Expositions of Holy Scripture Mark

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Title: Expositions of Holy Scripture: Mark

Creator(s): Maclaren, Alexander (1826-1910)

CCEL Subjects: All; Bible

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EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.

ST. MARK

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WHAT THE GOSPEL' IS

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ.--Mark i. 1.

My purpose now is to point out some of the various connections in which

the New Testament uses that familiar phrase, the gospel,' and briefly

to gather some of the important thoughts which these suggest. Possibly

the process may help to restore freshness to a word so well worn that

it slips over our tongues almost unnoticed and excites little thought.

The history of the word in the New Testament books is worth notice. It

seldom occurs in those lives of our Lord which now are emphatically so

called, and where it does occur, it is the gospel of the Kingdom' quite

as frequently as the gospel' of the King. The word is never used in

Luke, and only twice in the Acts of the Apostles, both times in

quotations. The Apostle John never employs it, either in his gospel' or

in his epistles, and in the Apocalypse the word is only once found, and

then it may be a question whether it refers to the good news of

salvation in Jesus Christ. John thought of the word which he had to

proclaim as the message,' the witness,' the truth,' rather than as the

gospel.' We search for the expression in vain in the epistles of James,

Jude, and to the Hebrews. Thrice it is used by Peter. The great bulk of

the instances of its occurrence are in the writings of Paul, who, if

not the first to use it, at any rate is the source from which the

familiar meaning of the phrase, as describing the sum total of the

revelation in Jesus Christ, has flowed.

The various connections in which the word is employed are remarkable

and instructive. We can but touch lightly on the more important lessons

which they are fitted to teach.

I. The Gospel is the Gospel of Christ.'

On our Lord's own lips and in the records of His life we find, as has

already been noticed, the phrase, the gospel of the kingdom'--the good

news of the establishment on earth of the rule of God in the hearts and

lives of men. The person of the King is not yet defined by it. The

diffused dawn floods the sky, and upon them that sit in darkness the

greatness of its light shines, before the sun is above the horizon. The

message of the Forerunner proclaimed, like a herald's clarion, the

coming of the Kingdom, before he could say to a more receptive few,

Behold the Lamb of God.' The order is first the message of the Kingdom,

then the discovery of the King. And so that earlier phrase falls out of

use, and when once Christ's life had been lived, and His death died,

the gospel is no longer the message of an impersonal revolution in the

world's attitude to God's will, but the biography of Him who is at once

first subject and monarch of the Kingdom of Heaven, and by whom alone

we are brought into it. The standing expression comes to be the gospel

of Christ.'

It is His, not so much because He is the author, as because He is the

subject of it. It is the good news about Christ. He is its contents and

great theme. And so we are led up at once to the great central

peculiarity of Christianity, namely that it is a record of historical

fact, and that all the world's life and blessedness lie in the story of

a human life and death. Christ is Christianity. His biography is the

good news for every child of man.

Neither a philosophy nor a morality, but a history, is the true good

news for men. The world is hungry, and when it cries for bread wise men

give it a stone, but God gives it the fare it needs in the bread that

comes down from Heaven. Though it be of small account in many people's

eyes, like the common barley cakes, the poor man's food, it is what we

all need; and humble people, and simple people, and uneducated people,

and barbarous people, and dying people, and the little children can all

eat and live. They would find little to keep them from starving in

anything more ambitious, and would only break their teeth in mumbling

the dry bones of philosophies and moralities. But the story of their

Brother who has lived and died for them feeds heart and mind and will,

fancy and imagination, memory and hope, nourishes the whole nature into

health and beauty, and alone deserves to be called good news for men.

All that the world needs lies in that story. Out of it have come peace

and gladness to the soul, light for the understanding, cleansing for

the conscience, renovation for the will, which can be made strong and

free by submission, a resting-place for the heart, and a starting-point

and a goal for the loftiest flights of hope. Out of it have come the

purifying of family and civic life, the culture of all noble social

virtues, the sanctity of the household, and the elevation of the state.

The thinker has found the largest problems raised and solved therein.

The setting forth of a loftier morality, and the enthusiasm which makes

the foulest nature aspire to and reach its heaven-touching heights, are

found together there. To it poet and painter, architect and musician,

owe their noblest themes. The good news of the world is the story of

Christ's life and death. Let us be thankful for its form; let us be

thankful for its substance.

But we must not forget that, as Paul, who is so fond of the word, has

taught us, the historical fact needs some explanation and commentary to

make the history a gospel. He has declared to us the gospel which he

preached,' and to which he ascribes saving power, and he gives these as

its elements, How that Christ died for our sins, according to the

Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third

day, according to the Scriptures.' There are three facts--death,

burial, resurrection. These are the things that any eye could have

seen. Are these the gospel? Is there any saving power in them? Not

unless you add the commentary for our sins,' and according to the

Scriptures.' That death was a death for us all, by which we are

delivered from our sins--that is the main thing; and in subordination

to that thought, the other that Christ's death was the accomplishment

of prophecies--these make the history a gospel. The bare facts, without

the exhibition of their purpose and meaning, are no more a gospel than

any other story of a death would be. The facts with any lower

explanation of their meaning are no gospel, any more than the story of

the death of Socrates or any innocent martyr would be. If you would

know the good news that will lift your heavy heart from sorrow and

break your chains of sin, that will put music into your life and make

your days blaze into brightness as when the sunlight strikes some

sullen mountain-side that lay black in shadow, you must take the fact

with its meaning, and find your gospel in the life and death of Him who

is more than example and more than martyr. How that Christ died for our

sins, according to the Scriptures,' is the gospel of Christ.'

