work — with God in view, resolved to fulfil the part He requires, whatever the present consequences, or want of consequences. This is the only practicable course. The world is such a morass of woe that



you will never do anything when once you get a full view of its hopelessness, if you trust to your feelings or to human wisdom. A man can do anything God commands when once he is sure He commands it. This is the secret of the exhortation: "Trust in Yahweh and do good;" Do your part towards Him; never mind the big impracticable that lies before you. "Trust in Yahweh with all thy heart and lean not unto thine own understanding." He says "Do good unto all men as you have opportunity." This is why we are to do it because He requires it, not because we are going to save the world by it, for that is impossible. It is a good, sound working rule that will keep a man in well-doing all his vain life, and that will glorify his memory in death — for God and man. It looks well when a man gets through — when we see him in his coffin, cold and quiet and at peace — life's fever past. It wreathes a holy memory round his head when we are able to say, "Well, poor fellow, he had an uphill fight, but he always strove to govern his actions by the will of God. He did a good turn to as many as he could. He loved not in word only, but in deed and truth." How differently we feel when the dead form is the form of a man who did well for himself, kept his own skin whole, but left his unfortunate neighbor to shift for himself.

Take the case one further step forward. Take it to the day when God shall judge the righteous and the wicked. Of the poor and righteous man, the Psalm says, "His horn shall be exalted with honor. The wicked shall see it and be grieved. He shall gnash with his teeth and melt away: the desire of the wicked shall perish."

When we fully and clearly see these things, we can heartily say with Paul in the reading from 2 Corinthians: "For which cause we faint not: but though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory: while we look not at the things which are seen but the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

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## This Present Evil World

*Truth not dependent upon human feelings — world appearances obscure — death may come any moment — Divine record alone tells truth — individual experience proves world evil — "strangers and pilgrims" in hope of deliverance by Christ.*

**W**E have come together for edification. That means building up; and that implies that we get into a broken down and dilapidated state, requiring building up again. That is true. There is very much in our daily life at present to pull down the structure of faith reared in our minds by

the Word understood and believed. A built-up state of mind is a comfortable state of mind. The opposite state of mind is a tormenting state of mind — the being uncertain or in doubt with regard to anything important to us.

The built-up state is a thing of conditions; that is, it is the result of powerful reasons before our mind. To feel the built-up state strongly, we must see clearly the reasons that produce it. When sight is dim, people put on glasses to improve the sight. This we do in the present case by the reading and rehearsal of the facts connected with the truth of God. But sometimes there is dust on the glasses. In this case the sight may not be much improved — perhaps made weaker. The first thing is to rub off the dust.

The dust takes various shapes. One form of it is connected with our own individual feelings. We are all burdened in mind and body — some in one way, some in another. Each man knows the plague of his own heart, and the distress of his own particular infirmity. In this connection we are liable to make two mistakes. We are liable to suppose that other people are not afflicted as we are, because we do not feel other people's troubles, and because those other people if they are of the truly civilized stamp, act habitually on the commandment to hide our troubles. But the second mistake is the more obscuring kind of dust. And that is the mistake of allowing our troubled feelings make us think the Truth less true than when we are comfortable and bright. We must take firm ground against ourselves here. We must say to ourselves "Now, remember, the Truth in no way depends upon you or your feelings. It was true before you were born, and cannot be altered in any way by what you may feel. You may feel depressed, and sometimes as if the Truth were far away, but remember that the Truth is a thing outside of you altogether — a thing independent of you. In a sense you have nothing to do with it. Your feelings belong to those native infirmities of constitution which entitle you to disown them, and say, "it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." Your dull and tinged feelings are mere dust on the glass, which you must wipe off while you try to look at the great and glorious things of God.

Next, you are liable to have your vision impaired by altogether inaccurate views of the nature of life. The world looms large in your eye, as a bright, active, living, reality and the Bible is apt to seem a very insignificant thing by the side of it. In this, things are not what they seem. You must educate yourself to pierce through misleading appearances. The world is not so real as it seems. What does James say, "That our life is but as a vapor that appeareth for a very little time, and then vanisheth away?" We know this to be true in the individual case. Follow any man's life long enough, and it bursts and disappears like a bubble in the water at last. There is no exception. Now, if this is true of one life, it is true of the fifteen hundred millions of lives that go to constitute the world, only that it takes a little longer time to see. It is all a picture that is passing. There is no reality in it. It seems real for the

moment; it is not real; it will soon have vanished. It is the part of intelligence to discern this. It enables us to see the Truth in its own real character.

How much more powerful is this consideration when it comes home upon us in the sudden removal of a brother whom we loved, as in the case of Brother Smith last week. He was at work on Wednesday week, and now he lies cold and still at home waiting that ceremony of interment which it will be our duty to perform tomorrow. He was not an old man; he was a young man, only 26, the very last we should have expected to lose in this sudden way. It shows the youngest are never safe, and that, therefore, as regards the rest of us, who may be getting on in life, there is always the possibility of the curtain dropping upon the finished drama of our life any day. That is, the time lying ahead may be very short for us — in any case, in any event. We are watching the signs of the times, but if we go off like brother Smith, the Lord will hurry upon our vision without another token, and we shall find ourselves before His judgment seat without another opportunity. It will seem so to us if we die, however long in actual time it may be. In such an event, the great and busy world around us will seem to burst into nonentity in a moment like a gigantic bubble. This is no fancy. It is a matter of fact always impending. We are always on the verge of this great change, and we never know when it will descend upon us. How unwise then to act as if the world around us were stable. How wise to act as Brother Smith acted, earnest, active, diligent in the things of God. How unwise to say as some people say, "Wait a little: by and by, I will give my attention to the things that belong to Christ." By and by? there may never be a "by and by" for us. The Bible word is always "Now." Who can be sure he will be alive next week? Who can be sure but that the world will have passed away by then for us as it has for Brother Smith?

Thus we rub off the dust that usually prevents the clear perception of the relative proportions of life we now live in the flesh, and the life from which we are never further away than the few days we may have to live. We are thus enabled to look more clearly and with a more earnest attention at the things exhibited in the Scriptures of Truth. Those things are in a very living form. The Bible is not a dreamy speculative book. It is a record of fact and experience throughout, whether in the exodus from Egypt or the work of the apostle Paul. Through such an active living medium God is revealed, and His will and purpose expressed. This morning it is Paul in his epistle to the Galatians. There is no part of the Word more calculated to bring before us the actual stirring nature of the work he had in hand than this, and nothing more calculated to impart to a sense of the actual authorship of Paul in what we have read. There are some parts of the Bible which, by a stretch of the imagination, we might concede might possibly have been written by other than the ostensible writers. But such a supposition is a moral impossibility in this case. A forging writer, sitting down to write a letter professedly by Paul

which Paul never had written, could never be imagined to write such a passage as this: "When Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed, for before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles, but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them that were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him, insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter," etc. A fictitious writer of a fictitious epistle would write his epistle for the sake of supporting the reputation of the Christian faith; whereas here is a finding fault with the leading apostle to whom had been given the keys of the Kingdom of heaven. This is inexplicable except on the principle that it is the actual writing of Paul, who writes for the sake of the Truth alone. All the evidence outside of the epistle tells us it was his, and this kind of internal character is conclusive. It is a picture to the life of the busy living work that went on in the first century — a divine work though in the hands of human frailty. Here you have Paul (Ch. 1:2) speaking of "all the brethren that are with me, and the ecclesias that are in Galatia." It was a work that had been going on for a considerable time, for you have him saying (Ch 2:1) "Fourteen years afterwards, I went up again to Jerusalem."

What was it that kept so many earnest men actively at work for many years in the first century? He tells us here. It was an affair emanating from God, the very first verse, "not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead." It was a faith which he says (v.23), "once I destroyed," but now preach "the gospel," he says (v. 11), "which is preached by me... I neither received it of men, neither was I taught it but by the revelation of Jesus Christ"—"not in a corner," as he said before Agrippa, but in open day, in the presence of witnesses, in a form that overpowered them all, and left its mark on him in particular in the blinding of his eyes (Acts 26:26, 13; 9:17, 18).

There is one expression made use of by Paul in explaining the object of the work of Christ, upon which I desire to fix special attention, as propounding a truth which is not generally received, yet which becomes glaringly true when the eyes are fully open, and the recognition of which is of the utmost help in our passage through the difficult life of probation. I refer to the statement of Galatians 1:4. "He gave himself for our sins that he might deliver us from this present evil world." Paul, by the word of inspiration, here declares the present world to be evil. Most men proceed upon the hypothesis that it is not evil, but "the best of all possible worlds" to use a phrase greatly current among the "wise" of these modern times. We are all liable to share this impression more or less, because we are all such poor judges of what a good world is, and are all so naturally in sympathy with what is in vogue with flesh and blood—like Peter, "savoring not the things that be of God but those

that be of men." But even with all our natural bias in its favor, we are bound to discover that the present world is an evil world that cannot be cured by man. Let our experience be long enough, and we shall infallibly come to the days when we shall say, "I have no pleasure in them." That is, we shall find out that the flower of life that looks and smells so beautifully in youth is a withering flower, and even in its unwithered state is not the beautiful thing it seems. There is an amount of weakness and pain and ineffectiveness of all kinds and failures and disappointments that are incompatible with a good state. We find that in ourselves we are not so good as we wish to be, nor have we the wisdom and understanding and clear-sightedness and memory which are essential to a state of true wellbeing. Our day is clouded; our plant is blighted; our light is dim; our strength is small; our faculties most limited, while all around us we see the ocean of immeasurable power and wisdom. Neither in ourselves nor our neighbors can we find the satisfaction for which we yearn. Our life is well called the days of our vain life. Only give us long enough, the brightest and strongest at last endorse the verdict of the wisest of men "all vanity and vexation of spirit."

If such is our experience of individual life—if we find our state an evil state individually, what shall we say of the human race collectively? What shall we say of the world as organized socially and politically? Here it is essentially, radically, manifestly and oppressively an evil world and nothing else. The great mass of mankind are lacking the most elementary conditions of wellbeing. Even the supply of the common necessities of life is pared down to the most demoralizing minimum. What marvel that they lack those higher conditions of mental culture and goodness which are only attainable with needful leisure and guidance. The population is not happy. It is not good. It is not intelligent. It is degraded and unkind to an extent little dreamed of by merely natural philanthropists. It is an ungodly, wicked, brutal, evil world, which can be seen only in its true character when compared with the angels to whom the human world originally belongs, and to whom Christ says the world to come will be assimilated.

The work of Christ is to "deliver us from this present evil world." It is well to accept the fact, once for all, that the world in which we dwell is an evil world, and that we cannot alter it, either individually or collectively. It will save us much futile work and disappointment. It will interpret our own experiences correctly to us, and put us into the right relation to the drift of things. It will keep us from the attitude of bootlessly looking for good that can never come now. It will lead us to accept cordially and heartily the position to which the gospel invites us as "strangers and pilgrims, passing the time of our sojourning here in fear"—fear of being implicated in the universal corruption—fear of coming short of the divine favor. It will lead us to set that light store on the things which are seen and temporal, which Paul recommends, and which Christ commands. "Take no thought (i.e. anxious

care), saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewith shall we be clothed? (for after all these things do the Gentiles seek), for your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

The glory of the Truth over all systems of human wisdom lies here that while it most frankly and plainly declares the evil nature of the time in which we live, it tells us the reason of the evil in the current departure from God, and it gives us a pledge of another time to come when there shall be no evil—for which time it bids us to labor in submission to God in the way He has made known. Human wisdom has to admit the evil, but offers no explanation of it, and as for the future, can only surmise that it will be what the past has been, or at the best can only utter an indefinite nebulous notion to the effect that there may be a better state in some "far-off time" of which we can know nothing, either as to its nature or as to our individual relation thereto. Human wisdom leaves us in utter darkness: divine wisdom brings us into glorious light. And the matter so stands that there can be no question as to which is really wisdom. For while human wisdom is the mere irresponsible maunderings of human ignorance, divine wisdom is the authenticated utterance of eternal power, "by many infallible proofs" "at sundry times and divers manners." It is no affair of tradition or opinion of the speculation; it is an affair of accomplished and visible facts and achievements that cannot be blotted from the history of the world.

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## All Parts of the Truth Necessary

*Ecclesiastes sombre, but true — vanity of life caused by disobedience — cure of evil state lies in obedience, through Jesus — present life a test, discipline of self-denial — "the eunuch" rejoiced, so should faithful — nothing too great or small for God.*

IT is needful to look at the various aspects of wisdom as they come before us one after the other in our daily readings of the Scriptures. We do well to look earnestly into each as it comes, and not trust to the special tastes that would incline us to attend only to particular things. We are almost all of us more or less lop-sided. That is, our mental organisation leans a little too much one way or other, from which we get a bias that would incline us too much to one particular line of truth. Some like hard facts; some beautiful sentiments. Some delight in political prophecy while having no taste for personal godliness. Others are all for zeal and devotion, while they have a

shrinking, or at least a lack of taste for everything requiring exact thought or reckoning. Some again have a taste for sombre themes; others, for those that are full of brightness and joy.

These preferences come from partial development. For every part of truth there is a time and a place; and every part blended is needful to a perfect result. In this respect, it is like light. Light is a mixture of seven differently colored elements. When any of them is absent, we have a defective light. Truth is compared to light, and it is like it in this respect — that it is composed of a variety of ingredients, the leaving out of any of which will interfere with the result.

The part of truth before us this morning in the Ecclesiastes reading is of a sombre aspect. It is disliked by some people on this account; but these are not wise. Let us have that which is true in its own place, however sad it is. Is it not true that “all things come alike to all;” that there is one event to the righteous and the wicked, to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean?” Is it not “an evil among all things that are done under the sun” that “the heart of the sons of men is full of evil? that madness is in their heart while they live, and, after that, they go to the dead?” Is it not so, that “the sons of men are snared in an evil time” that “the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise nor riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill, but time and chance happeneth to all?” In a word, speaking with a wide racial sweep, do we not come into being with vanity and depart in darkness? Is not all vanity and vexation of spirit?

The Bible is the only book that propounds this doctrine to us. All other books would ask us to think that man is an angel of light in the nature inside of him, and that there is always the possibility, with proper circumstances, of his blooming out into goodness and joy and wellbeing. Experience, long enough extended, tells us that the Bible is true and that the romancing books are deceivers. There is no real romance in life. It is all a thing of grimness and futility at the bottom. Our best natural writers see and confess this. Carlyle speaks of human life as being encircled with a dark ring of necessity which draws ever closer till it devours us or something to that effect. It is true, all go unto one place; it is only a question of time. Turn up your old letters, where are the writers? Look into the file of old newspapers a hundred years ago; where is “the public” of those days that were flaunting themselves in print in all the fussiness and apparent reality of the generation now pouring down our streets.

But all this by itself would be distressing. It is truth, but it is only part of truth. It is the only part that we know as natural men. We want the other part that the Bible only can supply. We want to know why all this is, and what will be the upshot of it all. Why is mankind such a failure? Why is all “vanity and vexation of spirit”? Mere philosophic writers can tell us nothing; the Bible tells us everything. It shows us that in the beginning, man was made for God and not for himself only, and that man refused that submission to God

in which God finds His pleasure, and that therefore man was driven off for a while into separation and alienation and death. Man in his pride may not like this explanation, but it is the explanation, there is no other. There are many attempts to find another, they are bound to be failures, for Christ is the Truth, and this is endorsed by him. What can the highest intellects do with a problem in the nature of things inscrutable with the highest intellect? How can man find out the ways of God? It is no new thing for the wisdom of this world to grope around here in vain. "The world by wisdom knew not God" in the days of Paul (1Cor. 1:21), and it has made no advances in that direction ever since. After the deepest search and the most soaring flights, man is bound to return with wearied faculties and confess that he cannot tell why man should be such a failure.

The Bible's explanation is not only simple but it is reasonable, and it is all sufficient. We need not go further. Man is made for God, and he is away from God and cannot be happy. Man is at war with the law of wisdom. The natural condition of his wellbeing is submission to this law. No marvel then that "the misery of man is great upon him." The wages of sin is death, and man is everywhere a sinner; no wonder that death reigns, and that his lot during life is the hapless one we know it to be. This is the explanation of the whole matter. It is best once for all to make full surrender. It will end the mental aches and wearinesses that sweep like cloud-masses over the spirit as we survey the wide-welter of human misery and fatuity; not that the mere explanation of the misery will end the misery. By no means, but that this explanation brings with it the hope that is linked with it and which exists in no other direction. The divine explanation not only tells us that human life is in darkness because of separation from God, but that God has purposed and is actually bringing about a reversal of this calamitous state of things, and invites every willing mind into the channel of the process. The beginning and the end of this matter go together and cannot be separated. If God has showed us the beginning of darkness with Adam, he has given us a pledge and a beginning of light with Christ: "whereof He hath given assurance unto all men in that He hath raised him from the dead." He has not only made known to us the entrance of sin into the world and death by sin, but He shows us in vision the time when "there shall be no more death." The line of revelation reaches from the banishment of man from Eden into alienation to an era of joyful recall when the "Tabernacle of God shall be with men, He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself shall be with them and be their God."

Here is light and the joy of hope. No other book but the Bible gives us this. And it is not a speculative hope. It is not a maybe. It is not even promise merely. There was a time when it was only promise. In our day, the promise is largely fulfilled. Christ has come and manifested the Father's name among men. He has set us a historical monument which no man can overturn. He



has fulfilled the prophetic forecast, not only in his own birth, life, works, death, and resurrection, but in the accomplished programme of events among men during the past 1,800 years. It is easy, under the circumstances, to believe in the second part of his work, that coming again in power and great glory, to take unto himself all power and to reign, which shall consummate the stupendous work the Father has given him to do.

The state of things depicted in Ecclesiastes is the state of things actually existing upon the earth for the time being. The recognition of it is part of wisdom: but it requires the companion picture of our second reading to give it the right adjustment in the scheme of things. It gives the necessary background to the exhibition of the glory of God, but, without the glory of God, it would be mere vacuity and darkness. That glory is especially visible in the apostolic writings from which we have read (Acts 8). Here we have Philip "preaching Christ" to the Samaritans, what was this but preaching the glory of God? As Paul expresses it in writing to the Corinthians (2Cor. 4:6), "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." We have the same Philip preaching it to the eunuch (Acts 8:35), and we note that the eunuch "went on his way rejoicing." What it was that made him rejoice we know when we know the Truth in its fulness. That which made the eunuch rejoice will make us rejoice if we surrender our hearts in knowledge and faith. We have just the same reason to rejoice that he had. How great that reason is, and how unjust we are to ourselves if we do not give way to it! It is not a reason that quite lays hold of our present experience. The gospel does not propose to make us the happiest of people now, that is, as regards the outward circumstances that are supposed to lead to happiness. On the contrary, as Paul had to acknowledge, "If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable." Jesus also, in his invitations to association with himself, did not propose beds of ease in this present life. He said, "Whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." It is, "Blessed are ye that weep now;" "Blessed are ye that hunger now;" "Blessed are ye that mourn;" "Blessed are ye when men shall hate you and when they shall separate you from their company and shall reproach you and cast out your name as evil." All Christ's representations of the state to which the Truth subjects men in the present life portrays that "great tribulation" out of which the resplendent multitude that John saw in vision had come.

It is inevitable that it should be so. The Truth is a call to self-denial on many heads. It is the discipline of self-denial that hews men into that noble shape that fits them for divine use in the Age to come. You know how odious, even to me, is the man who never denies himself, but gives in to every passing freak of desire. How much more odious it must be to God. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously

and godly in this present world." So says Paul (Titus 2:11). So also Peter: "Be sober and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ, as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance, but, as He who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation." Here is one source of the affliction that belongs to the high calling to which men are called in Christ Jesus. Another is to be found in the aversions that the Truth creates towards those who obey the Truth. Ungodly men do most keenly resent the reflection implied in the separateness for Christ that the Truth imposes. "Come out from among them;" you could not hurt them more. They "reproach you," as Jesus says, and "cast out your name as evil." What are we to do? If we are weak-eyed in the things of the Spirit, we shall fear men and try to propitiate them, and be neither one thing nor another. This will be a mistake. You cannot propitiate them except by being out-and-out one of themselves. If you are this you cannot belong to Christ. If you are half-and-half, you please neither him nor them. It is best to be thorough, but with all courtesy. Even the enemies of Christ will respect you more if you are thorough than if you mince and trim and try to appear to belong to them when you don't.

Why, then, should the eunuch go on his way rejoicing? and why should we, like him, "rejoice in the Lord alway"? Because of the great things to which our submission to the Truth introduces us. Oh, how great, even now! "I will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters." "The Father Himself loveth you." The first effect of this happy change is the forgiveness of our sins. Is this not something to be glad about—that our sins are blotted out, and that we stand clean and accepted in Christ, the beloved mediator, and recognized "joint heirs with him" of the boundless goodness of the endless ages to come? This is truly an unspeakable consolation when the mind lays hold of the truth that it is. "The peace of God that passeth all understanding" diffuses itself throughout the mental man where such a faith exists. "Even now are we the sons of God," this means that we are now guided and directed and controlled in our affairs.

Our foolish hearts are liable to stand in our way here. We are apt to feel as if it could not be. When our eyes open to the enormous magnitude of the earth, to the inconceivable bulk and distance of the sun, to the appalling vastness of the universe of suns and worlds beyond, we are staggered and think the idea of God attending to our little selves and our little affairs is out of the question. What is the cause of this thought? Examine and you will find it is this — the attributing to God of our littleness and weakness. We would not do so avowedly, but actually this is our secret assumption. We unconsciously reason that because, if, with our little power, we had to manage the stupendous affairs of the universe, we could not attend to the details of personal cares; therefore, it must be so with God. Let us get rid of all feelings

of this kind, they are the aberration of fallacy. The universe is one. The strength underlying it is one. This strength is God in His immensity. There is no limiting or exhausting of His power. Not only is nothing too great, but nothing is too small for Him. A sparrow cannot fall without Him. The hairs of your head are all numbered. Your affairs are not beneath His notice. "Commit thy way unto the Lord and He shall direct thy steps." Need you trouble how? You cannot understand His way, even in the most familiar things. Know ye what thought is? Know ye what light is? Know ye what life is? Can you conceive to yourself the two most elementary facts of time and space? If you cannot understand, but only take note of these common phenomena of being, why not take note of the higher authenticated phenomena, though they may elude your understanding! "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not to thine own understanding."

If all our sins are forgiven, if our ways are directed through this momentarily dark labyrinth of time, and if at the end of our weary journey, there waits a "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," which will appear to burst upon our eyes as soon as they are closed at death: and if beyond that culmination, there stretches away into the infinite distance the endless ages of perfect being in which our joy will never pall — our strength never decay, but our path shine brighter and brighter in the eternal felicity of unity with the everlasting strength and perfection and wisdom of God through Christ — have we not reason unutterable for doing as the eunuch did — "going on our way rejoicing"? It is only the darkness of the night and the weakness of our minds that admits of any faltering, and God, who knows our weakness, forgives the faltering, for it is in weakness that the foundation is laid for the great glory that is to give joy to both God and man. "My grace," said Jesus to Paul (and it was written for those who should come after), "is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore," he adds "will I glory in my infirmities." "Our light affliction" will not, by enlightened reason, be laid in the balance for a moment against the result that is being worked out for us by its means. How poor are all human achievements by comparison with what God is working in us by the Truth. How insignificant and intrinsically worthless are all human movements and contrivances outside the channel of God's work in Christ. They shine and impress in a certain way only the generation that is contemporary with them, but, judge them by the result — they are the mere burnished tinsel on coffin lids, destined to be forgotten utterly like the dust and cobwebs that gather in the darkness of the vault of death. The Word of the Lord endureth for ever, and this is the Word which by the gospel has been preached unto us.

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## Ultimate Unity with God

*High privilege to “remember Christ” — preparing the “Father’s House” — Jesus the “way” to the Father — this “way” ends with God — the Father in Jesus by indwelling Spirit — full unity with the Eternal awaits all faithful in Jesus.*

**W**HEN this memorial institution was first appointed, the Lord himself was present to speak living words of comfort and instruction. This was a privilege in which we are far behind the apostles. The Lord is neither here to speak, nor has he appointed anyone to speak as his delegate. Yet we have his words which is a very great matter. Our privilege is greater than it may seem. Although he is not here for our eyes to look upon, and our ears to hear his voice, as the apostles on that occasion heard it, what we do here this morning is done by his authority. The authority has come to us indirectly, still it has come, and not very indirectly either, all things considered. It comes to us through the apostle Paul who wrote to the Corinthians, “I have received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and said... Do this in remembrance of me.” He praised the Corinthian brethren that they “kept the ordinances he had delivered unto them” (1Cor. 11:2). He would praise us in the same connection if he were now alive. That is, it would be to his mind and meet with approval that we should thus break bread on the first day of the week in remembrance of Christ. To secure Paul’s approbation in this matter is to secure Christ’s approbation; for Christ has identified himself so closely with the word and work of the apostles as to say “He that heareth you (the apostles) heareth me.” Consequently, however deficient we may feel our situation in other respects, we may legitimately indulge in this supreme satisfaction, as we meet from Sunday to Sunday in the darkness and silence of his absence, that what we do in this respect is as wellpleasing to him as if he were with us, and perhaps more so, for it is no eye-service we render while he is away, as we thus call him to mind in the way of his own appointment.

It would, of course, be a privilege unspeakable to have him here to speak to us as he spoke to the twelve who were present on the occasion of its first observance. That privilege we hope to have on the not now very distant day, of which he spoke at that time when he said, “This fruit of the vine I shall drink with you new in my Father’s Kingdom.” But have we not a higher degree of privilege even now than we at all times make full use of? If our eyes were clearer and our memories stronger and our minds less clogged with the pre-occupations of this evil state, we should almost feel all the time as if we “had been with Jesus” in the personal sense. He is not here to speak to us, but he has contrived to have the words he did speak placed reliably on record and

brought safely down to our own time, so that we can read them in our own tongue in our own very midst. What a privilege is this! A portion of those words has been read to us. Let us dwell on them. They are full of light and instruction and encouragement.

“Let not your hearts be troubled,” he said. The apostles were disposed to be much troubled. No wonder, the clouds of adversity were gathering round. The Lord had spoken dark words that had perplexed them: “One of you shall betray me.” “The Son of Man goeth as it is written of him.” “All ye shall be offended because of me this night.” The Lord himself was troubled. He said so: “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death.” Yet he says, “Let not your hearts be troubled.” This is a gleam of light in the darkness. There is something in cheering words even when circumstances may be the opposite of cheery. To be told to cheer up by anyone helps us to cheer up even if there is nothing particularly to cheer up about. How much more when the words are spoken by one who has command of the circumstances. Christ spoke the words not for the sake of the apostles alone, but for all who should afterwards believe on him. All these things that are written were written for the whole family of God. God knew they would be needed in all the days of their trouble and darkness. They are sorely needed yet, for these days are still current. We are often in circumstances of deep trouble. Let us not sink under them. Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness. An earnest of this light will strike into our desolate hearts if we open our ears to this most sweet voice: “Let not your hearts be troubled.”

Jesus gives a reason for not being troubled — a reason that holds good with all the children of God to the end of the time, “Ye believe in God.” There is no greater balm to the mind than this. Only those who really believe know the power of it. It is the feeling expressed in Psalm 16, “I have set the Lord always before me. Therefore I will not be moved.” A full sense of the fact that all creation subsists in Him — that it has been contrived by His wisdom and is upheld by His power — and that His very presence fills the whole of it — that He is not far from every one of us — will fully fortify the mental man in all the fluctuating conditions of our vain life. The fact itself is exhilarating without reference to personal advantage; but the comfort is complete and inexpressible when the mind is opened out to personal hope in the beautiful words which Jesus proceeded to add: “In my Father’s house are many mansions (or abiding places). If it were not so, I would have told you.” He would not have encouraged illusions. He would not have countenanced their hopes of inheritance in the Kingdom of God if they had not been well founded. He would plainly have said they were indulging a phantom if it had been so. But it was not so. It was true that the Father’s house to which they were looking had many untenanted places waiting the prepared and the elect of God — places that would be gloriously occupied when the work of

preparation should be complete. There are no abiding places now, for saint or sinner. Our days upon the earth are as a shadow. "Wise men die; likewise the fool and the brutish person perish." All life is but a vapor that appeareth for a very little time and then vanisheth away. But in the Father's house are many abiding places. It is real comfort in the apparent vanity of life. It is the language of parable, to which Jesus was prone, but the meaning is plain. It is the clothing given to the doctrine of the Kingdom which Jesus preached and which all the prophets foreshowed. To the eye of animal sense, it would seem as if there were no Father's house anywhere, but this scientific age has taught nothing more decisively than this, that the eye of animal sense is a very short-seeing eye and a very false-seeing eye, and that there are things in heaven and earth which it has no power of knowing. It cannot see into the future. To the eye of animal sense, the earth and human life are a wide desert in which there is no providence or plan beyond that of the prowling wolves, who leave the bones of their hapless prey to bleach in the sun. But God has revealed what man could never have known, that He will set up a kingdom on the earth in which His tabernacle will be with men, and blessedness and glory prevail — banishing all evil — bringing in everlasting joy. He has revealed that He will accomplish this work by His son, laying the foundation in him first of all, in righteousness, the righteousness of obedience, the righteousness of sin-condemnation in his crucifixion, the righteousness of inevitable resurrection for a holy one, and the righteousness of ascension to the Father's right hand, to make intercession for all that come unto God by him, "to purify unto Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." This was the work which the Father had given him to do. It was the work continually before his mind as the explanation of his appearance in Israel's midst 1,800 years ago "when the fulness of the time had come." The consummation of it in the development of the Father's House was "the joy set before him," of which Paul speaks in Hebrews 12:2. He looked forward to this Father's house, which, in the hour of his sorrow, was empty and required preparation. He looked forward to the time when it would be joyfully tenanted in its many abiding places as the result of his work. This was the prospect on which he aimed to fix the eyes of his disciples for comfort: "I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself." Thus the absence of Christ that is so distressing to his real brethren and so stumbling to the mere caviller, is a necessity. It is part of the programme. It is part of the work of preparation. It is something, therefore, to which we can become reconciled in the attitude of intelligent patience. If the preparation work were not done, the abiding places would never be prepared. To everything there is a season and a time. Preparation is a self-evident necessity in this work at every stage. For example, we had to be born before our personal part could begin. But this was not enough: we had to grow up. But

this was not enough, we had to be instructed. This was not enough: we had to be hewn into acceptable shape by experience and trouble and chastisement. In all this, Christ has borne his part, for he says, "I know my sheep... other sheep I have which are not of this (Jewish) fold: them also I must bring."

So with the larger phases of the work, development by stages is the rule. It was not enough that Adam was made, disobedience had to come. It was not enough that Adam was driven out of Eden, there had to be sacrifice and law and promise. It was not enough that Noah was saved from a whole population consigned to watery destruction, Abraham had to be called, and Israel had to be nationally organized, and all the other phases had to come in their due succession. The sacrifice and resurrection and ascension of Christ had the supremest place. "I go to prepare a place for you" was a pregnant saying — intelligible only to those who know the Truth as a complete Bible system. The work of preparation required Christ to die and to rise and to depart and to remain away for a long time as he now is. When the work is finished, he will return in great joy to dispense to his people the results — calling them from the dead, welcoming them to the presence of his glory, and associating them with himself in the unspeakable glory and honor of the work of leading all mankind into the honor of God, the joy of wisdom, and the felicity of life everlasting.

"Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know" he remarks, in apparent response to the surprised looks of his disciples. He was speaking of his death, and he seems to assume that the disciples would understand. But they did not understand, as becomes apparent at various junctures, evidently to Christ's pain: "How is it that ye do not understand?" He had spoken to them plainly of his approaching death, resurrection and departure: but their understanding as yet was closed. Thomas now becomes spokesman of the bewilderment with which they listened: "Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way?" The answer to this ("I am the way") appears at first sight to be no answer, but a mere trifling with the question. How vastly different is the fact when we understand. It is a complete answer, a precise answer, a profound answer, oh, how much so. Before we can see it, we must have a larger idea than was before the mind of Thomas. He was thinking of Jesus going as a man goes from one place to another. In this sense, the "way" would be road or direction taken. But Jesus was not speaking in this limited sense. He was speaking in a larger sense — a sense in which a man, and not a road was the way — the sense of relation and state. "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." "He that cometh to God must believe that He is," says Paul. This is not a mechanical coming. No man can come to God in that sense. We do not require to shift our place in space to go to God, for God dwells in every place in the fulness of His Spirit filling heaven and earth

(which does not conflict with that other truth that in a particular and bodily sense, He dwells in heaven. The Father in heaven and His effluent Spirit are one person, as the sun in the sky, and the light that comes from it are one sun). To come to God, we have to be reconciled to Him, and become pleasing to Him, so that our approaches to Him in thanksgiving and worship are acceptable to Him. There are some in whom He can take no pleasure, as He told Israel (Amos 5:21-23; Isa. 1:14), whose very religious exercises are an abomination to Him. An acceptable approach in this way is to be followed by the still closer approach of nature — “changed in a moment,” so that our dull mortal bodies will become spiritual bodies, conformed in all respects to the likeness of the Lord’s own glorious body, as we are so plainly assured by the “apostles.” Thus changed, we shall truly have come to the Father, in having become spiritual and glorious, and powerful and immortal as He is — partakers of the divine nature in fulness and truth.

It was to prepare the way for this emancipation that Jesus was about to be temporarily separated from his disciples. This way to the Father was to be prepared in himself. “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” The way was to be prepared in the offering up of himself to God in sacrifice, which the Father required at his hands for the condemnation of sin in the flesh, preparatory to resurrection to glorious and immortal life, and to ascension to the mediatorial work to be done for those who should afterwards “come unto God by him.” No man can come to God apart from this arrangement of His own wisdom. It is what Christ declared, and it is the declaration of every faithful testimony of the Truth in our day — the one declaration which gives more offence than all others — namely, that men are not in the way of hope unless they place themselves in Christ in the way appointed. Well, we must not be deterred from the declaration of the Truth, because it gives offence. We are to speak the Truth in love, but the Truth we are to speak, and this is the truth — that Christ, and Christ alone, is the way of life and hope for sinful man; and that Christ can only be entered by the belief and obedience of the gospel or baptism; and that men can only continue in him by keeping his commandments faithfully to the end.

Jesus proceeded to say other things that apparently had no connection with the subject, and yet which have to do with the very marrow of it. “If ye had known me, ye would have known my Father also.” Did not the disciples know Jesus then? Yes, in a manner, but not as yet in a perfect manner. They knew and believed in him as “the Messiah that should come into the world” according to all the prophets, but their idea of him as the Messiah was too limited as yet. They knew him as one person knows another. They did not yet know him in his intimate relation to the Father who was working by him and in him. He desired to give them an insight into his higher greatness, and made some startling statements with that view: “If ye had known me, ye



should have known my *Father* also, and from henceforth ye know him and have seen Him" (John 14:7). "Known the Father?" "Have seen the Father?" and yet no man had seen the Father (John 6:46). This was baffling to the as the yet unenlightened minds of the disciples. Philip gave utterance to their feelings: "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." This is the highest desire of godly men, to be brought into direct touch with the Eternal One. What an answer Jesus returned to Philip: "Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father: how then sayest thou, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father and the Father in me?" These words it is impossible to understand except in the light of the truth revealed concerning the Father — that He fills all space — that all things are in Him — embraced in His universal presence, and are but the expression and contrivance of His own eternal power. But even this truth does not give us a complete explanation. It is the first step towards an explanation; another truth is needed. If all are in God, wherein did Christ differ from all? The other truth is supplied in the statement that not only was he in the Father, but the Father was in him. This was not affirmable of other men. Jesus was in the Father in being embraced in the universe-filling Spirit, which is the Father, in illimitable immensity, and the Father was in him by this same Spirit dwelling in him and energizing him to the performance of all he did and said. It might be illustrated by a diving bell: the bell is in the water and the water in the bell. All illustrations necessarily fail in resembling the infinite, but still this is an approach to the idea conveyed by the words "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." The idea is that of a man so connected with the Father as to be in complete unity with Him, so that the one is the reflex and instrument of the other, or as Jesus said, "I and my Father are one." "Believest thou not," he proceeds, "that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself." Here is a self separate from the Father, notwithstanding the unity, but a self, nevertheless, employed by the Father in the speaking. "The Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works," as he said on another occasion, "Of mine own self I can do nothing." He appears to read hesitation in the minds of the disciples. He entreats them to receive his declarations: "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me," or else (he now appeals to their reason), "Believe me for the very works sake." How could they account for the things he did except by the presence of an in-dwelling power that was not with other men? Looking upon his outward person, they might not perceive any difference between him and other men, but looking at his works and listening to his words, he necessarily seemed very different from all other men. Whence the difference? "My Father;" this was Christ's explanation and the inevitable conclusion of reason. It is a most glorious idea, that in Christ we touch the Father—that the Father is not a distant

being in the background who has to be pacified by a kindly Christ, but that He is enshrined in Christ and comes near to us in him, "reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."

Jesus assured the disciples that whatever difficulty they had at the time in opening their minds to the truth he was presenting to them, in the day of eternal life they would see it clearly and rejoice in it fully. "Because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father and ye in me and I in you." This is the definite and attractive prospect before us in the gospel. This is the finish of the process of which this breaking of bread is but a contributory part. It is the highest goal of rational being—this coming to God in the redemption of bodily nature from death, the restoration of a broken friendship and the establishment of a perfect fellowship and service, in which there will necessarily be the sweetness of pure and effectual worship, and the joy of a full infusion and unity with the Eternal. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." "Blessed are ye that hunger and thirst after righteousness, ye shall be filled."

The agonizing after holiness; the aspiration after the infinite and the perfect, is not a chimera except apart from Christ. Out of him, it is the chase of phantoms. There is much of this vain yearning in certain circles; and men have invented various methods of attaining their desires—differing with different ages and countries. Oriental mysticism is a form of it. Buddhism finding modern favor is an effort in the same direction. Theosophy is the latest and most fashionable phase of the bootless quest which was even pursued among the Essenes in the days of Paul, "in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which men had not seen, vainly puffed up by their fleshly minds... which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship and humility and neglecting of the body" (Col. 2:18,23).

It is all a mistake. God cannot be attained by man at all, except by God's permission, for man is alienated and cast off from Him, however little he may realise it in his pride. And God only permits the approach of sinners in His own way, and that way is Christ crucified and raised—to the Greeks of every kind, foolishness; and to the Jews a stumbling "but to them who are called, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God, because the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1Cor. 1:23-25). Wherein we may have attained to the revealed wisdom of God in this matter, as symbolised by the bread and wine on the Table, let us hold fast to our privilege, in all humble gratitude yet with all the firmness and determination of enlightened boldness, refusing to be led away by the thousand plausibilities of an ingenious, metaphysical but God-neglecting age; and holding with inflexible grip on the immovable rock of God's revealed wisdom as embodied in the Scriptures of His Truth.

## Jeremiah's Experiences an Example

*Jeremiah in the stocks — by order of religious leaders — obligation to “preach the Word” — terrible awakening for deniers and persecutors of Truth — Jeremiah disappointed at failure of preaching — yet protected by God and prophecies came true.*

WE know something of the comforts and advantages of the Truth. Sometimes we may be tempted to think we know more of the other side — the distresses and mortifications and drawbacks connected with its profession. We may think there is extreme truth in the saying of Solomon, “In much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.” When such may be our mood in the changeful experiences and conditions of human nature, we cannot do better than act on the exhortation of James, who says, “Take, my brethren, the prophets for an example of suffering, affliction and of patience.” We are enabled to do so this morning from the reading of Jeremiah (Ch. 20).

Here we have the prophet in a very extreme state of affliction: “in the stocks” (v. 2). None of us have been in the stocks. It is a form of penal infliction that has gone out of use in Great Britain and some other countries, but here and there the stocks are to be seen as a relic of the past; and we may form some idea of the bodily suffering undergone by those who were put into them for even the short space of twenty-four hours as Jeremiah was (v. 3). Hands and feet locked into holes in a wooden frame compelled the unhappy victim to sit in one position on the ground in a public place all the time. We may be subject to disadvantages and annoyances on account of our faithfulness to the Truth, but we have nothing of this sort to endure. I imagine a single night in the stocks would make us feel our tribulation to be very light indeed. Yet here is an actual prophet of God, with the word of inspiration in his mouth, subjected to this extreme humiliation and distress.

At whose hands? Here is something to think of, at the hands of the “chief governor of the house of Yahweh” (v. 1). One would expect barbarity from a heathen; from the head caretaker of the holy temple of God, it would be natural to expect something else. It was from God's own people that the prophets of God received their trouble. It was Jerusalem that killed the prophets and stoned those who were sent from God to her, down to God's own Son, “with wicked hands crucified and slain.” Need we wonder at the opposition of religious people to the Truth? It distresses some people greatly to find the curate or the vicar, or the rector or the dean or the bishop denouncing the Truth as detestable heresy. It need not distress in the least. Even if those professional ecclesiastics had the divine origin which they

imagine; even if they had been originally appointed of God, as the Levites were; even if they had the authority of the anointing oil of the sanctuary upon them, it would be no new thing for an order of men originally divine to be so far astray from the spirit and purpose of their calling as to set themselves in opposition to the will of God and his faithful messengers, for here in Jerusalem was the whole hierarchy of the priests against Jeremiah. But how much more easily borne is the opposition of the clergy when we realise that they are an entirely and human artificial order of men, whose "call" is not of God but of man: who owe their position wholly to maternal ambition or social exigency or individual aspiration under the operation of a false system. "I have not sent them, yet they ran," said God concerning the false prophets. So He would certainly say of the clergy did He speak now as in days of old, and as He will speak again very shortly.

Why did "the chief governor of the House of Yahweh" proceed to such extremities against Jeremiah? Because, as we read in v. 1, "he heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things." What things? The things going before which are all summarized in the last verse of the immediately preceding chapter: "Thus saith Yahweh of Hosts, the God of Israel, behold I will bring upon this city and upon all her towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it, because they have hardened their necks that they might not hear my words." The people of Jerusalem, instigated by the religious leaders, persecuted Jeremiah for speaking the Word of Yahweh, which was distasteful to them. Is not this the present posture of affairs as regards the Truth? What is our offence against the religious community but just this, that we declare the Word of the Lord in opposition to the traditions and ideas that are palatable to the people? We seek to bring them under the influence of the Word of God. We have no other aim — no other interest. We seek to induce them to abandon the lying traditions of men and to embrace the authenticated verities of God's own revealed Truth; and for this we are hated and rejected with a bitterness of animus quite equal to that which led to the killing of the prophets, and quite equal to the repetition of the old sanguinary barbarities, if the nature of the times admitted of it. Well, we look at Jeremiah and take comfort. If an original medium of God's living voice was so treated at the hands of God's actually chosen people and appointed priests, we need not be alarmed or surprised at a similar unfriendliness manifested towards the mere retailers of that Word.

It may be said, we have no message, and therefore cannot rank ourselves with the original purveyors of the Word. This is only partly true; in large part it would be a mistake. Every man has a message who has received the Truth in a full enlightenment and a full assurance of faith. Are we not commanded that if a man have ears (that is, capacity to listen discerningly), he is to hear what the Spirit said to the ecclesias by John in Patmos? And did not the Spirit say, "Let him that heareth, say, Come"? What is this but an

authorisation and an injunction to deliver the invitation that has come from heaven to men to become partakers of eternal life? A man's standing in this affair depends upon his ability to discern and realise the situation. As Jesus said of another matter, "all men cannot receive this saying," so all men cannot perceive their day and their calling and their opportunity in this matter. They think the work of the Truth is not for them; that it was an affair for the apostles, and has been done; and that no man now is under any special obligation to send round the message. We should be disposed to regard such a view as proof that those holding it are not among those who have "heard" the Word to saving effect. Jesus says, "Ye shall know them by their fruits." Now if any man profess to have accepted the invitation of the Gospel, and be insensible to the obligation which the Lord has laid upon such to "Say come," it shows that the soil of his mind, in which the good seed has been sown, is not of a fertile quality, and that consequently he is an unfruitful servant. There are hundreds of forms of fruitfulness; but it is a bad sign if there is sterility here, where lies the beginning of all life spiritually — viz., the proclamation of the Word of the Lord.

We have to note that Jeremiah was authorized to declare (verse 4) to Pashur, the leader of the opposition against him, that he would shortly be a terror to himself and his friends in the particular share he would have in the troubles at that time impending over Jerusalem: "I will give all the strength of this city and all the labors thereof, and all the precious things thereof, and all the treasures of the Kings of Judah, into the hands of their enemies which shall spoil them, and take them, and carry them to Babylon. And thou, Pashur, and all that dwell in thine house, shalt go into captivity, and thou shalt be buried there, thou and all thy friends to whom thou hast prophesied lies" — which came to pass shortly after the delivery of the message. These things were not written with an exclusive application to the day of their occurrence. They adumbrate the principle and the method of God's procedure in all cases where His Word is operative. There are probably many now living of whom the same things are true in the special relations of the time of the end. They reject the testimony of God, and "prophesy lies" to the contemporary generation and flourish for the time being in a great and swelling prosperity which inflates them to an arrogance quite equal to putting all the troublesome Jeremiahs in the stocks, and worse, if they had the power. What but a terrible experience awaits them in the great upturn which at the Lord's coming will remove their foundations from under their feet and convict them as ungodly scorners and blasphemers, notwithstanding the popularity and sanctity of the position which meanwhile they maintain in the eyes of the world? Nor will the grave be a screen for them from the righteous judgment of God, should they come within the line of that responsibility which the light creates, of which God only can be judge. Though they peacefully pass away amid the sumptuous accessories of wealth,

and be interred amid the honors and regrets of their generation, they will open their eyes at the return of Christ to behold and share in that "judgment to come," which Paul made so prominent in all his exhibitions of the Truth. There will be modern, as well as ancient, instances of Christ's declaration to the Philadelphian ecclesia: "Behold, I will make them, of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but do lie, behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee" (Rev. 3:9).

Jeremiah was deeply and bitterly exercised by the hostile attitude of the people to whom he delivered the Word of God. He gives expression to his feelings in a way that at first sight may seem a little difficult to understand: (verse 7) "O Lord, Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily; everyone mocketh me." It is evident that Jeremiah expected a different result from this. He expected to be attended to and influential in his words, in accordance with what God had said to him. But in this Jeremiah was mistaken. Granted that the words addressed to him sounded as if they meant a triumphant course for Jeremiah right away through from the commencement of his work. They meant this in God's sense, but not in the sense that Jeremiah put upon them. They meant that kingdoms would rise and kingdoms fall in accordance with the Word that he should speak, and not at all in accordance with the words that the false prophets, who were popular in Israel, would speak, and they meant that, notwithstanding the extreme opposition he should encounter on account of his words, the plots of his enemies to stop his mouth would all miscarry, and he would be found at the finish of the storm unprevailed against, while his enemies should be blown to the four winds. And so it came to pass: for though Jeremiah was "in derision daily," and "mocked" by "everyone," his word had the power of divine purpose in it, and was of such weight that the king on his throne sent to him secretly when he was a prisoner in the hands of the princes to get his advice (Jer. 37:15, 17); and though they intrigued against him, and at last shut him up in prison, and even cast him into a miry dungeon that he might perish, God was with him and protected him from their enmity, and at the last, when his enemies perished miserably at the siege, or were put to the sword when dragged as captives before Nebuchadnezzar at the close of the siege, Jeremiah was an object of favor at the hands of the officers of the king, and emerged in safety from the sea of trouble through which he came in the doing of the work appointed to him. God's promise to him came to pass. The suggestion that God had deceived him relates only to his own disappointed expectations. There may be something for us to apply to our experience here. God had made promise that He will supply our needs if we seek first the Kingdom. If we suppose, as we are liable to suppose in the childhood of our faith, that this means abundance, and an abundance supplied to us in a way that will save us

all forethought and trouble, we shall be disappointed, because there are other objects that God has with us — objects of self-abasement and trial of faith — requiring that we shall know what it is to be of the poor of this world, and to have a taste of the purifying tribulation “whereof all (the children) are partakers.” These objects must be realized in the process of our daily experience. God will fulfil the promise to supply our needs, but not in a way that will interfere with these objects, nor in the form or to the extent we might imagine to be necessary. We may be tempted to exclaim with Jeremiah sometimes, “O Lord, Thou hast deceived me,” but the fault will lie with our own misinterpretation, and not with any failure in His Word, which is impossible. “Neither tribulation, nor distress, persecution nor famine, nor death, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword, can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” His love may require these very severities to secure for us a place in the haven of everlasting rest and joy at last.

Jeremiah was inclined (verse 9) to abstain from any further declaration of the words of the Lord in view of its evident uselessness, and the fact that it was only a cause of trouble. We may sometimes share this feeling, but if we let reason reign, we shall be exercised as he was, and feel His Word like a burning fire shut up, which will give us no rest till it have free and constant vent.

The chapter closes in a despairing strain: “Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labor and sorrow?” “Cursed be the day wherein I was born; let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed.” This is human weakness. The record of it is useful for all the children of God who have come after Jeremiah. It is an evidence to us that the prophets were men of like infirmities to ourselves, and, further, it enables us to realise that the waves of darkness and despair that may sometimes overwhelm us in the extreme weakness characterising the earthly nature we now possess, are not for our destruction, nor even tokens of reprobation, but are simply part and parcel of the evil through which we are passing to the Kingdom and glory of God.

Even in this very chapter, Jeremiah is able to burst out, as with a gleam of strong light in the darkness, “Sing unto the Lord: praise ye the Lord, for He hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evil-doers.” And we know, on the authority of Christ, that a high and a glorious place awaits him in the company of “Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets.” So even now, in the midst of the burden and groaning of this evil state, the cloud lifts ever and anon, and reveals a vision of reality that enables us to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God and to give thanks to His name. And we may look forward with anticipation not unfounded that our faith and work will be accepted in Christ, that our sins and shortcomings will be forgiven, and that we shall be invited to a place in the glorious inheritance of the saints in light!

## Aliens — Sin — Responsibility

*Obadiah's message to aliens — aliens sin against God — examples of past punishments for transgression — further judgment if responsible — God, owner of all, has spoken to all men — will not always tolerate universal revolt against Himself.*

THIS time it is the writing of Obadiah, the prophet. Of Obadiah himself we know very little. This is no great drawback. It was not what the prophets were in themselves that made them important to us, it was the communication of which they were the mediums. God made use of insignificant men often, on the principle defined by Paul in writing to the Corinthians concerning the spiritual light in the apostles: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be (manifestly) of God and not of us."

It is the vision of Obadiah—what he saw. God speaks of "the foolish prophets that follow their own spirit and *have seen nothing*" (Eze. 13:3). "Yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart" (Jer. 23:26). The prophets, without inspiration, were no more than other men, and, therefore, could see nothing in "their own spirits" but those fortuitous combinations of ideas and imaginations which are natural to all men and profitable to none for guidance in the things of righteousness or futurity. What God causes a man to see by the action of inspiration is another thing. We may then see something with him that is of advantage to us to know.

This vision of Obadiah differs somewhat from the visions of the other prophets. It is brief, but that is no great detriment. Much may be said in few words. It is in its topic that it principally differs. The messages of the prophets as a rule relate to Israel, and we are directed either to the reproof of Israel's wanderings or the delineation of Israel's future. But Obadiah has to do with an alien nation. "Thus said the Lord God concerning Edom." We all know who Edom was. It was a community descended from Esau, the brother of Jacob, for whom Edom was another name. Though a son of Isaac, he was not beloved of God, but otherwise. "Jacob have I loved; Esau have I hated." To men who judge the matter from a merely natural point of view, this seems strange. Of the two men, judged from this point of view, Esau seems the more lovable of the two: "Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents." Esau was what people would consider a more manly, frank, and interesting character; Jacob was his mother's boy, and appears in the light of what might seem overreaching and underhanded. Why should one be loved and the other hated? We get the clue in that divine saying: "I love them that love Me." Jacob was a lover of his father's God; Esau was a mere lover of nature. This was a great difference, and continues to this



day, the great distinction between men that are godly and men that are not. And it constitutes the ground of aversion between one class and the other; for there is a fundamental aversion that is almost mutual between those who love God and those who love the present evil world. The love of the present world is due to the exclusive action of the mind of the flesh, or the mind generated by the unenlightened brain left to itself; the love of God is due to the enlightenment of the natural mind by the Spirit of God in revelation. Hence the explanation given by Paul of the antagonism between Isaac and his brother Ishmael: "He that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit; even so it is now." The two states are mutually repellent on the natural principle universally illustrated in society that people who love different things do not love one another. If this principle operates where there are different natural loves, it operates more powerfully where spiritual love comes into the process. The world hates those who love God, because it has no love for God. Jesus said it would be so: "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, therefore the world hateth you." He said also in prayer to the Father, "I have given them Thy Word, and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." Again Paul says: "We, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise."

Obadiah, then has to deal with the descendants of a man who was not in the covenant of promise, and to whose posterity God had assigned a district to the southwest of the land of promise, consisting of rocky valleys and precipitous places. Concerning this community—active, predatory, zealous, and prosperous, Obadiah speaks. What had he to say? Words of "lamentation and mourning and woe." Destruction and desolation are foreshown for reasons given. "Thou shouldest not have" done this; "thou shouldest not have" done that. Thou shouldest not have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction. Thou shouldest not have stood in the crossway to cut off those of his that did escape; thou shouldest not have spoken proudly in the day of their distress.

Well, why lay stress on those things? There is a reason. It is written in the prophet Amos concerning Israel. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquity." From this it might seem as if God would have no punishments for any other. But here in Obadiah is a case of punishing for their iniquity a nation whom God did not "know" as he knew Israel. And it is far, far from the only case. In the very prophet Amos, in which we read "You only have I known," we read, "for three transgressions of *Damascus*, and for four, I will not turn away from the punishment thereof"... "For three transgressions of *Gaza*, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof... for three transgressions of *Tyrus*, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof;" all these were "families of the earth" whom God had not "known" as He had known Israel:

yet there is punishment for them. We should, therefore, reason wrongly if we were to infer from the statement in Amos, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquity," that God would not punish other nations. He expressly bars the way against this misinterpretation by sending Jeremiah to "all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth" to say, "Lo, I begin to bring evil on the city which is called by My name, and should ye be utterly unpunished? Ye shall not be unpunished, for I will call for a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth, saith Yahweh of Hosts." Even the Canaanites, whom Israel succeeded in the land were examples of punishment for iniquity. Moses told Israel (Deu. 9:4) that "for the wickedness of those nations, Yahweh doth drive them out before thee — not for thy righteousness or the uprightness of thy heart." In Leviticus 18, you may read a description of the wicked ways of the Canaanites. Israel is commanded (vv. 24-25), "Defile not ye yourselves in any of those things: for in all these things the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: and the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it." The flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah are lessons to the same point. The statement, "You only have I known" is absolutely true both as to that fact and as to the special punishment growing out of it. It is the negative deduction from it that would be wrong. Israel has been punished as no other nation has because privileged as no other; but other nations are not unpunished. The principle regulating the dispensation of judgment is the simple and reasonable one affirmed by the Lord: "To whom much is given, of them shall much be required."

The principle has application in another direction, because the work of God has taken an individual after a national form. The individual salvation offered to Israel in the preaching of John and Jesus, and rejected by them, has been offered to the Gentiles instead, and along with it a call to "all men everywhere to repent," and a "revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds... in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:17-18; 2:5-6, 16). This operation develops a household of Christ, whose house, men continue to be so long as they "hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope steadfast unto the end." These have special privileges and will have special accountability to answer for; but some have reasoned that because this is true, therefore the rebellious among men who "refuse him that speaketh," will have nothing to answer for in "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" if they should happen to be among the dead. This is a fallacy of the nature of the supposed mistake to which we have already referred, viz., — that those would make, who should reason, that because God knew Israel only of all the families of the earth, therefore He would not punish the other families. It is a mistake made by some who have pushed true principles too far through failing to make allowance for other

principles. It is not a mistake made by those who have remained in harmony with Dr. Thomas from the beginning. These have always recognized that the Truth creates responsibility wherever it understandingly comes, and that if men refuse the submission which God commands, they expose themselves to the terrors of the second death, naturally taking rank with the third class of the parable — additional to the faithful and unfaithful members of the household, whom the Lord describes as “those mine enemies who would not that I should reign over them!”

How terrible it will be in that day, if through looseness of doctrine in this matter on our part, men should find themselves awake from the dead to judgment who did not expect to be there, and who would naturally turn their reproaches against us. “Why did you tell me I was not responsible?” Paul declared himself “free from the blood of all men,” because he “had not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God.” In this position we can scarcely consider ourselves if we lull people into a deadly indifference by teaching them that if they choose to disobey God, the worst they have to look for is to be left undisturbed in an everlasting grave. This is not the worst. There is a judgment which shall “devour the adversary” of which every (responsible) soul of man will partake who are “contentious, and do not obey the Truth, but obey unrighteousness” (Rom. 2:8). This judgment is in “the time of the dead” — that is, the time of the awaking of the dead “that they should be judged” — not of those who, having no understanding “shall not rise,” but have passed away as the beasts that perish; but of those who, notwithstanding their contact with “the light that is come into the world,” loved darkness rather than light — and who, having heard the words of Christ as the acknowledged words of Christ and of God, and having rejected them practically in refusing to walk in accord with them, will be “judged by them in the last day.”

These are the solemn teachings of Christ and the apostles. The contrary doctrine is based upon too narrow a construction of “covenant-relationship.” This relationship is more an affair of benefit than of accountability. Outside the covenant, there can be no eternal life; but everything shows that men need not be inside that covenant to be the objects of His righteous anger and punishment. We must not overlook the wide proprietorship of the Deity in all His works. If “the cattle upon a thousand hills” are His, much more the teeming millions of Adam’s race. He is the “God of the spirits of all flesh,” as Moses declared him to be. “All souls are His,” as He Himself said by Ezekiel, “the soul of the son and the soul also of the father.” If He had not spoken to them, their being His would have done no more for them than it does for the beasts that perish; but He has spoken to them in their cast-off condition, and though few of them know the fact or are in illuminated relation with the fact, it does not lessen the terrible import of the fact to those who cast it knowingly aside and live indifferently to it as if man were his own maker and

God's claims on him were nothing. There is very little sense on the earth at present of what is due to God. An outrageous theology and a false science have, between them, so emasculated and confused all reasonable ideas on the subject that it is one of the last things recognized, "that God hath made all things for Himself, yea even the wicked for the day of His power."

But let not us sleep as do others. We are not of the night but of the day. As such, it belongs to us to reflect the light of day in advance. It may be to little purpose as regards others, but as regards ourselves, it is well-pleasing to God that while we sojourn in the land of the living, we should let the light shine, both in our manifest works and submission to God, and in our re-echo of the testimony that the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; and that though, for a time, He tolerates the universal revolt against Himself, He will not always restrain His righteous anger, but will show Himself "as a consuming fire against all unrighteousness of men, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints and admired in all them that believe."

There may not seem to be much comfort in the exhibition of this phase of the Truth. Looked at all round, there is more than appears. There is nothing but comfort in the prospect of the effectual assertion and vindication and establishment of the authority of God in the earth. There can be no peace or joy or wellbeing till this is done. Part of the process consists of that great judicial inquisition which He has been pleased to appoint. He will root the wicked out of the earth, but not without showing cause. He will confound the arrogant and take the wise in their own craftiness, by exhibiting their folly to all men, as the fitting and effectual prelude to His own management of the earth. This He will do on the day which He hath appointed for judging the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath appointed. This day, which is a terrible day, will only be terrible to the Lord's enemies. It will be a glorious day for those who love righteousness and hate iniquity, and who wait daily upon God in the patient continuance in well doing which He has required. The day of the ending of the present evil world will necessarily be a day of storm and trouble and clouds and thick darkness: but because of its presage of the everlasting day of light and love that lies beyond, it will be a day to be much hailed and much remembered by all the friends of God.

It is no unnatural association of terms in Isaiah that in the same breath describes "the day of vengeance of our God" as a day that will "comfort all that mourn"(Isa. 61:2). There can be no comfort to God's mourners till earth's transgressors have become the subjects of God's vengeance; for among the many causes of their mourning is this, that the transgressors lift the head on high, and to the wicked for the time being, the earth is given in

undisturbed possession. Jesus asks the question, "Shall not God avenge His own elect who cry day and night unto Him?" (Luke 18:7). A section of them are apocalyptically exhibited as ejaculating "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" It is not an unscriptural prayer, therefore, to pray, "O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, lift up Thyself, Thou judge of the earth. Render a reward to the proud. Let not man prevail: let the heathen be judged in Thy sight. Put them in fear, O Lord, that the nations may know themselves to be but men." He will answer this prayer at the time appointed, "though He bear long with them." Then will He at the same time "comfort all (His own people) that mourn, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." Then will they exclaim, as it is written in the same chapter, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord: my soul shall be joyful in my God: for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation: He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations." Then will be fulfilled what is written in Obadiah: "Upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance: and there shall be holiness, and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions... and saviours shall come up on Mount Zion to judge the Mount of Esau, and the Kingdom shall be Yahweh's."

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## Choose God — Accept Consequences

*God silent, but will speak again — God's love better than life — dreadfulness of forgetting God — wicked world ripe for punishment — shun their ways — choose God regardless unpopularity, etc — obedience brings immeasurable blessing.*

**W**E shall find instruction, help, and consolation in the beautiful Psalm of David, which we have just been singing—the Psalm in which he declares his highest mental hunger to be a hunger after God. We have just sung "My soul thirsteth for Thee; my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is." How few men are to be met with on the earth who are in this state of mind towards God; yet it is the state of mind that makes a man a godly man, and it is the godly man that God chooses for Himself. It is a reasonable state of mind when the claims of reason are fully seen. God is necessarily the highest object of desire with a mind

made to reach after the delight in the infinite and the perfect and the everlasting. Such is the ultimate desire of the human mind when developed to its full capacity.

But this desire is not only little developed by the order of things at present active upon the earth, but it is even balked and violated when it is developed. There is nothing to gratify it except the silent proclamation of God in nature, and the manifestation of Him by revelation which has been preserved in the Bible. There is no apparent activity and no apparent guidance among men except that of men. The earth seems given over to unchallenged man, so that he who is the most unscrupulous is the most successful, provided he is also the most energetic and the most cunning. God apparently takes no notice and no part. Prayer is apparently a futile appeal, and faith the fantasy of a fool. "Oh, that God would speak!" is the natural exclamation of the godly man. If this state of things were to continue without interruption, godliness would soon be an effete superstition. God has not hitherto been without interruption. God has not always been silent, and He will not always preserve the present silence. The fact of His having spoken is too apparent to be doubted when all the proofs of it are in view; and the promise that He will speak again is too plain to be mistaken, while the intimation that He would be silent at this time is too direct for that silence to be misunderstood. While it continues, it is a trying experience, causing the intense thirst that David describes. Its continuance for a while is a necessity in preparation for the day when it will end in joyful streams in the desert. "To see Thy power and Thy glory" was David's strong desire in which he has the company of every one of like mind.

"Better is Thy love than life," exclaims he. If we are tempted to ask how can this be, we may see the fulness of our answer if we reflect. Life is only a transient thing, hanging on conditions that cannot last, whereas to be loved of God, who is everlasting, is to be made sure at last of every gift and every good. For a man to possess the love of God in the sense of being loved of God is to be the subject of the highest possession possible to a created being, for the Lord will at last withhold no good thing from such. To such, the statement "All things are yours," will ultimately apply in the most absolute sense. God requires our love as the condition of the continuance of His. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," is the first and the great command. We must come to this if we are to come to final good. Surely it ought to be easy for a man to love God. Love is invariably drawn out by excellence. What excellence lacks in the Eternal? Yea, what excellence is there that has not its first cause in Him? What has man in the way of wisdom or strength that he has not received? To love God is to love the perfect, the only wise, and good, and true, the incorruptible and glorious, powerful and kind, incorporate in a self-subsistence which never began and cannot end. In God is the fountain of life, the source of all power, mentality and existence.

The love of Him seems the inevitable effect of the knowledge of Him; and the knowledge of Him is within the reach of every man who has eyes to see and ears to hear what is manifest in nature and history.

How dreadful to neglect Him: It seems not so just at any one moment. The knowledge of Him — the love of Him — the obedience to Him, seem shadowy things to those whose senses are engrossed by the proximate expressions of physical life. How real and of what operative potency they appear, when seen in their ultimate connections! You look back upon the beginningless past from which, though beginningless to Eternal Power, the wonderful present has emerged with a beginning. You look round upon the vast and beautiful universe in which we fill so small a place, and to whose sustenance we contribute less than nothing. You look forward to the endless futurity in which some things will last for ever. If you are capable of reflection, you must, on such a survey, enquire, What is the explanation of it all? And when you have enquired and reflected your utmost, and excavated your little deepest into the foundation of things, you are forced home at last by the relentless stress of reason upon — God.

How dreadful it is to forget God, our reading from Jeremiah shows us. If ever there was a people upon earth who might presume upon exemption from evil, or a land that might be considered safe from desolation, that people and land were Israel and the Holy Land. Israel was a nation not only chosen of God, but created by God, and delivered and guided by God with visible outstretched arm, as a nation never had been. He rescued them from Egypt by miracles, signs and wonders as had never been performed on behalf of any people. He fed them in the wilderness with manna from heaven: opened the rock for their thirst, and gave them a law which left nothing to devise or improve. He spoke to them by prophets and guided them by captains of His own direct appointment and illumination. As David said, "He hath not dealt so with any people." Yet here in Jeremiah, we have things to make the heart break. The land is harried by invading hosts. A cloud is on all affairs. Uncertainty and fear are everywhere. There is no cheering message from God; on the contrary, tidings of woe, presage of calamity, forecast of evil, are daily reported from His mouth by Jeremiah. At last, the Chaldeans, "that bitter and hasty nation," prevail over Jerusalem, give its people to the sword, its buildings to the flames, and a miserable remnant to captivity. On their departure, the city sits solitary that was full of people. A beautiful and fertile neighborhood becomes a wilderness. The ways of Zion do mourn; none come to the solemn feasts; all her gates are desolate. From the daughter of Zion all beauty is departed. She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks. Among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her.

It is the explanation of this strange picture that brings home to us the dreadfulness of forgetting God. The Bible is full of the explanation. It is not

only that Jeremiah plainly says, in his lamentations: "Jerusalem hath grievously sinned, therefore she is removed," but the messages of the prophets incessantly re-echo what was written by Moses in the prophetic song which God directed him to leave as his dying gift to the nation. Moses said (Deu. 32:18), "Thou hast forgotten God that formed thee," and by Jeremiah God said, "Thou hast forgotten Me days without number... I will bring upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I have pronounced against them, because I have spoken unto them and they have not heard, and I have called unto them and they have not answered." "Will ye not receive instruction to hearken unto My words? saith Yahweh."

Now, we should make a great mistake if we did not recognise the modern application of these principles. If it was a sin against God, which was purged only in the terrible deluge of blood and fire which at last overwhelmed Israel at the hands of the Romans — namely, that the people "snuffed at" the divine institutions, and said, "What a weariness is it" — and found agreeable stimulus only in buying and selling and getting gain — are we to suppose it is a matter of indifference to Him that a precisely similar state of things prevails in the European community that is called by the name of Christ? Any such supposition is a delusion, which will be expelled from anyone's mind who fully realises the statement that "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel," and who has fully discerned the meaning of the apocalyptic hieroglyph which exhibits Him in the act of treading the wine-press, choked with the ripe bunches of human wickedness.

The greater danger is that we may be drawn into conformity with the evil principles and the evil ways of a system of society that is in reality ripe for divine judgment. As with Israel in the days of the prophets, so now; this receiving instruction is the last thing that the people have any taste for. It is the most unpopular thing you can propose to people that they should "receive instruction in the ways of God." "Give us entertainment, give us fun — anything but your long-faced, hypocritical cant about religion." This is how the popular sentiment runs, and the clergy do not help to stem the current at all. They run with the stream. They speak smooth things. They say all is well. Like the false prophets spoken of in Jer. 25:17, "They say still unto them that despise Me, Yahweh hath said, ye shall have peace: and they say unto every one that walketh in the imagination of his own heart, no evil shall come upon you."

But the truth of the matter remains unchanged — that "the world lieth in wickedness" (1John 1:19), that "all that is in the world, the lust of the eye, and the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, is not of the Father" (1John 2:16), and that it is the part of the friends of God to love not the world (1John 2:15), because they are not of the world, even as Christ was not of the



world (John 17:14). The voice of God calls, "Receive My instruction and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it." The voice of God calls, "My son, attend to My words, incline thine ear to My sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart."

We have therefore to choose between the ways that God has condescended to prescribe, and the ways that are pleasing to a foolish generation, but hurtful in their working out. Why should you hesitate? God's ways are pleasant now, and purely good at last. Man's ways are ugly and evil in the upshot. In Jeremiah's days it had to be said, "From the least of them, even unto the greatest of them, every one is given unto covetousness: and from the prophet even unto the priest, every one dealeth falsely... Among my people are found wicked men: they lay wait as he that setteth snares: they set a trap: they catch men. As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great and waxen rich. They are waxen fat: they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked. They judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper: and the right of the needy do they not judge." This is exactly the state of things in the Gentile world of the nineteenth century. Wicked men prosper by their "exploitation" of their fellow men, and by shutting their ears to the cry of the needy. Righteous men looking on are liable to weary at the sight, and to think it is no use for them to persevere in ways that do not "pay." They are liable to say "All seek their own, and so will I." Oh, listen not for a moment to such promptings of the flesh. "Brave the battle, fight the fight, welcome waits the victory gained." On all sides, it is "grab, grab, grab," but follow things to their issue, and what comes of the grab, grab, grab? Death, death, death. "Be thou faithful unto death." What are you afraid of? Of coming to poverty? Is it the first time the servants of God have been poor and needy men, and has not God promised to be with us, even as we pass through the fire and water of affliction? Are you afraid of affliction? Afraid of tribulation? How in that case do you hope to find place when all affliction is past, among those whom John saw in Patmos, who were described to him as those who had come out of great tribulation? Is it unpopularity and disgrace that you are afraid of? Have you considered that Jesus whom we seek to follow was "despised and rejected of men?" How can you hope to be exalted with him if you do not share his preliminary dishonor? Is it death you fear? Have you never heard of "the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God and for the testimony which they held... who loved not their lives to the death?" Are you or are you not of those who would "rejoice to be counted worthy to suffer shame for his name?" If so, you cannot greatly dread the prospect of death indirectly through obedience in non-persecuting times like ours.

Let us put away all these illusions and depressions which belong merely to the unenlightened mind of the flesh. Let us bravely and thoroughly accept the position to which God calls us — however humiliating and painful — even if it is meanwhile to ruin and death. Let us burn our boats. The sacrifice is not nearly so difficult when we frankly accept it in all its issues. It is only when we try to serve God and mammon that we find the task too hard. Christ says it cannot be done, and you may be sure his word will work out truly in your experience. Choose mammon, or choose God, but do not mix the services. Could enlightened reason hesitate in the choice? There is not a single reason absent from the argument that would incline us to the service of wisdom. It is God that calls; what an honor to obey such a call. God only has a right to call, for He made all things and understands all things, while poor man is so shortsighted and possesses nothing for long; what a satisfaction to have sound reason for our policy. He calls us to suffering and death, not for the sake of suffering and death, but only as a necessary preparation for “glory, honor and immortality.” There is nothing but good in the end of obedience — nothing but evil in the end of refusal.

How great that goodness is we may learn from the transfiguration of which we have been reading. It was a vision of “the Kingdom of God come with power.” Moses, the dead, Elijah, the living, appear in glory, with Jesus, the transfigured. The Man of Sorrows appeared no longer such in the brightness that illuminated him and his companions. His very clothes, ordinary woven stuff, shone with a glistening whiteness, exceeding the highest art of the fuller. In this we may see what God can do with the common stuff of our mortal nature when “He shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his own glorious body,” when this corruptible shall put on immortality and we shall all be changed. The prospect is not an illusion: it is not a dream or an idea. It is the declared and authenticated purpose of God, proclaimed by the apostles, guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ, and supported in a hundred ways by the character of the Bible and the entire history to which it stands related before and since its publication. We have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for He is faithful who hath promised. Cast not away your confidence which hath great recompence of reward. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come and will not tarry; and who shall tell the joy that shall be the portion of those to whom he will say, “Thou hast been faithful in a few things, be thou ruler over many things, enter into the joy of thy Lord.”

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# Knowledge, Love, Obedience

*Understanding brings enlightenment — it “grew up” in Christ — love like bride’s for Christ — but a love manifested in obedience — continually “put in” the Word of God — aspects of Jesus that inspire love — the result of love.*

**W**E are this morning, as the lovers of Christ, to remember Christ. There are various ways of remembering him. We may think of him in the dim and distant way that the world thinks of him — as a figure in the world’s history. Or we may think of him as the symbol of doctrine which we are prepared to formulate and demonstrate with the cold precision of a lawyer, or an anatomist. Or we may think of him as pious sectarians think, as the mere ideal of sensuous sentimentalism. The true way of remembering him includes all these in a certain way, but goes much beyond them. It stands upon three solid foundations — knowledge, understanding and love. Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian brethren exhibits the features of the case: that “God might give unto them the spirit of wisdom in the knowledge and revelation of Him, the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, that they might know what was the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints and what the exceeding greatness of His power to reward who believe what He wrought in Christ when He raised him from the dead, and set him at His own right hand” (Eph. 1:17-20). Again he expressed the desire concerning them that they might “henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine... but speaking the truth in love might grow up unto him in all things who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure in every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”

We all recognise the need for knowledge in order to a right discernment of Christ; but if we come short of the love of Christ which ought to spring from the knowledge of Christ, the result is an abortive one. Paul is very emphatic on this head. His strong desire concerning the brethren was that “they might know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge,” not only the love which Christ has for those who please him, but the love which they ought to have for him, as expressed in the other words “that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all fulness of God.”

Concerning himself he declared to the Galatians: “The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me,” and to the Philippians, “for me to live is Christ” and to the

Corinthians, "The love of Christ constraineth us: because we thus judge that if one died for all, then all died: and that he died for all that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto him who died for them and rose again."

Christ himself made the demand for our love a prominent point in his teaching. "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden: take my yoke upon you and learn of me." "If any man love father or mother more than me, he is not worthy of me." "My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me." "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself unto him... If a man love me, he will keep my words... He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings." The figure of a bride to represent the relation to Christ of those who are to be accepted by him, is a powerful indication in the same direction. What is the leading characteristic of a bride as such, but delightful love towards him to whom she is about to be united? We read of this consummation: "The marriage of the Lamb is come: and the bride hath made herself ready."

Now, brethren, we have come from religious communities in which this idea is carried to a great and extravagant extreme, to the exclusion of that understanding which is the preliminary to acceptable love. The love of Christ in these communities, has degenerated to an effeminate sentiment, without reasonable body shape, or meaning. But it is just possible that by natural rebound we may go to the other extreme, and be content with knowing about Christ and not loving him. This would be as great a failure as the other. The right form of these things generally lies in the middle. The clear knowledge of what God has testified concerning Christ should be wedded to the cordial and enthusiastic love which is its natural and reasonable accompaniment. How arid and unlovely is knowledge in any direction without love. Even a man of science, without enthusiasm for his subject, is a failure. Love always makes a man interesting, if it is only in specimen hunting, in eggs or butterflies, or beetles. Even a beast showing interest in its offspring is a pleasant sight. How inexpressibly beautiful is love shown towards high objects: the higher the object, the higher the beauty. In this connection, how noble is the love of Christ in a man. Its pure and healthy original is to be seen in Paul, as when he writes to the Philippians: "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection."

Let us rise to this, brethren. We shall be of no use to Christ if we do not love him. He finds pleasure in his people's love as a man finds pleasure in a woman's love. He says we are unworthy of him if we give a stronger love to

any human object. He gives us a method by which we may judge ourselves in the matter as to whether we love him. He says "If a man love me, *he will keep my words*" (John 14:23). Here is a self-test which we should daily apply. We cannot apply it without making ourselves familiar with his "words," for how can a man keep his "words" who is either ignorant or forgetful of them. Reflection will show us that this test is an absolutely reasonable one. Love always conforms to the will and wishes of its object. See if it is not so. If the love of Christ is a distinct enthusiasm of the mind, the doing of his commandments is inevitable by the laws that govern the mental operations of every human being.

But such an operative love of Christ presupposes faith, and acquaintance. If the worm of doubt be gnawing at the foundation, the growth of love is a moral impossibility, or if there is no doubt, but only distance, through "the lust of other things entering in" there will be the same failure in the vigor of love. These are the two points we have to watch: "Beware lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief." How are we to beware of unbelief? By being on our guard against that which leads to it. Unbelief is the result of ignorance or partial knowledge in any matter. The first condition of faith is knowledge. Let us give attention to the facts — study the facts: keep company with the facts. Let us take Paul's advice to Timothy: "give thyself wholly to them." They are worthy of it. There is no class of facts to be compared with the facts concerning Christ. All other facts have but a superficial bearing. They are limited and transient. The facts concerning Christ go down to the foundations of being, affect the springs of all motive, touch the true philosophy of life, govern the everlasting prospect for individual life. How unwise to give them the second place. "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." This is the apostolic exhortation. It is the voice of reason. It means that we must adopt the habits and methods that will lead to this result. How can a man expect the Word of Christ to dwell richly in him, who does not put it in, but fills up his mind instead with the human thoughts reflected in human literature of the moment, and allows his heart to be wholly pre-occupied with the affairs of fleeting life, which may collapse like a bubble any moment? "Give thyself to reading" are Paul's words again. This is an absolute necessity. Only by reading can we make God's acquaintance in His revealed Word, and come under the power of His thoughts and commandments. The daily reading of the Bible ought to be the inexorable practice of every man and woman who aims to "overcome" in the battle all have to wage, who mean to "lay hold on eternal life."

Personal love towards Christ can only be generated by contact with the personal manifestation of him which we have in the apostolic writings. It is thus that all love comes: by knowledge and acquaintance of the things or persons to be loved. The means of acquaintance in this case are wonderfully ample. How full, in the biographic sense, is the exhibition of Christ in the

gospels. No one spoken of in the Scriptures receives the prominence that Christ receives. We have very little concerning even Moses in the personal sense. He appears merely as the medium and instrument of the divine commands. The prophets, as persons, are scarcely visible in their communications. Of the apostles, we get but a very casual glimpse in their relations with Christ; but Christ stands before us in prolonged and full drawn brightness, with many details of word, and work and gesture. We are permitted to make his full acquaintance, though nothing is said of the colour of his hair, the contour or complexion of his face, the measure of his stature, or other such immaterial particulars. We hear his voice, and see his demeanour and discern his spirit. The contemplation leads us to exclaim, with Thomas, "my Lord and my God."

We have been in his company this morning in the reading of the 24th chapter of Luke. This is perhaps the most beautiful of all the presentments of him we have. The picture is full of tranquility and sunshine. It is suggestive of the morning calm after the storm of a terrible night. How pleasant to be with him as he joins the two disciples on the road to Emmaus as they "walk and are sad" — holding their eyes that they should not know him. How deeply interesting to hear him ask, "What is the matter?"— and to note him listen attentively while they rehearse the awful calamities of the last few days, and to listen to his cheering explanation of the whys and the wherefores by appeal to what was written in Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms concerning himself. How delightful to turn into the same house with them, and to hear him give thanks for the refreshment about to be partaken of. How thrillingly perplexing to note his sudden disappearance and the surprised embarrassment of the two as they exchange excited comments on the extraordinary words of their vanished companion, and gather up their things for an instantaneous return to Jerusalem. How pleasing when we get there to hear their account to the eleven, that "the Lord hath risen indeed and hath appeared to Simon." How agreeable to hear the absorbing discussion which sets in among them upon all these facts. How unspeakable the impressiveness of his sudden re-appearance in their midst, their stupefied incredulity, his appeals to their senses, and his reassuring rally of their memory. "These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you that all things must be fulfilled which are written in the Law of Moses and in the Prophets and in the Psalms concerning me."

A little way back, we are with him in very different circumstances. "In an agony," in Gethsemane, "he prays more earnestly, his sweat being as great drops of blood, falling to the ground." The mental conflict is appalling, in prospect of what is before him by command of the Father. We see him kneel; we see him cast himself on his face; we hear him earnestly implore, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done." We see an angel strengthen and soothe and encourage him to the submission required. We see him at last a prisoner in the hands of an unfeeling — a cruel

mob; we see him in a court, the butt of judicial scorn and menial insult. We see him treated as the basest criminal, under the scourge. We see him at last nailed to a cross under the open vault of heaven, a spectacle to a soul-less, jeering rabble surging round. We hear his dying wail; we behold him lifeless hanging there, and witness the frown of heaven in the veiling of the sun and the convulsion of the earth. "He gave himself for our sins that he might redeem us from this present evil world."

Further back still, we see a different picture. We see the Lord patiently ministering and teaching among crowds of people who could give him no society; "going about and doing good" — to the sinner, saying "Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more;" to the forbidding and overzealous disciples, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, for of such is the Kingdom of heaven;" to the appealing blind man, whom the crowd try to silence, "Bid him come hither;" to the emulative disciples, "This I command you that ye love one another. He that exalteth himself shall be abased. He that is greatest amongst you, let him be as he that serveth;" to Jerusalem with tears, "If thou hadst known even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes... O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, but ye would not. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate, and ye shall not see me henceforth until that time come that ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

If the contemplation of these aspects of the Lord excite our love, and command our reverence, what shall we say of the one remaining aspect that lies ahead. It is no illusory act of the mind that looks forward to his reappearance in the earth. The expectation rests on the express promise of Christ himself, on the clear foreshadowing of the prophets, who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit," and on the repeated declaration of the apostles, who were led into all truth by the same Spirit as Jesus promised. The character of his second coming rests on the same clearly-spoken and authenticated word. It combines every element that is calculated to excite admiration and engage love. Power and excellence, and goodness, on an errand of rescue, always appeal to sympathy, even on the low plane of humanity, but what shall we say to such power, and such excellence, and such goodness, as appertain to the resurrected Lord Jesus arriving on such a mission as the Word of God outlines for him: "His reward with him and his work before him?" We shall then see the full meaning of his words: "All power is given to me in heaven and in earth." The words are true now, but their truth is not self-evident. We apprehend their truth by process of reason: "we walk by faith and not by sight." But when he comes "in power and great glory and all the holy angels with him," it will no longer be a matter of faith but of manifest fact that will move the world. "Look, ye saints, the sight is

glorious, see the man of sorrows now, to the earth returned victorious, every knee to him shall bow." Every knee will not bow at first. It is revealed that "the kings of the earth and their armies" will fight against him. It is also revealed that "the Lamb shall overcome them," and that "all nations shall come and worship when the judgments of God are made manifest." How blessed to be among those who will bow the knee with an enlightened alacrity at once. How "blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching," and waiting, and longing, and preparing. The Lord says he will himself "make them sit down to meat and come forth and serve them." He tells us he will invite them to enter into his joy, to sit down at his table, to share his throne, and to partake of the glory, and dominion, and honor, and gladness that will belong to him as the conquering King of all the earth. Yea, he will change them into his own immortal nature and bring them into his Father's House as the bride whom he loves and whom he will take pleasure in nourishing and cherishing and honoring for evermore.

These are not pretty fables. They are not poetical fancies. They are the words of authentic truth, as sober and demonstrable as any problem in mathematics. How reasonable, then, to open our hearts wide and warm to the reception and reciprocation of his love. How irrational and narrow-minded and benighted to despise the love of Christ as effeminate or a visionary. It is neither visionary nor effeminate. It is as actual and solidly founded as any human love under the sun, and it is a nobler and more beautiful love than any to be found in merely natural channels among the sons of men. It is one of the thousand sadnesses of the age that a man cultivating the enthusiastic love of Christ should be regarded as an insipient maniac. It is all perfectly intelligible to those who are abreast of all the facts. The world does not love Christ because he stands as the symbol and incarnation of ideas with which it has no sympathy. He is the manifested name and authority of God, and for God the world has no taste. The world is a mass of population which cares only for what it can eat and drink and sensuously enjoy. As John says, "All that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." As Jesus says, "All these things the nations of the world seek after." "They have not known the Father nor me." They are, in relation to real wisdom, where the barbarians of uncivilized countries are in relation to the problems and achievements of science.

Are we to be intimidated by the voice and example of unreason because it has a host of followers and slaves? Are we to shun the light because "darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people?" Rather be it ours to walk in the light that we may be the children of the light who shall receive the approbation of the Lord of Light when he comes to establish the everlasting day that will chase from the earth for ever the dreadful night of sin and sorrow that broods everywhere on its surface.



## Use of Similitudes by God

*The advantage of "visions, similitudes, parables" always a key to understanding — Zechariah's symbolic sleep and the resurrection — olive trees and candlestick — Salvation for a few, by God's mercy, through the Word.*

OUR reading has been from Zechariah. This is one of the prophets in whose writings there is a good deal of the obscurity and of the difficulty arising out of the employment of figure and symbol. That there should be any obscurity at all in any part of the prophets seems strange to such as think that all revelation should be as clear as the morning light. There is no ground for the thought in the subject itself. It is in perfect harmony with God's own declaration as to the character of His general communications to the prophets. "I have multiplied visions and used similitudes by the ministry of the prophets" (Hosea 12:10), and again, "If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make Myself known unto him in a vision and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all Mine house. With him I will speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, *not in dark speeches*" (Num. 12:6). "Dark speeches" then is the rule in prophetic communication. They have a meaning, but the meaning is not on the surface, and it has to be sought for. It is not wise to quarrel with this fact or to ignore it. We must recognise it and adapt ourselves humbly to it — taking care at the same time not to push it beyond its own strict boundaries, as those do who claim a veiled meaning for everything, like the Swedenborgians, or a spiritual significance for literal statements, like the common run of popular religionists.