II. The Gospel of Christ is the Gospel of God.'

This form of the expression, though by no means so frequent as the

other, is found throughout Paul's epistles, thrice in the

earliest--Thessalonians (1 Thess. ii. 8), once in the great Epistle to

the Romans (i. 1), once in Corinthians (2 Cor. xi. 7), and once in a

modified form in the pathetic letter from the dungeon, which the old

man addressed to his son Timothy' (1 Tim. i. 11). It is also found in

the writings of Peter (1 Pet. iv. 17). In all these cases the phrase,

the gospel of God,' may mean the gospel which has God for its author or

origin, but it seems rather to mean which has God for its subject.'

It was, as we saw, mainly designated as the good news about Jesus

Christ, but it is also the good news about God. So in one and the same

set of facts we have the history of Jesus and the revelation of God.

They are not only the biography of a man, but they are the unveiling of

the heart of God. These Scripture writers take it for granted that

their readers will understand that paradox, and do not stop to explain

how they change the statement of the subject matter of their message,

in this extraordinary fashion, between their Master who had lived and

died on earth, and the Unseen Almightiness throned above all heavens.

How comes that to be?

It is not that the gospel has two subjects, one of which is the matter

of one portion, and the other of another. It does not sometimes speak

of Christ, and sometimes rise to tell us of God. It is always speaking

of both, and when its subject is most exclusively the man Christ Jesus,

it is then most chiefly the Father God. How comes that to be? Surely

this unconscious shifting of the statement of their theme, which these

writers practise as a matter of course, shows us how deeply the

conviction had stamped itself on their spirits, He that hath seen Me

hath seen the Father,' and how the point of view from which they had

learned to look on all the sweet and wondrous story of their Master's

life and death, was that of a revelation of the deepest heart of God.

And so must we look on that whole career, from the cradle to the cross,

from Calvary to Olivet, if we are to know its deepest tenderness and

catch its gladdest notes. That such a man has lived and died is

beautiful, and the portrait will hang for ever as that of the fairest

of the children of men. But that in that life and death we have our

most authentic knowledge of what God is, and that all the pity and

truth, the gentleness and the brotherliness, the tears and the

self-surrender, are a revelation to us of God; and that the cross, with

its awful sorrow and its painful death, tells us not only how a man

gave himself for those whom he loved, but how God loves the world and

how tremendous is His law--this is good news of God indeed. We have to

look for our truest knowledge of Him not in the majesties of the starry

heavens, nor in the depths of our own souls, not in the scattered

tokens of His character given by the perplexed order of the world, nor

in the intuitions of the wise, but in the life and death of His Son,

whose tears are the pity of God as well as the compassion of a man, and

in whose life and death the whole world may behold the brightness of

His glory and the express image of His person,' and be delivered from

all their fears of an angry, and all their doubts of an unknown, God.

There is a double modification of this phrase. We hear of the gospel of

the grace of God' and the gospel of the glory of God,' which latter

expression, rendered in the English version misleadingly the glorious

gospel,' is given in its true shape in the Revised Version. The great

theme of the message is further defined in these two noteworthy forms.

It is the tender love of God in exercise to lowly creatures who deserve

something else that the gospel is busy in setting forth, a love which

flows forth unbought and unmotived save by itself, like some stream

from a hidden lake high up among the pure Alpine snows. The story of

Christ's work is the story of God's rich, unmerited love, bending down

to creatures far beneath, and making a radiant pathway from earth to

heaven, like the sevenfold rainbow. It is so, not merely because this

mission is the result of God's love, but also because His grace is

God's grace, and therefore every act of Christ which speaks His own

tenderness is therein an apocalypse of God.

The second of these two expressions, the gospel of the glory of God,'

leads up to that great thought that the true glory of the divine nature

is its tenderness. The lowliness and death of Christ are the glory of

God! Not in the awful attributes which separate that inconceivable

Nature from us, not in the eternity of His existence, nor in the

Infinitude of His Being, not in the Omnipotence of His unwearied arm,

nor in fire-eyed Omniscience, but in the pity and graciousness which

bend lovingly over us, is the true glory of God. These pompous

attributes' are but the fringes of the brightness, the living white

heart of which is love. God's glory is God's grace, and the purest

expression of both is found there, where Jesus hangs dying in the dark,

The true throne of God's glory is not builded high in a remote heaven,

flashing intolerable brightness and set about with bending

principalities and powers, but it is the Cross of Calvary. The story of

the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,' with its humiliation and shame, is

the gospel of the grace,' and therefore is the gospel of the glory, of

God.'

III. The good news of Christ and of God is the gospel of our salvation

and peace.

We read of the gospel of your salvation' (Eph. i. 13), and in the same

letter (vi. 15) of the gospel of peace.' In these expressions we pass

from the consideration of the author or of the subject matter of the

good news to that of its purpose and issue. It is meant to bring to

men, and it does in fact bring to all who accept it, those wide and

complex blessings described by those two great words.