If we surmise the divine object in cloaking meanings in figure and symbol, we may glean it from two features abundantly manifest in the Scriptures and in experience; first, the unutterable majesty of God, the Eternal Self-Subsisting Creator, and the unutterable insignificance, and weakness, and meanness, of the perishing race of groundlings to whom these communications are made. It is a marvel that God should condescend to speak to man at all. That when He does so, He does it in a veiled manner, is manifest from the form of the first communication in Eden, concerning redemption, and the first appointment of a form for fallen worship, in the offering of slain animals. That it is fit it should be so we are made to feel in all our experience of the impossibility of wisdom and folly dwelling together, and the unsuitability of open and friendly intimacies between greatness of any kind and the common shallow run of insignificant men.

That it is advantageous to "conceal a thing," while revealing it is also manifest from experience. A riddle is proverbially more interesting than an aphorism. A parable stimulates discernment. A thing seen after the search

provoked by obscurity is seen much more clearly than if exhibited in a plain and direct manner in the first instance. This at least is the case with the turbid human intellect. It may be that all created mentality requires thus to be brought to a focus. At all events it is certain that concealment whets curiosity everywhere. Say even to a child, "You mustn't look in this box," that is the one box it wants to see the inside of.

On the whole, then, it is not strange, though at first it might appear so, that there should be dark similitudes in the communications of the prophets. If the darkness were complete — if the riddle were absolutely insoluble — there could be no advantage in it. But it is never so in divine communications. There is always an inkling of the meaning somewhere — a clue by which the secret can be unlocked, which those may find who are humbly anxious to find. It is so in the dark chapter we have read from Zechariah (ch. 4).

"The angel that talked with me came again and waked me as a man that is wakened out of his sleep." Considering that this is one of the things "written for our learning," as Paul alleges (Rom. 15:4), there must be a reason for mentioning a circumstance like this. It cannot be that the mere circumstance of Zechariah having become drowsy would be recorded. It must be that sleep in the case is sleep with a figurative meaning. That there is such a sleep in the experience of God's people, we know from Christ's reference to the death of Lazarus as a being asleep. "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." The disciples did not see the figure. "They thought that Jesus had spoken of taking of rest in sleep" (John 11:13). Then said Jesus unto them plainly, "Lazarus is dead." Thus the plain description is death, the figurative, sleep. To see Zechariah, then, being "waked, as a man that is wakened out of sleep," must be to see him in a figure raised from the dead.

This conclusion is in strict harmony with the surroundings of the incident. Zechariah had beheld (ch. 3:4,5) the figurative investiture of Joshua with "change of raiment" in substitution for "the filthy garments" he had upon him — which were said to represent his iniquity. This was a figurative change from the mortal to the immortal. He had heard the angel "protest unto Joshua" that he and his companions in the transaction were "men of sign," and that the sign had reference to "my servant the Branch" (v. 8), in whose day the iniquity of Israel would be removed, and "every man call his neighbor under the vine and under the fig tree." This was prophecy. Now for Zechariah to fall into a figurative sleep at this point and be wakened by an angel, what could it mean but that the next thing to be seen was to belong to the day when Zechariah and all the prophets and saints should rise from the dead and when the prophecy should be fulfilled? The conclusion becomes absolutely inevitable when we follow Zechariah in his description of what he saw. His attention was directly challenged: "What seest thou?" Before looking at what he saw, it will be advantageous to consider the hint given in the

middle of the vision as to the general meaning. Having seen the vision, the question was addressed to Zechariah, "Knowest thou not what these be?" And he said, "No, my Lord." "Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, this is the Word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying: Not by might, nor by power — (that is, not by human power) — but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." Here is an interpretation to the effect that the things seen by Zechariah signified that the work to be done after the sleep-walking at the resurrection was to be a work of the Spirit of God and not of human accomplishment.

With this clue, we look with some certainty of guidance at the things which Zechariah saw. Briefly stated, they were these: a seven branched candlestick standing between two olive trees and a connection between the candlestick and the trees on each side by means of two branches which emptied the oil of the trees into the candlestick. Looking at these as natural objects figuratively employed, what should we say could be the meaning but this: perpetual combustion and perpetual light. If an oil lamp could be connected with an oil-furnishing tree in such a way as that the oil of the tree would be automatically supplied by the growth of the tree to the lamp, we should have an apparatus capable of everlasting light. Lamps usually burn out because of the supply of the oil giving in; this would be a lamp whose supply of oil would be perpetual, and whose light therefore would never go out. Naturally, therefore, such a figure would mean an arrangement of some kind that would secure a perpetual manifestation of light.

But now, light itself is a figure, used we know in what sense. Jesus says of himself: "I am the light of the world." Paul says, "walk as children of the light". We read of darkness covering the earth, and of the light of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shining in the face of Jesus Christ. The light-shedding candlestick of Zechariah's vision, then, must signify some arrangement or organisation of the Spirit for illuminating the earth after the resurrection. What that organisation is, there is no room whatever for doubt. It is the Kingdom of God and nothing else. This Kingdom in its kernel, consists of Jesus and the saints established in the Holy Land as the rulers of mankind. That they should be exhibited as a light-shedding apparatus of the Spirit is most fitting: for that is just what they are. Mortal men at first, the salvation of the world does not come by them as such, but by the power of the Spirit of God incorporate in them in the day when they are no longer mortal men, but men changed into Spirit-nature, and made efficient for the work which God purposes to effect through them.

But why should the candlestick be represented as fed by the olive trees? There is a clue to this in the fact that Paul speaks of the mortal origin of the sons of God (or the stock from which they are derived) under the figure of an olive tree. You will remember what I am referring to, viz., his question in Rom. 11 to the Gentiles. "If some of the branches be broken off and thou

being a wild olive tree wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree," etc. It is the foremost feature of the glory to be revealed that it is preceded by and drawn from the state of evil brought into vogue among the sons of men by disobedience. This feature appears to be the one signified by the olive trees. It might seem otherwise from what was said to Zechariah. "They are the two anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth;" but this dark saying really proves it when looked into. For who are the two anointed ones that stand in the day of glory before the Lord? They are two communities that require anointing in order to be qualified to sustain that position. Anointing and christening are the same in meaning. To be covered with Christ is to be anointed. He is pre-eminently the anointed or Christ, having been "anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power" (Acts 10:38). The two communities who stand covered with him though at this time fused into one candlestick are Jews and Gentiles, from both of whom the elements of Spirit-candlestick of the future age will be derived. They will be "no longer twain." They will be "both one," the middle wall of partition having been broken down. But, historically, it will remain a fact, to be recognized in the ages of perfection, that they were two. It is proclaimed in the day of redemption, that the kings and priests of God were redeemed "out of every kindred, tongue, people and nation." So it will be a fact that the one body of that glorious age was originally two — Jew and Gentile — both of whom required anointing before they could be qualified to "stand before the Lord of all the earth." This historic aspect of the glorious state of things prevalent in the age to come is exhibited in the two olive trees which stand on each side of the oil-combusting candle-sticks with which they are connected by two "olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves." The two olive branches show it is only a section of the two communities as a whole that is used, and the two golden pipes, that it is on the principle of faith that any are selected from Jew or Gentile to be made use of as sons of light and power in the coming age of glory.

The vision has a powerful practical bearing on the age of darkness in which we live. It is an age distinguished among other things by much scheming for the reformation of the world by various human agencies. The vision tells us that it is all in vain, that the cure must come, and can only come from God: "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." The evil plight we are in is by His appointment and His causation, for so the Bible reveals; and in the nature of things, man cannot alter what God ordains. The whole "philosophy of evil," as men talk, is summed up in Paul's description of man's present lot: "made subject to vanity, not willingly but *by reason of Him* who hath subjected the same in hope." The vanity to which we are subject is not an affair of human will, but of divine ordinance, yet with light in the darkness, for it is "in hope" that we are subjected to the

evil. It is not without a reason, nor without a purpose, nor without a hope that mankind are in their present evil state. No system of human wisdom can solve the terrible enigma. It is solved and solved completely in the Bible, and the Bible cannot be overthrown. "Is it not of the Lord's Host that the people shall labor in the very fire and shall weary themselves for very vanity?" (Hab 2:13). It is God who creates evil (Isa. 45:7). Man is in an evil state because he is not using his life and his power for the purpose for which God bestowed them. The words have come to pass which were specially addressed to the priests through Malachi, "If ye will not hear and if ye will not lay it to heart to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of Hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart" (Mal 2:2). Till this curse is removed there can be no reformation of the human lot, such as man needs and such as his constitutional mentality leads him to desire and aspire after. Human aims and human schemes in this direction are all in vain. Men might conceivably by human effort be better clothed and fed and housed and educated (though even in these items improvement as regards the mass is not possible to any appreciable extent), but as regards the fundamental needs of man in these relations of his being and state of his nature that have to do with making "life worth living" — man can never change the world from the hell-upon-earth state which has been the average character of its experience for six thousand years past. "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." His Spirit in olive-tree-fed candlestick manifestation, or operating through the society being developed from Adam's race during its painful progress from darkness to light — in other words, working in the sons of God in the day of their manifestation upon the earth in glory — will do the work and will do it with such perfection that at last it will be said, "There is no more curse, no more pain, no more death."

Called by the gospel, we are called to be constituents of this glorious family. Our particular business at present is to prepare ourselves for this position by submission to the commandments of the gospel. It is here where the candlestick vision brings a powerful lesson to bear as regards our relation to the governments and institutions of the present evil world. It must be manifest to any man's ordinary understanding that it is no fit preparation for the doing of God's effectual work for the saints of God to take part with man in his various vain and man-glorifying schemes for doing a work that man cannot do and that God has purposed to do, and which He will do at last by the hands of those who wait patiently for Him. We can never too earnestly repeat to ourselves that this is a time of probation — not of effectuation. It is our part to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, who will exalt us in due time. The waiting may be wearying to flesh and blood, but not more wearying than the disappointments that are inevitably associated with all human schemes; and in the end, this is nothing but joy and peace,

satisfaction and glory, immortality and perfection for those who, with enlightened eye and resolute hand, accept the short-lived position of strangers and pilgrims in the journey to an everlasting place in the house of God.

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## Reality of Bible History and Prophecy

*Simply reading Bible convinces unprejudiced mix of elements of Truth — blessings in Abraham — Israel under discipline — wicked justly destroyed — prophetic testimony to Jesus — Bible things were all real — Jesus will come.*

**W**E are commanded by the Lord to attend to this ordinance of the breaking of bread “until he come.” Most people think it a strange thing if you speak of Christ coming again. The strange thing really is that people professing to be christian people should think such a thing strange. It does not seem possible for ordinary intelligence to read and believe the Bible without believing in “the coming again of our Lord Jesus and our gathering together unto him.” On the very last page of the Bible, this is what we read in the very last verse but one: “He that testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so. Come Lord Jesus.” Let us imagine some stranger who knew nothing of Christ and nothing of the history connected with the Bible, taking up the Bible, and reading these words. His natural enquiry would be, “Who is this Lord Jesus? and what is meant by his coming quickly? Coming to where? From where, and for what purpose?” Let us try and pursue these questions from the stranger’s point of view, and see on what a great rock is founded our hope of the return of the Lord whom we call to mind in the breaking of bread.

Supposing it was the New Testament in which our attention had been caught by the words in question: we should naturally turn backwards to ascertain who this Lord Jesus was. Going right back to the first page, we should find ourselves in the very first verse face to face with “the book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham,” and presented with a long line of ancestry traced for nearly two thousand years, from Abraham downward to the days of “Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ.” We should find that the child so born was the Son of God and not of Joseph, being conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. If it struck us with wonder that there should be such a departure from the established ways of nature, we should be informed, “Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold a virgin shall conceive,” etc.

Here we should become aware that there had been a writing before the New Testament. Our curiosity might be aroused with respect to this, especially if on glancing through the body of the New Testament we should happen to notice that the Lord Jesus said in his day, "I am not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets but to fulfil," and again, "all things must be fulfilled which are written in the Law of Moses and in the Prophets and in the Psalms concerning me." And again the statement of Peter, "To him give all the prophets witness." We should be inclined to ask, "Who were those prophets? What was this Law of Moses? To whom did the prophets prophesy? To whom was the Law of Moses given?"

An enlightened friend might say to us, "If you want to know, read the Old Testament." We might ask, "Is there an Old Testament?" The answer would be, "Oh yes, it is a much larger book than the New Testament and much more ancient, and contains full particulars on the subject of your enquiries." So getting an Old Testament, we may imagine ourselves interestedly consulting it and finding the full and clear answer to all our questions. We should make the discovery that the birth of Jesus Christ was the end of a long line of operations commencing a long way back in the history of mankind. We should find ourselves indeed taken right away back to the beginning of things on earth. We should find information nowhere else to be found under the sun, namely, as to why it is that things are wrong with man — as to why evil rather than good, curse rather than blessing, is his portion. We should also find it revealed at the very beginning that God purposed to bring good out of the evil, and to establish blessedness in the place of curse. We should find that a foundation was laid for working out the blessing at the very start. We do not get twelve chapters into Genesis before we read "all families of the earth shall be blessed." We find the statement connected with a certain man, to whom God said, "In *thee* and thy seed" shall this be done. This man was Abraham, a Chaldean, to whom the word of command came: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, and go into a land which I shall show thee." Paul tells us: "He obeyed, not knowing whither he went;" and Stephen that "he (Abraham) came into this land wherein ye (Jews) now dwell" — 1850 years ago — the land of Canaan, Palestine, the Holy Land.

Here was a very interesting — a very important man: "In *thee* and in thy seed shall all families of the earth be blessed" — a promise renewed to his son, Isaac; and to Isaac's son, Jacob. Let us fix our eyes upon him — this very important man — to whom Paul informs us "the promises were made" (Gal. 3:16), by which promises he was constituted "the heir of the world" (Rom. 4:13). Here is the man through whom and his seed God declared His purpose to work out the purposed blessing. He comes into view at the very beginning of the Bible, namely in the 11th chapter of Genesis; and we may say, he never

leaves the field, for by Christ in the New Testament, he is exhibited as the leading figure in the Kingdom of God, with Isaac and Jacob (Luke 13:28), and declared by Paul to be the father of all who belong to Christ, his seed (Gal. 3:29). Indeed, you may say that the whole Bible is a history of the evolution of Abraham in the channel of God's purpose.

For what do we find? That Abraham's son Isaac had a son Jacob, who had twelve sons, who settled in Egypt, where they multiplied greatly for several generations, and became a community so numerous and powerful as to excite the jealous fears of the Egyptians, who sought to destroy them by persecution as the Russians are doing at the present day. From the terrible affliction ensuing, God sent Moses to deliver them, and in prolonged dealings with the Egyptians, visited them with terrible plagues, at last opening the sea for Israel's escape, which the Egyptians trying to cross were drowned. Safe on the eastern side of the sea which had closed over the Egyptians, Israel found themselves in the desert of Sinai, where no supplies of food or water were to be had. In ordinary circumstances, a huge company of people so circumstanced must have perished; but the circumstances were not ordinary. God was making use of the posterity of Abraham His friend, in working out His purpose with the whole earth. So He sustained with bread from heaven, and water from the rock. The sustenance provided was barely sufficient to maintain life, at which Israel murmured. But Moses informed them that there was a purpose of mental discipline in it; that God might humble them and prove them, and that they might know that man was not on earth live by bread alone, but by the Word proceeding from God. Assembled at Sinai, they were permitted to see the manifested power and majesty of God; and Moses called to the top of the mount, received for them a Law for the development of their national and individual life in the land to which they were going. This Law is recorded extensively in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. When it is discerned in its aims, its completeness and its harmony, it is found to be the most beneficent Law ever established among men, as it is also the most ancient. Here it is in the hands of the Jews to the present day in the very form in which it issued from the hands of Moses. It has not been tinkered and altered as human laws have been in all ages and countries.

Armed with this Law and provided with the machinery which it required, Israel, after forty years' disciplinary wanderings in the wilderness, crossed the Jordan under Joshua, to wage a war of extermination upon the occupants of the land. To many people this appears a shocking proceeding. All ideas of this sort disappear when it is recognized that the enterprise was by divine command, and that the wickedness of the Canaanites (illustrated in Lev. 18) assumed such an extreme form as to call for their divine destruction. There is no understanding of the Bible if the participation of God in the transactions



it records is ignored. God, who creates, has the right to destroy; and He is the sole Judge of the right time. Where this is recognized, there is no difficulty about the command to Joshua, at the head of the Israelitish host, to "slay utterly (the seven nations of Canaan) old and young, man and woman; save nothing alive that breatheth."

The work was partly done, and Israel occupied the country in their place. From this time onward Israel occupied the land with intermissions for over 1,400 years. This was the time covered by "the Law and the Prophets." The nation lived under the Law that had been given to them through Moses, and they received messages through the prophets. Moses had told them it would be well with them if they obeyed the Law, but that if they were disobedient nothing but curse would attend them. They bitterly experienced the truth of the latter statement. Time after time they were brought very low because of their non-compliance with the Law of God, till at last His patience came to an end, and they were overwhelmed in the whirlwind of His anger and dispersed to the ends of the earth, as at this day. Before this calamity came fully upon them, God sent prophets to expostulate with them. Indeed, the whole course of their history was marked by the warnings of these messengers of God. It is beautifully expressed in the last chapter of 2 Chronicles. Having told us that the people "transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen," the record adds (verse 15) "And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes and sending, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God and despised His words and misused His prophets until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people till there was no remedy." You may remember that Jesus presents us with the same picture in his parable of the Householder who planted a vineyard and let it out to the husbandmen and went into a far country (Matt. 21:33). At the fruit season, He sent his servants to receive of the fruit, but the husbandmen "took His servants, and beat one and killed another, and stoned another." And when He sent other servants, they did the same to them. Last of all, He sent His son, "and they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard and slew him." When the question was asked, "What shall the Lord of the vineyard do unto those husbandmen?" the answer was "He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and give the vineyard unto others."

Of the messages delivered by these prophets to disobedient Israel, much was by divine command reduced to writing; and this writing it is that is so frequently referred to in the New Testament as "The Scriptures of the Prophets," which required such and such things to happen to Christ in order that they might be "fulfilled." From these New Testament references, we learn that the predictions of the prophets had much to do with him. Indeed, the angel who communicated the apocalypse of Christ to John in Patmos

informed him that “the Lord God of the holy prophets had commissioned the revelation,” and that “the testimony of Jesus was the spirit of prophecy” — that is that Christ and the prophets were not only not separate and incompatible, but that Christ was the very kernel — the inspiring principle — of the scheme of things that had been communicated through the prophets. When we come to compare the testimony of the apostles to Christ, and the foreshadowings of him in the Prophets, we find that this is the case. There was to be a son of David manifested in the course of Israel’s future (2 Sam. 7:10-16; Psa. 89:35-37; Isa. 9:6; Jer. 23:5). He was to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2): he was to be despised by the nation and rejected (Isa. 53:3); but to have a momentary triumph while he should ride into Jerusalem on an ass (Zech. 9:9), then to be smitten and insulted (Micah 5:1; Isa. 53:7), his clothes divided and he himself crucified in the company of vile men (Psa. 22:16-18; Isa. 53:9). All these things were realized in Christ, who was a descendant of David (Mat. 1:1; Rom. 1:3) born in Bethlehem (Mat. 2:1); rejected by his own nation (John 1:11), but was the subject of a transient ovation (Mat. 21:6-9), was arrested, insulted, divested of his clothes on which the soldiers cast lots, and was then crucified (Mat. 26:57; 27:28, 31,35).

The prophecy did not stop there. It spoke of his being raised from the dead (Psa. 71:20; 16:10), and the fact of his resurrection is the chief feature of the apostolic testimony (Acts 4:33). It spoke also of his ascending to God’s right hand, to wait for a season in the presence of the divine glory, while God’s face should be hidden from Israel (Psa. 68:18; 110:1; Isa. 8:16-17), and nothing is more conspicuous in the apostolic testimony than the declaration that Jesus after his resurrection was “received up to the right hand of God,” “ascending to heaven itself, there to appear in the presence of God for us” (Mark 16:19; Heb. 9:24).

Now, in all these things, there is the most tangible reality. Israel was as real a nation as the British or American. The prophets were as real men as any ambassador now living and their writings as real documents as any despatch transmitted to London. Christ when born, in harmony with their predictions, was as real a baby as ever appeared in a cradle. He grew up with real manhood through all the stages of real childhood and boyhood as really as any of ourselves. He was a real teacher and worker in Israel for three-and-a-half years. At last he was a real prisoner in the hands of a real mob, and stood in a real court before real bearded elderly Jews, and at last, before a real Roman official, by whose order he was taken out and really executed by the dreadful process of crucifixion.

And now on the morning of the third day, the grave into which his real dead body had been placed was really empty. The clothes in which he had been buried were there all right but not himself. Where was he himself? If

nothing further was known, we should have had to say: No one can tell. But within half-an-hour of the emptying of the tomb, he was as really seen and felt as ever he had been during his ministry among the people: First to one, then to three or four, then to one, then to two, then to eleven, then to seven, then to 500, then to eleven again, during a period of six weeks, "he showed himself alive by many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3), exhibiting the marks of crucifixion, offering himself to be handled, eating and drinking food provided for him (Luke 24:38, 43; Acts 10:41).

And then at the end of the six weeks what happens? He leads the eleven to the summit of the hill standing to the east of Jerusalem, where the Russians have a monastery to mark the spot at the present day; and there he takes leave of them, saying, "Ye shall be my witnesses to the ends of the earth; but wait till ye receive power" which I shall send to enable you to give effective testimony. He had said, "I go away... it is needful for you that I go away," and now he goes away. "When he had spoken those things, while they beheld, he was taken up and a cloud received him out of their sight." He had said, "If I go away, I will come again."

And now would not our imaginary stranger, passing all these things under his review, have an answer to his question, "Who is this Lord Jesus? and what does it mean by his coming?" If any doubt lingered in his mind as to the meaning of the coming (caused perhaps by the fact that sometimes the word coming is used in a figurative sense), it would for ever be dispelled by the declaration of the angels at his ascension as to the sense in which his coming should be. "This same Jesus who is taken from you into heaven shall so come IN LIKE MANNER AS YE HAVE SEEN HIM GO into heaven" (Acts 1:11). He would only have to realize that his going away was personal, visible, real and literal to be persuaded that the return of Christ will be personal, visible, real and literal also. It would remain for him but to enquire the purpose for which he was coming, and the state of revelation as to the time of his coming and the signs thereof, to feel all the interest we feel while we surround this Table, and break this bread in remembrance of him "until he come." And he would join with us in wonderment at the strange state of things in a professedly Christian community that should permit of their thinking it strange that believers in Christ should be "looking for his appearing" according to his promise. "Take heed to yourselves lest... that day come upon you unawares, for as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth."

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## “Not as I Will, but as Thou Wilt”

*Jesus, the greatest of all — a conflict between two wills — future visualized enables present overcoming — crucifying the flesh — God’s will and law paramount — present things temporal, vanity, disappearing — holiness brings joy unspeakable, life everlasting.*

HERE we are again to call Christ to remembrance. What an extraordinary thing it is that after 1,800 years, men should be found from week to week so engaged. There have been many great men in the earth, so-called, but where is there one among them all who has a feast held every week to his honor? And this man was not in his day esteemed one of the great men of the earth. As the prophet had said: “He was despised and we esteemed him not.” Augustus, Caesar, and Antony, and Brutus and Cassius, and Herod were among the bright lights of that age; Jesus was a mechanic in an obscure village of Galilee, whom the authorities executed as a felon. Yet here, in our day, his name is above every name. All other names are in eclipse by the side of his. What is the meaning of this extraordinary fact? Investigation yields but one answer that meets all the demands of reason. The name of Jesus is now worldwide, and his memory had in reverence by believing thousands in every age since his crucifixion, because he wrought miracles while alive and after death rose again, and sent forth to the world by the hands of his chosen companions and friends, a miraculously-attested message, affirming these facts, and calling upon them to turn to God in faith and repentance with the coming dispensation of his judgment and goodness when he should return.

This being the only rationally-admissible explanation of the undeniable ascendancy of the name of Jesus in this our 19th century, let us look at him and the meaning of him as bearing upon ourselves this morning. Looking at him, as exhibited to us in the gospel narratives, we see many wonderful things. Let us consider the one aspect in which he appears before us in the chapter read this morning. We look and see a prostrate figure under the trees in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus has thrown himself upon his face. He is visibly convulsed in agony of mind. As we listen, we hear words come from his mouth which are those particularly deserving our consideration on this occasion: “Father, all things are possible with Thee: take away this cup from me. Nevertheless, not what I will, but what Thou wilt.” The “cup” in question was the death on the cross to which the Father had made known His desire he should submit — the prospect of which, the chapter informs us, made him “sore amazed and very heavy.” The feature that stands out so clearly is the conflict between two wills and the willing subordination of one

to the other. The Father wished, willed, desired, required, that Jesus should surrender himself to the violence of cruel foes, and submit to the torture and ignominy of being nailed through hands and feet and hung up on a Roman cross in the face of the sun till he should die. From this terrible ordeal Jesus shrank with fearful apprehension. He wished not to suffer it, he desired to avoid it. It was his will to escape it, “if it were possible,” that is, if the Father’s objects in the case could admit of its omission. It was in his power to evade the terrible death before him if he had chosen to prefer his own feelings to the divine command. Here was where the conflict lay. It was the great historic conflict — the will of God versus the wish of man — brought to a focus. The conflict ended in victory, we know, otherwise we should not be here to celebrate the resurrection. But what was the nature of the victory? It was the deliberate preference of the Father’s will to his own: “not what I will, but what Thou wilt.” He was enabled to exercise this preference by reason of what he was, as the Son of God. Still, it was by what we may call the operation of reason in the discernment of truth. Paul informs us that “for the joy set before him he endured the cross.” This shows us the power of mental view in sustaining him, and leading him to “overcome,” which is the term he himself employed in afterwards describing the achievement.

It is according to our experience of human life. A strong idea will carry a man through anything. Of course, if the idea is visionary, it will lead to nothing; still, it will impel a man to action, though the action may be a plunge into the ditch, like Frederick’s soldiers at the battle of Prague, who mistook a morass for a grass field, at the other side of which was the enemy. Here is where the power of the Truth comes in. The discernment of its reality, resulting in conviction, renewed and strengthened by daily contact in the reading of the Scriptures and prayer, will lead us to overcome where Christ overcame, as he says, “To him that overcometh will I grant that he sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame and am sat down with my Father on His throne.”

But some have the idea that we have no opportunity of overcoming as Christ overcame. They are apt to say “We have not been commanded to submit to crucifixion as he was, we have no occasion to say ‘Not as I will, but as Thou wilt.’” Now, in this there is much apprehension of a dangerous kind, of which it will be our wisdom to get rid as entirely and as speedily as possible. It is true that as regards the particular form in which Christ was called upon to submit to the will of God, we cannot imitate him. It would be no pleasure to God if we were to get somebody to literally crucify us. He has not required this at our hands. But is there no sense in which He has required us to submit to crucifixion? Those who keep close to the Scriptures will have no hesitation in answering this question. We are commanded by Paul to “crucify the old man with his affections and lusts.” This is a command direct to every one of us from God, for Paul said, “The things that I write unto you are

commandments of the Lord." Now, what is this crucifixion of the old man but the repression and denial of every natural desire that goes against the Law of God? The old man says, when any one injures him, "I will do to my injurer as he had done to me." The Law of God says, "avenge not yourselves." "Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the Lord and He shall save thee" (Rom. 12:19; Pro. 20:22). The wise man will repress the impulse of nature; will crucify the old man and say to God, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt." The old man says, "I hate my enemies; I am not going to put any advantage in their way." The Law of God says, "Do good to them that hate you... If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink." The wise man will quench the resentments of the natural mind. He will crucify the old man. He will say to God, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt," and he will benefit his foes if he can. The old man says, "I love money, and I must have it. I like the pleasures of the world, and I don't see why I should deny myself any more than other people. I relish the honors of life, and I do not see any harm in putting myself in the way of receiving and enjoying them."

Here there is much positive pain to be encountered in the doing of the will of God. God says, "Love not the world nor the things that are in the world." "Set your affections on things above." "Deny all ungodliness and worldly lust." "The love of money is the root of all evil." "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." "How can ye believe that receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only."

What can a wise man do but set himself against all these desires of the flesh and of the mind. What can he do, but, like the apostles, "obey God rather than man?" What can he do but "crucify the old man" and say to God, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

Again, the old man delights in all manner of uncleanness — libidinous thoughts, lustful exercises, impure habits, as exemplified in the whole round of worldly custom in the larger cities — smoking, drinking, theatre-going, light talk, jesting, frivolous reading, gay company — folly, everywhere. The old man says, "Why should not I have the liberty that everybody takes?" "Why should not I please myself also? Why should not I indulge in these pleasing diversions that chase away the dullness of life and open to me the solace and refreshment that the world has in all directions?"

There is an answer to the old man which the old man does not like, and which it inflicts the highest pain on him to receive. That answer is: The Law of God forbids. God says, "Ye are called to holiness;" "Be ye holy in all manner of conversation — holy both in body and spirit." "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." "Fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness let it not be once named amongst you as becometh saints, neither filthiness nor foolish talking nor jesting which are not convenient but rather giving of thanks." "Flee youthful lusts, but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" — "hating even the

garment spotted by the flesh” — “having no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reproving them.”

In all things, there is but one course for every true lover of Christ, and that is, to bear him company in the garden of Gethsemane, and say with him, “not my will but Thine be done.” The conflict may be painful for the time being; but it never can be so painful as that through which he went in prospect of the prolonged agony that ended in the “loud cry” at the ninth hour. And however painful, it prepares a sweetness of victory that no language can exaggerate. Even in this present life, the results of conformity to the will of God are most precious, most noble. Who does not admire the beauty of the new man who avenges not himself, and walketh in holiness and kindness in all his ways? Who would not buy with much money if it could purchase it, the peace of God that passeth all understanding, filling the heart and mind of those who put on the new man, and follow Christ in righteousness and true holiness? But who can adequately speak of “the end of the matter?” It is the precept of eternal wisdom by Solomon, “In everything, consider the end.” The end of the world’s ways — dishonor, misery, and death. The end of those who crucify the old man is exaltation, joy unspeakable, and life everlasting. There is no proportion between the sacrifices and the recompences of holiness. Paul, with much fervor, declared that the one was “not worthy to be compared with the other.” “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

To see this clearly is part of the discernment that enables us to overcome. “For the joy set before him,” Jesus was enabled to “endure the cross.” A similar exercise of mind will similarly strengthen us. True intelligence will perceive that “Wisdom excelleth folly as far as light exceedeth darkness” (Ecc. 2:13). There is every high inducement to constrain us to submission. Look round on human affairs. What good is there for man in all the multifarious forms of his experience? Supposing he get his highest desires gratified? Let it be in business, in fame, in friendship, what does it amount to at last? We may not be able to give a clear answer in the case of our own affairs, because we so strongly feel in our own case that if we could just carry our point, whatever it may happen to be that is engaging our attention, it would be perfectly and substantially and satisfactorily well with us as it has perhaps never been with anybody else before. (This is how we feel.) But in the case of those who have preceded us, we can see the matter clearly enough. Take the people who lived only 50 years ago — that is, those who were in their prime and in the full current of life’s affairs 50 years ago. We can get a peep at them by looking up the files of, say, the Birmingham Journal of 50 years ago. We see in the advertising columns mention of many matters that were very urgent with the advertisers 50 years ago. In the news-columns, we read reports of public meetings at which testimonials were presented to

successful men, or of business enterprises that were opening out in a very successful way, or of the awarding of prizes and diplomas in some educational or other competitions, or perhaps of some popular wedding in which the parties were the imagined possessors of supreme bliss. We read, and it all seems so very real — just as it seemed at the time. We take our eyes off the paper, and how does it seem when we realise that it is all gone — that all these people have got through, and that all the affairs that they had in hand have disappeared as entirely as if they had never been!

Now what is the difference between their affairs and ours? Only this, that we know their affairs, however large and urgent at the time, were a mere phantasmagoria, and that we have to try and remember that ours are the same, theirs have passed and ours are passing. The best we can achieve in mortal life is “but a vapor that appeareth for a very little while and then vanisheth away.” Is there then no abiding good for men? The answer is without uncertainty. It must be so, just as there are in nature more enduring substances than vapor; just as there is a sun in the heavens, as well as shifting clouds in the sky, just as there are precious stones and incorruptible gold, as well as perishable grass and flowers, so there is a life higher than mortal life, and a state far beyond the experience of human life. We should have inferred this as a matter of reason if we had not been told it; but what, as reasonable beings, can we feel but enthusiastic and immovable confidence in the presence of the name and the revelation of Jesus Christ, whose influence has already remodelled the world; whose command this morning we obey to “show forth his death until he come,” and for whose reappearing we wait as for the sun that shall arise with healing in his beams, at whose bright presence darkness of all kinds will forever flee away.

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## Fulfilled Prophecies that Encourage

*Influence of past and future upon present — Bible is absolutely true — Bible prophecies enlighten and encourage — Mt. Olivet prophecy came to pass — pledge of Christ's return — corruption of gospel foretold is now existent — things now “coming to pass” prove return of Jesus imminent.*

IT is made an objection by some concerning those who are ardently in love with the things represented by this “Table of the Lord,” that they are always living either in the past or in the future; that they do not live enough in the present. The complaint is not a well-founded one; it is not a reasonable one. Yesterday and tomorrow are always a part of today in a wise



treatment of things. Today cannot be lived wisely, in any line of things, without reference to yesterday and tomorrow. Yesterday has its facts — its obligations — its covenants — which shape and colour the proceedings of today. Tomorrow has its hopes and aims, which can only be realised by the needful adjustments of today. The man who should forget yesterday, or be heedless of tomorrow, even in worldly matters, would be esteemed a fool by the most worldly of people.

If this be the case in small matters, it is not less so in large matters, though it may not be so common or so easy to recognise the fact. The 19th century is part of the 18th, in so far as it is what it is by reason of what the 18th century was. You cannot explain the England of Victoria without reference to the England of the Georges. And the 19th century is part of the first century in so far as its shape and contour have sprung from the events and influences that were active in the first. These general considerations would have no urgent practical application were it not for the fact that things occurred in the first century having a governing effect on a remote future reaching to our time, and going over our heads into endless ages to come. Those things are represented by the bread and wine on the Table. They centre round the man concerning whom a surging crowd in Pilate's presence fiercely shouted, "Away with him! crucify him! crucify him!" We are here to be reminded of the reality of these things. The act of breaking bread is for this very purpose: "Do this in remembrance of me." Upon this remembrance depends so much that every help to its attainment is precious and every hindrance an evil to be avoided.

One powerful means of this valuable act of memory is not only to read the record of them regularly, but to remember as we read that we are reading words of actual truth, and not the words of imagination or fiction. They are words that have been in the hands of the world for 1,800 years. If by means of the great libraries you peep in upon the world at any time during the past 1,800 years, you find the New Testament just as we have it. They are the very words written by the men who were the Lord's companions and witnesses of the things they record, for they were in circulation during the very lifetime of the writers, and not a whisper of contradiction as to their authenticity was ever raised. It is the testimony of men whose integrity is guaranteed by the work they did in turning men to righteousness, and by their submission to death for their work; and whose capability of giving an accurate testimony is shown by the testimony itself. The people have been too easily blinded to the enormous value of the New Testament as actual evidence of the things it records. The result is due to the persistent dogmatisms of unscrupulous enmity on the part of the enemies of the Bible; a predisposition on the part of the people to disbelieve, and the actual neglect of almost all people of the New Testament itself. We have been delivered from this blindness. We shall

only remain delivered by walking in the light by regular reading of the apostolic testimony for ourselves, and those meditations on co-related things which the reading is sure to engender.

Familiarity is apt to prevent our getting the full benefit of our reading. There is a prevalent feeling to the effect that the New Testament is very useful for Sunday schools and "pious" people, but of no serviceableness for mature and practical people; a good sort of book to get mottoes and texts from, but of no authority as proving the truth of anything. This idea is nothing more than popular infatuation. When the mind fully opens to the actual facts as they are, not only surprise, but indignation, hot to the explosive point, is the predominant feeling produced. Such feelings are of no particular use perhaps, but they are the inevitable and growing effect produced by the full apprehension of the actual situation of things with regard to this important matter. Let us say to ourselves as we read, "I am reading a true record. I am reading a recital of things that actually occurred. I am not reading cunningly-devised fables, but the sober testimony of earnest men who were *eye witnesses* — who saw what they describe, who heard what they report; and whose very method of recording their testimony is of itself a proof of the presence of that superhuman guidance which Jesus promised when he said, 'It shall be given you what ye shall say; for it is not ye that speak but the Spirit of the Father that speaketh in you.' For who ever before wrote such a graphic story in such few and simple words, and with such majesty and chasteness of style?"

Reading in this mind, we shall read with attention and with faith, and will come under the power of the things read because believed. Many are the things having great power to help us rightly to live today with reference to that tomorrow of which Christ's yesterday is the guarantee. We take them by turn as they come. Let us on this occasion take the words, "When ye see these things come to pass, look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh." There was a moment when these words were fresh out of the mouth of Christ. That moment was when he and his disciples were resting on the western brow of the Mount of Olives, overlooking the city of Jerusalem, and the temple outspread at their feet. They had just come from the city, and in passing through the temple Jesus had said something that excited the curiosity of the disciples. When called on to admire the beauty of the buildings, instead of joining in the conventional sentiment, he said the time was not far off when the whole structure of the temple would be in ruins. As the disciples were "expecting that the Kingdom of God should immediately appear" (Luke 19:11), this was naturally a difficult intimation for them to understand. So when seated together on the ascent of Olivet, they asked him about it. In answering the question, he embraced the opportunity of outlining to them in a brief way the course of events from the destruction of Jerusalem

onwards to his coming again in power and great glory. He had before spoken of his absence being for "a long time." He now tells them of things that would happen at the end of the long time, and just before his coming, concerning which he makes a general remark to the effect that when they saw the budding of vegetation they knew that summer was near. "So likewise, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand."

Now, had we been there, should we not have felt strong in his words? Standing by his side, should we not have looked forward with him to a long period of confusion and darkness, at the end of which things would show themselves that would justify the saints then living in "looking up and lifting up their heads," because of the manifest approach of the Kingdom of God? There is no doubt that such would have been our feelings under the influence of all that we should have seen and heard, in company with the other disciples, during the three years and a-half journeying with the Lord in Galilee and Judea. Under the shadow of Christ and his very loving presence, we should have felt very bold and confident, and regarded everything as it appeared to him. It is very certain that as we looked forward and thought of the people that should be living in the world at the end of the times of the Gentiles, that we should have felt that it wouldn't matter in the very least what they might think about Christ and the Kingdom of God. We should very likely have said, "Very likely the people living then will think the Kingdom of God a dream, and the coming of Christ an impossibility; but that will only be their ignorance, however much they may know about other things." We should have looked forward expecting that that would be the general temper of men's minds in relation to the things of God, in view of what we had heard Christ say: "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be when the Son of Man cometh."

Now then, we are not there but here. We are living at the end of those very times of the Gentiles that Jesus spoke of, and not in the first half of the first century looking forward to that end. We are just where Christ contemplated some of his disciples would be when events would show that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand. What, then, is the right attitude for us? Is it not the attitude he expressly enjoins: "Look up; lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh"? Has anything happened since Christ spoke these words to take away from their force? It is just entirely the other way. Everything that has happened since then has proved the truth of what he said. See the temple demolished in less than forty years afterwards; see Jerusalem laid in ashes, and its teeming population decimated by the sword; see the city "trodden down of the Gentiles" from that day to this; and see another thing that people generally little reckon of as a pledge of Christ's return.

If there is one class of prophecy that more than another proves the

divinity of the predictions of the prophets and apostles, it is that in which the corruption of the work of Christ is foretold. The natural tendency of speculation would have been to anticipate progress, improvement, reform. Start a powerful civilizing agency of any kind, and the ordinary probability is that it will work like the path of the just: "Shining more and more unto the perfect day." In the unparalleled performances of Christ, the words of Isaiah received an incipient fulfilment: "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together." What was more likely than that the Word of the Gospel having received such a tremendous impetus that it would go on from strength to strength till it had brought the whole world into enlightened and happy subjection to God? Such an anticipation would have been in harmony with the universal idea of the millennium being brought about by the gradual prevalence of the gospel principles. It is such an anticipation as the apostles left to themselves would doubtless have indulged in. Instead of this, the Spirit of God by them forecast the gloomiest failure — not only declension but monstrous abortion; not only apostasy but abomination, repudiation, and spiritual folly, comparable only to inebriation. Consider the combined prophecies of Paul, John, and Daniel. According to Paul, "evil men and seducers" — already active in his day — were to "wax worse and worse." Believers were to turn away their ears from the Truth and turn unto fables. There would be a falling away so complete that a public official would be developed who could only be fitly described as "the Man of Sin and Son of Perdition," lording it over the consciences of mankind, and giving himself out as the representative of God upon earth (2Timothy 4:3-4; 2Thes. 2:3-8). According to John, a false church (symbolized by an unchaste woman) would be established at Rome, holding close relations with the governments of Europe, and constituting in alliance with them, a destroying tyranny (comparable only to a wild beast), which should exercise power over "all peoples, nations and languages," and use that power hurtfully against the saints of God for 42 months or 1260 days or years (Rev.13:5-8; 17:1-5, 18). According to Daniel, an ecclesiastical sprout should shoot forth from the head of the fourth beast (or Roman universal monarchy), and subvert three secular governments, and "make war with the saints and prevail against them" for time, times, and the dividing of time, which is reducible to 1260 days or years (Dan. 7:19-25).

Nothing is more striking in the European retrospect than the fulfilment of these prophetic foreshadowings. The history of Europe has been an ecclesiastical history. The work of the apostles has been inwrought with it, in a nominal form. A church has been founded at Rome professedly on their principles, but conducted in violation of them in every particular. The names of the apostles are on all their buildings, but the doctrines of the apostles are absent from their systems, which is mainly a structure of tradition and fable.

As the crowning feature of this false church's organization, visible to all the world for ages, has been a titular head, reputed infallible, assuming the name of God (Holy Father), and exercising an oppressive secular jurisdiction in all countries for centuries, either direct or through tools, working particularly against the saints of God, whom in all ages it has described as heretics.

Here is this notable prophecy now all a matter of history, and proclaimed to all the world as a fulfilled prophecy by this unmistakable circumstance, that the power to make war with the saints has departed from the Pope within the lifetime of the present generation, after having been possessed by him, directly or indirectly, just 1,260 years since it was accorded to him by imperial decree. But the world has no ear for such matters. Its foolish heart is "overcharged with the surfeiting and cares and pleasures" of this fleeting life. Consequently, this crying fact of the dispensation makes no impression upon it, although so far as the logic of facts is concerned, it is proclaimed with the tongue of the trumpet.