That good news about Christ and God brings to a man salvation, if he

believes it. To know and feel that I have a loving Father who has so

cared for me and all my brethren that He has sent His Son to live and

die for me, is surely enough to deliver me from all the bonds and death

of sin, and to quicken me into humble consecration to His service. And

such emancipation from the burden and misery of sin, from the gnawing

consciousness of evil and the weakening sense of guilt, from the

dominion of wrong tastes and habits, and from the despair of ever

shaking them off which is only too well grounded in the experience of

the past, is the beginning of salvation for each of us. That great

keyword of the New Testament covers the whole field of positive and

negative good which man can need or God can give. Negatively it

includes the removal of every evil, whether of the nature of sorrow or

of sin, under which men can groan. Positively it includes the endowment

with all good, whether of the nature of joy or of purity, which men can

hope for or receive. It is past, present, and future, for every heart

that accepts the word of the truth of the gospel'--past, inasmuch as

the first effect of even the most incomplete acceptance is to put us in

a new position and attitude towards the law of God, and to plant the

germs of all holiness and joy in our souls; present, inasmuch as

salvation is a growing possession and a continuous process running on

all through our lives, if we be true to ourselves and our calling;

future, inasmuch as its completion waits to be unveiled in another

order of things, where perfect purity and perfect consecration shall

issue in perfect joy. And all this ennobling and enriching of human

nature is produced by that good news about the grace and glory of God

and of Christ, if we will only listen to it, and let it work its work

on our souls.

Substantially the same set of facts is included under that other

expression, the gospel of peace.' The Hebrew use of the word peace' as

a kind of shorthand for all good is probably to be remembered. But even

in the narrower sense of the word, how great are the blessings set

forth by it! All inward serenity and outward calm, the tranquillity of

a soul free from the agitations of emotion and the storms of passions

and the tumults of desire, as well as the security of a life guarded

from the assaults of foes and girded about with an impregnable barrier

which nothing can destroy and no enemy overleap, are ours, if we take

the good news about God to our heart. They are ours in the measure in

which we take it. Clearly such truths as those which the gospel brings

have a plain tendency to give peace. They give peace with God, with the

world, and with ourselves. They lead to trust, and trust is peace. They

lead to union with God, and that is peace. They lead to submission, and

that is peace. They lead to consecration, and that is peace. They lead

to indifference to fleeting joys and treasures, and that is peace. They

give to heart and mind and will an all-sufficient and infinite object,

and that is peace. They deliver us from ourselves, and that is peace.

They fill the past, the present, and the future with the loving

Father's presence, and brighten life and death with the Saviour's

footsteps--and so to live is calm, and to die is to lay ourselves down

in peace and sleep, quiet by His side, like a child by its mother. The

good news about God and Christ is the good news of our salvation and of

our peace.

IV. The good news about Christ and God is the gospel.

By far the most frequent form in which the word gospel occurs is that

of the simple use of the noun with the definite article. This message

is emphatically the good news. It is the tidings which men most of all

want. It stands alone; there is no other like it. If this be not the

glad tidings of great joy for the world, then there are none.

Let no false liberality lead us to lose sight of the exclusive claims

which are made in this phrase for the set of facts the narrative of

which constitutes the gospel.' The life and death of Jesus Christ for

the sins of the world, His resurrection and continuous life for the

saving of the world--these are the truths, without which there can be

no gospel. They may be apprehended in different ways, set forth in

different perspective, proclaimed in different dialects, explained in

different fashion, associated with different accompaniments, drawn out

into different consequences, and yet, through all diversity of tones,

the message may be one. Sounded on a ram's horn or a silver trumpet, it

may be the same saving and joy-bringing proclamation, and it will be,

if Christ and His life and death are plainly set forth as the beginning

and ending of all. But if there be an omission of that mighty name, or

if a Christ be proclaimed without a Cross, a salvation without a

Saviour, or a Saviour without a Sacrifice, all the adornments of genius

and sincerity will not prevent such a half gospel from falling flat.

Its preachers have never been able, and never will be able, to touch

the general heart or to bring good cheer to men. They have always had

to complain, We have piped unto you and ye have not danced.' They

cannot get people to be glad over such a message. Only when you speak

of a Christ who has died for our sins, will you cause the heavy heart

of the world to sing for joy. Only that old, old message is the good

news which men want.

There is no second gospel. Men who preach a message of a different

kind, as Paul tells us, are preaching what is not really another

gospel. There cannot be two messages. There is but one genuine; all

others are counterfeits. For us it is all-important that we should be

no less narrow than the truth, and no more liberal than he was to whom

the message how that Jesus died for our sins' was the only thing worth

calling the gospel. Our own salvation depends on our firm grasp of that

one message, and for some of us, the clear decisiveness with which our

lips ring it out determines whether we shall be blessings or curses to

our generation. There is a Babel of voices now preaching other messages

which promise good tidings of good. Let us cleave with all our hearts

to Christ alone, and let our tongues not falter in proclaiming, Neither

is there salvation in any other.' The gospel of the Christ who died for

our sins, is the gospel.

And what we have for ourselves to do with it is told us in that

pregnant phrase of the apostle's, my gospel,' and our gospel'; meaning

not merely the message which he was charged to proclaim, but the good

news which he and his brethren had made their own. So we have to make

it ours. It is of no use to us, unless we do. It is not enough that it

echoes all around us, like music borne upon the wind. It is not enough

that we hear it, as men do some sweet melody, while their thoughts are

busy on other things. It is not enough that we believe it, as we do

other histories in which we have no concern. What more is needed?

Another expression of the apostle's gives the answer. He speaks of the

faith of the gospel,' that is the trust which that glad message evokes,

and by which it is laid hold of.