Instead of the lapse of time having weakened the words of Christ, it has greatly strengthened them. Do we not see "the things" which he said would characterize the end? Look at the roaring sea of nations, agitated democratically by a ground swell which has never before passed over the face of political waters. See the universal distress of nations with perplexity. Note the doleful forebodings generated in every reflective mind by the endless and unappeasable demands of the people, the intrigues of anarchism, and the hellish activity of dynamiters and Nihilists. Mark the shaking of the powers of the political heaven in all countries. See the "signs in the sun, moon and stars" of the political system — the dying Turk, the dried Euphrates, the restless Franco-frogs, the portentous arming of nations everywhere, the ascendancy of England in Egypt, the beginning of revival in the Holy Land, the formation of Jewish colonies; the stirring of the Jewish question in all lands.

We see these things "coming to pass." They have been steadily coming to pass before our eyes for 40 years past. They may have various meanings, but this one meaning they do have: They are the fulfilment of the words of Christ; and we have Christ's interpretation of them. "The Kingdom is nigh at hand." We have his own proclamation in connection with them: "Behold I come as a thief; blessed is he that watcheth." We have his own assurance beforehand as regards the world in general, that "as a snare" the crisis will burst upon all them that dwell upon the face of the whole earth. What is the course of wisdom on the part of his friends but the one he prescribes when he says: "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord when he will return from the wedding, that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching. Verily, I say unto you that he shall gird himself and shall

make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them... But if that servant shall say in his heart, my lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to beat the men-servants and maidens, and to eat and drink and be drunken, the lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.”

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## God Also Bearing Them Witness

*Positive evidences of resurrection of Jesus to disciples — actual “witnesses” — need of God-endorsement by Spirit-power — Pentecost miracle ground of resurrection — divinely-endorsed testimony before us — means of salvation if believed and obeyed.*

**T**HERE are chapters in the Bible that stand out like the events that are turning points in a man’s life. Such is the chapter read in our hearing — the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. It marks a new trend in the current of divine affairs upon the earth. Let us devote a part of the short time we are together this morning to the endeavor to realize the momentous bearing it has on our own life and the life of the world in the final upshot of things.

It is a narrative of events, to perceive the bearings of which, we must consider what had happened during the previous two months. Christ, whose wondrous ministry had filled Judea with a new and extraordinary excitement for three years and a half, had been publicly executed, and had been buried under a public certificate of death, and a public guarantee against the surreptitious removal of his body. On the third day, his grave had been officially certified as empty. That same day, as Acts 1:3, and other parts of the apostolic testimony inform us, “He showed himself alive... by many infallible proofs” — proofs not leaving the smallest loophole for unbelief or doubt; every proof by which it was possible for a man once dead to demonstrate to his friends that he had come alive again, showing himself to them in a succession of interviews, first to one group and then another, and then to all simultaneously, allowing himself to be handled, exhibiting marks of personal identity with which they were acquainted, talking with them of matters they were all aware of, and finally eating in their presence of food provided by them, which when he was gone was gone also.

Not only so, but he gave them instructions for their guidance when he should be taken from them (as he had often said to them he would be). The instructions were quite practical. We read in this first chapter of the Acts,

that "being assembled together with them, he commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem but WAIT for the promise of the Father which (saith he) ye have heard of me. Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

There is something here deserving the deepest consideration. The apostles were to be "witnesses," because they had "seen and heard" the things which they were to bear witness to (Acts 4:20). As Peter so frequently said afterwards in his public addresses, they were "his witnesses to the people" (Acts 2:32; 3:15; 4:20-33; 5:32; 10:39 and many other places). But if they were to be his witnesses in the sense of declaring what they had been personally cognisant of, why was it necessary that they should "wait" a certain time before beginning their work? The whole narrative shows us. The object of their testimony was to create conviction with reference to the things testified. Now, had they presented this testimony in the form of their own personal knowledge merely, it is certain that their labor would have been unsuccessful. The things they had to testify were so extraordinary that the people could not have believed them on the mere assertions of any number of witnesses. The apostles were to be qualified to give an effective testimony by the witness that God should give to their witness, in the "miracles, wonders and signs," which they should be enabled to work. This is what Jesus had said: "When the comforter is come whom I will send unto you from the Father, he shall testify of me, and ye also shall bear witness *Because ye have been with me from the beginning*" (John 15:26). The words of Paul are to a like purport: "Confirmed unto us by them that heard him, God also bearing them witness by signs and wonders and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will" (Heb.2:4).

It was for the promise of this powerful co-operation that Jesus told the disciples to "wait." Jesus did not tell them how long they would have to wait. As a matter of fact, it was only ten days. The occasion and form of its arrival challenge the utmost admiration in view of the object to be accomplished. So far as we know, it had not been revealed that the feast of Pentecost would witness the fulfilment of the promise, nor had the apostles been apprised of the arresting and convincing form the manifestation would take. What rendered the occasion so suitable was the presence at Jerusalem at that time of "Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven" (verse 5). The very cream of the Israelitish race, in a spiritual sense, were brought together at such a time, in the spirit of obedience to the Law; a prepared accumulation of good soil for the good seed to be sown. The city would be crowded with people at holiday leisure, and in a mood to be interested in what would be said and shown to them. The disciples, also, when "the day of Pentecost had fully come," were "all with one accord in one place," to keep the feast in the

same spirit that had brought together large numbers of devout Jews from all parts. This was a suitable moment chosen for the bestowal of the promised equipment for the apostolic enterprise, and now consider the form of it. A "sound of a rushing mighty wind filled all the house where they were sitting." This was the first token of the preternatural crisis that was upon them. By itself this would have been nothing as a sign to the unbelieving community of Jerusalem. What could a sound like the swaying of trees have signified, either to believers or unbelievers? So next, the rushing, however, concentrated itself over the heads of the twelve apostles in the form of "cloven tongues, as of fire, sitting upon each of them." But this also, by itself, would have failed of intelligible significance. Men would simply have exclaimed, "What an extraordinary thing. Whatever can be the cause? What a state these men's blood must be in to show a fiery appearance like that." But quite another complexion was given to it by the next phenomenon. "They began to speak with other tongues," not unknown tongues — not jabber or jargon that nobody could understand. There is much misunderstanding among the common run of people on this point. They have the idea that what happened on the day of Pentecost was on a par with the incoherent rave of modern delusionists, who think they imitate the apostles in pouring forth a stream of inarticulate and meaningless rodomontade. This is a terrible mistake. These fishermen spoke in the known language of their day, which they had never learnt. One spoke in Latin, one in Greek, one in Coptic, one in Persian, others in other current dialects, all in a clear grammatical style. They discoursed intelligibly in these tongues which they had never learnt, on "the wonderful works of God." In the crowded state of Jerusalem the marvel soon got noised abroad, and the visitors from other lands, in large number, "came together and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in their own language." Their curiosity was intensely aroused. The question was, "How is this?" "How hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born — Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God? And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, 'What meaneth this?'"

What could it mean? It was something entirely beyond human experience or capacity. It was as if a company of working men should begin all of a sudden to lecture learnedly in French or German, or Russian, on the profundities of chemistry or electrical science. No wonder that enquiring attention was fixed. This was one of the very objects aimed at. When people are curious to know, they are prepared to listen. There were, of course, some foolish suggestions as to the meaning of it, as is the manner with a crowd.



Some "mocking said, These men are full of new wine." Absurd! Drunkenness has been known to take away what sense and utterance a man has, but who ever knew of it imparting knowledge to him — whether of languages or anything else?

Peter stands up with the eleven and gives the true explanation. To appreciate the force of it, we must remember that the public execution of Jesus had taken place in less than two months before, and that the immense crowd assembled in the front of the house knew all about it, some from report and some from personal knowledge. "These are not drunken as ye suppose." It is something else altogether. It is connected with "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know. Him... ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain... This Jesus hath God raised up whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath shed forth this which ye now SEE AND HEAR... Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

It is not possible to conceive a more convincing testimony to the resurrection of Christ. The conjunction between the personal witness of the apostles and the evidence of divine co-operation with them was overpowering. No wonder that the crowd was stirred to the very heart, and anxiously enquired what they were to do. They had been convicted of being murderers of the Son of God; and the pain of the conviction would not be much assuaged by the apostolic assurance that the crucifixion was a matter of the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, and that "David had spoken concerning the matter." What hope could there be for the perpetrators of such a crime? "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

Peter told them what to do (verse 38) and they did it, "and the same day, there were added unto them about 3,000 souls." Thus was a beginning made to the work of planting the name and the faith of Christ in that position of worldwide acceptance and honor which they occupy in our own day. Thus was the foundation of christendom laid and though christendom is a poor counterfeit, having but little in common with the faith of Christ as originally promulgated by the apostles, yet its existence is of great value to us as an evidence of powerful means having been employed to establish it in the first case.

The nature of the means is manifest. It is nothing short of an absolute demonstration of Christ's resurrection. Nothing else could have caused thousands to embrace the faith of it at a time when to do so was to sacrifice everything dear to men. Having been so established, the fact remains unchanged and unchangeable to the present day, however much men may forget the fact or be weary of it.

Christ has not died since he rose, nor can he die any more. It is a glorious fact in itself; but how much more when coupled with the other fact that he is coming again and that the world, in a short time, will know him as it has never known him in times past as a powerful, personal, actual ingredient in the current, visible, practical life of men in all countries.

It is not possible that God could have contrived a more convincing testimony to the resurrection of His Son. We have only to imagine such circumstances in connection with the case of any public men in our day being publicly executed, as Ravachol or Valliant was recently executed — to see the force of them in carrying conviction. Some say, “Yes, very forcible, but you see, such circumstances do not happen in our day.” Friends, if they would be forcible in our day, they were forcible 1,800 years ago, and their force cannot be spent by the lapse of time.

Men fail to feel their force merely because they lose sight of them through engrossing attention to other things. Lift the veil of time, by means of the undeniable record of them, and there they stand in all their naked glory. It is the part of wisdom to be influenced by facts, however much our immediate surroundings may seem to shut them off. It is our part therefore to open the mind and heart without reserve to this fact of facts that Jesus rose from the dead, and was proclaimed to the nations of the earth as the ground of hope for man through reconciliation with God.

The same “some” say the case would have been more satisfactory if the resurrected Christ had been shown “to all the people,” and not “to witnesses chosen before of God who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.” This is both unreasonable and a presumptuous criticism. It is unreasonable because the divine object in the case required the belief of accredited testimony, as the means to be employed in working the work of salvation among men with which the restoration of Christ to familiar intercourse with men would have been incompatible. It is presumptuous, because it is the part of created intelligence to bow in the presence of an attested work of God.

True reason tells a man that whatever God appoints or enjoins must be wise and of binding force, and that a man must be a barbarian to raise the least demur. The only question in any case is: Has he appointed? To this there is but one answer in the case of the resurrection of Christ: it is the demonstrated work of God for the salvation of men who believe and obey His Word in the case. Be it ours to have the wondrous appointment always before us, and the heart in that docile and loving attitude on which Christ lays so much stress when he says: “Except a man receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no wise enter therein.”

## Unpleasant Things For the World

*Apparently barren portions of Word yet yield edification — disobedience brought desolation to Israel, etc. — Israel's trouble will soon end — opposing nations destroyed by God — Britain's duty to regather Jews — her mission and destiny.*

HOW important is the fact that God hath spoken, and that we have here in our hands the authentic and authorized record of what He has said. We believe the fact; are we always in the mental attitude of deferential attention to what we read in the Bible, which such a belief ought to inspire? It is to be feared, not. Our weak minds are so easily engrossed with the things of this life that we are often but indifferently affected by the great things presented to us in the Scriptures. So much the more need for that assembling of ourselves together which Paul enjoins, the very object of which is to refresh memory and strengthen faith in those things. Our system of progressive reading always brings some portion of the Word before us with that quality of profitableness which is necessarily the result of its being inspired.

This morning it is a chapter (Isaiah 17), which we may find not so barren as it looks. It is headed "the burden of Damascus," but there is much more in it than this. There is burden for other places and people as well, and some things that are not burdensome, but contrariwise, lightsome and gladsome. "Burden" is that which is heavy, and, applied to a message, means heavy tidings. There is much of heavy tidings in the prophets which is one result of their message being divine; reproof and condemnation for evil ways come from God. When it is left to man he speaks pleasant things. The prophets do not deal in pleasant things, but the reverse. "Gladness is taken away," says Isaiah in the chapter before the one we have read: "and joy out of the plentiful field; in the vineyards there shall be no singing." In the chapter before us Damascus is to "become a ruinous heap: the cities of Aroer are to be forsaken: the fortress is to cease from Ephraim." Even "the glory of Jacob" is to be "made thin in that day, and the fatness of his flesh shall wax lean." The harvest of the human activities then going on would not be such as they were aiming at and expecting, it would be "a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow." In a word, as at verse 9, "*There shall be desolation.*" Why all this terrible blackness in human prospects? The answer is in verse 10: "Because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the Rock of thy strength."

Here we have an important teaching of revelation — one that runs through every phase of that revelation namely, that forgetfulness of God is the ultimate cause of human ruin. The thing is true, both historically and in current experience, and whether affecting individual men or nations —

although it apparently may not be so at any one particular moment. It is a point on which the sons of God should rouse themselves. The world at large are guilty of this forgetfulness, and we are liable to be tintured by the thoughts of the world at large. If we remember what Christ said that "we are not of this world," we also remember that this being not of the world, consists of being not of its mind — not of its forgetfulness — not of its way. Our affections are not set upon the things that engage their loves; our memories are open to those things that they have no inclination for: "They say unto God, depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways. What is the Almighty that we should serve Him; and what profit should we have if we pray unto Him?" (Job 21:14). The sons of God say the very reverse: "The desire of our soul is to the remembrance of Thy name and to the remembrance of Thee. With our soul have we desired Thee in the night: Yea, with our spirit within us will we seek Thee early... My soul thirsteth for Thee: my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is" (Isa. 26:9; Psa. 63:1).

In the day when Isaiah wrote the words we are considering, Aroer, Ephraim, and the other places spoken of were in peace and prosperity. The message was, "There shall be desolation." We look round today and we ask, "How is it now?" The answer is, "Exactly as it was foretold." "The glory of Jacob has become very thin; the fatness of his flesh has waxed very lean." "Gleaning grapes" are left, as the oracle foretold, "as the shaking of an olive tree; two or three berries on the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches." The "strong cities" are "forsaken," as foreshown — the land a desolate wilderness where all was smiling fertility and populous occupation. Israel's state is exactly as foretold.

But there is a lifting of the veil towards the end of the chapter. "Woe to the multitude of many people which make a noise like the noise of the seas, and to the rushing of nations that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters." In what way this is to be considered as a lifting of the veil will appear when we consider the part performed by the nations in the affliction of Israel. They have prevailed against Israel for ages by their rushing power; and here is a glimpse of a turn in the rushing tide (verse 13): "The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters: but God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee afar off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind." The next verse justifies us in regarding this as the culminating crisis of Israel's troubles, and the commencement of the day of their deliverance. The verse reads thus: "And, behold at eveningtide trouble, and, before the morning, he is not. *This is the portion of them that spoil us, and the lot of them that rob us.*" Here is an evening and a morning in relation to Israel; an evening marked by trouble — trouble all round; and a morning when the trouble has rolled away like a spent thundercloud. We can have no difficulty in identifying both these. The "eveningtide" is the finishing season of the long day of evil that has prevailed

upon the earth. It is revealed in many parts of the Scriptures that the ending of this long day will be marked by "a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation upon the earth to that same time." Jesus speaks of it as a time when "distress of nations with perplexity and men's hearts failing them for fear" will indicate that "the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand." Israel were to be especial partakers of that trouble, after the analogy of the great trouble that befell them in Egypt just before their deliverance by Moses. This is plainly revealed by Jeremiah, who, contemplating the approach of the day when God would bring again the captivity of Israel and Judah exclaimed (30:6), "Wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great; it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it."

It is the saving of Israel out of his trouble that is plainly before us in Isaiah 17, "God shall rebuke them (the rushing nations), and they shall flee far off... This is the portion of them that spoil us." "At evening tide, trouble; and before the morning, he (the enemy) is not." This "morning" is one of the most beautiful of scripture figures. David said, "Joy cometh in the morning." No doubt he meant it in a general sense in contrast to the weeping that he says "may endure for a night." But it is true in the more specific sense of the chapter before us. He said of the Son promised to him, "He shall be like the light of the morning when the sun riseth." The arrival of Christ will inaugurate "the day of salvation," whose morning must necessarily be glorious. The evening preceding this morning is an evening of blackness and darkness and trouble; but when the morning has come, the darkness has disappeared. The enemy "is not." The spoiler has ceased. "The multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel (i.e. Jerusalem) ...and that distress her shall be as a dream of a night vision" (Isa. 29:7).

The definite shape which the overthrow and dispersal of the enemy takes on this momentous occasion is revealed in Ezek. 38th and 39th chapters, as we all know. In the latter days, as the prophecy informs us, a stupendous military confederacy, under Russian headship, invades the land, and carries all before it. Jerusalem is taken; the inhabitants made captive, and the whole land put under bondage. It seems as if Israel's prospects were shrouded in everlasting gloom. What arrests and turns back the flood is nothing less than the interposition of the glorious arm that broke the power of Egypt at the Red Sea: "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him. And the Redeemer shall come to Zion" (Isa. 59:19-20). No wonder, the spirit of prophecy breaks out in the next chapter, into loud, cheering apostrophe: "Arise, shine, for thy light is come; and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." For the enemy, it is a day of gloom: "Surely in that day, there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel so that the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of heaven, and the beasts of the field, and all creeping things that creep upon the earth, and all the men that are upon the face of the earth shall shake at My presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep

places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground, and I will call for a sword against him throughout all My mountains, saith the Lord God: every man's sword shall be against his brother. And I will plead against him with pestilence, and with blood and I will rain upon him and upon his band and upon the many people that are with him with an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone."

The chapter we have been considering, which tells us of the disaster that befalls the rushing nations at even-tide when "God shall rebuke them," is immediately followed by an address to "a land shadowing with wings" entrusted with a mission of mercy and aid to Israel. It can scarcely be an accident that such an address should be inserted in such a situation. It seems to come right into its place at the overthrow of the Russian Gog and his multitude; for that overthrow is succeeded by the work of rebuilding the Tabernacle of David which the nations had thrown down. That in this work, the Lord proposes to make use of the leading maritime power in the earth at that time, is a matter of gracious revelation: "Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows? Surely *The Isles* shall wait for Me, and the ships of Tarshish first to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them," etc. (Isa. 60:8). The situation of this passage (right in the heart of the glowing description of Israel's restoration in Isa. 60) narrows its application. The mention of "the ships of Tarshish" identifies it with the power spoken of by Ezekiel 38:13, as the antagonist of Gog in the land of Israel. The verse referred to informs us that in "the latter days" (see v.16), on the occasion of Gog coming out of his place in the north parts "descending upon the land of Israel as a cloud to cover the land," "Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish and all the young lions thereof shall say unto him, art thou come to take a spoil," etc. The two phrases "Merchants of Tarshish," and "the ships of Tarshish" point to a power trading by the sea "in the latter days" a specified epoch that gives the argument its pith. The declaration of the prophecy is that the ships of this power will be foremost in the work of bringing Israel again to their land.

We have now reached the latter days. This does not admit of a doubt. We look round at the situation, political, military and geographic, and we see a state of things exactly corresponding with the prophecy. We see the powerful Russian Gog, at the head of many vassal nations, "preparing" as commanded in Ezek. 38:7, in his place in the north parts (v.15). And we see another power situate in "the isles," whose ships cover the sea, and who is the natural rival and antagonist of the great Russian Bear. The conclusion that the ships of this British power are "the ships of Tarshish" becomes irresistible when we ascertain that Britain was the source of the tin supply furnished to the market of Tyre by Tarshish (Ezek. 27:12), and that the very name of Britain is traceable to a Phoenician (or Tyrian) word (*Baratanac*) signifying the tin islands. Britain is merely the Tarshish power pushed to her utmost western limits, yet exercising dominion in all the regions which formerly owned the name, east or west.

The proof is complete that this is the power addressed in Isa. 18, "Woe (or Ho!) to the land shadowing with wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia" — a land of extended empire, land of wide lying protectorates. This is exactly descriptive of the British power. "That sendeth ambassadors by the sea." This can only apply to an island power as a characteristic description. Other powers might use the sea for ambassadors, but an island power must. Other powers on conterminous territories could, and in most cases would, and do, use the land, an island power cannot send their ambassadors by the land.

Well, here, the numerous, well-appointed, swift-sailing vessels of Britain's naval and mercantile fleet are sent off to the work of bringing Israel from the ends of the earth when Christ arrives to "build again the tabernacle of David that is fallen down." The divine mandate here recorded is: "Go, ye swift messengers, to a nation scattered and peeled... in that time shall the present be brought in to the Lord of Hosts of a people scattered and peeled ... to the place of the name of the Lord of Hosts, the Mount Zion." Such a work will be very humiliating to British pride; but the British pride will first be broken, as it is testified earlier in Isaiah: "The day of the Lord of Hosts shall be... upon all the ships of Tarshish... when He arises to shake terribly the earth" (Isa. 2:12, 16, 19). There is intimation of a disaster to the British fleet which will make Britain sensible of the divine character of the power at work (Psa. 48:7). After this, she will be the "first" to place her ships at the Lord's service. All this is of unspeakable interest to us, placed as we are in the very heart of the power to be so divinely used. It is a pleasant thought, but let us not rest too much upon it. It will help us nothing in the great day drawing near, if it should be found that with all our knowledge, and all our satisfaction, we are lacking in that submission to God in His worship, love and obedience, of which Christ is the highest example, and by which all the true children of God are in some degree characterized.

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## Present Rest

*Suffering necessary — God's majesty vindicated in Christ's crucifixion — any present peace and rest obtained by worship and obedience to God — ambition, worldly ways, etc. bring unrest — forgiveness, obedience, etc. bring "rest that remaineth."*

**W**E know the truth of the popular saying, "Out of sight, out of mind." The Lord has been out of sight of his brethren for over 1,800 years, and he would have been liable to get out of their minds also if he had not provided this ordinance of the breaking of bread by which he is in a measure kept in their remembrance. It is a most beautiful and most fitting ordinance in every way. It not only brings him specially before us once in seven days, but it brings him before us in an aspect especially suited to our present

needs. It is not in the aspect of power or glory that we are invited to contemplate him in this broken bread and poured out blood, but in that of suffering. We are reminded that he was a sufferer: that it pleased the Lord to bruise him. Our own part at present is very much one of suffering, and we are enabled to bear it properly by the exhibition of this body given and this blood shed. We are made to realize that the first stage of our development as sons of God is necessarily one of humiliation, and that in this stage the Lord himself has preceded us, in having been made to "learn obedience by the things that he suffered," as is testified. In these two significances, the breaking of bread has great value.

But there is another meaning which we are slow to take in, perhaps, and yet which lies at the root of the matter. Why was the Lord called upon to suffer? Why was the Holy One commanded to allow himself to be put to death by sinners? "This commandment" he said, he had "received of the Father," and he prayed unavailingly in the garden of Gethsemane that the cup might pass from him. It has to do with the greatness of God and the smallness of man. He has said "I will be exalted." He has said "I will be sanctified" — (held in holy reverence and deepest and highest honor) — "in them that approach unto Me." He has invited man to approach. He has said "Come unto me." "Look unto me." "Draw nigh to me." "Come out from among the unclean, and I will receive you." But between these two points — the point at which man is invited, and the point at which his compliance is accepted lies this awful ceremony of holiness, — the condemnation of sin in the public crucifixion of one who bore the sin nature, but who was himself obedient in all things. A condemnation with which we are required to identify ourselves in the ceremony appointed for the purpose — baptism into his death. We do not "show forth the Lord's death" to any effectual purpose if we do not see the terrible majesty of God which was vindicated in it. The principle is illustrated to us in the vision of the seraphim covering head and body in the presence of God, and saying "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts." If the angels of His presence humble themselves thus before God, what attitude becomes mortal man but the very one provided in this institution: "crucified with Christ," yet saying with Paul, "Nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

We are here also to soothe ourselves with the words which he spoke. He spoke them for all who should be pleased to receive them. Many and precious they are — perhaps none more suited to our need than the ones before us in the words which have been read: "I will give you rest." The idea of rest is agreeable to the weary, and we are all weary. We need not dwell on the physical weariness inseparable from "this corruptible." All men agree on the need for "Nature's sweet restorer" — that mysterious and healing suspension of consciousness that takes place, or ought to take place, when we lay our heads on the pillow. All are agreed as to the advantage of recurring seasons of holiday rest. But there is a weariness of which the world in general is not so directly conscious, and of which the rest that Christ speaks is the remedy. God said to Israel, in reference to their



efforts to keep up style to please the neighboring nations, "Thou art wearied in the greatness of thy way." So it may be said to the world in general, that it is weary in the emptiness of its way. It knows nothing of the sweet restfulness that belongs to Christ. Rest naturally belongs to his ways. "Learn of me," says he, "for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." There is a "rest that remaineth for the people of God" — a rest that will, as Isaiah says of Christ's rest, "be glorious in that day," but this is not the rest of which Christ here speaks. He is speaking of a present rest, which he otherwise speaks of as "my peace" — a peace, he says, which the world cannot give, a peace which Paul speaks of as "the peace of God that passeth all understanding, filling the heart and mind." "Let the peace of God dwell in your hearts, and be ye thankful."

"Learn of me, I am meek and lowly of heart." This belongs to rest and peace. The violent and the arrogant do not and cannot know peace. It is not in the nature of things for the service of the lower faculties to bring rest and peace, but rather the reverse — unrest, unhappiness and fear. A contemplation of our own mental constitution will show us this (and we must remember that we are of divine workmanship — notwithstanding the abortive state in which we live). All the faculties to which Christ appeals are of a restful action. The worship of God; what peace there is in this. The love and service of neighbor; what sweetness is like it. It is well said that "the merciful man doeth good to his own soul; but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh." Then take the action of faith and hope; no faculties are more calming and soothing to the mental man. So with conscientiousness or the sense of duty to which the law of Christ is one prolonged appeal. There is no satisfaction so pure and lasting as that which comes from the habit of doing things because they ought to be done — because they are right to be done and because we ought to do that which is right — quite apart from any other considerations. So also with the cultivation of the understanding — the pursuit of knowledge — the love of wisdom — there is no peace like the peace that comes with these. To all these Christ invites us in asking us to learn of him, and under the power of all these we are brought when we surrender to the full obedience of his law, with the result that we "find rest." In the world there is no rest. Ambition distends the mind with more gas; emulation is a feverish competition that leaves no joy behind; avarice is an appetite never satisfied. The life of the world as a picture may be bright, many-hued, and gaudy, but it is all a vain show that cheats and wounds the heart of every one that follows it. In Christ there is perfect peace, even in the midst of the tribulation that is inseparable from the life of faith.

But there is a higher ingredient in the "rest" that Christ offers. It relates to a heavier burden than any that belongs to the present life. Paul speaks of those that "through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." This fear, we know, arises out of sin. Solomon tells us that "fools make a mock at sin." It is no new thing, therefore, for a man to make light of sin. Sin is a terrible reality though scouted in our generation as a pious myth. Let us not be diverted from

wisdom in this matter by the general folly. It is a matter of revelation that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,” and that “the wrath of God” is operative against this state of things and will inflict “tribulation and anguish, indignation and wrath upon every (responsible) soul of man that doeth evil” — who will at last be “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power when he shall come to be glorified in his saints.”

Now, to a reasonable man, it is a cause of much heaviness and distress of mind that he should be implicated in such a situation. We are all originally in this position. We have all to own with Paul that among the sinners that go to make up the present evil world, “we all had our conversation in time past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath even as others” (Eph. 2:2). “At that time,” as he further says, “we were without Christ... having no hope and without God in the world.” How is it possible that we could have rest and peace of mind in such a state of things? No amount of the exercise of veneration, benevolence, faith, hope, conscientiousness, observation, causality and comparison could bring peace under such a condition of alienation from God and condemnation by His law, any more than physical health could give peace to a man sentenced to be executed for treason. We require to be assured of God’s friendship, and of our reconciliation to Him through forgiveness. Here is emphatically where we find rest in Christ. “Through this man is preached the forgiveness of sins.” A forgiven man is at rest. “God, for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven us,” if we submit to Christ. There is no reconciliation in any other way. The reconciliation in this way is complete. This is what Paul calls “the ministry of reconciliation, to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” The conditions are simple, and we have complied with them. “By him all that believe are justified”... that is, forgiven. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.” Christ crucified and raised is the way to reconciliation and peace for those who believe and obey, and for no other. And there is no other way, “No man cometh unto the Father but by me.” “I am the way.” “There is none other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved.” These are the express declarations of revealed truth which compel us to stand aside from systems and thoughts around us that make human righteousness and human salvation independent of the work of Christ.

“Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus, by whom we have access into this grace wherein we stand.” Thus we find rest. But there is one higher and final step. There is a future rest — a rest that remaineth — the prospect of which adds much to the rest we now enjoy in the confidence of the hope. Of the nature of that rest we learn something from Paul’s treatment of the subject in Heb. 3 and 4. It comprises both locality and state. The locality comes before us in the reference to the failure of the Israelites who came out of

Egypt to enter the land of promise: "To whom sware He that they should not enter into His rest but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief." This remark is based on Psa. 95, in which Paul here declares "the Holy Spirit saith" (see ch 3:7), "I sware in My wrath that they should not enter into My rest" (ch. 3:11). This is God's own description of the Holy Land and all that its inheritance involves in His presence and favor. It is not the only place where the description occurs. In Psalm 132 it is still more plainly said (v. 13): "The Lord hath chosen Zion: He hath desired it for His habitation. This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell, for I have desired it." So also Moses speaks of the land as "the rest and the inheritance of the Lord" (Deu. 12:9). In the song that Moses and the children of Israel sang on the shores of the Red Sea on the morrow after the overthrow of the Egyptians, it is spoken of as "the mountain of Thine inheritance — the place, O Lord, which Thou hast made for Thee to dwell in; the sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established" (Exo. 15:17).

It seems strange at first sight that a particular spot on the earth's surface should be associated with the divine rest and pleasure, seeing that all the earth belongs to Him. But the thought changes when we reflect that if God indeed dwell on the earth, as He proposes to do, pitching His tabernacle among men for their deliverance at last from every curse, there must be some spots much more fitted for such a manifestation than others. The eternal snows of the North Pole, for example, would not be a suitable locality for the revelation of the glory of the Lord. Of all the places on earth, He necessarily knows which is the best, and the choice He has made shows it; for the land of Canaan, which He has promised as an everlasting inheritance to Abraham and his seed, is the glory of all lands — in whichever way you view it. It is, in a word, "the glory of all lands," and well fitted to be "the rest and the inheritance of the Lord," in the day when the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. "Israel," we are informed "could not enter in because of unbelief" (Heb. 3:19), upon which there is this suggestive comment in ch. 4:6, "It remaineth that some must enter therein," and in verse 1, "Let us therefore fear lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." This practical application of the matter, which is utterly unintelligible on the immortal soul hypothesis of the popular religionism of the day, is perfectly apparent on the principles of the Truth — the Gospel of the Kingdom founded on the promises made to the fathers. Instructed by the prophets, as expounded by Jesus and the apostles, we learn that the "rest" which was not attained under the Law in the hands of the typical Joshua will be reached under the new covenant in the hands of Jesus, the mediator thereof, at his coming, when "His rest," as we read in Isaiah 11:10, "shall be glorious." "In that day shall the Branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel." "Thou shalt weep no more: the Lord shall be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry... in the day that the Lord bindeth up the

breach of His people and healeth the stroke of their wound." "Your soul shall be as a watered garden: thou shalt not sorrow any more at all." "Ye shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." "For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul."

These are the great and precious promises — the "fat things full of marrow" — which the Spirit of God invites men to partake of instead of the empty notions and enterprises that men create for themselves. The question will press to the very last: "Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live." Be it ours, brethren and sisters, to respond to this reasonable and loving challenge, and to be found among those who at the last shall enter into the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

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## Diminish not a Word

*Politics, business, fame, pleasure, all fail and cheat — Word of God supplies all needs — Some rejected, some accepted — God's preparations for future glory — prophet's messages unpalatable — present Truth with energetic thoroughness — no fear or suppression.*

**W**HAT an extraordinary thing the Truth is! What other thing on earth is there that would stand such constant handling without wearing out? Here we are after many years, speaking of it Sunday after Sunday, still talking of it one to another, without any loss of interest. Its power to comfort, to purify, to make strong in the battle of life — abates not in the least from year to year. It is perennial — inexhaustible. It suits all weather and all circumstances. The bright sunshine that streams in at the window on this midsummer morning does not eclipse or dim it. The dark and cold of winter, which we have often seen, when it seems difficult to live, only increases its glory. It is the moderating and sweetening element in prosperity, such as David was permitted at last to see; it is the soothing and sustaining power in the dark hours of affliction.

Is there anything like it among all the busy occupations and schemes, and pursuits, and affections of men? We see many activities among them, in the upper walks of life, they are absorbingly busy, either in politics, business, fame, art or pleasure, do any of these endure the constant handling which we find the Truth can stand? There is but one answer, and it is the answer supplied in the words of Peter: "The glory of man is as the flower of the field." Flowers don't last. They bloom in great beauty and fragrance for a season, and then they disappear; politics are a weariness and a vexation after the novelty

and glory have worn off. Men want to get out of them in broken health after the first few years. Business becomes a spiritless drudgery; and even when its highest prizes are secured, and the successful competitor retires upon the fruits of his labor, it is only to find that life is a burden when the activities of business life are withdrawn. Fame is a mocking mirage whose pursuit is a consuming fever; art is but a hobby based upon too limited an action of the mind to give permanent satisfaction. As for "pleasure," no flower withers so soon, no impostor cheats more thoroughly, no enemy wounds more fatally.

In contrast with all these, Peter declared that "while all flesh is grass, and the glory of man as the flower of the field," "the Word of the Lord endureth for ever." The statement is true in all senses, and it is one of the utmost benefit to us to see its truth. Its highest truth we instinctively recognize, namely that while human nature is a vanishing form of life, the creative energy of which it is a blossom, is eternal; also that while the highest good attainable in the present life is transient, the life offered in the Word of God is perfect, and will endure for ever. But it is true in the experience of mortal life — that while everything else dies in our hands as the years roll on, the Word of the Lord remains an ever-living treasure whose preciousness only increases with the efflux of our vain life. This is inevitable from the nature of it. It appeals to the highest needs and capacities of man. It gives us God and we need Him, whether in our first ignorance we know it or not. It gives us a mediator, who is essential to us, for without a mediator, we cannot come into relations of friendship with the Upholder of heaven and earth. It gives us hope, and without hope the human mind cannot develop to the full beauty of which it is now capable. We need the infinite and everlasting light of hope on the horizon, and this the gospel alone gives us. It gives us a standard of duty, without which man is as a rudderless ship in the ocean currents of inclination and whim. It imposes on us the constant obligation to be worshipful of God and mindful of man. It requires prayers without ceasing and well-doing without weariness at our hands. It commands us with a daily monition to "Love the Lord with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves." It asks us to forsake folly and to seek understanding with industry. For these reasons, it touches the perennial springs of human mentality, and explains the wonderful fact before us, that we can go on reading and talking about the Truth all the year round, year after year, without the weariness and sense of satiety that belongs to every other form of human activity.

How good it would be to see the whole world in this beneficent line of action. We have been singing the well-known Psalm, "All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice." This is not only a divine adjuration to mankind, but a divine adumbration of what is coming. If we sang it merely as a piece of advice to the world, it would be a vain exercise. We might as well whistle to the wind. "All people that on earth do dwell" have no mind to sing to the Lord at all. They are in Pharaoh's mood: "Who

is the Lord that I should obey Him?" They are like Belshazzar: they are not aware that their very power to breathe, upon which all else depends, is in the hand of God. They are like those of whom Job speaks: "They say unto God, depart from us: we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways." But, nevertheless, "God hath appointed a day," in which there will be a great change. God hath decreed: "Unto Me every knee shall bend and every tongue confess." His appointments and His decrees stand fast. They cannot be set aside. His words shall not return unaccomplished. Whatever men think or do, the purposes of God will be fulfilled in their due season. "I, the Lord, will hasten it in His time." It is well to plant this fact deeply in our hearts — that the effectuation of the purposes of God in no way depends on us. It is with the spiritual sun as with the natural. The sun will rise without our co-operation. We go to sleep and are wrapped in the unconsciousness of helpless slumber, but the machinery of this mighty universe rests not a moment. At the due moment (to a second by the watch) — the morning's sun will show on the horizon whether we are awake or asleep. If we die, it will make no difference. We cannot help and we cannot hinder the ways of God. God exists without us. Christ lives whether we think he does or not. He will come again, whether we are believing, or unbelieving. The times of the Gentiles will end, whatever schemes they may have in hand for their continuance, or whatever steps they may take to carry them out. "The God of heaven shall set up a Kingdom," however extensively republicans may organize or anarchists plot. They shall all of them — republicans and monarchies — be "broken to pieces like a potter's vessel," however skilfully they may strengthen themselves with formidable rifled artillery, iron-plated battleships, destructive torpedoes, or bullet-proof coats. "Many are the counsels of a man's heart; but the purpose of the Lord, that shall stand."

We cannot alter or retard the purpose of God. One thing we can do, and this is all we can do: we can fasten on to it. This we are invited to do — commanded to do. Those who comply with this command will see the glory of God in the land of the living. The Kingdom of God will be established: and they will be there, with Christ as the glorious head over all upon earth. Of others, it is said, "They shall not enter in," "They shall not inherit," "They shall be cast out." Do we want to be among these? Where is the man who does not desire to be rather among those whom God shall select, and spare as "His jewels"? as saith the Lord by the prophet, "They shall be Mine in that day when I make up My jewels." The question is, How are we to be included? One thing is certain: the privilege is open to all if the conditions are complied with. There will be no favoritism in the matter. There is no respect of persons with God. "Whosoever" is their constant description, that is, whosoever pleases God. He has made known how we can please Him. There is no obscurity about this part of the subject. We must know Him; we must love Him; we must obey Him; we must be interested in those things in which

He delights. The house of the wicked, at present established upon the earth, has the reverse of all these characteristics. He purposes to build a house to take their place when the house of the wicked is with violence overthrown. He has laid the foundation in Zion, as He said, and He has got ready in advance many of the stones that are to be built on the foundation. Indeed, the materials of the house are nearly all provided. We live in an age when the work is nearly done. It is not an interesting work to mere natural sense, because mere natural sense unenlightened does not know the purpose of God, and is only interested in what it can see and hear — which is all very well so far as it goes, but a very limited and transient affair for mortals. No house in the first stage is interesting to those who do not know what is going on. There is a mere display of heaps of sand and mortar and stone and brick, and piles of timber, with perhaps a bit of the framework beginning to show in the middle. To the architect or the destined proprietor these heaps are interesting. In the present case the house is not only in its rudimentary stage, but it is invisible. The stones are not literal stones, but men who are passed away and long forgotten, so far as man is concerned. Most of the men who will surround Christ in the day of his glory are in the dust. They reach back in a long line — even to the gates of Eden. The work of their preparation has been, and continues to be, a rough work, which is one reason why it is a work not attractive to natural men. We see it illustrated in the case of Jeremiah who was one of them. We have him before us in the chapter read in a position profitable for us to contemplate in our evil day. What is that position? A position of single-handed antagonism to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. He was commanded to deliver a most unpalatable message to them — viz., that if they would not reform their ways, and live in harmony with the Law which He had given them, He would destroy them and make the temple a ruin, and Jerusalem a curse to the whole earth (Jer. 26:1-6). Jeremiah was earnestly enjoined to be thorough in his communication. He was not to soften or trim the message in any way. “Speak all the words that I command thee to speak unto them, diminish not a word.” Let us note this. It implies that Jeremiah was under some kind of temptation to keep back the message. So he was. He tells us so, earlier in the book, viz., that because the Word of the Lord was made a derision to him daily, he was inclined to hold his peace (ch. 20:8-9). The command now was “Hold not thy peace.” “Cry aloud and spare not.” The point has an importance for all who would do the will of the Lord in our day and generation. We have not received a message such as Jeremiah received, nor a command such as he was laid under. But we have received a message and a command, nevertheless. The message and the command laid upon believers in the first century retain their force for all believers till the Lord come. “Let him that heareth say, come.” “Shine as lights in the world.” “Hold forth the Word of life.”

Now this obligation may be discharged in a pinched and niggardly way, or

it may be done with openhanded and energetic thoroughness. We may hold back the profession of faith through fear of unpopularity, or we may do the work as Paul did, who said, "I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God." As to which is the right method, reason cannot falter. The Word of God to Jeremiah gives us the right cue. "Diminish not a word." "He that hath My Word, let him speak it faithfully." Professors who are only half enlightened, or who are in bondage to their worldly interests which they fear to put in peril, are very liable to "diminish" the Truth exceedingly, so that in their hands, it shrinks to a mere variation of the popular superstition. The influence of such faint-hearted professors is not good. They are liable to demoralize fellow-soldiers. They would be better as out-and-out enemies. No good comes from a half-and-half profession of the Faith. Even present interests are not protected by it. There is a very fair illustration of this in the same chapter.

Jeremiah obeyed the command to be thorough. He went and took up his position openly in the court of the temple, and delivered the message fully and without running away. The result was his arrest and threatened death. It seemed likely he would die, for "all the people were gathered against him in the house of the Lord" (ch. 26:9). But a turn in circumstances delivered him and placed him under the protection of a powerful prince. But in the case of another man, "Urijah, the son of Shemaiah, of Kirjath-jeearim, who prophesied against the city: according to all the words of Jeremiah," matters worked out differently. Whether he received a message direct from the Lord, or merely re-echoed the words of Jeremiah, does not appear; but at all events, when the king heard of his words, he ordered his arrest and execution, which Urijah hearing of, Urijah "was afraid and went and fled into Egypt" (v. 21). He thought he had made himself safe by running away. It was not so. The king despatched messengers in pursuit, "and they fetched Urijah out of Egypt and brought him unto Jehoiakim, the king, who slew him with the sword and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people," whereas, "the hand of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death." Jeremiah, who did his duty and braved death was preserved, while Urijah, who did his part in a timid hearted way, and fled from danger, was overwhelmed in the peril he feared. The way of faithfulness is the way of safety — sometimes even now, for God can preserve His servants in the midst of danger without appearing to interfere. Certainly, at last, there is no other way of safety, for the words of Christ will be absolutely true, in this as in all other matters, that "he that loseth his life for my sake, the same shall save it." Let us, therefore, "endure hardness as good soldiers of Christ Jesus" — "contending earnestly for the Faith once for all delivered to the saints." The enterprise is the most bootless and unwise and dangerous to which we can put our hands from the present point of view, for there is nothing so detestable to all classes of the people as



the Truth of God as testified in the Scriptures. But in the end, it will prove the most honorable and advantageous work in which the sons of men can engage: and in such a work we are on God's side, and He has promised that He will not forget those who are faithful to Him in the day of evil. He will give them an everlasting place in His house, in which are pleasures for ever more flowing from the deep fountains of eternal wisdom, and life that never ends.