Make it yours by trusting your whole self to the Christ of whom it

tells you. The reliance of heart and will on Jesus who has died for me,

makes it my gospel.' There is one God, one Christ, one gospel which

tells us of them, and one faith by which we lay hold upon the gospel,

and upon the loving Father and the ever-helpful Saviour of whom it

tells. Let us make that great word our own by simple faith, and then as

cold water to our thirsty soul,' so will be that good news from a far

country,' the country where the Father's house is, and to which He has

sent the Elder Brother to bring back us prodigal children.

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THE STRONG FORERUNNER AND THE STRONGER SON

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; 2. As it

is written in the prophets, Behold, I send My messenger before Thy

face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee. 3. The voice of one

crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His

paths straight. 4. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the

baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. 5. And there went out

unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all

baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. 6. And

John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about

his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; 7. And preached,

saying, There cometh One mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose

shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. 8. I indeed have

baptized you with water: but He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

9. And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of

Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up

out of the water, He saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove

descending upon Him: 11. And there came a voice from heaven, saying,

Thou art My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'--Mark i. 1-11.

The first words of In Memoriam might be taken to describe the theme of

Mark's Gospel. It is the strong Son of God' whom he sets forth in his

rapid, impetuous narrative, which is full of fiery energy, and delights

to paint the unresting continuity of Christ's filial service. His theme

is not the King, as in Matthew; nor the Son of Man, as in Luke; nor the

eternal Word manifested in flesh, as in John. Therefore he neither

begins by tracing His kingly lineage, as does the first evangelist; nor

by dwelling on the humanities of wedded life and the sacredness of the

family since He has been born; nor by soaring to the abysses of the

eternal abiding of the Word with God, as the agent of creation, the

medium of life and light; but plunges at once into his subject, and

begins the Gospel with the mission of the Forerunner, which melts

immediately into the appearance of the Son.

I. We may note first, in this passage, the prelude, including verses 1,

2, and 3. We need not discuss the grammatical connection of these

verses, nor the relation of verses 2 and 3 to the following section.

However that be settled, the result, for our present purpose, is the

same. Mark considers that John's mission is the beginning of the

gospel. Here are two noteworthy points,--his use of that well-worn

word, the gospel,' and his view of John's place in relation to it. The

gospel is the narrative of the facts of Christ's life and death. Later

usage has taken it to be, rather, the statement of the truths deducible

from these facts, and especially the proclamation of salvation by the

power of Christ's atoning death; but the primitive application of the

word is to the history itself. So Paul uses it in his formal statement

of the gospel which he preached, with the addition, indeed, of the

explanation of the meaning of Christ's death (1 Cor. xv. 1-6). The very

name good news' necessarily implies that the gospel is, primarily,

history; but we cannot exclude from the meaning of the word the

statement of the significance of the facts, without which the facts

have no message of blessing. Mark adds the dogmatic element when he

defines the subject of the Gospel as being Jesus Christ, the Son of

God.' In the remainder of the book the simple name Jesus' is used; but

here, in starting, the full, solemn title is given, which unites the

contemplation of Him in His manhood, in His office as fulfiller of

prophecy and crown of revelation, and in His mysterious, divine nature.

Whether we regard verses 2 and 3 as connected grammatically with the

preceding or the following verses, they equally refer to John, and

define his position in relation to the Gospel. The Revised Version

restores the true reading, in Isaiah the prophet,' which some unwise

and timid transcriber has, as he thought, mended into the prophets,'

for fear that an error should be found in Scripture. Of course, verse 2

is not Isaiah's, but Malachi's; but verse 3, which is Isaiah's, was

uppermost in Mark's mind, and his quotation of Malachi is, apparently,

an afterthought, and is plainly merely introductory of the other, on

which the stress lies. The remarkable variation in the Malachi

quotation, which occurs in all three Evangelists, shows how completely

they recognised the divinity of our Lord, in their making words which,

in the original, are addressed by Jehovah to Himself, to be addressed

by the Father to the Son. There is a difference in the representation

of the office of the forerunner in the two prophetic passages. In the

former he' prepares the way of the coming Lord; in the latter he calls

upon his hearers to prepare it. In fact, John prepared the way, as we

shall see presently, just by calling on men to do so. In Mark's view,

the first stage in the gospel is the mission of John. He might have

gone further back--to the work of prophets of old, or to the earliest

beginnings in time of the self-revelation of God, as the writer of the

Epistle to the Hebrews does; or he might have ascended even higher up

the stream--to the true beginning,' from which the fourth Evangelist

starts. But his distinctly practical genius leads him to fix his gaze

on the historical fact of John's mission, and to claim for it a unique

position, which he proceeds to develop.

II. So we have, next, the strong servant and fore runner (verses 4-8).

The abruptness with which the curtain is drawn, and the gaunt figure of

the desert-loving ascetic shown us, is very striking. It is like the

way in which Elijah, his prototype, leaps, as it were, full-armed, into

the arena. The parallel passage in Matthew links his appearance with

the events which it has been narrating by the phrase in these days,'

and calls him the Baptist.' Mark has no such words, but lets him stand

forth in his isolation. The two accounts may profitably be compared.