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## God Condemned Sin in the Flesh of Jesus

*Sin rightly brings death — mercy — door opened to repentant, obedient sinners — Jesus not a substitute — sin condemned in Jesus by God, at crucifixion — a righteous character in unclean flesh — God's supremacy admitted, His mercy forgives.*

YOU may remember that after the resurrection of Christ, he made up to two of his sorrowing disciples incognito as they walked along the road on a business errand to a distant village, and asked them why they were talking so dejectedly together. He knew well what it was that troubled them. Why then did he feign ignorance? Undoubtedly to draw them out. It was a pleasure to him to hear them unfold their feelings with reference to the terrible events of the last three days — a pleasure because he knew how soon and how effectively he was about to apply a balm to their wounds. It is probably a pleasure to every human being to overhear himself talked about, if the communications are those of appreciation. Christ, though so immeasurably above us, shared this feeling in measure. Can we doubt, then that our meeting this morning affords him pleasure? We have just been attentively reading together the very full account of his sufferings written by Matthew at the time. Though withdrawn from the earth, he is not unaware of what is going on among us, as his message to the seven ecclesias testifies. Have we not also his express statement: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." With the power of the universal spirit of God at his command, there is no limit to the possibility of his presence. He can fix his attention and be influentially present at any point. It all depends upon what there may be to interest him. He is interested where he is recognized and loved as the result of wisdom reigning. How can he be interested where the carnal mind is in the ascendant and men are only interested in themselves?

We are assembled expressly to do what he commanded. "Do this (break this bread, drink this wine) in remembrance of me." It is his pleasure that we

do this, and it is to our benefit. The meaning of it he has told us. It connects with and brings forward the very events that were sorrowfully engaging the minds of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus; "My body broken: my blood shed" for you. "It pleased the Lord to bruise him," so we read in Isaiah — "to put him to grief." Yet the Lord loved him: "My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." How apparently inconsistent are the two things! Why bruise him if He loved him? There is a full explanation, but we cannot see it unless we comprehensively take the whole system of wisdom of which Christ was the centre in relation to us. There was a history going before, necessitating his appearing. It is too simple for "the wisdom of the world," but we need not be afraid, "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." Sin had entered, and sin had prevailed, bringing woe and death. What sin is we are told: it is "the transgression of the law" (1John 3:4). It is "disobedience" (Rom. 5:19). And what may disobedience be? It is the doing of that which is forbidden: the omission to do what is commanded. And the terrible penalty is death. It is all very simple, and it is all very reasonable. As to the simplicity, the great verities of the universe are all simple. What's simpler than letting fresh air in by a gullet to give us life? Choke up the gullet with a bit of tough beef, and where is your philosopher? Gone as clean as the meanest strangled rat or rabbit. The high-stepping mightinesses of philosophy are absurd. The great facts of God are simple, and it is our business to "receive them as little children." As to the reasonableness, since God has given us a power of choice, and since this power is capable of being used with great mischief, is it not good and even necessary that God should tell us how to use it? and is it not necessary that His command in this case could be of an imperative obligation? Ought not His will to be the supreme law of life? and ought not insubordination to be insufferable? Is it not defensible on every ground that the wages of sin should be death? There is only one answer to all these questions, and that answer brings the heartiest endorsement of the ways of God, and the severest rebuke of the shallow presumption that would criticize and disparage these ways.

"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death hath passed upon all men for that all have sinned." Now, how was this state of things to be remedied? There were three ways of mending it. One way was to exterminate the whole human species. But this would have been a poor remedy. It would have been to confess failure — that God had set a-going an arrangement on this planet for His glory and could not make it work. This was impossible. God has said that He has not made the earth in vain; that He formed it to be inhabited by the righteous; and that as truly as He lives, it will be wholly filled with His glory yet. The second way would have been what might be called the toleration-of-sin method — the universal and indiscriminating pity method, by which the wickedness of disobedience should have been ignored, and mankind allowed to occupy the earth immortally for

their own pleasure. But this also was impossible. It would have meant God's abdication, and the handing over of man to eternal misery. There was a third way — a middle way, and that is the way which has been adopted — namely, to enforce the law against sin, and at the same time leave the door open for mercy to repentant and obedient sinners. How such a method could be made consistent with itself has been exhibited to us in the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ.

There has been no operation in divine wisdom so completely misapprehended and misrepresented as this. The popular preaching of the death of Christ is a complete travesty of it. It brings it down to a level with the sacrifices of idolatrous superstition, by which wrathful deities are supposed to be placated by the blood of a victim in consideration of which, the offerer is supposed to go free. Christ is represented as having paid our debts — as having died instead of us — as having stood in our room like a substitute in military service, or like a man rushing to the scaffold where a criminal is about to be executed, and offering to die instead of him (a favorite illustration in the pulpit).

All this is a complete obscuration of the divine objects in the sacrifice of Christ. Such views are contradicted by even the most superficial facts of the case, for if Christ died instead of us, then we ought not to die (which we do); and if he paid the penalty naturally due from us, he ought not to have risen (which he did) for certainly there would have been no resurrection for us had we died in darkness unredeemed. And if his death was of the character alleged, the redeeming power lay in itself and not in the resurrection that followed; the resurrection that followed was not essential to its efficacy on such a theory of its character — which renders it impossible for us to understand the declaration of Paul to the Corinthians that, notwithstanding the death of Christ, "if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, and ye are yet in your sins" (1Cor. 15:17). Further, if Christ has paid our debts, our debts are not forgiven, for it would be absurd for a creditor to talk of having forgiven a debt, which someone else has paid for the debtor — and thus is blotted out the very first feature of the Gospel of the grace of God — the forgiveness of our sins "through the forbearance of God" (Rom 3:25).

What was the meaning of the death of Christ then? It has been defined for us in the words of inspiration and the definition satisfies all the demands of the understanding, reconciling every apparently discordant element in the case. It is defined twice in the course of Paul's letter to the Romans — in two different forms combining to exhibit the whole case. In the first, he says it was to "declare His (God's) righteousness for (and in order to) the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (ch. 3:25), and in the second, he says it "condemned sin in the flesh" (ch. 8:3). If we consider these two descriptions, we shall see the meaning of the whole matter.

The crucifixion of Christ as a "declaration of the righteousness of God"

and "a condemnation of sin in the flesh," must exhibit to us the righteous treatment of sin. It was as though it was proclaimed to all the world, when the body was nailed to the cross. "This is how condemned human nature should be treated according to the righteousness of God; it is fit only for destruction." The shedding of the blood was the ritual symbol of the Truth; for the shedding of the blood was the taking away of life. Such a declaration of the righteousness of God could only be made in the very nature concerned; a body under the dominion of death because of sin. It would not have been a declaration of the righteousness of God to have crucified an angel or a new man made fresh from the ground. There would have been confusion in such an operation. This is why it was necessary that Jesus should be "made of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom. 1:3), that he might partake of the very flesh and blood of man (Heb. 2:14). It was that nature that was to be operated upon and redeemed in him. It was needful that he should at the first "come in the flesh." This is where the gnostic heresy of the first century condemned by John (1John 4:3) was so disastrous to the scheme of God's wisdom in Christ. They denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh, which obscured the lesson taught and the object aimed at in the sacrifice of Christ. This also is the effect of the orthodox doctrine of substitution and the kindred doctrine of Renunciationism which has been ventilated in our day and still lingers in uninformed quarters here and there.

The object of this sacrificial declaration of the righteousness of God is also made clearly manifest in its practical applications. It was "for (or in order to) the remission of sins that are past," that is, where men believe — "remission," not as a legal right accruing, but as the gift of grace, "through the forbearance of God." There would be no "forbearance" if a legal claim had been discharged. God "forgives for Christ's sake" (Eph. 4:32). This is the literal issue of the whole matter. God's supremacy having been vindicated, a foundation has been laid on which He can offer forgiveness without the compromise of wisdom and righteousness. He does not offer it or allow it apart from submission to the declaration of His righteousness in Christ crucified. There must be the most humble identification with that declaration. Baptism in our age is provided as the means of that identification. The believer is "baptised into his death" (Rom. 6:3), and "buried with him in baptism" (Col. 2:12) and receives the forgiveness of all his sins "through the forbearance (the kindness, the graciousness) of God," who is pleased with our conformity to the form of humiliation He has provided. The whole sacrificial institution and our endorsement of it in baptism is comparable to a form of apology presented to the Majesty of heaven as the condition of our receiving His mercy unto life eternal. The object secured is the triumphant assertion and recognition of God's supremacy and man's abasement as a dependent beneficiary. Thus law and mercy are reconciled.

It may be asked, could not such a result have been achieved by the

sacrificial immolation of any sinner? So far as the mere condemnation of sin was concerned, no doubt the lesson could have been thus enforced; but as in all the works of God, there were more objects than one. Not only had sin to be condemned, but resurrection had to come in harmony with the Law that made death the wages of sin; and this resurrection was not merely to be a restoration of life, but the provision of an administrator of the glorious results achieved, the raising up of one who should be a mediator between God and man, the dispenser of the forgiveness and the salvation of God through him, and the Judge also of who should be fit to receive these great gifts. All these aims required that the sacrificial victim should be a perfectly righteous man, as well as a possessor of the nature to be sacrificially condemned — who should do no sin himself, while “made sin” and treated as sin for us; who should be just and holy, obedient in all things, while “numbered with the transgressors and making his grave with the wicked.” Consequently, it required God’s interposition in the way recorded by the apostles. “The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, Mary: the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee. Therefore also that holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Thus God “sent forth His Son made of a woman made under the law” (Gal. 4:4). Being made of a woman, he was of our nature — our condemned and weak and mortal nature, but being begotten of God and not of man, he was in character spotless “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” Sin had hold of him in his nature, which inherited the sentence of death from Adam, but it had no hold of him in his character: for he always did those things that were pleasing to his Father. When he died, “he died unto sin once.” But God raised him because of his obedience, and, “being raised from the dead, he dieth no more: Death hath no more dominion over him” (Rom. 6:9-10). “Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). So we may triumphantly enquire with Paul in Rom. 8:33; “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”

It is important to understand these things, because they qualify us for acceptable approach to God, and they work out the right result in character and daily life. In dealing even with great men, you are unacceptable if you do not enter into the spirit and aim of their etiquette; how much more with God who “taketh not pleasure in fools” and in men “that have no understanding.” In our approaches to Him in prayer, we must understand that though He is kind and gracious He makes no compromises of the greatness of His way, but will be “sanctified in them that approach unto Him.” We must also understand that we can establish no claim; this passing by of our sins is the act of His forbearance; that no debt of ours has been paid or can be paid; that what the death of Christ has done has been to declare His righteousness that we may,

by taking part in it, receive God's free forgiveness through him. Thus God in all things is glorified. The orthodox theology of the day generates an offensive spirit of presumption.

So also do wrong views on this subject interfere with a proper development of character. The idea that Christ has borne our punishment and paid our debts; and that his righteousness is placed to our credit, and that all we have to do is believe it, is demoralizing. It nullifies that other most important element of the Truth, that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God, and that he only is righteous who doeth righteousness. It draws a veil over the truth that we have to "work out our salvation" by a "patient continuance in well-doing," and that he only that endureth to the end shall be saved. It undermines that most important testimony of the gospel that Christ is the judge of who is fit to be saved, and that he will impartially give to every man according to his works. These blighting results are to be witnessed in all communities where the doctrine of a substitutionary sacrifice and an imputed righteousness holds sway. Where there is any robust righteousness of character exhibited, where any true holiness of life — it is where the purifying Truth is discerned, believed, and cherished in daily Bible reading and prayer. The Truth is a beautiful and perfect whole. The sacrifice of Christ, at first a mystery to the natural mind, becomes lucid and glorious as a sunbeam of life and light. Enveloped in the clouds of false thoughts and theories, it is hidden as entirely from view as if it had never been preached. God permit us admission among the noble and gladsome throng that will at last ascribe glory and blessing "to him who was slain, and who hath washed them from their sins in his own blood, and hath redeemed them to God out of every kindred and tongue and people and language to reign with him for ever."

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## Bible Things are True

*Old things and new — Tyre's power and glory, Ezekiel's prophecies of downfall, Tyre disappeared — prophecies re Israel, Palestine, Babylon, Egypt, Papacy, Jesus, etc., in great variety and detail all came true — prophecies of future will also — glory and joy ahead.*

**A**T this Table of the Lord, we stand between the old and the new, and curiously blend both in our present experience. We have "put off the old man with his deeds" in the sense of having broken bread with the lead and guidance of the nature into which we were born: yet that nature is still with us and gives us a good deal of trouble at times with its revolts and oppositions to divine injunction, causing us to groan with Paul at the wretchedness, which Paul experienced from the same cause. Disowning the old man as but an ephemeral prelude to the perfect state, we have "put on the new man," yet we know the new man only as a state of mental renewal; not

as an endowment of that strength and real sweetness that will come with the new nature which is the new man's final development.

We stand between the old and the new — leaving the one — reaching forward to the other. In this, we are dealing with facts — not with fancies. Tennyson speaks of “ringing out the old, and ringing in the new; ringing out the false, and ringing in the true.” But in his mouth, it is but a pretty saying. There is no power of changing the old into the new except with God, who has revealed His method in Christ. Bells may ring and poets may write to all eternity without inducing the least change from one to the other. In the visions of Patmos, “He that sat upon the throne, said, Behold I make all things new” (Rev. 21:5). This was after “a great voice out of heaven had said, There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.” This shows the sense in which God will make all things new.

Here is something to trust to: “He that sat on the throne” is careful to emphasize this. He immediately adds, “Write, for those words are true and faithful.” This is the pith of the whole matter. There are in the world many beautiful thoughts, it may be; beautiful sayings; but what if they are not true? What if they are beautiful dreams? What profit in the beauty in that case? The words of God may be sometimes uncouth in the ear of the fastidious verbal refinement, but here is their terrible, their glorious quality; they are true. They cannot fail. Of this God has given us many pledges. Let us seize them and realise them as they come before us.

Take the prophecy before us in Ezekiel 25-28. It concerns Tyre, which as every person of knowledge is well aware, was the Britain of the ancient world — the centre of all maritime traffic: the meeting-place and emporium of all the trade done by sea and of a great part of what was done on land, for all countries. We get a very good idea of the extent and variety and importance of her commerce from ch. 27; and the Greek writers who accompanied Alexander in his wars against the Persian empire have left us a very full description of the architectural glory and military strength of the place, which was an island close to the shore of northern Palestine till Alexander joined it to the shore by an immense mole constructed during his memorable siege. In the days when Ezekiel wrote this prophecy, Tyre, like Babylon, was in the zenith of her prosperity, for he wrote at the beginning of Judah's captivity by Nebuchadnezzar “among the captives by the river of Chebar” (Ezek. 1:1). Tyre, with her extensive shipping, was queen of the sea and nurse of all nations. She enriched the kings of the earth with the multitude of her merchandise (ch. 27:33). She had a very high position in her own estimation and in the estimation of all who had dealings with her. She said, “I am of perfect beauty.” Her builders had perfected her beauty. Her shipboards were of the best timber — cedar of Lebanon; her oars, of the oaks of Bashan; her benches of ivory; her sails of the finest material that could be manufactured

— fine linen with brodered work from Egypt, blue and purple from the isles of Elishah. The mariners sang of her: they could not find language to describe her glory: “What city is like Tyrus?” (ch. 27:3-7, 25, 32).

Well, what does the prophecy say? That God is against her, and that she will be brought to ruin: “Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I am against thee, O Tyrus: I will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causeth her waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyrus and break down her towers. I will also scrape her dust from her and make her like the top of a rock. It shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the seas; for I have spoken it, saith the Lord God” (ch. 26:3-5). How has this prophecy worked out? The fact is notorious to all who make history their study and not romance; who choose truth and not fiction for their mental pabulum; who prefer knowledge and understanding to the gapes and fripperies of light literature. The prophecy has been fulfilled to the letter. You may go to the sea coast of Palestine by one of Cook’s excursions and you will search in vain for Tyre. You will of course find the geographical spot where she stood. You will find the sea-washed island about 40 miles to the north of Haifa, where the range of Carmel ends in a promontory. The shape of land and sea is the same as when Tyre boasted and Ezekiel wrote. But the busy harbor, crowded shipping, the stately towers, the sumptuous mansions, the villas and castles of the rich stretching away right and left on the main land, the thronging prosperous populace everywhere — you look for them in vain. It is so written in the chapter we have read: “Thou shalt be no more: though thou be sought for, yet shalt thou never be found again, saith the Lord God” (ch. 26:21). You cannot even find her architectural relics, except in the water round the island, according to the account of travellers, as it had been written: “They shall lay thy stones and thy timber and thy dust in the midst of the water.” Looking down into the depths on a clear day, it is said you can see broken columns and masses of stone work. All is a silent desolation where once were busy sounds of human industry and mirth, as it had been written: “I will cause the noise of thy songs to cease; and the sound of thy harps shall be no more heard” (ch. 26:13).

But on the island itself we see something. There is a small fishing settlement. What is that which, by the eyes of travellers, we see drying and bleaching on the rocks? Fishermen’s nets. What is this which we read in the chapters before us? “I will scrape her dust from her and make her like the top of a rock. It shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea” (v. 4-5). What shall we say? That the Word of God is true and cannot be broken. This prophecy has been fulfilled to the very letter; and man cannot prophesy. Tyre came to ruin, not by natural decay; not by the uprising of a commercial rival on another spot drawing away her business from her; but in the very way foretold: “I will cause many nations to come up against her, as the sea causeth her waves to come up.” First under Nebuchadnezzar, and then



under Alexander, nearly 250 years after Nebuchadnezzar, imperial armies (comprising many nationalities) subjected Tyre to the most destructive of sieges, and brought her into the ruin foretold.

It is not as if this were the only case of Bible prophecy fulfilled. There is scarcely an end to such cases. The Bible is full of prophecy to a much greater extent than the common run of people imagine, and all its prophecies have been fulfilled. There is not an exception. Look at the great mountain outlines of the subject. Look at scattered Israel; look at desolate Palestine; look at overthrown and obliterated Babylon; look at degraded Egypt. Look at the four great empires that have successively ruled the world; look at the terrible Papacy that rose out of the fourth of these empires, wielding the most odious tyranny over the consciences and liberties of men that could be imagined, but which was plainly foretold, and losing it exactly at the end of the allotted time (1,260 years). Look at the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ — all foreshown in the prophets many centuries before their occurrence. What verdict of reason can there be but one — that God is in this Book, and that the prophets spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit?

Of what stupendous import is this verdict when we consider that two-thirds (roughly speaking) of the prophecy outlined in the Bible relates to a future as yet ahead of us, and a future so glorious? “In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never perish... it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.” “At that time, I shall build again the tabernacle of David that is fallen.” “I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen whither they be gone, and gather them on every side and bring them into their own land, and one King shall be king to them all” — even “the branch of David, whom I will raise up unto them — a king who shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land, before whom all kings shall bow down, and all nations serve him: under whom the nations shall turn to God, saying, let us go up; He will teach us of His ways, and we shall walk in His paths. In Him men shall be blessed, and all nations shall call Him blessed. They shall beat their swords into ploughshares; they shall study war no more. Princes shall rule among them and guide them unto all righteousness and truth, and they shall all know the Lord; and there shall be peace on earth and goodwill among men. The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.” The saints of God, redeemed out of every nation, and out of much tribulation, and made immortal in nature, will reign in Christ among the nations, and the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

These are not poetic imaginations, but the authentic disclosure and enunciation of the divine purpose. It is not the thought of man, but the Word of God. It is therefore something for us to lean on with comfort and hope and the joy of sunlit anticipation — something by which also we are purified in

the life we now live, for as John says, "He that hath this hope purifieth himself." It is inevitable. A man with such convictions and such prospects before his mind will naturally conform to the standard of things associated with them. If ever we falter and drift again in the direction of the pollutions of the world, from which the Truth has delivered us, it is when the power of conviction grows weak. Full assurance of faith is at the bottom of all effectual enterprise, even in this world's affairs; unbelief at the bottom of all failure. Well-grounded faith and hope will bear a man up in the darkest and most difficult circumstances. Hence the importance of nourishing faith. Faith will enable us to overcome, as John says, and we know what God says, "He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be my son." (Rev. 21:7). Some ask, What is this overcoming? A moment's thought will show them the answer. Overcoming is getting the upper hand of an opposing force of some kind. The opposing force we have to contend against is the fleshly mind, or mind natural to man, either in ourselves or others. Paul defines it, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit (that is, against the Spirit of God, as active towards us, through apostles and prophets, in doctrine, precept and command), and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other, so that we cannot do the things that we would." Here are two opposing forces in those who have become enlightened in the things of the Spirit. Our problematic relation to them is clearly defined in Rom. 8:13, "If ye walk after the flesh ye shall die, but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Here is the fight; the flesh in a thousand ways says, "Follow me," and the Spirit also, in manifold ways, says, "Follow me." The one goes east, the other goes west. We cannot follow both at the same time. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." The overcoming lies in making a successful choice and holding to it — casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

There is every incentive to overcome. "Godliness is profitable for the life that now is as well as that which is to come," for a man who suffers himself to be guided by the precepts of the Spirit of God is happier and nobler and better in every way than the man who obeys the promptings of the lower instincts. Sin will blight and ruin a man even now; righteousness will confer a crown of glory upon a man even now. Righteousness exalteth a nation — let alone a man. "Great peace have they that love Thy law; nothing shall them offend." There is more joy in the exercise of the understanding and of the higher faculties than can ever be found in the pursuit of mere secular aims of life. The service of God, the love of God, the opening out of the mind in the daily contemplation of God in prayer and reading, open out sources of peace and joy unknown to the man who knows not God and obeys not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. But the chief incentive relates to prospect. "Ho every one that thirsteth, come to the waters... come to me. I will make

an everlasting covenant with you. Hear and your soul shall live. I will give to him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely." "Come out from among them (the unheedful) and be ye separate, and I will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters." "To you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his beams."

With such relations and prospects, there is no darkness on the horizon. There is nothing but brightness and joy ahead. Even the present darkness is illuminated by the glory of joyful hope. Even in distress and infirmities, like Paul, we are enabled in a measure to take pleasure, knowing that they work out for us a state of preparedness for the unspeakable goodness which God has in reserve for those who love Him. We are able to think and say with him: "The sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us... Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

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## Dare To Be A Daniel

*Truth and inspiration of Bible adequate ground for "building up" faith — Jehoshaphat righteous but not firm enough — decline co-operation — all not obedient — Daniel faithful regardless of consequences — give God all, don't cheat.*

WE all know that the object of this meeting for the breaking of bread is edification, or building up in those convictions that constitute faith, and that lead to that course of action that is acceptable to God. There is no more powerful method of reaching this result than by reading the apostolic narratives with the constant recollection that they are true. We may read them sometimes without this recollection — we may read them in a mechanical, only half-conscious mood; as of a thing we have been long familiar with, and take little living interest in. This mode of reading will do us no good. I will not say it is better not to read at all than to read in this way; but it is better read in a better way. It is better to say to ourselves as we read: "Now, this that I read is true. It is no legend, or tradition, or cunningly-devised fable. Christ did really perform all these miracles of healing. Christ did really rise from the dead after he was crucified. The apostles did really speak with tongues, and deliver a testimony of personal witness to Christ's resurrection, with all the attendant circumstances recorded; and therefore God now lives and reigns, and there will certainly in due time come all those good and glorious things He has promised by the prophets and apostles.

There is not lacking a single reason for our thus building ourselves up in our most holy faith. Pure reason warrants, justifies, yea, compels it. Many reasons converge powerfully on this wholesome result, with these reasons you are all more or less familiar. There is no necessity for going into them on such an occasion as this. It is sufficient to realise that the narrative of the sayings and doings of Christ, and of the apostles who came after him and powerfully planted his name in the earth, has been in the hands of believers from that day to this: in which alone we have a guarantee that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote these accounts, for none other than the genuine productions of these men could have obtained currency among their friends, and in the generation contemporary with them. Being their accounts, it is the testimony of men who were eye-witnesses of the events which they narrate; and of men who are proved true by the nature of their enterprise (to turn men from their sins) and by the effects they themselves suffered in its prosecution (*viz.*, the loss of all things, and in many cases of life itself). The nature of the writing, when we study it, comes in as a powerful supplement to the demonstration that it is true and noble, and finally, there is the evidence of that underlying inspiration which of itself gives us all the pledge we need in trusting our lives to that self-denying submission which the gospel demands.

The truth of the apostolic testimony brings with it the truth of Moses and the prophets, which Jesus and the apostles so emphatically endorsed. In a sense, Moses and the prophets do not require endorsement; for they are their own witnesses when we are able to estimate their character in comparison with the productions of mere human intelligence.

All we have to do, therefore, is simply to surrender to the belief of what we read. This will produce faith and all the other excellent fruits of the Spirit — love, joy and peace in the mind, and righteousness in the life in preparation for the Kingdom.

One thing which the apostles declare is that the things written were “written for our learning.” It was of the Old Testament this was said; and of course, if true of the Old, it is true of the New. This being the case, let us spend a little time in getting out of the portions that have been read the “learning” they were intended to afford.

It might not seem at first sight that we could get much out of the first reading concerning the reign of Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat. It is a story of murder and wickedness; what good can it do us? He, Jehoram, came to the throne when Jehoshaphat died. Jehoshaphat had many sons, and had made a good settlement for them all. He left a handsome fortune to each, and had distributed them among the various cities of the realm, so that each was a prince in his own district. To Jehoram he had given the headship over all as king. This wise arrangement ought to have worked well for all, but the very first thing that Jehoram did was to kill all his brothers, and to put also to death their friends and sympathisers — filling the land with mourning and

woe. Not only so, but he established idolatry throughout the land, and led the nation away from the right ways of God.

What is the explanation of this extraordinary sequel to a reign so excellent as Jehoshaphat's? Why did the son of a good king turn out such a monster? Is it not true that if you "train up a child in the way in which he should go, when he is old he will not depart from it?" Yes, it is true. Wherein was Jehoshaphat lacking then? Here is the point, and here is where we shall find our "learning." Jehoshaphat did not take a firm attitude with those who were in a wrong position. He was friendly with the ten tribes who, though Israelites, had departed from the right way. He granted co-operation with Ahab, which he ought to have declined. He allowed his son, Jehoram, to marry a daughter of Ahab, which he ought to have forbidden. A prophet of God reproved him on the subject: "Shouldest thou help the ungodly and love them that hate the Lord?" (2Chr. 19:2). Jehoshaphat was a good man, but lacking in firmness towards evil-doers. He could not refuse their friendly advances. He consented to matrimonial alliance with the family of Ahab. His son "had the daughter of Ahab to wife." The consequence was "Jehoram walked in the way of the (wicked) kings of Israel, to whom his wife belonged, and he wrought that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord." Here is a bit of "learning" which we get from this as from many other parts of Scripture; it is our duty to decline religious co-operation with those who are not in full submission to the way of the Lord. Above all, we ought not in marriage to be "unequally yoked together with the unbeliever." Any other line of conduct is not only displeasing to the Lord, but most hurtful to those who pursue it. From the days of the flood down to the corruptions of the captivity in the times of Ezra, the scriptural narrative affords many illustrations of the evil that comes from "the sons of God" marrying "the daughters of men." It is our duty to marry "only in the Lord," that in the fusion of two lives, equally dedicated to wisdom, there may be mutual help in the way of holiness, and family life based on the fear of the Lord and submission to His Word.

The second portion "written for our learning" not only shows the power of God to interfere on behalf of His faithful servants, in the shutting of the mouths of the lions to whom Daniel had been given over, but it brings home two other much-needed lessons — perhaps not so obvious. Daniel, who had been promoted to high political rank in Babylon, was found a useful servant of the state when Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian took possession of the city — so useful that he was put in the first rank over the heads of a multitude of native princes. The empire was divided, by the sagacity of Cyrus, into 127 provinces, over each of which was placed a governor, and over all these, three presidents, of whom Daniel was first. It was according to the ordinary bent of human nature for these governors to be envious of a man so high in favor. The next natural thing was for them to plot his downfall. To bring this about, they must prove some fault against him. They looked into

his affairs with this intent. "They sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom, but they could find none occasion nor fault, forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him." Here is a strong feature: Daniel was "a man greatly beloved" of God — not without reason, and here is part of it, that he was an accurate, faithful man of business. His enemies could find no fault with him on this head. Ought they to be able to find fault with us? I do not speak of slander or misrepresentation, of which any man may be subject, and of which all men who pursue a conspicuous course are sure to be the subject. I speak of true accusation. It ought not to be possible for the adversary to speak reproachfully with truth against the servants of God. They ought not to be able to truly say that they are untrustworthy — that their word is not to be relied on — that they are slack in the performance of promises and in payment of dues — that they are insensible to honor in their transaction. They ought to be like Daniel: "of good report among those who are without" — known for integrity, kindness, promptitude, accuracy, honor. This is a place of learning to which the apostolic epistles lend constant and special emphasis. Popular "gospel" preaching — "only believe" — "down with your deadly doing" — has demoralized the public mind, so that the more "pious" people are, the more do business men shun them as a rule, because as a rule they find them capable of taking a mean advantage in the ratio of their piety. But the robust and glorious gospel of the first century produces very different results. It teaches men that they will "reap as they sow;" that they will be "rewarded according to their works" — and that if they are given to unrighteous ways, "they shall not inherit the Kingdom of God." The Truth is able to turn men into Daniels if they will but give in to it.

Daniel's enemies were able to get him into difficulty "concerning the law of his God." They contrived a state law that would make him a rebel if he remained faithful to his usual modes and habits of worship. They knew he was a praying man. They extorted from the king a law that no prayer should be permissible for a month except to the king, and that any one breaking the law should be thrown to the wild beasts. How did Daniel meet the law? He knew how he would have met it had he been like many modern trimmers and sophists. He would have said: "I do not see that I am called upon to run into danger. I am not called upon to tempt God by giving myself into the hands of these men. I can pray to God under the blankets as well as on my knees. God knows the heart and will accept the pure offering of the lips whatever the posture of the body may be. If I pray openly I will become food to the lions and will pray no more, whereas if I exercise prudence and veil off my devotions from these wicked men, I will live to pray to God many times. God will be glorified; I will be saved, and these plotting sinners will be foiled." Not thus did Daniel deceive himself and try to deceive God. "When Daniel knew

that the writing was signed, he went into his house and his windows being open in his chambers toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he did aforetime. Then those men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God."

The "learning" afforded by this incident is unmistakable — that we ought not to allow the fear of consequences to pare off the edges of our service to God. Let our service be hearty and thorough and bold, with humility. The truth exposes us to many disadvantages. We do not belong to the state-church nor to other bodies in many parts equally respectable. We cannot conform to the public law on many points. In our day, the penalty is no longer exposure to wild beasts or deprivation of liberty; but the penalty is often quite distressing, nevertheless, in a community where individual prosperity depends upon popularity with neighbors. They may find no fault with our business ways, but they cannot pardon our exclusiveness — our separateness — our faith. What are we to do? The temptation is to hide the light of God under a bushel — to go to church or chapel with the sophistical self-deception that we can worship God equally well in a pew, in the midst of a large congregation, as in a small meeting at the breaking of bread in an upper room; that we need not believe what the priest or parson says, or take part in their exercises, though we are bodily present; that we can communicate with God direct for ourselves as much as if we were in the solitude of a desert; that we are not called upon to make ourselves a pest by finding fault with what the people around us say and think and do — etc., etc., etc. This would not be "daring to be a Daniel" or confessing Christ before men. It would be trimming for the sake of worldly advantage. The Daniel part is to openly profess and do what the service of God calls for at our hands — with all meekness and respectfulness certainly, but with all decisiveness of resolution, "as to the Lord, and not unto men." We can well afford to take this course, even if it lead to a death as certain as that which seemed to be waiting for Daniel. Our present life is a very transient affair. He that saveth it by pusillanimity toward God will certainly lose it, as Christ has said; but he that loseth it by faithfulness "unto death" will shortly (and to him so very shortly) be the subject of a divine interference more complete and lasting in its effects than that which took place in the case of Daniel. Not only from lion's terrible jaws shall we be delivered for a moment, but from the everlasting dominion of the ignominious and obliterating grave. The cheering and powerful words will be addressed to us: "Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust." Joyfully, in calm strength, shall we respond: "O grave, where is thy victory?" How pale and hideous and mean will then appear the craven and uncertain course of those who fear man too much to serve God in the teeth of danger. How sensible and wise and noble and radiant, on the

contrary, will seem to all men the course of those (looked back upon) who can truly say with Paul: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." Brethren, now is our opportunity of being on Daniel's side, in a bold and thorough service of God, amidst many foes and dangers. The opportunity courageously embraced will land us by his side, by the grace of God, in the day when "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets will be seen radiant in the Kingdom of God."

Our third portion gives us a little "learning" in another but not less important direction. Ananias and Sapphira, at a time when the peculiar situation of the Truth led believers to dispose of their property and place the proceeds at the disposal of the apostles, "sold a possession and kept back part of the price." In this Peter accused them of having committed a great crime. The crime did not consist in withholding part, but in professing to give the whole. They were under no obligation to part with the property or to hand over the price. As Peter said, "While it remained was it not thine own; and after it was sold, was it (the price) not in thine own power?" But in the general enthusiasm of generosity that prevailed, Ananias and Sapphira did not wish to appear to be behind others, nor did they want to clean out every penny, so they took the middle and dangerous course of misrepresentation — alias lying. The heinousness of the offence was increased by the fact that it was an attempt to deceive God. "Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." Ananias and Sapphira were both struck dead on the spot, one after the other, which naturally made a deep impression on the believing community, at the time very numerous in Jerusalem. "Great fear came upon all the ecclesia, and upon as many as heard these things."

If it be said there can be no "learning" for us in circumstances so out of the run of our experience, the answer has to be made that the lesson is not limited to the particular circumstances nor to any circumstances. It is a lesson affecting all characters and all time. It may be expressed in the simple words: "Never try to appear to be more than you are. Be simple and modest and true." Ananias and Sapphira would have come out all right if they had said, "We cannot afford to give more than half." The mistake was to attempt to gain the credit that did not belong to them. This mistake may be made, and is made, in many, many matters besides giving; and it is here where what is written is fruitful for "our learning" in this sad case. Let us avoid with scorn all attempts to seem wiser than we are, to know more than we know, to be better than we are, to be more generous, or to be of more consequence than we are. "He that giveth, let him give with simplicity" and truth, guarding in the main against letting our left hand know what our right hand is doing.

Thus from all parts of the Scriptures, with mind attent and eyes and ears open, we are able to gather "learning," and to become wise unto salvation. The result is one that is despised in the world, and that in the weakness and



weariness of mortal life may sometimes seem of small value to ourselves. But at last it will be "found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Christ."

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## Standing Upon Facts

*Hopeless Babel of human ideas — evidences prove Paul's letters authentic — Paul's change, writings, activities, etc., all God inspired — no new revelation — Bible knowledge begets belief, faith, obedience — continuous Bible reading essential.*

ONCE more we are here to remember Christ, as represented by the symbols on the Table. Are we sure that in remembering Christ, we are not remembering a myth? Are we sure that it is a real living person we are calling to mind when we break this bread and drink this wine? Yes, we are sure. We can give our reasons for this certainty, and no man can dispose of them. We stand upon facts and not upon opinions or may-be's.

There are such things as shadows. There are ideas earnestly held among men which must be, and which, beyond all contradiction, are the mere figments of the imagination. Let us look at this first. Let us begin with cases that are plain. We meet three men — one a Roman Catholic, one a Protestant, and one an Agnostic. The Roman Catholic says, "I belong to the true church; we have an infallible head in our church — a man that acts with the authority of Christ. I can get my sins absolved by confessing to the priest. No man can be saved out of our church." The Protestant says, "No man can be saved out of your church? It is just the other way about. No man can be saved in your church. Your church is the drunken harlot of the Apocalypse. Your Pope is the Man of Sin." The Agnostic says, "My poor friends, why do you trouble yourselves in that way? You are both right. Nobody knows what truth is. The right thing is for each man to follow that which he thinks right, and condemn nobody."

Now here are three men who earnestly hold ideas that must, one or two of them (and possibly, and in truth all of them) be mere figments of the imagination. It is not possible their ideas can all be true. There are scores of other types, and they stand for millions. Now, how are we to find our way? How are we to determine what is truth in the midst of the Babel? There must be a method. There is a method. We must carefully feel for the stepping stones of fact in the midst of the quagmire. We can. There are such things as facts. Let us find them and stick to them. We stand on them this morning. It is facts and nothing but facts that are at the bottom of the memorial institution that brings us together this morning.

The facts are not far off, and only to be seen through a telescope as it

were. They reach straight away down from the far-off times to the very place and the very moment where we now stand. The facts touch us, and are before us as we sit assembled this morning. Let us realise them. Let us not doze unconscious in their presence like mere animals.

Here is fact no. 1 — real fact — not impression, not matter of hearsay, not matter of speculation, but fact real as the building we are in, and inexpugnable as the great mountains. We have in our hands the professed letter of the apostle Paul, from which we have read an extract this morning. There is no denying this. Nobody can say to us “you only think you have.” Whatever they may say or think as to the professed letters themselves, they cannot begin to cast the shadow of a doubt on the fact that we have them, and have been reading them.

Here is fact no. 2. These professed letters of Paul have been in the hands of christians ever since there were christians upon the earth, and that is ever since the end of the first century. No man can deny this fact. Reckless and unprincipled men like Bradlaugh may say there is no evidence of an earlier existence than A.D. 150, and multitudes of the shallow populace may echo the careless dogmatism as if it disposed of the question. But none of them feel they dare allege the letters came into existence at that date. The evidence thoroughly weighed confutes the suggestion. The evidence that proves an existence at A.D. 150, proves it right away back to Paul’s day; for what is the evidence for A.D. 150? The existence of books written then — by Justin Martyr, Ignatius, Clement and others — in which Paul’s letters are quoted. What poor powers of induction must those unbelieving mortals possess, who can see in the quotation of Paul by these men, evidence of the existence of Paul’s letters in their day, and cannot see it in evidence that they must have existed long before then; for how is it possible that leading men in the christian community would quote as a received authority writings that were not well-known to those to whom they wrote? and how is it possible that they would be well-known without a long previous standing among them? and how could any writings acquire such a standing except the real writings of the apostle Paul who had not been in his grave a hundred years at that time?

From these considerations of common sense, we get fact no. 3, that these professed letters of Paul are the very letters he wrote. There can be no possible escape from this, when the other facts are considered. There were in the first century, as evidenced by Pliny’s letter to Trajan, large communities of christians scattered up and down the Roman empire. These communities had mainly been founded by the labors of the apostle Paul, who wrote letters to them in absences from them at other places. Is it possible, think you, that any other than his own very letter could have obtained established currency among them while he was alive? And is it any the more possible that letters not received as his letters at that time could have passed current as his letters

in the generation after his decease? Use your common sense. We are similarly placed as regards the works of Dr. Thomas. He has been in his grave about 24 years. Is it possible, think you, that any work falsely professing to be his, could get into circulation among us as Dr. Thomas' real writing? Let any man try. First, he could not produce such a writing: he might produce an imitation, the weakness and spuriousness of which would instantly be detected; and its condemnation by us would be its death as regards the confidence of anybody after us.

What springs out of this fact no. 3, but fact no. 4 — that is, that the things on which we rest our faith this morning are true. For, consider what Paul taught; consider the grounds on which he taught it, and consider the object with which he did so. He did not teach a system of philosophy, or a conviction of any kind derived at second hand. It is a feature of his letters that he deprecates philosophy as destructive of what he preached: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit... as ye have received Christ Jesus our Lord, so walk ye in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the Faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving... for in him are had all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and this I say lest any man should beguile you with enticing words." He preached Christ, and Christ alone. He said, "I determined to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and him crucified." He said, "For me to live is Christ... I count all things but loss that I may win Christ." He further said, "The gospel which I preach is not after (i.e., according to) man: for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the *revelation* of Jesus Christ." What form the revelation took we are abundantly informed — wherein lies matter of powerful consideration. Many in our day profess to have received revelation because they have felt something strong in their heads — which may always be mere illusion — as when a man dreams. If this had been the nature of Paul's revelation, we might have distrusted, for a man's own brain may easily be out of order or deranged, or abnormally active in its impressions. His own certainty is no evidence to others, in such a case, and strictly speaking, no evidence to himself. Paul's revelation was external to himself. It was not internal at all. It was communicated in the presence of others, who were all witnesses of what transpired, though they did not understand the Hebrew communications that passed. And the revelation produced palpable effects which all could recognize. They were all thrown to the ground, and Paul was blind when the incident was over, and had to be led by the hand into the place which he had come to enter by his own guidance, and by those whom it was his business to lead as captain by official commission. And then the revelation related to matters of recent occurrence and public notoriety and actual character — that is, the execution of Jesus Christ, and the active and successful proclamation of his resurrection by those who had been his companions in his lifetime. Paul had been an active

opponent of that movement, and was in fact on an errand of hostility to it when he was struck down near Damascus by the Lord showing himself to him with a light above the brightness of the sun. If Paul preached Christ with an energy with which no other preached him, and counted all things but dross that he might win Christ, it was not on hearsay; it was on the basis of that "experience" that men make so much of. "I have seen Jesus Christ our Lord." "Last of all, he was seen of me also." "He said to me, For this cause I have appeared unto thee, to make thee a minister and a witness."

And consider the object of the enthusiastic efforts of a lifetime. It is defined in the words which Paul reports as having been heard by him out of the mouth of him who declared himself "Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest." "To open the eyes of the Gentiles, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among all them that are sanctified by the faith that is in me." Such an enterprise is out of the category of all human imaginations. It is only to be understood as part and parcel of an evolution of divine truth beginning proximately in that age with the miraculous achievements of Jesus, his resurrection after crucifixion, and the successful and miracle-attested testimony of apostles to that fact among the Judean and neighboring populations. Understood as a continuance of that work, it is an enterprise both intelligible and rational. But to imagine it a craze of Paul's is to present us with an idea in violent collision with every surrounding fact of the case.

And fact no. 4 is related to many other facts too numerous to categorise; the existence of the Jewish Scriptures; the history of the Jewish nation; the fulfilment of Jewish prophecy, down to our own distant day; and the nature of the sentiments that pervade the entire writings of Moses and the Prophets. Along with this, we have to place the nature of the works of Christ, by which he arrested universal public attention in Judea; the character of his teaching, and the character of his own sublime personality. Paul's case, though so powerful of itself, is only an incident in a whole history of things. It is only one of many foundations upon which the truth of Christ stands. Let us not be afraid of taking up a strong position. Let us not be afraid of putting our foot down and saying: "This is the truth of God, and nothing else. Here and here alone, is to be found hope for man."