Their likenesses suggest that they rest on a common basis, probably of

oral tradition, while their differences are, for the most part,

significant. Mark differs in his arrangement of the common matter, in

omissions, and in some variations of expression. Each account gives a

general summary of John's teaching at the beginning; but Matthew puts

emphasis on the Baptist's proclamation that the kingdom of heaven was

at hand, to which nothing in Mark corresponds. His Gospel does not

dwell on the royalty of Jesus, but rather represents Him as the Servant

than as the King. Mark begins with describing John as baptizing, which

only appears later in Matthew's account. Mark omits all reference to

the Sadducees and Pharisees, and to John's sharp words to them. He has

nothing about the axe laid to the trees, nothing about the children of

Abraham, nothing about the fan in the hand of the great Husbandman. All

the theocratic aspect of the Messiah, as proclaimed by John, is absent;

and, as there is no reference to the fire which destroys, so neither is

there to the fire of the Holy Ghost, in which He baptizes. Mark reports

only John's preaching and baptism of repentance, and his testimony to

Christ as stronger than he, and as baptizing with the Holy Ghost.

So, on the whole, Mark's picture brings out prominently the following

traits in John's personality and mission:--First, his preparation for

Christ by preaching repentance. The truest way to create in men a

longing for Jesus, and to lead to a true apprehension of His unique

gift to mankind, is to evoke the penitent consciousness of sin. The

preacher of guilt and repentance is the herald of the bringer of pardon

and purity. That is true in reference to the relation of Judaism and

Christianity, of John and Jesus, and is as true to-day as ever it was.

The root of maimed conceptions of the work and nature of Jesus Christ

is a defective sense of sin. When men are roused to believe in

judgment, and to realise their own evil, they are ready to listen to

the blessed news of a Saviour from sin and its curse. The Christ whom

John heralds is the Christ that men need; the Christ whom men receive,

without having been out in the wilderness with the stern preacher of

sin and judgment, is but half a Christ--and it is the vital half that

is missing.

Again, Mark brings out John's personal asceticism. He omits much; but

he could not leave out the picture of the grim, lean solitary, who

stalked among soft-robed men, like Elijah come to life again, and held

the crowds by his self-chosen privations no less than by his fierce,

fiery eloquence. His desert life and contempt for ease and luxury spoke

of a strength of character and purpose which fascinated commoner men,

and make the next point the more striking--namely, the utter humility

with which this strong, self-reliant, fiery rebuker of sin, and

despiser of rank and official dignities, flings himself at the feet of

the coming One. He is strong, as his life and the awestruck crowds

testified; how strong must that Other be! He feared not the face of

man, nor owned inferiority to any; but his whole soul melted into

joyful submission, and confessed unworthiness even to unlace the

sandals of that mightier One. His transitional position is also plainly

marked by our Evangelist. He is the end of prophecy, the beginning of

the Gospel, belonging to neither and to both. He is not merely a

prophet, for he is prophesied of as well; and he stands so near Him

whom he foretells, that his prediction is almost fact. He is not an

Evangelist, nor, in the closest sense, a servant of the coming Christ;

for his lowly confession of unworthiness does not imply merely his

humility, but accurately defines the limits of his function. It was not

for him to bear or to loose that Lord's sandals. There were those who

did minister to Him, and the least of those, whose message to the world

was Christ has come,' had the honour of closer service than that

greatest among women-born, whose task was to run before the chariot of

the King and tell that He was at hand.

III. We have the gentle figure of the stronger Son. The introduction of

Jesus is somewhat less abrupt than that of John; but if we remember

whom Mark believed Him to be, the quiet words which tell of His first

appearance are sufficiently remarkable. There is no mention of His

birth or previous years. His deeds will tell who He is. The years

before His baptism were of no moment for Mark's purpose. Nor has he any

report of the precious conversation of Jesus with John, when the

forerunner testified to Christ's purity, which needed no washing nor

repentance, and acknowledged at once his own sinfulness and the Lord's

cleansing power, and when Christ accepted the homage, and, by

implication, claimed the character, purity, and power which John

attributed to Him. The omission may be accounted for on a principle

which seems to run through all this Gospel--of touching lightly or

omitting indications of our Lord's dignity, and dwelling by preference

on His acts of lowliness and service. The baptism is recorded; but the

conversation, which showed that the King of Israel, in submitting to

it, acknowledged no need of it for Himself, but regarded it as

fulfilling righteousness' is passed by. The sinlessness of Jesus, and

the special meaning of His baptism, are sufficiently shown by the

descending Spirit and the approving voice. These Mark does record; for

they warrant the great name by which, in his first verse, he has

described Jesus as the Son of God.'

The brief account of these is marked by the Evangelist's vivid

pictorial faculty, which we shall frequently have to notice as we read

his Gospel. Here he puts us, by a word, in the position of

eye-witnesses of the scene as it is passing, when he describes the

heavens as being rent asunder'--a much more forcible and pictorial word

than Matthew's opened.' He says nothing of John's share in the vision.

All is intended for the Son. It is Jesus who sees the rending heavens

and the descending dove. The voice which Matthew represents as speaking

of Christ, Mark represents as speaking to Him.

The baptism of Jesus, then, was an epoch in His own consciousness. It

was not merely His designation to John or to others as Messiah, but for

Himself the sense of Sonship and the sunlight of divine complacency

filled His spirit in new measure or manner. Speaking as we have to do

from the outside, and knowing but dimly the mysteries of His unique

personality, we have to speak modestly and little. But we know that our

Lord grew, as to His manhood, in wisdom, and that His manhood was

continually the receiver, from the Father, of the Spirit; and the

reality of His divinity, as dwelling in His manhood from the beginning

of that manhood, is not affected by the belief that when the dovelike

Spirit floated down on His meek head, glistening with the water of

baptism, His manhood then received a new and special consciousness of

His Messianic office and of His Sonship.