There is much need for this decided attitude. We live in an extraordinary age, when the air is full of contradictory sounds, and when, if a man do not keep an eye open for himself, he may easily be blinded to the glory of Christ. There are endless theories, innumerable glosses, seductive eloquences, plausible claims, misleading claims. "Try the spirits whether they be of God." We may easily try them when we have first settled that the work of Christ and the work of the apostles in the first century is the work of God. If a man with a new claim say, "No, the work of the first century was a work of

fanaticism — a work of unwitting imposture,” then we say, “In that case it is not possible you can guarantee the truth of any work you may have in hand. If a work conducted with the ability, with the probity, with the intellectual lucidity, and with the miracle-working power of Christ and the apostles, was not a work of God, how can a work of yours be a work of God, characterized by feebleness and muddiness and incoherency and without power to do anything beyond the capacity of ordinary men?” But he may say, “Oh yes, granted that the work of Christ was the work of God: ours is also.” If so, we say, “Then we demand two things: that God attest it, and that it be in harmony with all that God has said and done before.” God never yet made a new revelation without showing signs that it was so. When God sent Moses, He empowered him to work miracles that would prove to Israel that he was not acting on his own motion. When God sent Christ, He enabled him to do “works which none other man did.” And Christ modestly took his stand on these, saying, “If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. If ye believe not me, believe the works. The works that I do bear witness of me that my Father hath sent me.” When Christ sent the apostles, he asked them not to begin their work until he should send “power from on high” by which “the works that he had done, they should do also.” When they went forth preaching, “God worked with them, confirming their word with signs following.”

And now you say you have “a new revelation.” Where are your signs? If you cannot show any, then we are entitled to say it is a new craze — not a new revelation. Above all, when your new revelation contradicts what the prophets wrote and the apostles taught, we say you are condemned out of your own mouth. You admit that they spoke by inspiration, and yet you would have us discard their doctrines, and their prophecies, their commandments, for the muddy vagaries of modern Zadkiels and Co. No, never. We tell you we hold by what God said: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them.” We may well say concerning your professed new revelation what the Mahommedan captain said about the Alexandrian library when he gave orders to burn it: “If it agree with the Koran, we don’t need it; and if it contradict the Koran, it is false.”

Therefore, with absolute confidence, we may attend to the breaking of bread in commemoration of Christ. The meeting for observing it is a necessity. We cannot keep our minds alive to the truth concerning him without it. The multitudinous details of daily life will deaden us to him if we do not antidote them by memorialisation in some shape or form. Our minds will be soon overgrown with the weeds of mortal life if we do not keep a place clear for him. The victory of faith requires that faith be kept well in the battle, otherwise the victory will be the wrong way. Faith will fall under the trampling feet of this life’s affairs. The battle is one between what we see and

what we cannot see, yet may know to be true — between what we like and what we may not like, but know to be what God requires at our hands. How can we win in such a battle unless we have a strong sense of the reality of Christ? It has been well said that the apostles had no doubts. They did not require to argue themselves into conviction as we have to do who live in an age so remote from the facts. They knew the truth about Christ just as we know the truth of our own affairs. There is no argument in their writings to prove the Bible true. Men do not argue about the self-evident. In our day the Truth is not so self-evident, so we have to get at its acquaintance in another way. When once we attain this acquaintance, the result is the same. Conviction enables us to act the part of the convinced. John affirms this in other words when he asks the question, "Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?" A man really believing in the divine sonship of Christ will certainly overcome if he follow the lead of his belief. He will certainly feel himself energised to the doing of those things that Christ requires. Who is he that fails in this respect but he that is either ignorant or doubtful of the nature and living reality and authority of Christ? Enlightened faith becomes by habit a sort of constant sense of sight, and we all know that sight would be very powerful in this matter. Who is there, if Christ were amongst us, but would feel constrained to do what he commands and to abstain from all that he forbids? Believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God amounts to the same thing. It involves what we read in Heb. 13: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever." Believing this, we must believe that Jesus is as much alive at every moment of our life as he was on the day that he appeared to Saul of Tarsus as a light above the brightness of the sun. And if alive, we must recognize that we are under his vivid cognisance, and that if he spoke, he would say to us, as he said to the Asian ecclesias of the first century, "I know thy works." Would not the recollection of this bring great and purifying circumspection all the day long? And when we add to this the fact that he is coming again, and that though for the moment he is not with us, the hour will certainly come when we shall stand before him to hear his estimate of our deserts, the power of our faith to give us the victory seems complete. This is the victory that overcometh the world even our faith. Faith is the result of knowledge of what God has revealed. Knowledge of this is only to be had where it is contained. It is contained only in the Bible. Thus, reading the Bible is the great source of the knowledge that will save us by the victory of faith, so that in a special sense is the saying of the apostles true, that "Scripture is able to make us wise unto salvation through the faith that is in Christ Jesus." Therefore, no wise man will omit the reading of the Bible from the programme of his daily life, nor will he read in such a way as to give it little chance of making an impression on his mind, such as reading it in a time of weariness, or reading it in too large quantities at long intervals. A wise man

will show the same wisdom in this as in his daily food. A little every day at the right time will make the spiritual man healthy and strong, where long fasts, followed by crams, will enfeeble and derange. Some think they can get on very well without Bible reading, and that it is enough for them to know the Truth sufficiently and believe and obey the gospel at their first contact. Those who think thus will find themselves out of harmony with fact. The mind is not retentive of knowledge — especially divine knowledge. The impressions of knowledge have to be renewed again and again, otherwise knowledge will evaporate. “Therefore, we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip. For if the words spoken by angels were steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?”

These admonitions of wisdom may fall faintly on the ear in this time of peace and silence while we are left alone with the Word of God for a season: they will burn like fire when this life is past, and we stand before the Lord at his coming to receive the due reward of our deeds.

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## Experience of Evil a Corollary of Divine Service and Approval

*God's instruments, as Moses, Jeremiah, etc. not self-sufficient, but God-energized — Jeremiah's inspired messages unpalatable — Jeremiah detested and persecuted — service to God hard, unpopular, brings trouble, now — “Be not dismayed.”*

THE chapter we have read from Jeremiah is remarkable in more ways than one. It will be profitable for us to consider it for a few minutes, as affording us an opportunity of doing what James recommends when he says, “Take, my brethren, the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and of patience.” Jeremiah is more serviceable in this respect than almost any of the prophets, for we get closer to him, and observe the shades of his individual feelings in the various circumstances in which he was placed.

His prophecy is remarkable for the absence of all pompous introduction. Nothing could be more bald or literal than the preface which describes him as “Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiyah, of the priests that were in Anathoth, of the land of Benjamin, to whom the Word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah, the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the 13th year of his reign. It came also in the days of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, unto the end of the

11th year of Zedekiah... unto the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the 5th month." What a total absence is there here of any attempt to magnify the importance of Jeremiah and his writings. How unlike in this respect to all ordinary literary efforts; how indicative, amongst many things, of the genuine character of his communications from God. Then we have Jeremiah's extreme sense of unfitness for the work to which he was called. The first message to him is that he had been ordained a prophet before his birth, "Before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." The natural corollary of this as a matter of human thought would have been one of two things, and perhaps both, first, that God would have made Jeremiah a strong, self-sufficient, impervious man, proof against all trouble, and secondly, that Jeremiah would at least have had a strong sense of his capacity for the work to which he was called. Instead of that, the very first response of Jeremiah is, "Ah, Lord God, I cannot speak, for I am a child." This response never could have been written but for the sincere experience of the sentiment; and it never could have found entrance into a human conception of a prophet's mission. It is a characteristic that crops up very frequently in the history of God's use for men. Even Moses, that first and greatest of the prophets, raised a similar objection, a sense of extreme self-deficiency; and Paul confesses to the same feeling. Such a feature naturally belongs to the genuine employment by God of men for purposes of revelation. It is easy to understand that Omnipotence would employ weak human mediums in the revelation of divine purposes and wishes; human importances and self-confidences would naturally have been in the way.

Jeremiah appears very far from one in the position of self-confidence. At this very opening interview he is divinely exhorted to be strong, because he was feeling weak. "Say not, I am a child, for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee shalt thou speak. Be not afraid of their faces, for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them" (Jer. 1:17).

Thus authorized, Jeremiah goes forth to his work, and soon finds it the most painful work a man could have been called to; so painful that he wishes himself dead. "Cursed be the day wherein I was born; let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man that brought tidings unto my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee, making him very glad. Let that man be as the cities which the Lord overthrew, because he slew me not from the womb. Wherefore came I forth to see labor and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?"

When we analyse his case, we find the reason of these bitter feelings. "I am in derision daily," he says, "Everyone mocketh me. The Word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision daily." Why this should be it is not difficult to see. The messages he was commanded to deliver were such as



to excite the utmost resentment on the part of the populace. When we read his prophecies we find them one continuous condemnation of their ways and prediction of coming woe, such as, "Behold I bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto My Word, nor unto My law, but have rejected it. They are all grievous revolters, walking with slanders; they are brass and iron, they are all corrupters. Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them... Behold ye trust in lying words that cannot profit. They steal, murder, commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations. Is this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? I will cast you out of My sight. Therefore pray not thou for this people... for I will not hear thee... Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice, nor walked therein, therefore thus saith the Lord God of Hosts, the God of Israel, Behold I will feed them with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink, and will scatter them also amongst the heathen, whom neither they nor their fathers have known; and I will send a sword after them that shall consume them."

It is no wonder that Jeremiah was detested. We have only to imagine such things addressed to people in our own day, to realise how inevitably it would stir hatred, and lead to that stubborn wrath that made Jeremiah feel it was no use speaking. He had really come to that decision at one stage of his work. "I said I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name." However, he was not able to act out his own feelings in this matter. When the Word of God is in a man, it is too strong for his natural control. "His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." And so he went on delivering in public places the various messages as they arrived. At last things came to a serious pass. The priests could no longer endure his reproofs. He had said, "This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant." Priest, prophet, and people came in a violent mob against him in the court of the temple, and seized him (Jer. 26:8). They carried him before the princes, who had the executive power, and demanded his death. Jeremiah could only say in reply (v.12), "The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words which ye have heard. Now, therefore, amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God. As for me, I am in your hand; do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you. But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon your heads; for of a truth the Lord hath sent me unto you to speak all these words." The princes were touched by his modest and pathetic appeal, and refused to sanction his death, and for that time he escaped. Later on, however, even the princes themselves implored the king

to give sentence for his death. The situation under which they did so was peculiar in this, that common sense seemed to be all on the side of the princes, and all against Jeremiah. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had invaded the land, and had laid siege to Jerusalem. The inhabitants were busy on every hand concerting measures for defence, and at such a time as this Jeremiah received a command to say, "He that abideth in the city shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence; and he that goeth out and falleth to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live; for I have set My face against this city for evil, and not for good, saith the Lord, and it shall be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire." The princes came to the king and said, "This man weakeneth the hands of the men of war in speaking such words, let him be put to death." The king said, "Behold, he is in your hand." So they took Jeremiah and gave him over to death, as they supposed, by lowering him into a pit in which there was mire at the bottom, in which Jeremiah sunk.

Such a message was certainly an extreme test both to Jeremiah and to the inhabitants of the city; but if we can realise the divine point of view, we may see that it was admirably suited to the situation. The city was on the point of being destroyed, and was, in fact, destroyed within 18 months or two years; but here was a last opportunity, after generations of disobedience, for any amongst the inhabitants who feared God, to deliver themselves by faith and obedience (the two great conditions of acceptance always). To go forth into apparent death would deliver them; to stay in apparent security would destroy them. It was parallel to the words of Christ, "He that saveth his life shall lose it, but he that loses his life shall preserve it." Many, in fact, did go out to the Chaldeans and were allowed to live, while those who tarried behind perished in the siege.

But think of Jeremiah, a messenger of God, sunk in ignominious mud and darkness, apparently a poor recompense for the delivery of his message; but, in fact, faithfulness was thus put to the test; for it requires no great faithfulness to do a work that is rewarded on the spot with honor and emolument. That horrible mud and the chills in his bones will be amongst Jeremiah's brightest memories when the work of God is complete. He will have no regrets about that pit when he is seen with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom. He could not long have lived in such a situation; the time had not come for him to die, for his work was not yet done; so a friend was provided in Ebedmelech, the Ethiopian, who obtained the king's authority to bring him up with ropes. Look at Jeremiah, just out of the pit, a sad sight for the servants of God, besmeared with mud, and chattering with cold. Let us learn that the service of God is not disproved by being hard. Jeremiah would be quickly cleaned and re-clad, but his troubles were not over. The siege was in progress; the heavy thuds of the battering-rams could be heard against the walls.

Food was in great scarcity, and nobody was in good spirits. By-and-by the city was captured. God had said to Jeremiah that he would be cared for in the end, but this did not interfere with his being chained amongst an indiscriminate crowd of captives, and wearily marched to Rabbath, where Nebuchadnezzar was encamped. Arrived here, he was discovered by Nebuchadnezzar, and his release ordered, and money given to him, and permission to go back among his people. But not then was his trouble over. The people, seeing his words had come to pass, were naturally deferential to him, and applied to him for direction as to their future proceedings. They strongly wished to go down to Egypt, as a land of peace, to get away from the terrors of war, and they consulted Jeremiah on the subject. Jeremiah submitted the matter to God, and received instructions to order them to remain in the land; but this the people disregarded and went down to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them. There we lose sight of him, except insofar as he makes himself visible in the "Lamentations," that were evidently written about this time.

These lamentations are deserving of being seriously pondered from this one special point of view, namely, the experience of evil as a corollary of divine service and approval. The natural man is so liable to assume that prosperity must necessarily accompany men divinely used and approved. This assumption is doubtless the natural result of the revealed fact that at the last it shall be well with them that fear God. The mistake lies in applying the finishing result to the process by which the result was reached. Jeremiah was a faithful servant of God, and yet he had to write this, "I am the man that hath seen affliction. He hath led me and brought me into darkness, and not into light. He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail. He hath set me in dark places, as they that are dead of old. He hath hedged me about that I cannot get out. He hath made my chain heavy. Also when I cry and shout, He shutteth out my prayer. He hath enclosed my ways with hewn stone; He hath made my paths crooked. He hath turned aside my ways, and pulled me in pieces; He hath made me desolate. He hath filled me with bitterness. He hath made me drunken with wormwood. Thou hast removed my soul far off from peace; I forgot prosperity. I said, my strength and my hope is perished from the Lord, remembering mine affliction and my sorrow, the wormwood and the gall."

Tradition says that Jeremiah was sawn asunder by the Jews in Egypt. That would at least end his sufferings, and prepare him for the joyful release that awaits all the children of God at the appointed time. The sorrows and horrors of the night will all be forgotten when the morning dawns. For the joy of that morning the sorrows are a preparation, grievous while they last, but working a work that cannot be dispensed with. We may take the prophets as a lesson on the subject that it is eminently profitable to study. In this age our sufferings never can be like theirs, but still to the last it must and will remain

true, that "many are the afflictions of the righteous." They are inseparable from the evil state of things through which the righteous are called to pass, and they are indispensable to the result that God proposes to work in them in preparation for the age of glory. We must, therefore, act on the advice that God gave to Jeremiah, and to many others besides, "Be strong and of good courage; gird up thy loins. Speak unto them all that I command thee. Be not dismayed at their faces. Set thy face like a flint. Contend earnestly for the Faith once delivered to the saints. Be faithful unto death." What if you have to wade through a sea of trouble? It is "that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, may be found unto praise and honor and glory, at the appearing of Christ."

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## Invited to the Son's Marriage

*God the first One, to be manifested in the last Ones — man's helpless state — yearning for Jesus to return — a multitudinous Bride — God's gracious invitation oft rejected — the wedding garment required.*

IT is a long time since this institution was observed for the first time. It cannot be long with any of us when we shall observe it for the last time. There is a first and a last to everything. The first with ourselves showed a puling baby in the cradle; the last brings to view a silent figure in a shroud, waiting to be carried to the last long home. Strange to say, there is a first and a last with God. The first exhibits an aspect of things too vast and subtle for the human understanding. There was a time when He alone existed; how far back we have to go for such a time we cannot begin to imagine; still less can we form any conception of such a state. The understanding tells us there must have been a time when God was alone in the vastness of His underived energy; there was a time when He began to incorporate His power in the stupendous framework of the heavens, and this introduces the idea of the last in relation to Him; it is a very different last from the last of anything else. It is not a last in the sense of end, but only in the sense of a last state. There is a grammatical peculiarity about the Hebrew word translated "last," that lets a little light on the subject. When He said in Hebrew by Isaiah, "I am the first, and I am the last," it is as if He had said in English, "I am the first, and I am the lasts." The latter word is plural, which cannot be rendered into English, but which suggests the intimation that the last phase of the divine existence would be a plural manifestation. This is in exact accord with what we see. Alone in the beginning, He is a multitude at the finish; a multitude in the amplest sense; a multitude of stars inhabited by a multitude of sons in whom His attributes are reflected.

In this there is a very grand conception. God in the first state doubtless was

fully content in Himself, but it must have been an increase to His pleasure to have companion objects developed in Himself, and companion intelligences. It is a far more glorious state of things at the finish than at the beginning; it is a finish reached by a gradual process which gives intensity to the glory when fully developed. We see it illustrated in the case of our own earth and our own race, and we are probably justified in judging other cases by our own. Here is a long history since Adam's fall, long and dreadful; but streaked with hope and comfort, and culminating in perfection. If we confine our view to the visions of the transition state through which we are passing, we shall be distressed beyond measure; but if we remember that it is but part of a divine evolution which, when completed, will have no place for the confusion, our feelings moderate and adjust themselves to the situation as it exists. The confusion will be obliterated in the attainment of the goal; the path we are going through will be like an evil dream which disappears with the sunshine of the morning.

We have strong need to lean upon this view, for the spectacle of human miseries is agonising, continued from age to age, and extending to such multitudes, many of whom desire the right and the good, and are helpless in all their efforts to attain them. It is difficult sometimes to withhold tears at the helpless state of man; even their very badness, as we might express it, is a thing to pity, for it is the inevitable result of the circumstances governing their appearance in being. How can a Zulu help being a Zulu? How can a Christ-blaspheming Jew be otherwise in the circumstances in which he is born and brought up? How can the denizens of British slums of squalor be other than they are? It is a sad sight, enough to break the heart. Why was Christ a man of sorrows, but that he realised the state of things as it exists in strong contrast to what he knew ought to be? God's ways are vast and inflexible, and our only comfort lies in the guaranteed and revealed purpose to work all things to a good result at last. If we could indulge in the Universalist thoughts, it would assuage the asperities of our experience; but so many things exclude this thought that we are obliged, while beholding the dreadful scene of human vanity and misery, to fall back upon the only comfort that is applicable, namely, that in a far-off time the earth will be as bright and happy as it now is dark and miserable: "The glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea." "All families of the earth shall be blessed in Abraham and his seed;" death itself abolished, and all imperfection swallowed up in the glorious efficiency of Spirit nature. The heart naturally yearns for the manifestation of God's actual presence. His presence is with us, we know, but it is unmanifested, and this makes a great practical difference to limited creatures like ourselves. Man was made for God's society, and he never can be happy apart from it. The traces of His presence we may intellectually discern in the wisdom of all things around us, and especially in the relics of past manifestation in connection with the Jews, Christ, and the Bible; but this is a

very different thing from the joy and comfort of actual communication. We read the Bible and are comforted by it, and affected by Him through it, but the process is indirect and subjective, as we might phrase it, and has none of the exhilarant power of open communion. The feeling I am referring to is the one expressed by David when he says, "When shall I come and appear before God?" and also when he says, "My tears have been my meat day and night, while they say unto me, Where is thy God?" We are in the position of a woman long separated from her husband, who perhaps has gone to some distant land. She has letters, perhaps, that she received a long time ago, and they are some comfort to her as she reads them over and over again; but what comparison is there between the meagre satisfaction she derives from this process and the joy that would be caused to her by a new letter, or, still more, by the arrival of her husband? The Bible is the letter that was sent long, long ago, and we have read it and read it until our poor mortal minds faint and fail in the effort to extract the sense of God's presence and guidance. We yearn even to death for the day of His revived work and revived communication with His people. We know it is coming, because it is promised, and this institution for the breaking of bread has just this one meaning — or, rather, specially this one meaning, for it has many meanings — that the long day of solitariness will end, and that Christ, the bridegroom, will make his long-promised visit to wed his waiting and watching bride, and introduce her to those glorious attendant circumstances that belong to his arrival.

The chapter we have read this morning introduces this illustration in some measure, and in connection with it exhibits various features of the divine plan that will be interesting for us to consider for a few moments. I refer to the parable of the King's son; this parable is in fact a sort of summary of the work of God upon the earth, from its beginning to its close, and we may find that in its scope it embraces ourselves in a sense. It is scarcely possible to make a mistake in the application of any of the details of the parable: the text shows that Christ was purposing to illustrate the attitude of Israel towards the invitation that had come by the hand of God's messengers. "A certain king made a marriage for His son;" this in a sentence is the purpose of God in its widest application to the earth. A more gladsome purpose could not be intimated as regards the form of the parable; a marriage is in universal experience the most gladsome occasion of a life, full of joy, and promise, and hope. That God should purpose such a thing for Christ reminds us of that other beautiful promise, that "the Lord of Hosts will make a feast to all people, a feast of fat things, full of marrow." Christ is the King's son; who is the bride? This also we know, by abundant instruction in the apostolic letters. It is not a single lovely woman, but an innumerable company of people selected from all lands and all ages, on the principle of that which is esteemed excellent in God's eyes, that is, faith towards Himself, and submission to His requirements.

These, generated and developed in circumstances of evil, are to be gathered together at a fixed time, and to be presented to and united with Christ, who comes for the purpose of the marriage. There is an element in the marriage not present in the ordinary institution except by a legal shadow. When a man takes to himself a woman in marriage, she is legally considered to be merged in him; she takes his name, and she assumes all his relations to circumstances, property, surroundings, etc.; but there is nothing in the case that answers to what takes place in the union of Christ with his multitudinous bride: he changes their nature from the weak, earthly, corruptible thing it now is, into the nature which he now possesses, which is incorruptible, glorious, and immortal. This change, in fact, must be considered the act of marriage, after which there is fulness of joy and inheritance for ever. As husband and wife they enter upon possession of the whole earth; with the specially interesting work in hand of enlightening its populations, and governing them in peace and righteousness, and bringing them into reconciliation with God and love with one another, and finally, as a race, into eternal life itself. This is a very glorious work lying before the newly-married pair; the immortal population developed at the end of the thousand years as the result of their labors may be considered as the family they beget in their joyous intercourse. To this marriage Jesus says the King sent out invitations: "The King sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding, and they would not come. Again He sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them that were bidden, behold I have prepared My dinner; My oxen and My fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come to the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise. And the remnant took His servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them." It will be recognized that in this Jesus represents the attitude of Israel towards the Word of God by the hand of the prophets. For many generations He had entreated them by His messengers to conform to His ways and purposes; but in almost every case they had rejected the entreaties and ill-used the messengers. There is frequent reference to this in the sayings of Christ. He speaks of Jerusalem as "Thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee." Paul also says that they "both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men" (1Thes. 2:15). We easily understand this part of the parable therefore; the Jews were first invited to the glorious occasion coming, and they rejected the invitation — not all of them — the parable represents things broadly; as a nation, this was Israel's attitude, but there were, of course, in all their generations a chosen remnant who were in harmony with God's will, of whom the fathers, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, and many such like are examples. Even in the darkest days of Israel's apostasy under Elijah, God told him of 7,000 faithful ones, at a time when Elijah supposed he was alone. Still, as a

nation, Israel took the position figured in the parable. If it be asked why the chosen remnant could not have answered the purpose, the answer is supplied to us in another expression in the parable, "Still there is room." This shows that a certain number are needed for the marriage of the King's son. This must be so, because the work of governing the earth is great, and requires a multitude. Those who were faithful under the Law will form a part of that multitude, but it is evident they were far from being sufficient.

The parable proceeds to say, "The King sent forth His armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burnt up their city." The meaning of this is one of the plainest things in the parable. The destruction of Jerusalem stands before universal mankind as a lurid spectacle of God's angry judgment against Israel for their incurable insubordination. Nothing ever equalled it in the history of mankind. There have been great sieges and tragic events; nothing ever came near the thorough and appalling destruction of a whole nation effected by the Roman nation.

It is worthy of notice that these Roman armies are in the parable styled God's armies. This will seem strange unless we have those wide views which the Scriptures create. By these views all things belong to God, and when He condescends to use any of them in a special work, they are His in a special sense. Thus the Assyrian is described as His weapon of indignation against Israel, and Nebuchadnezzar as His servant, though it is carefully intimated in both cases that they did not know Him, nor were aware that He was using them. The Romans were God's army of destruction against Israel for their sins. Another thing to be thought of, as we contemplate the unparalleled horrors of the Roman subjugation, is that there is a terrible side to God's character, as well as a kind and loving one. We need to call this to mind in our age, when the tendency is to presume upon the love of God, in the absence of submission to God. What Paul says is terribly illustrated in the destruction of Jerusalem, that "our God is a consuming fire." It is according to the analogy of things running all through nature; the ordinances of heaven and earth, whether in things small or great, are inflexible in their operation, but you must adjust yourself to them to experience their beneficial operation. The fire in the grate will prepare wholesome food, but in the wrong place it will scald and burn and destroy; so with everything else.

It is in the next phase of the parable where our own place as Gentiles comes in. "Then saith He to His servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage." The servants in the case were the apostles, who went forth first in the highways of Jewish life outside the synagogue, and then in the highways of Gentile lands to gather a sufficient number to fill the vacant places. The work was a very effectual work for the time, for God worked with them, confirming their word with signs following,



and great multitudes were added to the Lord everywhere. But when the apostles died, and the caprice of human ambitions came into play, the work deteriorated, and practically ceased. The present system of state churches throughout Europe is the relic or survival of their labors in a mummified form. Still, we cannot doubt that, as in the case of Elijah's 7,000, there have been all along the dark centuries and generations some who have been generated by the Word of God. The work has received a certain feeble revival in our own day, but there is nothing to give any satisfaction. The only instrumentality in operation (namely, the power of appeal to reason on the basis of the Scriptures) is ineffectual against the high fortresses of human prejudices and vested interests that rear themselves on every hand to the enslavement of the respectable multitudes. Very little has been done, so little as to be invisible in the general situation of things, and probably very little more will be done. It is likely that the muster-roll is nearly finished, and the moment ready for the Judge to step forth to inspect the result. The result, though meagre in our age, will be glorious in its totality, for the whole number from Eden downwards will be great.

The parable informs us that "when the King came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment," and ordered the man to be excluded. This is a remarkable feature, which is fully explained to us in the apostolic writings as well as in the Lord's other teachings. All who present themselves for admission to the glorious occasion will not be accepted; the parable would be incomplete without giving a place to this feature. It does it on the very smallest scale; only one man was rejected. This does not mean, of course, that only one person will be found unfit for presence at the marriage supper, but stands to represent a class, and that a large one, for the interpretative remark with which the Lord concludes this parable is this: "many are called, but few are chosen."

The reason why the rejected guest was not admitted was because he was not suitable attired; he had not on a wedding garment. What this means we know, and it is of the greatest moment to us. The wording is explained in the Apocalypse as the righteousness of saints; that is, the righteous character of saints finding expression in the righteous deeds of saints. It is the constant declaration of Paul that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God, and that he only is righteous that doeth righteousness. Let us beware then of trusting to the easy doctrines that are in vogue in the religious communities around us, and hold fast by the wholesome words of the Lord Jesus and his apostles, which will give us at last an entrance into the glorious Kingdom, when the darkness of night shall have passed away.

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## Nature But God's Machinery

*God's ideas in Bible alone, for us to assimilate — Nature's laws, etc. all of God — He made, He can change, suspend, accelerate — Nature gives no hope — everything good comes through Christ, to faithful and obedient.*

IT is recorded of Paul and Silas that in the course of their apostolic journey they entered into the synagogue in Pisidia, where they received an invitation from the rulers of the synagogue, after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, to address the assembly, if they were so disposed. This was in the right order — to bring human comment under the heading of the divine Oracles. It illustrates the contrast between ancient and modern practice. The writing of God should be the basis of all that man has to say; as Peter says, "If any man speak, let him speak as the Oracles of God." This is the true communion of Spirit. Man has no Spirit in himself, except his physical power of subsistence. He has not the Spirit in that relation that would connect him with the divine intelligence as the children of God will be connected in the perfect state. He must, therefore, attach himself to the only channel in which in our age the Spirit flows. The ideas of the Spirit of God are for us at present in the Bible and nowhere else. There was a day when they flashed and sparkled by inspiration direct from the Spirit of God to the prophets and apostles; but, in our day, that refreshing operation is in abeyance, as foretold. In this respect our position is less privileged than the position of the saints in the apostolic age. All the more reason why we should avail ourselves to the utmost of the privilege which is ours in possessing the written Oracles of Yahweh's Truth.

In the reading of them, we may think ourselves as the men who sometimes tap the wires of the electric telegraph, as in a time of war. You know what happens. A party of men provided with suitable apparatus go out into the open country, where perhaps the telegraph crosses a solitary wilderness. As you look at the suspended wires, and the whitened posts, you see nothing to tell you of the current of intelligent communication that is passing along, and you hear nothing unless it be the musical vibrations of the wind as it blows past in the neighborhood of the posts. You attach your apparatus, and you are able to read on your own indicator the messages which are being transmitted from a long distance off to a long distance off.

As we sit at our reading of "the Law and the Prophets," we receive the messages transmitted ages ago to distant times. By those messages we are brought into touch with many things that were living realities in their day, and that arch over our head to another day, when they will be greater realities still. This morning, this is one of the echoes we catch of one of these long past and soon coming realities. We hear a voice saying, "I am from above; ye

are from beneath; I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me." Taken by itself, this seems a strange voice, and seems to justify the comment which we hear from the wires almost immediately after, "He hath a demon and is mad, why hear ye him?" But as we ponder all the other things that come along the wire, the aspect of the matter changes, and we incline to that other verdict, which we hear from the same source, "These are not the words of him that hath a demon; can a demon open the eyes of the blind?" It will be perceived that this lays direct hold on the purpose for which we have met this morning. We have not met to commemorate a madman; but one whose whole recorded case, however silent he is to us at the present time, is a complete guarantee of the perfect truth and wisdom and greatness of his claims to be the Son of God and the saviour of the world.

So, too, as we listen again, and hear the exultant adjurations of David's enthusiastic mind, to "praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men." We hear a voice, with which the modern strain is in little and less accord. David attributes everything to God; human wisdom of the nineteenth century — nothing. Let us consider this for a moment. To a first look it would seem as if modern wisdom were in the right. David attributes to the voice of God things with which in our day we should be tempted to say God had nothing to do. "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters, the God of glory thundereth, the voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness, the voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve, and discovereth the forests." All these are what we call the operations of Nature, and totally independent of any divine procedure. How are we to understand this apparent collision between the impressions of sense and the portrayal of Scripture? The reconciliation will be found in a view that makes the modern philosopher the shallower and the Bible the deeper and truer. The modern philosophy is correct so far as it goes; but it is embraced in a higher philosophy that contains the whole truth. God has established the institutions of Nature with a certain automatic action. The question is, whether it be not more correct to attribute the action of the ordinances to Him who established them, than to the ordinances themselves.

The idea might be simplified and helped by supposing the case of a machine, introduced into a household by a father for the exercise and benefit and entertainment of his children. Let it be a number of these "penny-in-the-slot machines," one for giving oranges, and another for giving toys, another sweetmeats, and so on. The father could give the oranges and sweetmeats direct; but he thinks it is better for the children to earn the pence which procure for them by their own actions the things they desire, and therefore he sets up these machines all about the house, and the children go to work and enjoy the process of getting out of them, with their pence, what they fancy.

The question might arise, was it the father or the machines that supplied the various articles? Less intelligent children would say that the father had nothing to do with it — that it was the machines and the pennies that brought them what they wanted. To a certain extent, these children would be right; but their truth would only be a halfruth. The eldest of the children having understanding of matters, would be righter still, who should say that it was all from their father — that although the machines did it, father had put the machines there, and could take them away again. The children who should deny the father's relation to the matter would be the ignorant children, while he who should recognize the father in the case would be the intelligent child.

The application of this to the matter before us must be obvious. Nature has been constructed to act automatically; but she possesses this power by reason of the initial force or power constructing her. She did not construct herself. She could not. The modern scientific doctrine of the conservation of energy is strong on this point. Nothing ever happens in nature without an antecedent energy equal to it. All nature is on the evolve. Trace the process backwards, and you must come to the first cause. In this must exist the potentiality of possibleness of all that comes after. What is this? God. There is no other ultimate conclusion. God has made heaven and earth, with all their wonderful ways. "God commanded, forth they came." "He spake and it was done, He commanded and it stood fast. He commanded and they were created, He hath established them for ever and ever, he hath made a decree which shall not pass."

It is therefore the language of intelligence to attribute the phenomena of nature to God, as David does. Nature is automatic; but God made the automatism. He is not in bondage, however, to the work of His hands. The father who puts machines in his house for his children has absolutely sovereign authority over them. He may appear on the scene, if they go wrong, and put them right, or he may remove them altogether when he thinks they have served their purpose. So, God, in the invisible background of creation, reserves to Himself the prerogative of interference when and how He sees fit. His non-interference does not mean nature is not His work, or that its wonderful operations are not His doing. God is present by His invisible energy, as much in one part of the universe as another, but it is only at "sundry times and divers manners" that He makes His presence known. In the high heaven of His habitation, He is doubtless always manifest in the movements of His nucleated being. Jesus said the angels of his people do always behold the face of his Father who is in heaven. To this altitude we may also hope to rise, if we are permitted a place in the final glory, when "the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads." But, meanwhile, we have to seek after Him, in those efforts of spiritual

discernment which the study of Revelation inspires. In the putting forth of this effort, we are enabled to see the relation of nature to God, and yet His separateness from all its machinery. The universe of heaven and earth may be said to be a vast machine, which He has constructed on the penny-in-the-slot system, and has made it capable of yielding the highest beneficence in response to the efforts of which He has made its rational denizens capable but He stands by, as it were, to supplement the efforts of His children, and to repair the machine where it goes wrong. The machine has gone all wrong, so far as our earth is concerned. How it may be in other worlds we have no means of knowing; but here, through disobedience, there is curse, and pain, and futility, and abortion and death. He knows it all and, indeed, has contrived it so under the circumstances, but He purposes the healing of all in His own way and time. Jesus says, "I am the way," which we may apply without reservation in the understanding of the problem. We surround his Table this morning with this full conviction, that since by Adam came death, by Christ came also the resurrection of the dead. The world may smile at our faith, and our own blind feelings may at times offer a passing rebellion; but the fact remains indelible in human history that such is the meaning and issue of the problem of human life. Israel under Moses for a thousand years is both the shadow and monument of the fact. Christ as the end of the Mosaic world, crucified and raised, is its blinding enunciation to all mankind. The history of papal tyranny, of 1,260 years, is its illustration and confirmation on the negative side of things. What is left for us therefore, as reasonable men, but to hold fast the confidence, and rejoicing of the hope, steadfast unto the end. It is not as if nature offered any alternative or contradiction; nature plus Christ is not less nature still, but nature minus Christ is nature without interest or glory. Nature promises nothing, gives us nothing, and explains nothing, apart from God, who made heaven and earth, and gave us Christ, His Son. The gospel promises everything, gives us everything, explains everything, and without detracting an atom from the interest of science, or the glory of the universe. Nay, Christ is for us the essential counterpart of nature; for with him all is secured — earth, sun, moon and stars, and eternity. As Paul has it: "All things are yours, whether the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's." Without him, nothing is ours. We are portionless orphans, flitting across a transitory scene, to die and disappear, and be no more known for ever. The highest title will not avert it. The most substantial possession will not stave it off. The most resplendent honors will not avail for a moment to give us place in the permanent house of God. Only in Christ can men have this hope. He is gone to prepare a place for them. He will come again and receive them to himself.

What course then, but one, is wise, and that is, to hold on amid all delays.

To be patient under all affliction. Faithful against all unbelief. Obedient under all trial. True to Christ under every difficulty, knowing that the longest probation will come to an end, the keenest suffering will be forgotten at last, and that the longest watch, faithfully maintained — even amidst painfulness and weariness, fastings oft and tribulation — will dissolve at last in the dewdrops of joyful tears, when we step from the dismal shades of the night into the brightness of everlasting day, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, with all his saints.

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## The Completeness of the Truth

*The Truth can satisfy all needs — reveals God and attributes — His requirements for acceptability — the glorious destiny — principles to guide present life — vanity and hopelessness of life without — death in Adam — resurrection in Jesus — removal of all evils.*

WE do not know, when we first become acquainted with the Truth, how complete a thing it is in its adaption to all the wants of man. We know it is glad tidings, in the sense of reporting to us a coming deliverance otherwise unattainable, but we do not know its completeness as a supply for all our needs. It is questionable if we will ever rise in the present state to the full appreciation it calls for. Our faculties are so weak, and our surroundings are so uncongenial, that the vision has scarcely a chance of full development. If we could see it as it is, we should be heartier in our appreciation of it, and more emphatic and cordial in the expression of our praise. I often wish we could see all the fervor of Salvation Army methodism joined with all the light and beauty of divine wisdom and knowledge. This was the combination in David's case; it is undoubtedly the combination that will be seen in the "general assembly and ecclesia of the firstborn."

We will spend a few minutes profitably if we try and take a rapid survey of the excellent features of the Truth. First of all it supplies the personal needs we feel in the state in which we live. All human beings are not conscious of the personal needs I refer to. Zulus and Hottentots, of course, are insensible to the highest needs of the human species; but there are British Hottentots and Zulus, and many of them, as we know. Our presence at the Table this morning justifies the hope that we do not belong to them. A thoughtful mind recognizes the force of David's question, "He that formed the eye, shall He not see? He that formed the ear, shall He not hear?" Looking abroad on the vast framework of wisdom and might visible in heaven and earth, in things great and small, the mind infers by inevitable induction that eternal power and intelligence lives and reigns. The mind in its full action gravitates as naturally, as irresistibly, to God as the needle to the pole; or rather, it yearns

and aspires, and pants after contact with the Eternal. Now where is this aspiration to be fulfilled?

Nature can do nothing for us, except in telling us of God in the language of its awful silences. Mountains and oceans, yawning space and sparkling worlds but overawe us with their greatness. The skill manifest in the constitution of little and even invisible things only baffles with its inscrutability. We can only see the work in nature, we cannot see the Worker; and it is the Worker we require to know. By the Truth we know Him, and only thus. He has revealed Himself and therefore we can become acquainted with Him. "This is eternal life, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." In this we feel we have cause to greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, we may be in heaviness through manifold trials. If we do not rise to the fulness of the joy which the fact is capable of yielding, it is because the flesh is weak, though the Spirit is more and more willing. Shortly, the flesh will be swallowed up by the Spirit, and then in strength and light and joy we shall praise as befits the Truth.

The next inexpressible suitability of the Truth lies in the enlightenment it affords us with regard to acceptability with God. We might know God, and be ignorant of our relation to Him. Overpowered like the publican of the parable with the burden of our unworthiness, we might scarcely dare to hope for approbation and salvation. Where can we know wherewith to approach God with the confidence of friendship? Nowhere in the wide realm of human life, but here, in the gospel. The apostles invisibly stand before us at this Table, and tell us that to them was committed the ministry of our reconciliation; that this ministry takes palpable shape, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself," and that all that He asks at our hands is that we heartily believe and humbly submit to His requirements in the case. "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." "The wages of sin is death," but He offers to cast all our sins behind His back, and to receive us as reconciled and acceptable children. His requirements are not burdensome; His commandments are not grievous. Love has the highest place among them, and love is the easiest thing. Love is the element in which we may come short. The world is so dark and cold, and we are necessarily so intimately associated with the world in our present life, that love has little chance of growing. Everything nips and blights and oppresses and kills, in divine directions; yet in itself love is the most powerful, the most prevailing, and the most easily managed impulse of which we are capable. Love God and love man, and the rest is easy. Oh, let us fight this battle; it is worth the conflict. We are bound to lose this life; we are bound to get through; in any case, we are bound to lay everything down, and faint and fail, and pass away. If we have been overcome by the bitternesses and darknesses and weaknesses and futilities of a mere self-defensive animal life our existence will have been a failure; whereas, if we yield to the power of love, to God and man, even if

it costs our life, we shall achieve a great victory, a double victory, for life now is sweetened and ennobled by love. But consider the glory of being lifted out of the grave by the outstretched hand of beneficent omnipotence, and invited to a place among the shining galaxies of the immortal family of God; Oh, how unspeakable the prize!

Then we need practical principles of life, that will enable us to make the best of the poor mortal state we are in. There is nothing comparable to the Truth here; the maxims of the Truth are all noble and bright and divine. They are such as are calculated to make man beautiful, and they do make him beautiful in the measure in which they prevail with him. They doubtless entail inconveniences, but these are temporary, and are alleviated by the reflection that God, who fills heaven and earth, has the oversight of those who fear Him, and will not allow the inconveniences to press more severely than may be needed for purposes of discipline and ultimate well-being. A man may succeed in life, as the world reckons success, by acting on the selfish propensities; he may do well to himself, and make himself insensible to the well-being of his neighbors; but such success is a poor achievement, whichever way it is reckoned. Even now, such a man is despised by those who profess to respect him, though it is truly written, "Men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself." The praise is a sinister praise; men defer to success only on the chance of getting a share of it. A successful selfish man will find the true estimate in which he is held after his success deserts him. The friends of sunshine all disappear when the sun goes down, whereas a man acting on divine principles is loved, not for what he has, but for what he is; and if all that he has deserts him, the reality of friendship, which submission to God creates, will be manifest in the constancy of friendship under clouds. This, of course, is a limited consideration, but still of force so far as it goes. A man of God is prepared to face the experience of the prophets, who were destitute, tormented, afflicted, to the end of their days, of whom the world was not worthy. Nevertheless, it is true that even for the present life godliness is profitable; that is, it imparts a beauty and a sweetness to mortal existence which are unattainable under mere principles of the flesh. So that the Truth is a priceless preceptor and guide and preservative even now, in the darkness where we walk.

But it is chiefly in its bearing on the futurity that lies ahead that the peerless excellence of the Truth appears. "What man is he that liveth and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?" Away from the Truth the answer to this is doleful indeed. What man indeed? Not the highest, not the richest, not the most gifted, not the most blameless, not the most loved, can escape the inflexible law which works in every human frame and dissolves it in death at last. The grave opens her mouth, and the whole stream of human glory descends into it from age to age. "Shall any deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?" If the answer depended upon



our individual ability there would be nothing ahead but the darkness of despair. No man can bring himself back from death. Is it then an impossibility? In the abstract, reason could but refuse to assert this. Reason would say that it must be possible for life to be restored, and that it must be possible for it to last for ever, but, of course, this is not enough. Men starving in an open boat at sea are not saved by knowing it is abstractly possible for food to be brought to them. Here the truth, and the truth alone, brings hope. "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead." Not by man generally, but by one man in each case, by Adam and Christ. Apart from Christ, there is no hope at all; in him we have a hope sure and certain. God has given him the power over all flesh to do as he wills, and he has made known his ready and most gracious willingness to exercise it beneficially towards all who humble themselves to his requirements. "Him that cometh to me," he says, "I will in no wise cast out." Not only so, but he has issued his invitation to "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Oh! how comforting and consoling are his words in the bleak desert of human life as it now is upon earth; and how distressing it is that in the population there should be such a brutish insensibility to the advance he makes. Well it is for his brethren to be steadfast and immovable, both in the confidence and rejoicing of this hope. It is only for a short time that it requires to be a matter of hope; in the end hope will be swallowed up in glorious and everlasting and ecstatic sight.