Whilst that voice was for His sake, it was for others too; for John

himself tells us (John i.) that the sign had been told him beforehand,

and that it was his sight of the descending dove which heightened his

thoughts and gave a new turn to his testimony, leading him to know and

to show that this is the Son of God.' The rent heavens have long since

closed, and that dread voice is silent; but the fact of that

attestation remains on record, that we, too, may hear through the

centuries God speaking of and to His Son, and may lay to heart the

commandment to us, which naturally follows God's witness to Jesus, Hear

ye Him.'

The symbol of the dove may be regarded as a prophecy of the gentleness

of the Son. Thus early in His course the two qualities were harmonised

in Him, which so seldom are united, and each of which dwelt in Him in

divinest perfection, both as to degree and manner. John's anticipations

of the strong coming One looked for the manifestations of His strength

in judgment and destruction. How strangely his images of the axe, the

fan, the fire, are contrasted with the reality, emblemed by this dove

dropping from heaven, with sunshine on its breast and peace in its

still wings! Through the ages, Christ's strength has been the strength

of gentleness, and His coming has been like that of Noah's dove, with

the olive-branch in its beak, and the tidings of an abated flood and of

a safe home in its return. The ascetic preacher of repentance was

strong to shake and purge men's hearts by terror; but the stronger Son

comes to conquer by meekness, and reign by the omnipotence of love. The

beginning of the gospel was the anticipation and the proclamation of

strength like the eagle's, swift of flight, and powerful to strike and

destroy. The gospel, when it became a fact, and not a hope, was found

in the meek Jesus, with the dove of God, the gentle Spirit, which is

mightier than all, nestling in His heart, and uttering soft notes of

invitation through His lips.

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MIGHTY IN WORD AND DEED

And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the Sabbath day He

entered into the synagogue, and taught. 22. And they were astonished at

His doctrine: for He taught them as one that had authority, and not as

the scribes. 23. And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean

spirit; and he cried out, 24. Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do

with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth? art Thou come to destroy us? I know

Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God. 25. And Jesus rebuked him,

saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. 26. And when the unclean

spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him.

27. And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among

themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for

with authority commandeth He even the unclean spirits, and they do obey

Him. 28. And immediately His fame spread abroad throughout all the

region round about Galilee. 29. And forthwith, when they were come out

of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with

James and John. 30. But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever, and

anon they tell Him of her. 31. And He came and took her by the hand,

and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she

ministered unto them. 32. And at even, when the sun did set, they

brought unto Him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed

with devils. 33. And all the city was gathered together at the door.

34. And He healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out

many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew

Him.'--Mark i. 21-34.

None of the incidents in this section are peculiar to Mark, but the

special stamp of his Gospel is on them all; and, both in the narration

of each and in the swift transition from one to another, the impression

of Christ's strength and unpausing diligence in filial service is made.

The short hours of that first Sabbath's ministry are crowded with work;

and Christ's energy bears Him through exhausting physical labours, and

enables Him to turn with unwearied sympathy and marvellous celerity to

each new form of misery, and to throw Himself with freshness

undiminished into the relief of each. The homely virtue of diligence

shines out in this lesson no less clearly than superhuman strength that

tames demons and heals all manner of sickness. There are four pictures

here, compressed and yet vivid. Mark can condense and keep all the

essentials, for his keen eye and sure hand go straight to the heart of

his incidents.

I. The strong Son of God teaching with authority. They enter; we see

the little group, consisting of Jesus and of the two pairs of brothers,

in whose hearts the mighty conviction of His Messiahship had taken

root. Simon and Andrew were at home in Capernaum; but we may, perhaps,

infer from the manner in which the sickness of Peter's wife's mother is

mentioned, that Peter had not been to his house till after the

synagogue service. At all events, these four were already detached from

ordinary life and bound to Him as disciples. We meet here with our

first instance of Mark's favourite straightway,' the recurrence of

which, in this chapter, so powerfully helps the impression of eager and

yet careful swiftness with which Christ ran His course, unhasting,

unresting.' From the beginning Mark stamps his story with the spirit of

our Lord's own words, I must work the works of Him that sent me, while

it is day: the night cometh.' And yet there is no hurry, but the calm,

equable rapidity with which planets move. The unostentatious manner of

Christ's beginning is noteworthy. He seeks to set Himself in the line

of the ordinary teaching of the day. He knew all the faults of the

synagogue and the rabbis, and He had come to revolutionise the very

conception of religious teaching and worship; but He prefers to

intertwine the new with the old, and to make as little disturbance as

possible. It is easy to get the cheap praise of originality' by

brushing aside existing methods. It is harder and nobler to use

whatever methods may be going, and to breathe new value and life into

them. Drowsy, hair-splitting disputations about nothings and endless

casuistry were the staple of the synagogue talk; but when He opened His

mouth there, the weary formalism went out of the service, and men's

hearts glowed again when they once more heard a Voice that lived,

speaking from a Soul that saw the invisible. Mark has no mission to

record many of our Lord's sayings. His Gospel deals more with deeds.

The sermon he does not give, but the hearer's comment he does. Matthew

has the same words at the close of the Sermon on the Mount, from which

it would seem that they were part of the oral tradition which underlies

the written Gospels; but Mark probably has them in their right place.

Very naturally, the first synagogue discourse in Capernaum would

surprise. Deeper impressions might be made by its successors, but the

first hearing of that voice would be an experience that could never be

repeated.

The feature of His teaching which astonished the villagers most was its

authority.' That fits in with the impression of strength which Mark

wishes to make. Another thing that struck them was its unlikeness to

the type of synagogue teaching to which they had been accustomed all

their lives. They had got so accustomed to the droning dreariness and

trivial subtleties of the rabbis, that it had never entered their heads

that there could be any other way of teaching religion than boring men

with interminable pedantries about trifles of ritual or outward

obedience. This new Teacher would startle all, as an eagle suddenly

appearing in a sanhedrim of owls. He would shock many; He would

fascinate a few. Nor was it only the dissimilarity of His teaching, but

also its authority, that was strange. The scribes spoke with authority

enough of a sort, lording it over the despised common people--men of

the earth,' as they called them--and exacting punctilious obedience and

much obsequiousness; but authority over the spirit they had none. They

pretended to no power but as expositors of a law; and they fortified

themselves by citations of what this, that, and the other rabbi had

said, which was all their learning. Christ quoted no one. He did not

even say, Moses has said.' He did not even preface His commands with a

Thus saith the Lord.' He spoke of His own authority: Verily, I say unto

you.' Other teachers explained the law; He is a lawgiver. Others drew

more or less pure waters from cisterns; He is in Himself a well of

water, from which all may draw. To us, as to these rude villagers in

the synagogue of the little fishing-town, Christ's teaching is unique

in this respect. He does not argue; He affirms. He seeks no support

from others' teachings; He alone is sufficient for us. He not only

speaks the truth, which needs no other confirmation than His own lips,

but He is the truth. We may canvass other men's teachings, and

distinguish their insight from their errors; we have but to accept His.

The world outgrows all others; it can only grow up towards the fulness

of His. Us and all the ages He teaches with authority, and the

guarantee for the truth of His teaching is Himself. Verily, verily, I

say unto you.' No other man has a right to say that to me. But Christ

dominates the race, and the strong Son of God is the world's Teacher.

II. The strong conqueror of demons. Again we have straightway.' The

language seems to imply that this wretched sufferer burst hurriedly

into the synagogue and interrupted the utterance of astonishment by

giving it new food. Perhaps the double consciousness of the demoniac

may be recognised, the humanity being drawn to Jesus by some disturbed

longings, the demoniac consciousness, on the other hand, being

repelled. It is no part of my purpose to discuss demoniacal possession.

I content myself with remarking that I, for one, do not see how

Christ's credit as a divine Teacher is to be saved without admitting

its reality, nor how such phenomena as the demoniac's knowledge of His

nature are to be accounted for on the hypothesis of disease or

insanity. It is assuming rather too encyclop�dical a knowledge to

allege the impossibility of such possession. There are facts enough

around us still, which would be at least as satisfactorily accounted

for by it as by natural causes; but as to the incident before us, Mark

puts it all into three sentences, each of which is pregnant with

suggestions. There is, first, the demoniac's shriek of hatred and

despair. Christ had said nothing. If, as we suppose, the man had broken

in on the worship, drawn to Jesus, he is no sooner in His presence than

the other power that darkly lodged in him overpowers him, and pours out

fierce passions from his reluctant lips. There is dreadful meaning in

the preposition here used, a man in an unclean spirit,' as if his human

self was immersed in that filthy flood. The words embody three

thoughts--the fierce hatred, which disowns all connection with Jesus;

the wild terror, which asks or affirms Christ's destructive might over

all foul spirits (for the us' means not the man and the demon, but the

demon and his fellows); and the recognition of Christ's holiness, which

lashes unholiness into a paroxysm of mingled despair and hate. Does

this sound like a madman, or an epileptic, or like a spirit which knew

more than men knew, and trembled and hated more than they could do?

There is nothing more terrible than the picture, self-drawn in these

spasmodic words, of a spirit which, by its very foulness, is made

shudderingly sensitive to the disturbing presence of purity, and would

fain have nothing to do with Him whom it recognises for the Holy One of

God, and therefore its destroyer. Foul things that lurk under stones

hurry out of the light when you lift the covering. Spirits that love

the darkness are hurt by the light. It is possible to recognise Jesus

for what He is, and to hate Him all the more. What a miserable state

that is, to hope that we shall have nothing to do with Him! These wild

utterances, seething with evil passions and fierce detestation, do

point to the possible terminus for men. A black gulf opens in them,

from which we are meant to start back with the prayer, Preserve me from

going down into that pit!'

What a contrast to the tempest of the demoniac's wild and whirling

words is the calm speech of Christ! He knows His authority, and His

word is imperative, curt, and assured: Hold thy peace!' literally, Be

muzzled,' as if the creature were a dangerous beast, whose raving and

snapping must be stopped. Jesus wishes no acknowledgments from such

lips. They who bear the vessels of the Lord must be clean. He had

taught with authority, and now He in like manner commands. His teaching

rested on His own assurance. His miracle is done by His own power. That

power is put forth by His simple word; that is to say, the bare

exercise or expression of His will is potent.

The third step in the narrative is the immediate obedience of the

demon. Reluctant but compelled, malicious to the last, doing the house

which he has to leave all the harm he can, and though no longer

venturing to speak, yet venting his rage and mortification, and

acknowledging his defeat by one parting howl, he comes out.