Finally, when we look abroad upon the hapless state of man upon the earth, his bad social arrangements, by which the bulk of the race are doomed to joyless poverty and grinding toil, and all the blights and evils that accompany such a state; when we look back upon the terrible history of darkness and bloodshed; when we contemplate the ferments of hatred and strife and evil that destroy his life in all countries and states; when we think of the failures of every form of government, all the injustices and oppressions that wring tears and blood from millions; when we consider the insane spectacle of earth's industry being mainly lavished in the maintenance and training of fighting men in countless multitudes; and when we see as the net result of all these confusions how ignoble and abortive a thing is human life in all cities, towns and villages, what heights of elegant folly with some, and what depths of hideous misery with many, we feel exercised in two ways. It is impossible not to share the distress and indignation of that class of political agitators who advocate the equal rights of man, the overthrow of monopoly, and the establishment of socialism. At the same time, discretion tells us how futile are their claims and how disastrous would be the experiment they recommend. Good judgment tells us there is no hope in any human direction, and the knowledge of the gospel comes in as a healing balm in the midst of all the woe; while it explains to us the reason of man's misery, it also gives us the joyful information that God Himself has a plan for the ending of

human woe; that He hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by Christ, and that that judgment will be so effectual that mankind will abandon war, and be compelled to accept a law that will bring light and life to all their ways. He will judge for the poor and needy, and break in pieces the oppressor. He will end all monopolies, and send the rich empty away. He will distribute earth's boundless plenty to the boundless blessing of earth's teeming populations, and establish goodwill among men, on the rational basis of glory to God in the highest. Well may we shout with David, "O let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for Thou wilt judge the people rightly, and govern the nations upon the earth." Meanwhile, our prayer with thanksgiving must be his — "God be merciful to us, and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us, that Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations." "Now unto Him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory, with exceeding joy; to the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, for ever and ever, Amen."

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## "Wholesome Words" for Pilgrims

*Pilgrims now travelling through — "infallible proof" of Christ's resurrection to disciples — miracles needed to confirm testimony — persecution, trouble, etc. sifts chaff from wheat — purpose of God terribly real — avoid habits, associations, of present life.*

WE have all heard of the "wholesome words of the Lord Jesus." We may also remember David's statement, that "every word of God is pure." Who can read the Scriptures without feeling how true these descriptions are? The Bible is a book of health and purity wherever we happen to read. Its whole theme has to do with that which is high and lofty and noble. In the largest sense its theme is God, of whom it informs us that "He is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." In its smaller sense it is God's procedure towards man; first towards Israel, and then towards a limited section of the Gentiles, and finally towards all nations. His procedure towards Israel was to make them a holy nation, and His action towards the Gentiles through Paul was to purify to Himself a peculiar people. His action in the largest form in ages to come is to manifest His glory in a commanding form, so that every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess.

Where we are just now is in the valley of humiliation, trudging our weary way towards the time of light and life and healing. We are rightly described as pilgrims. Pilgrims are people on their travels, and therefore without a settled dwelling-place. People in such a position are liable to be tired and

dispirited; they need a stimulus for their drooping minds. This stimulus we find in the contemplation of the things brought before us in the various parts of the Word.

The section of the Word before us this morning is peculiarly strengthening; it is not only that it possesses the quality of purity and wholesomeness already referred to, but that it deals with very palpable things of which we can almost lay hold. They were things “most surely believed among” the Christian community in the first century, and this most sure belief becomes ours, when we look at the things that created their most sure belief. They were things of which the writers had personal knowledge, even apart from the guiding help of the Holy Spirit which gave them utterance. They are described by Luke as “those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word.” He himself was eye-witness of a portion of the things he narrates, and the other portion grows out of them as their inevitable corollary. He was a travelling companion of Paul, and heard his discourses and saw his miracles. In connection with that work he was introduced to probably all the apostles at different times, who all of them were answerable to the description applied to the successor of Judas, “Men who companied with the Lord Jesus all the time that he came in and out amongst them.” From them he would receive many of the particulars he has embodied in his account of the life of Christ. The gifts of the Spirit which he saw in the hands of the apostles, and which he probably possessed himself, were to him the witness of the truth of those particulars, in addition to the strong implication arising out of all that he heard and saw.

These amounted to what he calls “infallible proofs.” This is no random expression; it defines accurately the nature of the circumstances that created faith in the Lord Jesus. He says, “he showed himself alive by many infallible proofs.” The more we ponder the situation, the more does the statement appear absolutely appropriate. It is impossible to imagine any circumstance to which the description “infallible proof” could apply that is not contained in the transactions associated with the intercourse between Christ and his disciples after his resurrection. He showed himself alive in every way in which it is possible for a man to show himself alive — by appearing, by speaking, by acting, by eating and drinking; and all these not once nor twice, all these not on the same day. It would have been sufficiently powerful if it had not extended beyond 24 hours — that is, as regards the convictions of those privileged to witness the circumstances; but, in point of fact, it extended over many weeks, and embraced a great variety of persons and places. The closing episode was in one sense the most convincing of all; I refer to his ascension, and what he said in connection with it. The disciples did not expect the event; they were not in a state of complete enlightenment with regard to the work of which Christ was the centre. We have that work before us in a complete form in the apostolic writings, and are therefore liable

to marvel at the incomplete knowledge of the disciples, but our sense will inform us that had we been in their position we should have been subject to their limited knowledge. They supposed Christ would fulfil his whole work then. They asked him on the very last day they were with him whether he would at that time restore the kingdom to Israel. His answer was, that it did not belong to them to know the time of that event, but this was not all he said. He said, "Ye shall be my witnesses," and this was not all he said, for it would not have been sufficient for them to have been his witnesses in an ordinary sense in view of the result to be aimed at in their witness. The object was to create believers; the unattested testimony of the apostles would not have had this result; how could it? Just imagine twelve or more illiterate fishermen declaring to the public that Jesus, whom the public knew to have been crucified as a felon, was no longer dead, because they had seen him: how could this have wrought conviction? The evidence of their senses was sufficient to convince the apostles, but the mere assertion of the apostles could not have wrought conviction in the multitude. Therefore, said Jesus, ye shall receive power; tarry at Jerusalem until ye receive this power. The nature of the power he made plain: "ye shall receive the Holy Spirit, and the works that I have done, ye shall do, and even greater works. Ye shall bear witness, and so also shall the Holy Spirit." It was thus that Paul interpreted the matter in his statement in Hebrews, "God bearing them witness both with signs and wonders and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit." Also the statement of Mark, "They went forth preaching everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the Word with signs."

Now consider this circumstance, that the apostles were forbidden to begin till the power of God enabled them to work effectually. No greater evidence is possible of the reality of the matter than this interdict; for had there been no reality in it, what could have been the object of this enjoined suspension of operations? If it had been a mere craze of the apostles, would they not have begun at once? They did not begin at once; they waited in Jerusalem until the day of Pentecost, and then they commenced the work that Christ had commanded them to do, and they did that work so effectually that its effects are before us at the present day. The apostles did not find their work an easy work; they were opposed and obstructed and persecuted from the very start. In a sense perhaps this made the work easier, with their knowledge of the case. Men are liable to be very earnest when persecution arises, or else very decided in their unbelief. As Jesus says, "By-and-by, when persecution arises because of the Word, they are offended." A breeze of persecution has a double effect; it blows away the chaff, and it blows the fire of zeal into a redder heat, but not where there is not truth to act on. A fancy, or an invention, or an imposture, disappears before unfavorable circumstances, but a question of fact, in the hands of earnest men, grows into stouter proportions. How many men would hold by the Truth in our age, if it meant the seizure of our property

and the deprivation of our liberty and perhaps the taking of our lives? Many would not stand the test; a few doubtless would. Why would those few endure? Because of their conviction of the Truth; the others would give in because their convictions were superficial. Looking back upon the apostles, and seeing them in prisons and in deaths oft, in hunger and thirst, and cold, and nakedness, counted as the refuse of the earth, we see pledges of those infallible proofs which convinced them of the resurrection of Christ.

It is impossible to disconnect all these circumstances from the future phase of the matter, for it is a thing of that kind that the future is the principal, and in a sense the only remaining phase of it. The past is gone, and will never return; the future remains. The past shows us Christ crucified and Christ raised, and Christ taken away. These events were compressed into a very short period. What does the future show? It shows us Christ for ever; I do not mean Christ living for ever, though that is involved. Christ might live for ever where he is, and the earth know nothing more of him. When I say Christ for ever, you know that I mean Christ in the earth's future for ever. The invitation to sit on the Father's right hand was bounded by the limitation, "sit thou on My right hand, until." The event contemplated in this limitation involves all when properly understood. "Until I make thine enemies thy footstool," that means putting the foes of Christ under him. Who are they? The whole mass of mankind who do not obey him. They are to be destroyed from his presence, as Paul declares and those that are left, bow the knee in complete and cordial homage. And what then? We have it in the words of the Psalm, "Yet have I set My king on My holy hill of Zion;" and in another Psalm, "The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion;" and in another prophet, "The Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion for ever."

Now, to this reigning we know there is no end. His kingly manifestation is not to be a mere episode, like his crucifixion. "Of his kingdom there shall be no end. His name shall endure as long as the sun;" and the ascendancy of his name is the ascendancy of pure blessing: "For men shall be blessed in him; yea, all nations shall call him blessed." And we also know that this reigning of his does not mean his merely taking the place of the kings that now are. He will do this, but it will be more than a mere substitution of authority. God has enlightened us on many particulars with regard to the state of things that will then exist; and, amongst others, this is the least obscure and the most unquestionable, that there will reign with him in the glory of a renovated nature like his own, all those men and all those women, who, during these ages of probation, please God by their submission and conformity to Christ.

This is where the tremendous power of the whole case comes in. We are not dealing with a theory of things, but with a purpose of God. A purpose of God is a terribly substantial thing, though treated so lightly by our generation. It really is the foundation on which the universe is built, if men only knew; for what was the antecedent to the stupendous framework of

heaven and earth but an idea conceived in the Eternal Mind, and executed by the Eternal Energy? The purpose of God can never fail where it depends upon His own creative power. Let Him enunciate a purpose, and men have before them a stupendous and solid thing. This is the position of the Gospel of the Kingdom. God has declared that God Himself shall set up a Kingdom that shall never be destroyed; that in this Kingdom His Son shall be the head, and that confederated under that glorious head, will be a host of kings and priests developed in times of darkness, during which they are allowed, by His grace, to earn a place in that illustrious throng. No member of that host will be there without a history, and without a character, and without desert. No man will enter into the Kingdom of God if he does not deserve it according to God's standard.

Here comes the terrible importance of God's standard as bearing upon our present life. Nothing is more unreal and more insignificant and more unimportant in popular estimation than this. Now, because we are liable to be influenced by popular estimation, we are liable to fail in a reasonable sense of this matter. We are liable to fail to be sufficiently impressed and sufficiently controlled by the Law of God as determining destiny. Here is where it is so important to pursue that line of life that enables us to come under its power, and to avoid all those habits and associations and avocations that have the contrary effect. Men see this very clearly when they come to die. The victory lies in seeing it while we are yet alive, and this victory is only to be achieved by the weapons God has given us to that end. "Put on the whole armor of God," do not leave off any part. The Bible is the armory, we cannot get the means of victory anywhere else. The daily reading will continue to the end of this miserable dispensation to be the course that the ending will show to be the only course of wisdom. It will often have to be done in weakness, sometimes in bitterness, sometimes with apparent failure of spiritual results, but the man of God will be undeterred by these obstacles, he will persevere in the ways of wisdom, though flesh and heart fail, and he will be rewarded, for God is on the side of those who faithfully fight the battle He has appointed to the sons of men; and the nature of things is on their side as well, for no man can bring his mind into habitual contact with the Bible without having his mind insensibly conformed to its ideas and principles.

This victory is indispensable. All the promises are to those that overcome. The battle in which this overcoming has to be achieved, is with diversified foes; we have to fight ourselves, we have to fight the world, and we have often to fight our friends, for sometimes our best friends are our worst foes in spiritual things. We will win, if we keep our eye on Christ. As John says "this is the victory that overcometh: our faith." Faith is the mental discernment and conviction of facts not seen. Christ is a great fact not seen with the natural eye, but to be discerned by the mental eye. This was the position of multitudes of believers in the first century, to whom Peter, therefore, had to

say, “whom having not seen, ye love.” It seems impossible to know Christ, without loving him, and it is impossible to listen to him without reading the Bible, and it is impossible to read the Bible without a clear discernment of what is involved in it, and the resolute determination not to be thwarted by anything under the sun in the effort to secure the unspeakable prize of life everlasting, which Christ has invited us to possess. We shall have failures, but let us not be discouraged by those. We have a merciful and faithful high priest, who, having himself suffered, being tempted, is able to succour those who are tempted. He ever liveth to make intercession for those who are engaged in the battle with weak flesh — a battle to which he has summoned us. The shining heights of victory are ahead, and many reassuring voices are encouraging us to be strong, and of a good courage in the conflict, the loudest and sweetest among which are the words of Christ, “In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world.”

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## Observations for Probation’s Course

*Journey through life needs charting — surroundings deceive — fixed and distant objects essential — past: God, life, death and resurrection of Jesus — present: God and Jesus control all — future: Jesus will return — steer life by these.*

THESE meetings are useful in more ways than one. They enable us to take observations like the ships at sea, by which to know our whereabouts. There is, in fact, a very complete analogy between the position of a ship at sea and the relation of our lives to the goal at which we are aiming. If you are on board a ship at sea, out of sight of land, you cannot tell where you are by looking over the ship’s side into the water, or by looking at other ships, or by looking at the shifting clouds in the sky. You have to look at fixed and distant objects, very distant. You have to take observations of the sun, and of certain stars; by working out these you can calculate to a nicety the latitude and longitude of the vessel, and ascertain how many miles you are from such a coast or such an island. If the people in the ship did not make these observations, the vessel would drift into danger, they would sail without knowing where they were going, and would soon be destroyed. This is exactly how it is with life: what is the meaning of it? Where is it situated? To what point is it tending? We cannot answer these questions by looking at what is passing immediately under the eye, nor by looking at other people, nor by watching the movements among men. All these are the mere water over the side of the ship, and passing ships and clouds. We have to fix our eyes upon distant objects.

If a ship is within sight of land, she can tell where she is, without looking at the sun and stars; at least, sometimes she can do so, if the land is recognizable; but even then she has to consider what is visible on her horizon in connection with what is in the sky so far away.

So it is with us; we look before and behind, and take our first and nearest observation from fixed objects. A short way back, we see a cradle; a short way forward, a grave. These tell us something; they tell us that the life we are now living is a fleeting thing; that it had a beginning not long ago, and it will have an end in no long time. We do not read life correctly unless we have these two things distinctly in view; but this is not enough by itself, it is a great deal so far as it goes, it is more than most people are in the habit of remembering. It helps everyone to be wise and humble, to remember that we are here but for a short time. But if we knew no more than this, we should not be sufficiently informed to be wise, we have to look further back and further forward.

Looking further back, we see, first, that there were many people alive before we were born. Of these, countless millions are of no moment to us; they lived and died, and passed away, and will never more be heard of. But this is not the case with some. As we look back, we see some very prominent names, some very tall figures, some men whose names will always be mentioned while the human race lasts. But not all of these are of importance to us; most of them are as shifting clouds. Pharaoh, for example, Nebuchadnezzar, Charlemagne, Napoleon; what are these to us but mere milestones of history? Is this the case with all the past? Is all history devoid of personal bearing? The answer naturally starts to every wise lip; there is a name above all names, a figure towering to the very heavens, who is much more than history. We not only hear of Jesus Christ in all lands and in all tongues, but the report of him differs from the report of all other men that ever appeared. The very first aspect in which he is seen by the idlest glance of the eye bespeaks a close personal significance. No one ever heard of Christ without knowing that he was crucified. The record written in the age that witnessed his crucifixion tells us also its meaning, and at once places Christ by himself amongst all historical celebrities. Although his crucifixion was a human performance so far as instrumentality was concerned, the Jews and Romans uniting to put him to death, under a common animus, yet it was a divine performance, as Peter, under the sanction of the Holy Spirit, informed the Jews afterwards. "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," he said, "ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." And again, "The kings of the earth stood up, and their rulers were gathered together, against the Lord, and against His Christ... to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel had determined before to be done" (Acts 2:23; 4:28).



But why did the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God decree such a tragic event? The information was written beforehand by the prophet: "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all... It pleased the Lord to bruise him, He hath put him to grief; he hath poured out his soul unto death, he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sin of many" (Isaiah 53:6-12). In the brief and comprehensive language of Paul, "He put away sin by the sacrifice of himself," the practical application of which he illustrated in the Gospel announcement, "Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." Who is there among all the celebrities of history of whom such things can be said?

When we consider the meaning of these things, how great and important does Christ appear. For God is in them; "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." But why should reconciliation take this sanguinary and painful form — the immolation of a harmless, righteous, benevolent man, at the hands of sinners? For the reason we discover in the instruction of the Spirit by the apostles, but a reason that touches no chord of sympathy in a merely natural man; it is a reason having to do with God, who made man and all things for Himself. God is great and holy, and will be exalted and obeyed. On the earth He has been debased and set at nought among men and He can have nothing further to do with them, except by the reversal of this position. He will only be approached by those who recognize the righteous condemnation of sin in one who shared their sin nature for the purpose, but who himself was holy, harmless and undefiled.

Looking back, therefore, at this historic figure of the crucified Jesus, we learn that our passing life has a divine relation; that man exists not for himself, but for God, who calls upon him to give unto God the glory due unto His name, and who will not tolerate the treason that withholds that glory, and bestows it upon man. He tells us that a life of indifference to Him, a life of disobedience, a life of wicked works, is a life that alienates from God, and a life darkened with a curse that no man can remove. We are thus brought to see a meaning in life undiscoverable otherwise.

The divine meaning of life is not wholly future. "Now are we the sons of God," as John says, and now are we to please God by offering the sacrifice of praise to Him continually, that is, "the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name" (Heb. 13:15). It is now that we are called upon to "present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God," being "not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds" (Rom. 12:1-2).

But as we look again, we see not only a crucified Christ but a risen Christ. There was more said about the resurrection of Christ by the apostles than about the crucifixion of Christ, a peculiarity in which there is a sharp contrast between their preaching and modern preaching. There is a reason

for this, which we know. The fables of heathendom have eaten out the Truth as a canker, as Paul foretold. The idea that man is an immortal, spiritual entity, surviving the dissolution of the body, takes away all necessity for and meaning from the resurrection, whereas the truth that man is but a living body whom death destroys, necessitates the resurrection, if there is to be a future life, and explains the whole transaction of divine wisdom by Christ in his crucifixion and resurrection. It was a bodily man that sinned, and a bodily man that was condemned, and it is a bodily man that dies; and, therefore, it was a bodily Christ that was crucified and a bodily Christ that rose. Without this bodily resurrection, the whole matter would have ended in emptiness in all senses, for God's object in the matter was to provide a mediator; His greatness and holiness did not permit of His dealing with sinful man direct; His kindness can only operate conformably with His dignity, through one in whom His righteousness has been declared.

Now if Christ had not risen, there would have been no provision of such an one; there would have been no priest, no judge, no dispenser of God's favor, no Job for the three friends. As Paul says, "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain." So here is another great aspect of this great name which serves as a guide to the meaning of the life we are now living. Christ died, but Christ rose; herein he differs from all other names of history. Why has no tradition of resurrection arisen in connection with any other man? There was no absence of motive. Of many of the great men of history we read that they were so important to the situation of the moment that when they died their attendants were afraid to make their death known, and if they could by any possibility have successfully invented the idea of their resurrection, the invention would have stalked forth in all pomp and parade. But no, it is not easy to invent a faith of this kind as unbelievers suggest; in fact, it is impossible; there is no other case but the case of Christ in which such a faith has been established, for the simple reason that there is no other case in which resurrection took place. The fact of his resurrection rested not upon opinion, nor desirability, nor predisposition, but went against all these; for the apostles, who were witnesses of his resurrection, had their opinions and predispositions in the contrary form. "They knew not the Scripture that he should rise from the dead," and they would not believe it in the first instance. Only the evidence of their senses repeated many times drove all unbelief away.

Now, if Christ rose from the dead, he lives at the present hour, and his existence has a personal meaning to every life that opens to the faith of him. With this relationship, the life we are now living acquires a meaning and an interest which it cannot possess in any other line of things. Disconnected from this, we know not what we should do, or why we are here, or where we are going; we are in an aimless drift across life's solemn main. But not so with

Christ in view. We have a rule of action and a prospect ahead that gives light where all was darkness, and hope, where all becomes ultimately despair. And so we naturally withdraw our eyes from the past and look ahead; and, looking forward, we get the divine meaning of life confirmed more and more. But how can we look ahead? No man knows the future; true, but God knows, and He has spoken. The Word of prophecy came not of private impulse, as Peter informs us, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Spirit. There is a God in heaven, as Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar, that revealeth secrets, and He hath made known what shall come to pass in the latter days. By means of this light in a dark place, we are able to look forward, and to see; and what is it we see? That this crucified and risen Christ is coming again. This is the one only great and glorious event associated with the future in Scripture revelation. Unenlightened people may weary of hearing of it, but it nonetheless remains as ineradicable an element of the divine programme as any item of a purposed royal progress, or private individual procedure for the matter of that; for a man in business may send an agent to Australia, with a very important commission upon which perhaps his whole fortune depends. He has arranged for that agent to return by a certain date, and until that date arrives, which perhaps may be a distant one, the return of the agent is a matter of purpose and prospect and faith. To the business man who is waiting his return, it is a very real matter of calculation, but to importunate creditors who may perhaps know nothing of the solid basis of the thing, it may seem a tiresome myth.

Men may say concerning Christ, "Where is the promise of his coming?" in the sense of doubting if it ever will come off. If they are earnest men, they can get their answer; if they are scornful men, no answer can meet their mood. The answer is that God hath appointed a day in which He will send Jesus Christ at the time and for the work arranged. He has given infallible proofs of this in all that has happened in the past, and if men are reasonable and attentive, they can discern the proofs. If they are frivolous and negligent, they are not worthy of the proofs. The proofs not only consist of the signs and wonders which God did by the hands of Christ and his apostles, but of the fulfilment since then of matters long foretold, and which present themselves in a very visible form in our own age.

It was foretold that in Christ's absence, history would chiefly be concerned with the figure and career of a false Christ, who would be a persecutor and destroyer of God's people, instead of their shepherd. Accordingly, the history of Europe has been the history of a religious government headed up in a man claiming to be the vicar of Christ, who has used fire and sword to coerce all the world to his claims. The only class that has disputed those claims is the one that has aimed to be in submission to Christ's own commandments, and these have been slaughtered by thousands,

while the others have saved themselves by worshipping the beast and his image. We see that the same sure Word of prophecy that foretold this monstrosity also revealed the time during which it would possess this terrible power. This time, as we look back, we have seen come and go. Exactly 1,260 years from its bestowal, the power has departed, within our own generation; and we live in the presence of many other multiplying and active signs of the coming of him who shall feed his flock like a shepherd, and gather them with his arm, and carry them in his bosom.

Thus taking our observations from the Sun as he rose in the east, and climbed to the meridian over our heads, we note our position on the sea of life; we know how to steer; we are not on the drift; we are nearing the shores of a happy country. We do not expect to land there without storm at the finish of the voyage, for we are informed by the chart that there is a time of trouble such as the world has never seen, waiting before it hushes into the peace of Messiah's glorious day. There is a billowy bay in front of the harbor, and a rough bar between the piers, and contrary winds chopping and changing, and lashing the waves into fury; but, taking our observations correctly, we know exactly how to handle the helm. We have a stout ship; we are under royal commission; there will be pilots out in plenty to meet us before we land; and if our papers are all in order, and we can show good result for the voyage, we shall make a triumphal entry into harbor, and be received with flying flags and musical honors.

For the time being, out of sight of land, we may be liable to languish, especially with occasional spells of calm, when there is next to no apparent motion of the vessel, and the sails flap idly against the mast; but intelligence in full view of the actual facts of the situation, is proof against the dispiritments of the passing hour. Weariness belongs to weakness, and does not alter truth. Therefore, brethren and sisters, hold fast the beginning of your confidence and rejoicing in the hope steadfast to the end. The vision has been written plain upon tables; it is for an appointed time; at the end it shall speak, and not lie; though it tarry for a time, wait for it; it will not always tarry. This is the Lord's own declaration by Habakkuk, with whom we pray, "O Lord, I have heard Thy speech, and was afraid; O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years; in the midst of the years make known, in wrath remember mercy... When I heard, my belly trembled, my lips quivered at the voice, rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble. Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. He will make my feet swift; He will make me to walk upon high places." "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so; come, Lord Jesus."

## Trouble Now, Power Soon

*True friends of God are pilgrims not at home, in present evil world — Bible truths bring comfort — not prophet's words but God's — everyone has gnawing distress now — all removed if worthy — offered future power as Christ's representatives — contingent on overcoming.*

PAUL speaks of the Scriptures having been given for our comfort. This implies that we are in need of comfort. We all feel this to be a fact as we come here Sunday morning after Sunday morning. It has been characteristic of God's people from the beginning that, while rejoicing in the Lord, they are subject to causes of depression and distress inseparable from this evil state. In the Psalms this is extremely expressed sometimes. "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord: hear my prayer. Save me, O my God; for the waters have come into my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing. I am come into deep waters, the floods overflow me." None of us can ever be in a worse position than language like this describes. If such was the experience of David, and of Christ whom David represented, we may well reconcile ourselves to any little trouble that may come to us. We all have experience in that line more or less, if we are God's children. There are those no doubt who live in pleasure; Paul spoke of sisters who did that, and who were "dead while they lived." No one who is a true friend of God can find consolation in an evil world like the one in which we dwell. A true friend of God necessarily feels a stranger and a pilgrim, trying to bear desert life, yet feeling it to be an affair of patience and endurance. In this condition it is natural for us to desire comfort. It is according to the will of God that the heirs of salvation should be somewhat disconsolate now. It is almost a necessary condition of the case. We could not imagine God offering His comforting salvation to those who felt in no need of it, and were callous and indifferent on the subject. This susceptibility to distress is one of the ingredients of the process by which God is working out everlasting joy. The joy and comfort is placed as a great light at the end of the journey. While we are on the road; we see it afar off. Mortal faculty may fail in looking at it sometimes; our eyes grow dim with dust and tears. Therefore we need to press home, as closely as we can, the comfort of the Scriptures, for that is a present comfort, and a very real one if we lay ourselves open to receive it.

What comfort is there in them? Of what does the comfort consist? First of all, it consists of the tokens they exhibit of their absolute and extraordinary truth. Without truth there could be no comfort, for what comfort would there be in untruthful or doubtful words, however beautiful? The tokens are incessant and various, as we read from day to day. Take the one before us in the Psalm we have sung, which contains a prophecy of the continuance of David's house and throne through an illustrious son. We know of course that that means the establishment of his Kingdom on the earth in power and great

glory. But look at the present moment; remember that that Psalm and the promise it contains were written nearly 3,000 years ago, many, many hundreds of years before Christ appeared. The most ingenious undermining critic is unable to suggest a denial of this. The evidence of it is altogether too solid to admit of such a suggestion. Josephus, who lived in Christ's age, and was not a believer, gives an analysis of the Bible (that is, the Old Testament), and in his analysis the Psalms of David appear as writings that had been at that time for centuries in Israel's hands. Look at this circumstance then: here is a prophecy of the fame and perpetuation of David's house in the hands of a son whose name should endure for ever. In Josephus' day, David's house was well nigh extinct, though the prophecy was hundreds of years old, but see — since then the name of Christ has filled the earth as the son of David. Look at it: 3,000 years ago a promise to David, and, a thousand years afterwards, this son of David, appears, whose name is now everywhere. This single case is a pledge of the truth of the Scriptures. We are witnesses that God's promise to David is already largely fulfilled. Looking over the wide gulf of time, we see David and the Psalm, and midway between we see Christ. We see the Bible true; that is comfort indeed. If you attack the truthfulness, you attack the comfort. This is where we had to fight ten years ago. It was said parts of the Bible were not inspired, because containing error; but no ability was professed to distinguish the partly inspired from the wholly inspired. At the hazard of every possible consequence, we had to stand against that, and secure the comfort of the Scriptures for life and hope, in the certainty of their entire divinity and truth.

We are able to settle down with this comfort in the presence of the two chapters read this morning; they are full of comfort, Revelation as well as Isaiah; it is difficult to choose between them. In Isaiah God speaks to us, not Isaiah; the prophets never claimed the credit of what they wrote or said.

Some things they, Isaiah and John could not possibly say of themselves, such as this: "Ho, everyone that thirsteth come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price... Incline your ear; come unto Me; hear and your soul shall live," etc. The invitation is renewed in Revelation, "It is to him that is athirst." We are very thirsty, hungering and thirsting for life, true life, for righteousness, for love, for knowledge, for truth, thirsting for the well-being of the people, for the glory of God. We thirst, and we cannot get a drop of the refreshing water we desire. We are in a great desert where there is hot and dry sand everywhere, and bleached skeletons lying about. Let us not despair. Here is God's invitation, "Ho, everyone that thirsteth." He invites us to partake of the very things we desire... a feast of fat things for all people. But there is a process. There is first, the listening to the news about it, and giving attention, and believing and submitting. Faith first; without faith we cannot please God. Faith is putting forth the hand to take of the water that will pour down our thirsty throats by-and-by. "Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye." We are in the act of coming. For the present it is coming to this hall in a town where the people despise us, and amidst many circumstances of trial and dishonor, but

presently it will be sitting down at the King's table. The present phase will be over in a short time; and when it is over, it will never come back. When it is gone, all the things we are thirsting for will be here. The spirit of heaviness will take flight, and we shall have the garment of praise instead, and an incorruptible body instead of this carcase of corruption. And then we shall be set free from the affairs that more or less distress everyone. Everyone has his own cross to carry. There are two or three hundred heads in this room just now. If we could lift the lids, as it were, and look in upon what is going on in the brain, we should see that everyone has a gnawing distress of some kind that they cannot get rid of. On that said glad morning all these mental toothaches will cease; the evil that depresses will take flight like the night before sunrise. We shall find ourselves in the presence of a noble King, vesting in himself the proprietorship of the whole earth, come from the God of the whole earth, who can say, "I live for ever;" who can say, "My Father hath given me glory everlasting, and the glory which He hath given me I give you." Think of being recognized by the gracious smile of such an one, not as a distant act of politeness, but as a close, personal, cordial friendship. That will be the beginning of many ecstasies, for Christ has many friends, and we shall know and rejoice in them all. They are hid away in darkness just now, but he will bring them up again — the salt of the earth, the pick of mankind, God's jewels. We are to be introduced to them. We are to be made one of them. That will be "receiving the right hand of fellowship" worthy of having. We receive the right hand of fellowship among each other now, but God has to ratify it before it is of any value. If God receive us not, what does human recognition avail? But God will receive us then, if we please Him now, and will introduce us to delightful friends whom we shall never lose, and never tire of, or find any fault in. Rejoicing together with them, we shall be invited to bless a world in darkness. The promise embraces all the perishing world. All families of the earth shall be blessed. The immortal friends of God are going to be sent out on that errand, and to have power and plenty in their hands for that purpose. At present we can do nothing, though our hearts may break at the universal misery. All we can do is to wait for God, doing the little we can meanwhile. Think of going forth as Christ's representatives, clothed with his authority, and supported by his power, to listen to all cases, and rectify all abuses, punish all crimes, and supply all needs. All democratic ferments and insubordinations will then be at an end. They are a mere upheaval of diabolism. They will be repressed as with a rod of iron. They are only a part of the night, these clamors of the voice of the people as the source of government. Republicanism is better than tyranny; but it is not in principle a reasonable form of government. The masses do not know what is right and good. Legislation should be from above — not from below. The wisdom of God should give law, the authority of God should enforce it. The world will never be happy till then. This is what is coming. The Kingdom that is coming will not be a kingdom of the people, but of God, whose Law shall go forth from Zion, through His friends who shall reign. Such a Kingdom will be a Kingdom of peace and holiness. This is one

reason why the Truth is unpalatable to politicians of the present time. It would not be to their mind to see a righteous calm among men. They prefer the battle and the breeze. They like the turmoil and contention of parties. The Kingdom of God is not a desirable prospect to them. "Without are dogs." Dogs are not governed by ideas, they are moved by impulse and like to make a noise; it gives them a certain satisfaction to bark, and this is why they bark. They can have no place in a righteous government. The real aim of government is to make people obedient to God, wise, well off and happy. The principles of such a government are very different from those of the long-winded speeches in the newspapers to which people are accustomed, and the talkee-talkee of leading articles which make the writers seem so important. The saints of God can understand all these men, but these men cannot understand the saints. As Paul says, "He that is spiritual discerneth all things, but is himself discerned of no man." It was the case of Christ in his generation. He was a puzzle to his carnal contemporaries, and they invented all kinds of absurd theories to explain him. The truth of the matter was beyond their reach. Jesus pressed it on them, but they could not receive it. He told them he was from above, while they were from beneath. The same is true in a sense of his brethren, in a mental and moral sense, and therefore they are unintelligible to the ordinary run of people. "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh," and these things are the things of the Spirit.

Many feel that they are too evil to come and accept these glorious things of the Spirit. There is a certain amount of truth in that, yet we are invited not to stand back on account of it. Gracious are the words of Isaiah 55. The wicked man is told not to stay away because of his wickedness, provided he forsake his way. He is assured that the Lord will have mercy upon him. God says, "My ways are not your ways, they are higher than yours." Man is unmerciful; God is gracious and full of compassion. This is one of our comforts. If we are failing and shortcoming, we have to deal with a God who is slow to anger and ready to pardon. Of course there are conditions. A reasonable man would be eager to conform to the conditions. It would be terrible anarchy if there were no conditions, yet the conditions are simple. Let a man believe in Christ and obey him, and he will receive forgiveness of sins. Afterwards there will be fightings and overcomings. We must be doers of the Word and not hearers only; "faith without works is dead." If we do not always come up to the full mark of the attainment in Christ, we have a High Priest. Peter actually denied Christ, but was forgiven because Christ prayed for him, for he knew that Peter loved him. If we love Christ and are bending our strength to the doing of his will, he will ask God to pardon us, and God will pardon whomsoever Christ asks for. It is one of the objects of this breaking of bread to bring this to remembrance, that we may not be overwhelmed by the sense of our shortcomings, and that we may be emboldened to "lift up the hands that hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees."



## "Blessed"—After Jesus Returns

*Death always present — "blessedness" at Christ's return for faithful — future glory of immortalised on literal Zion — visible signs of imminence of Christ's return — "deny ungodliness" now, sing with 144,000 soon.*

DEATH has made frequent inroads among us lately. It is not inappropriate to refer to the fact at a meeting expressly held to show forth the Lord's death till he come. The Lord's death and the death of his people are two different things, but still they are connected. It is written, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." There are millions of deaths that are of no interest to Him one way or another; "all flesh is grass;" as the flower of the field man passes away, except where he attains a higher relation, through the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. To such the words of Solomon apply, "The righteous hath hope in his death."

In the Apocalypse we read, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord." It is customary to quote these words on all hands as affirming a blessedness in the fact and state of death — the idea that the dead are blessed in being not dead, but having departed into a blessed state; this is the idea we all had in the days of our ignorance; it is not the idea contained in the words of the Apocalypse. There are two little supplemental words which divert it from such a meaning — "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth" (Rev. 14:13). These words suggest the question, "From whenceforth?" The answer to this question is only to be obtained by a study of the chapter in which the words occur. This chapter has to do with a certain situation seen by John in vision, the situation having to do with those "things that must shortly come to pass," of which he was told the whole vision would consist; things future to John's day. To the various things shown there were various times; times of persecution had to do with a different time from the times of glory. It was one of the times of glory that John was shown in the 14th chapter, as the first verse informs us: "I looked, and lo, on the Mount Zion stood a Lamb, and with him an hundred and forty-four thousand having his Father's name written on their foreheads, and they sang as it were a new song," etc. These were the redeemed in glory, as we are expressly informed: "These were redeemed from among men, and are the firstfruits unto God and unto the Lamb." These, as we know from the whole tenor of the apostolic epistles, and the teaching of Christ, are not manifested until the Lord comes to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe. Their manifestation stands related to Mount Zion, just as the manifestation of Israel under Moses stood related to Mount Sinai. Mount Sinai was a real mountain, but came to be used as a figure expressive of the Mosaic constitution of things; so Mt. Zion is a real locality, though used with a figurative import in

the Apocalypse. The figurative does not exclude the literal, though it is larger than the literal. It includes the literal, just as the Euphrates when used as a symbol of the Turkish Empire includes the literal as an element.

The literal associations of Mount Zion explain to us why the Lord and his people should be manifested there in the day of the manifestation of the sons of God. Mount Zion is the place where David reigned. We read that "the Lord hath chosen Zion, He hath desired it for His habitation" (Psa. 132); and Moses speaks of the whole mountain of the Lord as the "place He hath made for Him to dwell in," an idea that seems petty or large, according to the way it is looked at. To the caviller it is a petty idea; but when we come to consider that the manifestation of the divine glory upon the earth must be at a particular spot, it is fitting that an appropriate spot should be chosen, and that it should be an object of desire. Such a spot is the Holy Land, standing first in the association of divine transactions in the past, and first in the centrality of its geographical location. When the Lord fulfils His promise to "build again the tabernacle of David that is fallen," we read that "He will build up Zion" (Psa. 102), and that He shall "reign in Mount Zion before His ancients gloriously" (Isa. 24); and that "in this mountain the Lord of Hosts shall make to all people a feast of fat things, and even swallow up death in victory" (Isa. 25:6, 8).

It was therefore no unnatural thing that John should see the Lamb and his companions standing there when the time shall have arrived for the God of heaven to set up a Kingdom that shall never be destroyed. But before they can appear in that position there must be a great work of executive judgment such as in Egypt preceded the establishment of Israel under Moses. Accordingly we find that the principal scenes of Revelation 14 are scenes of this character. John saw an angel fly through the earth announcing that the hour of divine judgment had come, and another angel proclaiming woe upon all who should worship the Beast and his image, which I need not stay to prove is the apocalyptic synonym for the European state of things in church and state. We read, "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture." Those who are subject to this indignation have been in other times the merciless destroyers of the saints. Their persecuting powers and enormities were foreshown in the Apocalypse, and so also their downfall and destruction; both foreshowings being intended for the comfort and encouragement of the saints, who in all generations have recognized that the triumph of their enemies, so bitter to them, was no accident, but was in the divine purpose, and also that their judicial overthrow was only a question of time.

This view became their faith, and was the source of their patience, hence the expression, "Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (v. 12). And John immediately proceeds to say, "I heard a voice saying unto me, Write, blessed are the dead

which die in the Lord from henceforth;" that is, from the time exhibited to John in the immediate connection, which was a time of triumph for the saints over their enemies. They are blessed from the time of Christ's coming onward. This is the blessedness spoken of in all the forms in which it is expressed in various parts and connections.

How unmistakable is the causation of the three frog power in relation to the political and military complications which have oppressed Europe for 30 years past. How unmistakable is the decay and impending dissolution of the Ottoman power, which, according to the apocalyptic figure, has been slowly drying, as a river might dry, for 50 years past. How striking is the fact of Britain's occupation of Egypt and Cyprus, after many years of definite expectation. How decided, though small, is the movement towards restitution, both in land and people, and who can shut his eyes to the oppressive and constant war preparations of the nations; and who can be oblivious to the "distress of nations with perplexity," and the fearful apprehensions of coming events that brood in all classes of thoughtful minds, and undermines all business calculations?

It may well be said, "Blessed is he that watcheth." Very blessed indeed will such appear to be when the moment arrives for the Lord's bright figure to emerge from all this darkness. Very palpable are the things to be watched, for those who have eyes to see and hearts to desire the fulfilment of the sure purpose of God. Very great is the danger of being driven off the attitude of watchfulness by the preoccupations of immediate personal surroundings, which blind the eyes to the wide bearings of elements and events affecting the whole habitable. The danger arises from the pleasantness of living as other men live, and the comparative bitterness of the self-denial those are called upon to exercise who accept the position of strangers and pilgrims waiting for the Kingdom of God. The rule of human life is gratification. There are various kinds of gratification, of course, and there is a form of gratification connected with the Truth; but gratification is not at present a characteristic feature of the divine service, because of the commandments. We are called upon to deny ourselves many things that are agreeable; "deny all ungodliness," for example. What is that? The world around us is called the world of the ungodly; a world of men and women who live without reverence to God; who do not recognize His share in the objects of being, but cast His Word behind their backs, with all its requirements that they should attend to wisdom and knowledge; that they should worship God; that they should be kind to men; that they should deny themselves, and be holy in all manner of conversation. To keep up a line of conduct in harmony with the divine requirements is trying to flesh and blood, and can only be maintained by the power of conviction concerning things revealed, alias faith, which, as John says, is the victory that overcomes the world. No man with a clear perception of the unreality, vanity, and futility of human life divorced from God, and

with similarly clear perceptions of the reality and certainty of His purpose in Christ, as already partly unfolded in the past, could be induced to play fast and loose with divine obligations, and throw in his lot with a foolish generation for the sake of its passing gratifications. Yet there is great danger in failing in these clear perceptions. They are only to be obtained by exercising the mind in the knowledge of these things, which, when we come to practical applications, means reading and reflection, which bring prayer and obedience. Weary may be he that watcheth for the time being; but how blessed, even if he die at his post, will he be when the Lord of life and glory exercises the power the eternal Father has given him to reorganize the dead, and call them forth to the issues at which divine wisdom has been aiming from the beginning. These issues are grand beyond the possibility of exaggeration, or our power to conceive. They are slow in being worked out, and involve much labor and suffering, but their magnitude and value will be commensurate with the skill of preparation. Merely human happiness soon comes and soon goes, like the grass of a season; but divine blessedness, reached through a long pilgrimage of labor and tears, is like the mighty oak when established, and that lasts many generations; a generation in this case without end, a generation of the race symbolically represented by the 144,000. John heard them sing — this is beautiful; men sing when they are happy. Happy will be the sons and daughters of the Lord when they have gained the victory, after a long and bitter waiting. They will experience the truth of what is written in the Psalms, “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.” “He that goeth forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.” So also will they be able to say, “when the Lord turned back the captivity of Jacob, we were like them that dreamed. Then were our mouths filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing, saying, “The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad.”

Those who are permitted to take part in this tempest of melodious exultation are very choice men and women in God’s estimation. He styles them “My jewels.” We do not call anyone a jewel unless we love them very much, and God’s love has its conditions. Those who are neither cold nor hot, He has no relish for, but reveals by the mouth of Christ that He will spue them out of His mouth. “I love them that love Me” saith He, which on thorough reflection will appear to every reasonable mind the perfection of reason. How would anyone be in place among the angels who did not share their enthusiastic devotion to the eternal source of being? This being in love with God means being out of fit with man. Here is where the present difficulty lies. “They are virgins!” so we read concerning the 144,000. This is one of the figures; it is not literal, for actually the redeemed will comprehend multitudes of married men and women, including the apostles. The “virgin” is spiritual, as is shown negatively by the figure of a harlot for the false

church, which commits fornication with the kings of the earth. To be not of this world, and to be accounted as the off-scouring of all things, is very painful to human nature; but this is no reason why we should shirk it. It was painful to Abraham to offer up Isaac, it was painful for Christ to be crucified, it is painful for us to suffer with him; but let us not forget that if we suffer we shall reign, and that even our tears will be wiped out and our groans extinguished in everlasting joy.

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## History Follows Bible Prophecy

*Worship by faith — faith result of evidence — communications by prophets to Israel complimentary — proofs of divine origin — 4,999 years of Bible prophecies all came true — Revelation's prophecies became history — "Behold, I come."*

WE meet this morning for more objects than one. The leading object is to worship God through Christ — to disengage our feelings from the various matters that engross our minds during the six battling days of the week, and concentrate them upon things eternal, which are things most real, though things unseen. Our meeting is a successful one individually only in so far as we accomplish this, opening our eyes to the vision of God, as it were. There is a difference between our act in this matter now, and the act in which we hope to be privileged to engage when we reach the perfect state. We shall then walk by sight, and not by faith; we shall be able to worship God with the overpowering sense and joy of actual sight, but at present our walk is a walk of faith. It pleases God to prepare His children for the living worship of the Spirit state by the worship of faith in the natural state. The natural state is the first stage of being, in which things divine have to be mentally perceived and received. There is a perfect wisdom in this, which we shall see clearly in the end. Meanwhile we have to recognize the fact that at present we are called to worship by faith. This worship is not a less real worship than the worship of the angelic hosts who see the Father's glory; but to a weak creature like man, it is neither so easy, nor so strong, nor so sweet as the worship we hope with them to take part in by-and-by.

Faith recognizes God's existence though we see it not. We do this as the result of evidence, for there is no other road to faith than evidence; but the faith that rests on evidence is as great a reality in its way as the conviction that comes from sight. Many people have a wrong idea on the subject of faith; they think it is a shadowy, sentimental thing without roots in anything substantial. This is a mistake; faith is "the substance of things hoped for," as Paul says; hoped for because promised. What God promises He will certainly perform; the question is, How do we know He has promised?

This touches the root of the matter. We do know He has promised; it is not a matter of opinion or speculation. When a friend makes a promise you

know it, either by having heard him speak or having received his written word. Your faith in his promise rests upon his having promised, and that certainty rests upon the evidence. The evidence of our senses is direct or indirect, either in having seen or heard, or having received information from those who have done so. This rule holds good in matters of divine faith; our faith is the result of the evidence of God having spoken.

Here is where the importance lies of our keeping in habitual contact with the evidence. This is where many people die. Separated from the evidence, their faith withers as inevitably as a plant cut from its root. A person who embraces the Truth, and then subjects his senses to things not related to the Truth, while at the same time keeping himself apart from the things that constitute the evidence of the Truth, is bound to lose his faith, and become what Christ calls "a withered branch." The evidence in the case is multiform; we are in contact with it in coming to break bread, for this very institution is in itself in a certain way an evidence of the Lord having been upon the earth. It has its origin, as we know, in the persecution of those who received it direct from his hand, as in the case of Paul, who says, "That which I received of the Lord, the same delivered I unto you." When we come here we are in contact with other evidence. We are in contact with the Word in the reading of its various parts. Our readings this morning are strongly illustrative of the power of the Word to purify faith. Take this chapter in Isaiah which we have read. It may not seem on the face of it to have much to do with the subject; but consider it — what is it? An expostulation with Israel by the God of Abraham. Not only an expostulation, but a condemnation in the extremest terms. "I know," He said, "that thou art obstinate, and thy neck an iron sinew, and thy brow brass... I knew that thou wouldest deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb. For My name's sake I will defer Mine anger, and for My praise will I refrain from thee, that I cut thee not off."

You may say, what has that to do with the subject? Well, whoever heard such a speech in any nation, from any pretended prophet, priest or god? Do you ever find in pretended supernatural communications to a people, the condemnation of that people in this powerful shape? On the contrary, these communications are always complimentary. They are bound to be so, because they are the utterances of men who live by the good graces of the people, and are therefore bound to conciliate them by sweet speeches; just as in business a man who hopes to get a benefit by dealing with his neighbor, assumes a suave aspect, and apparently becomes a most benevolent man.

This peculiarity is not confined to Isaiah, as you well know. It is found all through the Scriptures. It begins at the very beginning, in the message of Moses, who said to Israel, "Think not ye are entering the land because of your righteousness". "Understand that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this land to possess because of thy righteousness for thou art a stiff-necked people. From the day that thou didst depart out of the land of Egypt until ye came to this place, ye have been rebellious against the Lord" (Deu. 9. 5-7). And again in taking leave of them he said, "I know that after my death ye will utterly

corrupt yourselves, and turn away from the way which I have commanded you, and evil will befall you in the latter days, because ye will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger with the work of your hands." All the prophets spoke in this vein. When we come to the days of Christ it is the same, "Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; ye outwardly appear righteous unto men, but inwardly ye are full of rottenness and dead men's bones."

How are we to account for this extraordinary and unique peculiarity — a peculiarity that belongs to the Bible alone — that the Bible condemns man, while all other books praise him? There are two views in the case: the view the Bible gives us and the view that opponents of the Bible try to believe. We have to judge between the two views. The Bible view is that God has spoken by the prophets since the world began. The opponents of the Bible say nothing of the sort has happened; the prophets were men carried away by their own notions. Upon only one of these views is the peculiarity in question intelligible. If God spoke to Israel by Moses and the prophets, we can understand the lofty and reproving tone of their utterances, and the small place given to man — "as a flower of the field he passes away." If the prophets spoke without inspiration, then they were as other men, and therefore their utterances should be as other human utterances. Jews are in no respect different from Gentiles in this matter. Jewish natural writers have praised the Jewish race for 1800 years past. None have spoken like the prophets since inspiration ceased. If their inspiration is denied, then there is a total lack of explanation of this extraordinary peculiarity which pervades the whole Bible. But, on many grounds, this inspiration cannot be denied, as we know; and therefore in this single feature of the chapter read from the prophets, we are in the presence of God, whom we have assembled to worship, and of whom we can say, as Peter said about Christ, "Whom having not seen, we love." We cannot see Him as we are now. We may be permitted this sublime privilege in the state to which we are going forward, and of which Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Though we cannot see Him, we can love Him; we must, it is the first and the great commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." True brethren and sisters are God lovers and God worshippers. Men who do not love and worship God are not His children. All other spiritual attainments go for nothing. How can knowledge or strength or cleverness commend a man to God? "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him." All the teachings of the Law and the Prophets converge upon God. Look at the encampment in the wilderness; the tabernacle was the central object, and the kernel of the tabernacle was the glory of God between the cherubim. All the sacrifices, all the utensils, all the furniture, everything connected with the tabernacle, looked to God, which is a lesson in parable remaining good for all time. Men knowing the Truth, whose hearts are not fixed upon God, are mere doctrine mongers.

Another and perhaps more palpable evidence comes before us in this chapter. In the course of His expostulations with the disobedient nation, God

refers to the fact that He had foreshown a number of things that had come to pass. He refers to these as a proof that He is the living God, and that the idols whom they worshipped were the creations of superstition. There is a strong argument here, on which we do well to lay hold. It is the argument of prophecy. We are in a position peculiarly favorable for putting it to the test. We are better placed than any previous generation for judging this point. We have behind us about 40 centuries to which prophecy has stood related, in some form or other. And here is the fact that looking in upon the world at any time during these 40 centuries, we find the state of things existing to be exactly the state of things that Bible prophecy required. Let us apply this in a rough way, that we may quickly perceive its power. If we go back 3,000 years, we find there was a universal monarchy; in our own day there is no universal monarchy, but congeries of co-equal sovereignties divide the earth amongst them. If there had been a universal monarchy now, it would have been out of harmony with prophecy, for prophecy requires that in those days there should be a divided state of the Roman Empire, with at least ten separate royalties. Why have not we a universal monarchy now? Is it because it was out of the line of desirability or possibility? Why, it is only a hundred years since Napoleon I made the attempt to establish such an institution, and nearly succeeded. If it had not been for the burning of Moscow, humanly speaking, he would have succeeded, and in that event he would have been able to make short work with the position of the British Islands, for the invasion of which he had prepared a formidable armament. There was nothing humanly impossible or undesirable in the establishment of a universal government in our age; in fact, politicians recognize that it is the one panacea for the world's leading afflictions, since it would not only abolish war, but the expense of getting ready for it, and allow plenty to circulate amongst the populations.

But here is the fact: prophecy forbade the existence of a universal empire in our age, while, on the other hand, it required the existence of such an empire 3,000 years ago. The time of Christ's manifestation is drawing on, and it has been revealed that when that manifestation occurs the earth is divided among many kings who coalesce in opposition to him when he comes.

You may apply the same argument to Israel's condition. Two thousand years ago Israel was a nation in the Holy Land. It is no longer such, but a mere race in dispersion. Why is this? Why is Israel scattered now? It is not because they did not want to be together; and they left the land 1,800 years ago, not because they wanted to go, for they tried hard to do as the Chinese have done, and which they might have done if the purpose of God had not been against them — that is, to hold together in unbroken national continuity from age to age; but had they succeeded in this the Word of God would have been broken, for the Word of prophecy, as you all know, required that Israel should be wanderers among the nations, and that their land should lie in desolation. The same Word required that they should be in Babylon for only 70 years, and beyond 70 years they did not remain. The same Word required



that Babylon, which then was great, should cease to exist; and, lo! it is so in all particulars.

We are able to apply this test in very particular matters. We have had this morning a chapter from the Apocalypse, which the friends of Christ have been privileged to possess for 1,800 years. "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him," as the first verse informs us, "to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass." By only a few at any time has this Book been understood. We have come to discern its import in our age, and to see that it is a political programme covering the interval that has elapsed since Christ departed, and reaching up to his coming again. Whatever part of this programme we look at, we find it has been carried out to the last detail in the accomplished history of the world. We can only roughly glance at the chapter before us in illustration of this. The empire of Rome is before us in the horse, a horse in various states under the various seals, representing the various experiences through which it should pass from John's day up to its dissolution by Constantine. The figures harmonize completely with history year by year. First the horse was white, with a rider carrying a bow, but no arrows. White signifies peace and righteousness, and a Bowman with no arrows is a warrior fighting without carnal weapons. This was the situation in the apostolic age. Peace reigned throughout the empire; the apostles were busy fighting paganism with those weapons referred to by Paul. "Not carnal," he says, "but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." An effective work of righteousness in a time of peace. The colour of the next horse was red, and the rider was armed with a great sword. This is in harmony with the state of things prevailing in the next generation, which was a most sanguinary period. Plots and intrigues and mutual assassinations prevailed in official life. A great many emperors reigned in a short time, and all of them came to a violent end. It was not only the emperors who perished but multitudes of their partisans. The best families of Rome were exterminated in the broils of this period. Then the horse was black, and ridden by a man with scales in his hand, which naturally speaks of scarcity. This was the experience of the empire after the termination of the assassination period. Public disasters interfered with trade, and lessened trade reduced food supplies. Farms went out of cultivation, and by-and-by famine prevailed, requiring fiscal measures of extremest wisdom to save the state from dissolution. Then the horse was pale, because death was the rider, followed by the yawning grave. Naturally upon a time of scarcity came a time of pestilence and death. It is calculated that half the human race died during the time covered by the fifth seal. The empire became a vast charnel-house. The next seal shows no horse, but an altar with the mangled bodies of the saints at its base, and in a figure, prayer to God from them for vengeance on their adversaries. This finds its counterpart in the fact that when the empire had revived from its calamities, the pagan priesthood threw the blame of those calamities upon the christians, upon whom burst a terrible tempest of persecution. Thousands were tortured and slain.

And so throughout the whole Apocalypse you will find the prophecies realized in the actual events that have happened. It is so down to this very moment, when the drying Euphrates and the arming of the nations are the notorious political features of the hour, connected with which is the portentous parenthesis, "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments."

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## "Good Tidings" for Jerusalem and her Children

*Israel's prophets not liars — God scattered Israel for iniquity — God promises Israel's redemption — Jesus the instrument — literal punishment and destruction of nations on earth — literal Jerusalem earth's future capital — obedient share glory.*

SPECIALLY profitable is the chapter we have read from Isaiah 52, when we get a full view of all it contains. The first question is, who is the speaker? This question is answered by the phrase occurring several times in the chapter, and occurring many hundreds of times through the whole Bible, "Thus saith the Lord God." This answer is either a great lie or a stupendous truth. It cannot be a lie when we consider who it is that utters it. Lies are uttered by liars. The prophets were not wicked men, but much the reverse. Paul says the world was unworthy of them. They wandered about in destitute and afflicted circumstances because of the unpopularity they incurred by their messages. When we look at these messages, they are a continual appeal to Israel to refrain from their evil ways and follow after righteousness. The idea that they were liars and impostors is preposterous and impossible. The books they wrote are resplendent with the beauty of righteousness and truth and holiness. There is no book on earth like the Bible in this respect. There is only the other alternative then, that the statement is true, that the Word of God came to them and that they spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit; so, as Paul words it, "God spake to the fathers by the prophets." This is what Jesus continually recognizes and asserts concerning the work of the prophets and their written word. He invariably recognizes that word as the Word of God. To hold any other view is to break away from Christ, and to break away from Christ is an impossible thing for calm reason to do when his whole case is fully in view.

The first joyful thing, then, connected with this chapter is that it is a message from God. What sort of a message? There are different messages from God; some of them, yea, most of them, are very sombre, and some very terrible, portending calamity, and destruction, and woe. This is no such

message, but the reverse; it is an inspiring, inspiriting, rousing message, “Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem.” Jerusalem is an actual city upon the earth; there is nothing in it to appeal to human interest at present; it is an insignificant and desolate city, but it has a history and it has a future. God formed a nation for Himself, and delivered it from Egypt; gave it a law; settled it in a country; did many things for it there, both good and evil; sent many messengers; and at last the greatest of all, His own Son, whose advent upon the scene has left a trail of brightness even in the midst of the darkness that covers the earth. This work having been done, the question naturally arises, Is it to stop where it is, in desolation, in abortion, in failure? Is the hand of God no more to be seen upon earth? Is Israel finally thrown aside and forsaken? Will the earth never know more of Christ?

All these things are real, you perceive; they have nothing to do with metaphysics; they are not matters of human opinion or science; they are not related to any theory of the constitution of things in heaven and earth; they are simply matters of history and fact, as real and temporary in their way as the men and countries of European politics.

It is the answer to these questions that gives them the position of such commanding importance. God, who brought Israel out of Egypt, tells us abundantly in the prophets that their downfall and destruction is as much His work as their deliverance from Pharaoh. “I have brought all this evil upon this people. Who gave Jacob to the spoil and Israel to the robbers? Did not the Lord against whom we have sinned? For they would not walk in His ways, neither were they obedient to His law.”

In the chapter before us, God, who brought the evil, proclaims its removal, and the bestowal of unbounded good, — “Ye have sold yourselves for nought; ye shall be redeemed without money.” Mark these words, and place the emphasis of lightning upon them, — “Ye shall be redeemed.” I will take out of thine hand the cup of trembling, and will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee.” “They that rule over them make them to howl, saith the Lord, and My name continually every day is blasphemed.” “Shake thyself from the dust: arise and sit down, O Jerusalem. Loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.”

“They shall know in that day that I am He that doth speak.” “Like as I have brought all this evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them” (Jer. 32:42).

No wonder the Spirit of God, in view of these things, burst forth as it were into ecstatic adjuration — “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings.” We have all known experimentally some time or other, though but too rarely, the acceptability of the person who brings us good news. Even a very insignificant bearer of glad tidings is invested in our eyes with a kind of halo of importance and glory. If this is the case in small matters — for small indeed are the greatest individual matters — how natural

that the bearer of these good tidings to Zion should be an object of ecstatic interest, "That bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth." For the time being it seems as if He did not reign, but as if the will of man alone was done, or could be done, upon the earth. When Christ was upon the scene, doing mighty signs and wonders, and speaking for God as man had never spoken, men were enabled to feel that God does reign, and not man. In the silence and passiveness of our present experience, mankind are otherwise impressed; but when the hand of God again is shown, especially in the terrible works He says He will perform, then men will say again, "Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth." These works of judgment are accompanied with and followed by works of kindness to Zion. Zion's watchmen, for ages put to shame, shall again "lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing, for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion." David calls upon the trees to clap their hands, and the seas to roar in prospect. It is natural, therefore, that Isaiah should be moved to exclaim "Break forth into joy, sing together ye waste places of Jerusalem." They are not called upon to break forth into joy without adequate cause. Men do not break forth into joy without a joy-inspiring reason. The reason in this case is plainly stated — "The Lord hath comforted His people, He hath redeemed Jerusalem." In what way is the comfort demonstrated? Is it by a passive distillation of Methodist "feeling" as it were, by which all Jews inexplicably find themselves happy on some particular morning? By no means; it is by no process of mere mesmerism that God does His joyful work. "The Lord hath made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nation, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God." The things done are affairs of open public feasibility and notoriety, as said in another chapter — "Behold the Lord God will come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him. Behold His reward is with Him, and His work before Him." The practical form of this promise is illustrated for us in the apostolic exhibition of Christ. Christ is the form of the power and glory of God; it is a personage who has been here and has gone away, and is coming back. As he says, "Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be." The matters in the chapter before us stand related to this event. When he arrives a busy work sets in, a work of reorganizing divine things, which have fallen waste, chaotic, and dark. The people of the Lord are summoned to leave the countries in which they now dwell: "Depart ye, depart ye, come out from thence; touch no unclean thing." Three points, — "Ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight;" that is, there will be no need for fear or precipitation, nor for the impetuosities that belong to uncertain human movements; for God will be before and behind His people in that day now near, and the work will be the work of deliberation therefore: "The Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rereward."

The form of his co-operation takes a personal shape, — "Behold, My

servant shall deal prudently: he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high." And then the Spirit of God steps back, as it were, to contemplate the personage thus introduced, in reference to a special, striking, preliminary phase of his experience, which will have been a feature of the earth's history before events arrive at this interesting conjuncture. "Many were astonished at thee, his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." Look back upon the past 1,800 years. Whose figure has been most before the public as a marred and grief-stricken form? There is only one answer. Christ crucified has been a figure in European history all the time, as a man of sorrows, known everywhere as a bleeding victim, as an impaled human sheep; none coming near him in the frequency and notoriety of this exhibition. It is this which will give his public manifestation as a conqueror and a deliverer such unspeakable interest — "He shall sprinkle many nations," or, as the margin of the Revised Version has it, "Startle many nations." "Kings shall shut their mouths at him."

The work which he proceeds to do is truly honorable and glorious; it is the work of Zion's deliverance. "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." "For Zion's sake I will not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest. The Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory, and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed forsaken, neither shall thy land any more be called desolate; but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah, for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married." "I will no more give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies, and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine for the which thou hast labored; but they that have gathered it shall eat it and praise the Lord; and they that have brought it together shall drink it in the courts of My holiness."

"Behold the Lord hath proclaimed to the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, behold thy salvation cometh; behold his reward is with him and his work before him. And they shall call thee the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord, and thou shalt be called Sought Out, a city not forsaken." These are great and precious promises. Those take a very poor and inadequate view of them who restrict them to a coming restitution of Jewish nationality, and who read in them a merely topographical restoration of the Holy Land. There is much more than this in it, as those are well aware who know the Gospel of the Kingdom. The children of Zion are mostly in the grave. Those who are her chief glory are there. What makes the history of Israel precious but the history of those faithful servants of God, such as Joseph, who managed Egypt with prudence for nearly a century, and Moses, faithful as never man was, in all divine affairs; David, the man after God's own heart, and

many others, of whose names we are ignorant? Has the Word of prophecy no light to shed on the question of their relation to this coming glory? We have the answer in this very book of the prophet Isaiah — “Thy dead shall live.” “He will swallow up death in victory,” “Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake to everlasting life.” We know how entirely this question is set at rest in the apostolic ministrations. Christ proclaimed himself the resurrection and the life, and declared that at the last the dead would hear his voice, and would come forth; they that had done good to the resurrection of life everlasting, their corruptible putting on incorruption, their natural bodies becoming spiritual, their dishonorable bodies glorious, to die no more, equal to the angels. In view of these things, we can understand the meaning of Christ’s words, “Ye shall see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God.”

The promised restoration of Israel is therefore a far more glorious affair than the common run of so-called believers in prophecy have any idea of, which is the establishment of a kingdom in the earth, with an immortal body of princes surrounding the Prince of life and glory, whose power will be administered through them in all the earth, for the accomplishment of the promised blessing. This is the Kingdom, brethren and sisters, to which we are called. Well may we be patient and resigned to the adversities at present incident to the house of God. God Himself asks us to be comforted in the very prophecy we have been considering in the previous chapter. “I am He that comforteth you. Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be made as grass?” Christ himself asks us to lift up our heads in view of the approaching redemption. Greater reason could not be placed before us. “The redeemed of the Lord shall return with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their head. They shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.” If we are in sorrow for the time being, the fact is recognized and allowed for. The “children of promise,” waiting in the time of Zion’s desolation, are thus addressed: “The Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath have I hid My face from thee, for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy redeemer. The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee.”

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# Knowledge We Cannot Do Without

*Popular aversion to knowledge — much human knowledge valueless — eternal life depends upon knowledge of God — only through Bible revelation — wonderful comfort to know God and purpose — know Jesus Christ and obey.*

**I**N the hymn we have sung we have been asking the watchman to tell us of the night. What watchman this is we know; it is not any living person. God set watchmen over the house of Israel, who by inspiration were able to reveal the times. They have long since disappeared from the land of the living. The prophecy has been fulfilled which said the sun would go down over the prophets, and the day would become dark; but though the personal watchmen are dead, their words in great measure have been preserved, and by referring to these, we are able to do what the hymn expresses, that is, to ask them to tell us of the night. There is a sense, of course, in which they cannot do so; they cannot tell us what is coming on in our own day; this we have to ascertain for ourselves. But then the significance of what is coming on in our own day arises from what they foretold; and therefore, figuratively speaking, our studies are a reference to them, to tell us of the night, what its signs of promise are.

This word "night" is also a figure, but a figure with very substantial meanings. They do not mean the literal darkness that prevails over the face of the earth when the sun is absent. There is a darkness more dreadful than this. The shining of the literal sun is itself an empty thing when figurative darkness holds sway. If your affairs, for example, are in darkness, a sinking heart is not helped by the shining of the sun. If ignorance and barbarism have the upper hand in a population, as in the central districts of Africa, the brightness of the orb of day and the beauty of tropical vegetation are a kind of mockery. Darkness in a man's mind makes everything dark for him. There are various kinds of darkness; we are concerned this morning with only one particular form of it. "Tell us of the night." This is the state of things now reigning among mankind. It is the night to which Paul says the brethren do not belong, "We are not of the night, nor of darkness." What is it that causes the darkness? The absence of light, but what is the light? As the darkness is figurative, so is the light. We have it apostolically defined for us with almost the precision of a dictionary. It is the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God" — the light of knowledge in a certain direction. How important is knowledge. We read in the Proverbs that "fools hate knowledge, and do not choose the fear of the Lord." By this we may know that the population around us are truly in the state alleged by Mr. Carlyle, "mostly fools," for the general attitude towards knowledge is that of aversion. What is relished is

sensation. The people are doing the reverse of what they are exhorted to do in the Scriptures; they do not search for wisdom, and dig for it as for hid treasure; but, like children, they turn their backs upon the hard work connected with the quest, and run after the fluttering gew-gaws on every rag-and-bone man's cart that comes along. We must not be carried away by their influence, nor follow their example. If we stand on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, we are all children of the light and of the day; that is, men and women in love with knowledge, and exercised in its daily use, as the birds of heaven soar in the sunlight. This indeed is the preparation for the literal basking in the light and life and glory that awaits the children of God in the ages to come, in which, as Paul says, He will show to them the exceeding riches of His kindness towards them.

There are various kinds of knowledge, and all knowledge is light in some sense or other; but some kinds of knowledge are not important for us at present. There are so many towns and villages in China, and so many trades, and so much revenue; to know these is to possess an item of knowledge, and therefore light, but obviously such knowledge is of little value. So we might know the exact number of the butterfly species in the British Islands, or the various orders of birds that visit our shores; but this also is of too limited value to be ranked with the knowledge of which Paul speaks. All knowledge in the ordinary sense waits the children of God in the Age to come, but most of it they can do without at present; but there is a knowledge they cannot do without, a knowledge which comforts and beautifies them now, and saves them hereafter. Jesus refers to this knowledge in his prayer recorded in John 17, "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." This is a comprehensive summary of the whole knowledge that constitutes the gospel of salvation; for although the Gospel of the Kingdom and the things of the Name are not mentioned, they are embraced.

Let us dwell for a moment upon these two great branches of saving knowledge — the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of Christ. To know God is to know what is revealed concerning Him, and to be in sympathetic submission to His will. We cannot know Him apart from revelation. The most that we can know without this is that He exists. This much only a fool can fail to discern, for as Paul says in writing to the Romans, "The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). No other account can be given of the existence of heaven and earth than that there is an antecedent, eternal, underlying Power, equal to their production, but this is a meagre and naked conclusion by itself; it does not impart to us the power that comes with the revealed knowledge of God. We could not know His



character, nor His purpose, nor His will, nor whether He had any, nor whether He took any notice of us one way or other; and it is from the knowledge of these items that the power of godliness comes. These are the things that have been made known in the course of that wondrous evolution to which Paul refers in the beautiful opening statement of Hebrews: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last times spoken unto us by His Son." This history of this speaking is the history of the revelation of those things so important to be known. It is the history contained in the Bible, and in the Bible alone. It is there contained in a form fully adequate to our spiritual needs. It is a form not to be mastered without patient industry; but still it is accessible to this. It has pleased God to place it in this position. This is His method in many things, placing His goodness within our reach, but in a position requiring us to put forth our hand and make an effort to get at it. It is so in all the precious metals which are hidden in the earth; it is so even in daily food, which requires the patient toil of the field cultivator. Those who turn away discouraged from the situation of things must needs die; the man who does not plough cannot reap. Let us not play the fool, but act the part of wise men, and address ourselves to the knowledge that God has revealed in the form in which He has revealed it.

The writings of Moses, the prophets, and the apostles are fully able to impart to us the precious knowledge of God. From them we learn that God is one, in the inscrutable sense illustrated to us by the unity of light; that He is universal in the presence of this unity; yet that His eternal and omnipresent Being is brought to a glorious focus at some point in the everlasting heavens, in which He holds high court, as we might express it, attended by multitudes of angelic beings, who act as His agents and commissaries in all parts of the universe, "excelling in strength, doing His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His Word;" that He has organized or concreted, or put into tangible form His eternal energy in the creation of the heavens and all that they contain; that by Him they have been contrived in wisdom, and are upheld in power; that in Him all things exist; that nothing can be without Him. They also reveal to us that this great Being, though so terrible in power, and dazzling in wisdom, is a magnanimous Being, gracious, long-suffering, slow to anger, plenteous in goodness and truth; that He will not pass by insubordination, but nevertheless delights in mercy, and will pardon where submission is conceded. That He has made all things as the delightful exercise of His power, and for the reflection of His glory; that He has made the earth for this purpose, and that He proposes slowly to extricate from the confusion incident to human rebellion an order of things in which His name will be in the ascendant, and all His servants in the perfect enjoyment of His goodness in its highest form. That this purpose

## SEASONS OF COMFORT

He will at last accomplish in its completeness, when His glory will fill the earth, and the inhabitants thereof will rejoice in the possession, not only of immortal life, but in every joyful capacity and circumstance of life. How glorious is the knowledge of God thus revealed; it enables us to adjust ourselves to all the conditions of this present life with tranquility and resignation and hope. Heaven and earth are to those possessed of this knowledge a very different place from the empty universe of the agnostic; they are the Father's house of comfort; whereas the universe of the mere scientist is the chilling vault of gloom and death.

But Jesus says we must not only know the only true God, but Jesus Christ, whom He hath sent. We therefore look at Jesus himself; it is the next element of the light of heaven. To know him is to discern him as exhibited in the testimony concerning him. There is much talk of Christ in public literature, without this discernment. He is spoken of as a paragon among men, but still a man, a great moral reformer, but only as men are supposed to reform each other; a teacher of kindness, but only as kindness is known between man and man. He is praised as a prodigy among fellow-men, but only as possessing in a higher degree what they all are supposed to have; for here is a great spiritual blight that runs everywhere — man is regarded as an immortal creature of the sky, instead of what he is — a poor perishing worm of the dust. The consequence is that Christ is displaced from the position to which he belongs; he is levelled down to man, or man is levelled up to him, and in either case it is impossible to know Jesus Christ, whom the Father hath sent. To know him is to accept him as presented in the apostolic testimony. By this we have to hold hard and fast, aye, with the desperate tenacity of men struggling in the water with their hand upon a lifebuoy; for the tendency of all human speculation is to weaken and obliterate the testimony of the apostles as a reliable thing. Robust reason acting upon the facts of the case seen in their naked truth, is all against this tendency; nevertheless, by reason of almost universal inattention to the facts, a tendency in the public mind is stronger than the facts, and we are liable to drift with the stream. We may accept absolutely, and without any reservation, the test formulated by the apostle John, "We (the apostles) are of God. He that knoweth God heareth us, the that knoweth not God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of Truth and the spirit of error." This is an impregnable rock in the midst of the restless ocean of human change. The apostles are demonstrably divine, as we know, and this being so, it must follow that everyone in true harmony with God is in harmony with the apostles, and that to be out of harmony with the apostles is to be out of harmony with God, however popular and prosperous for the time being.

Now the apostolic testimony concerning Christ is distinct and palpable, and also beautiful and reasonable. They preached Christ crucified. There are

two elements in this: a man might preach Christ without preaching Christ crucified; it would be preaching Christ to preach the coming manifestation of a seed of Abraham and a Son of David, in kingly power and glory in the earth, under whom the whole race of man would attain to blessedness. A Jew might preach this, but this would not be to preach Christ crucified. The apostolic preaching was that this coming seed of Abraham and Son of David was crucified with a special divine aim, and by special divine plan, having to do with the foundation of the blessedness to come after. What this aim was is plainly stated. "Him hath God set forth," says Paul, "as a propitiation for our sins," and again, "He was delivered (to death) for our offences, and raised again for our justification." How prominent this aspect of Christ is all through the apostolic writings cannot be hidden from those who read them. Christ himself said he had to give his flesh for the life of the world, and that he would lay down his life for his sheep, and that the symbolic cup was the new covenant in his blood, shed for the remission of the sins of many. "In him," said Paul to the Galatians, "we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins;" and in the Apocalypse the redeemed appear in the act of thanksgiving and praise to him "who washed them from their sins in his own blood."

To know Jesus Christ, then, whom the Father hath sent, is to know him as the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. But to know him in this character we must know something of sin. With the wise of the world this is baby knowledge, but to the wisdom that sustains the universe, it is the first principle of eternal wisdom. Sin is disobedience of God's revealed Law, and the penalty of it — death. The idea of immortality to a sinner is a human speculation in outrageous revolt against the first principles of truth. Sin reigns, and man dies; but God is kind, yet wise and just, and therefore, as regards permitting eternal life, will not pass by iniquity. It has to be visited by Him, and recognized by us. In Christ He has provided the means of this; for in Him we have not only the glory of God manifest, but a fellow-partaker of the mortal nature that has been propagated throughout the earth as the result of sin; and in this nature God condemned sin by its crucifixion, and rescued the crucified one from death because of righteousness and love, and has given him to us as our only avenue to life eternal. "This is the testimony, that God hath given us eternal life, and this life in His Son." He who attains possession of the Son attains possession of the life; but he who stands apart from the Son has nothing but his own evanescent mortality, which will disappear when the judgments of God are complete in the earth. How to obtain possession of the Son, is only to be learnt from the apostles and from Christ. "He that believeth;" this is the first and incessantly prescribed condition, apart from which nothing can be done. Next, he that is obedient, for He is revealed as "the author of eternal life to all them that obey him." Those who obey Him

are meantime on trial for his approbation at his coming. He exhorts them to be "faithful unto death," to "watch," to "overcome," that he is coming shortly, that his reward is with him, and that he will give to every man according as his work shall be — God having given to him the prerogative and power of judgment unto life or death eternal. To know all these things and to put faith in Christ, who, though absent, is alive, and to walk in harmony with his commandments, is to know Jesus Christ, whom God hath sent. To know Christ according to any philosophic or pagan or false theological method, is to know another Jesus, and not the Jesus Christ whom God hath sent.

Thus the watchman tells us of the night in various ways. He tells us that the state of things now upon earth is night and darkness. He also tells us that the night is far spent, and that the tokens of the approach of morn may be recognized in the signs that have been revealed. These tokens we know are all visible on the horizon. The power of the papal Antichrist has disappeared; the frog-power has embroiled the nations, the kings of the earth are getting ready their armies for the Armageddon assembly. The Euphratean flood, long shrunk in its channel, is about to disappear in final evaporation; the revival of Jewish nationality, though but in embryo, has begun; the lions of Tarshish are in possession of the Holy Land's neighborhood, and their ships are crowding every sea in readiness for the use of Zion's king. We may therefore well take heart in the midst of the gloom, and do as Christ commanded when he said, "When ye see these things come to pass, lift up your heads, for redemption draweth nigh."

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## Right Understandings

*Outward appearances, earthly knowledge worthless — trouble, chaos, evil necessary now — understanding of God's purpose, glory honor, essential — dual mission of Christ — dreadful to enemies, delightful to friends.*

WE have read this morning that when the people of the country of the Gadarenes saw Christ they besought him to depart out of their coasts. We are hoping and desiring to see him shortly; with what different feelings shall we greet him. Shall we desire him to depart out of our coasts? No; he may say to us "Depart," but if we are amongst those who having seen him love him, as Peter says, our desires will be the reverse of the people in question.

What an extraordinary aberration of judgment on their part; what a mighty privilege was theirs, had they only known, to have the son of God in their midst, "the Word made flesh," the long-promised Messiah speaking

gracious words such as never came out of human mouth before, and doing such works of power as had never been heard of, and yet they besought him to depart out of their coasts. What was the cause of this extraordinary behavior? It may be simply expressed as a want of understanding, for had they understood who their visitor was, it is not possible they could ever in reason have desired such an insane thing as that he should leave them. This shows to us what a very great thing understanding is; it makes all the difference between a desirable human being, and one who is undesirable. It matters little how people may look externally, if they have a good understanding. They may be quite plain, or even decidedly ill-looking. They become objects not only of interest but of love if they possess an enlightened and good character, a good mind. On the other hand, a fine figure and comely features become at last repulsive, if associated with an insipid or an empty mind. We can see the wisdom of the constant exhortation in the Scriptures to cultivate above all things the understanding. "Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting get understanding."

But then, understanding must be directed to proper objects; understanding in the abstract may be applied to anything, but if applied to insignificant objects, it ceases to be of great value. The common habit is to apply it to insignificant things — to understanding the structure of an engine, or the anatomy of the human body, or the nature of the atmosphere, or the movements of the planets; they are considered supreme efforts and creditable achievements of the understanding, and in their place they are not insignificant, but in their final results they are, for a man may understand all these things without attaining to a true understanding. The direction in which we are exhorted in the Scriptures to apply understanding is one that includes all others really, for if through understanding we attain to the Kingdom of God we shall understand all things in due time, "Then shall we know as we are known," as Paul says. This form of understanding is not popular, it is scarcely respectable. It receives the treatment that Christ himself received; when the people see it they desire it to be taken out of their way. It is so with the Bible; it has been so with all divinely good men that have ever appeared. Even Moses was refused; all the prophets were slain, and the apostles rejected and killed. It has been universally and incessantly the same since, and will continue to be so till Christ comes. The precious things of God and His precious people are amongst the off-scouring of all things. Here is our danger, for there is a constant shrinking on the part of human nature from contemptuous treatment, and the constant disposition to desire to be in the respectable current of things. Against this tendency we must be on our guard, for it is the appointment of wisdom that things divine should be lightly esteemed and lightly treated at present.

It may trouble us sometimes to understand why God should preface His

glorious work with such a time of trouble and chaos. We must simply lay this trouble aside; it is impossible that we can fully apprehend the methods of eternal Power: we may well take them for granted where we cannot follow them. Jeremiah was exercised on the subject on one occasion. "Righteous art thou, O Lord," said he, "yet let me talk with Thee of Thy judgments. Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root, they grow; they bring forth fruit." God did not vouchsafe to Jeremiah what we might call a metaphysical answer; He did not explain to him the philosophy of His ways, probably because Jeremiah would not have understood, had He attempted such an explanation. Instead of answering him, He rather prepared him for worse things, saying, "If thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee, how can'st thou contend with horses?" As much as to say far more terrible things were coming, which proved to be the case; for the history of the world since then has been a history of far more triumphant wickedness than what Jeremiah had to deplore.

We have to take God's ways on trust. We may well do so, for what are we? Only an infinitesimal atom of God's substance in a temporary and insignificant shape. It is only when people are shut up to their own feelings that they think importantly of themselves. Very likely we all do this more or less; we can scarcely help it in the first stage. It is the very object of trouble to open our eyes, and develop true understanding. We are all no use to God until we attain to this; that is, until we see things as they are, and not as we feel. To see things as they are is to see that we are as insignificant and evanescent as the flowers, mere grass, that withers away with a season; but true existence and true rights belong only to God, of whose eternal power we are but miniature blossoms. The object of trouble is to work us into the recognition of this. We are born without understanding, and only experience can give it to us, and this experience has to be rough in some cases.

There are many kinds of knowledge that do not give us understanding. The Scriptures say, "The knowledge of the holy, that is understanding;" but who, or what, is the holy? It is a term comprehensive of God, and all that pertains to Him, for He only is holy; but this is a knowledge of no esteem among men. It is discarded from scholastic attainments, and its presence in the endless examinations that go on from year to year would be resented as an outrage. Well, the understanding of the gospel will save us from this general barbarism, for such it is in truth, though elegant and polished, and tolerable through habit. We are not of those who say unto God, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways." Our position around this Table means the reverse of all this. We ask God to come near to us that we may know Him. We desire to come very close to Christ, not only as our Saviour,

but as our elder brother, that is, one whom we desire to resemble in all things. He was above all things not only the acceptor, but the exhibitor, and the zealous champion of God. It was his business to show Him. "I have manifested Thy name to the men whom Thou hast given me out of the world." This was the real and ultimate object of his mission. He did not come merely to be crucified, but to illustrate the principles that lay behind the crucifixion; the majesty and authority and holiness of God, that God's wisdom might be exhibited, and God's way glorified. He did not come to be raised from the dead merely that a dead body might come to life again; but that the true dependence of life upon God, and its true object for His worship, and the certainty of His final purpose might be shown. He did not come to proclaim his Messiahship merely as the assertion of a political prerogative; but that the purpose of God in making the earth and man might be manifest. And so his coming again is not merely for the purpose of establishing a new arrangement of things upon the earth; but that the earth may be filled with his Father's glory. All the objects of the work of Christ centre in God; this is his standard, and it must become ours, if we are to be his. When he comes to the earth again we shall be in the presence of this standard. Birmingham will be behind us forever with all its affairs, great and small. Our domestic affairs, our business grievances, our individual anxieties, will all be things of the past. Nothing will remain for us but Christ and his standard. This will be very comforting if we are in harmony with him; it will be much the reverse if the case is otherwise, for Christ is just as well as kind, and the world has greatly misapprehended his character. Christ was very ready to grant favors when on the earth; he was very gentle even to offenders. He will not have lost his kindness nor his gentleness at his second coming, but his second coming will involve other manifestations. His first coming was represented as a lamb to be slain; his second coming is as a lion to avenge.

We have this idea in the chapter (63) read from Isaiah, concurring with the terrible figure in the Apocalypse, with eyes like flame, and face like the sun, and limbs like burnished brass. I point to this concurrence because of the popular feeling which we are perhaps liable to share, that the New Testament exhibits a different Christ from the Old Testament. Some even go so far as to say that the New Testament and the Old Testament are in contradiction. They say that in the New Testament we have a meek and gentle Christ, saying, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" whereas in the Old Testament we have a Messiah who makes war and treads down all his enemies. It is true that the Old Testament and the New Testament exhibit these aspects of Christ, but not in the sense of being in collision with each other, for the New Testament exhibits a war-making Christ as well as the Old, and the Old Testament exhibits a gentle shepherd Christ as well as the New. The New Testament shows us the wine press of the

wrath of God trodden by Christ at his second coming; and the Old Testament shows us a guileless and unavengeful Man of Sorrows. Both are one — one Christ and two comings. With the second coming is associated the work of vengeance. This is what we have in the chapter before us.

“Who is this that comes from Edom?” This implies that the questioner had a picture before his mind of some one coming from a particular direction. We must look at the context to understand this. The chapter before this one supplies it. It is a chapter of favor to Zion, “For Zion’s sake I will not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, till the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory, and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God.”

Jerusalem, to whom these comforting words are addressed, is desolate in all senses, topographical, social and political. Considering that she has come to this state through the ascendancy and power of her enemies, it is evident that some great revolution must take place to bring about this change, in which she will no more be termed desolate. What is the nature of this revolution? The end of the chapter informs us. “Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold thy salvation cometh, behold his reward is with him, and his work before him.” It is the coming of Christ that is to bring about the change. Isaiah, in vision, sees him coming from Bozrah, and he asks, “Who is it that comes thus arrayed in blood-stained garments?” The answer is, “I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.” Why? Because he has trodden the wine-press, that is, a wine-press of blood. We know from other Scriptures that he overthrows and disperses the confederated armies of Europe, but in this work he says, “Of the people there were none with me.” A work on behalf of the Jews which was not achieved by the Jews. We know the principle of divine operation, that no flesh should glory in His sight. The Jews are excluded from all glory in their deliverance. “When the enemy shall come in like a flood” it is the Spirit of the Lord that lifts up a standard against them, and not the arm of flesh in any sense. Brethren and sisters, we are on the verge of these sublime occurrences. We shall presently see this personage whom Isaiah saw travelling from Bozrah; he will be very dreadful to his enemies, but very precious and delightful to his friends. As to which of the two classes we shall be found among in that day will depend upon our present conformity or otherwise to his will. Let us wait and endure a little longer; the day of gladness and salvation is at hand.