Again, we are bid to note the impression produced. The interrupted buzz

of talk begins once more, and is vividly reported by the fragmentary

sentences of verse 27, and by the remark that it was among themselves'

that they compared notes. Two things startled the people:--first, the

new teaching'; and second, the authority over demons, into which they

naturally generalise the one instance. The busy tongues were not

silenced when they left the synagogue. Verse 28 shows what happened, in

one direction, when the meeting broke up. With another straightway,'

Mark paints the swift flight of the rumour over all the district, and

somewhat overleaps the strict line of chronology, to let us hear how

far the echo of such a blow sounded. This first miracle recorded by him

is as a duel between Christ and the strong man armed,' who keeps his

house.' The shield of the great oppressor is first struck in challenge

by the champion, and His first essay at arms proves Him mightiest. Such

a victory well heads the chronicle.

III. The tenderness of the strong Son. We come back to the strict order

of succession with another straightway,' which opens a very different

scene. The Authorised Version gives three straightways' in the three

verses as to the cure of Peter's mother-in-law. Immediately' they go to

the house; immediately' they tell Jesus of her; immediately' the fever

leaves her; and even if we omit the third of these, as the Revised

Version does, we cannot miss the rapid haste of the narrative, which

reflects the unwearied energy of the Master. Peter and Andrew had

apparently been ignorant of the sickness till they reached the house,

from which the inference is not that it was a slight attack which had

come on after they went to the synagogue, but that the two disciples

had so really left house and kindred, that though in Capernaum, they

had not gone home till they took Jesus there for rest and quiet and

food after the toil of the morning. The owners would naturally first

know of the sickness, which would interfere with their hospitable

purpose; and so Mark's account seems more near the details than

Matthew's, inasmuch as the former says that Jesus was told' of the sick

woman, while Matthew's version is that He saw' her. Luke says that they

besought Him for her.' No doubt that was the meaning of telling' Him;

but Mark's representation brings out very beautifully the confidence

already beginning to spring in their hearts that He needed but to know

in order to heal, and the reverence which hindered them from direct

asking. The instinct of the devout heart is to tell Christ all its

troubles, great or small; and He does not need beseeching before He

answers. He did not need to be told either, but He would not rob them

or us of the solace of confiding all griefs to Him.

Their confidence was not misplaced. No moment intervened unused between

the tidings and the cure. He came,' as if He had been in some outer

room, or not yet in the house, and now passed into the sick chamber.

Then comes one of Mark's minute and graphic details, in which we may

see the keen eye and faithful memory of Peter. He took her by the hand,

and lifted her up.' Mark is fond of telling of Christ's taking by the

hand; as, for instance, the little child whom He set in the midst, the

blind man whom He healed, the child with the dumb spirit. His touch has

power. His grasp means sympathy, tenderness, identification of Himself

with us, the communication of upholding, restoring strength. It is a

picture, in a small matter, of the very heart of the gospel. He layeth

not hold of angels, but He layeth hold of the seed of Abraham.' It is a

lesson for all who would help their fellows, that they must not be too

dainty to lay hold of the dirtiest hand, both metaphorically and

literally, if they want their sympathy to be believed. His hand

banishes not only the disease, but its consequences. Immediate

convalescence and restoration to strength follow; and the strength is

used, as it should be, in ministering to the Healer who,

notwithstanding His power, needed the humble ministration and the poor

fare of the fisherman's hut. What a lesson for all Christian homes is

here! Let Jesus know all that troubles them, welcome Him as a guest,

tell Him everything, and He will cure all diseases and sorrows, or give

the light of His presence to make them endurable. Consecrate to Him the

strength which He gives, and let deliverances teach trust, and inflame

grateful love, which delights in serving Him who needs no service, but

delights in all.

IV. The strong Son, unwearied by toil and sufficient for all the needy.

Each incident in this lesson has a note appended of the impression it

made. Verses 32-34 give the united result of all, on the people of

Capernaum. They wait till the Sabbath is past, and then, without

thought of His long day of work, crowd round the house with their sick.

The sinking sun brought no rest for Him, but the new calls found Him

neither exhausted nor unwilling. Capernaum was but a little place, and

the whole city might well be gathered together at the door,' some sick,

some bearing the sick, all curious and eager. There was no depth in the

excitement. There was earnestness enough, no doubt, in the wish for

healing, but there was no insight into His message. Any travelling

European with a medicine chest can get the same kind of cortege round

his tent. These people, who hung upon Him thus, were those of whom He

had afterwards to say that it would be more tolerable for Sodom, in the

day of judgment, than for them.' But though He knew the shallowness of

the impression, He was not deaf to the misery; and, with power which

knew no weariness, and sympathy which had no limit, and a reservoir of

healing virtue which the day's draughts had not emptied by a

hairs-breadth, He healed them all. Remarkable is the prohibition of the

demons' speech, They knew Him, while men were ignorant; for they had

met Him before to-day. He would have no witness from them; not merely,

as has been said, because their attestation would hinder, rather than

further, His acceptance by the people, nor because they may be supposed

to have spoken in malice, but because a divine decorum forbade that He

should accept acknowledgments from such tainted sources.

So ended this first of the days of the Son of Man,' which our

Evangelist records. It was a day of hard toil, of merciful and manifold

self-revelation. As teacher and doer, in the synagogue, and in the

home, and in the city; as Lord of the dark realms of evil and of

disease; as ready to hear hinted and dumb prayers, and able to answer

them all; as careless of His own ease, and ready to spend Himself for

others' help,--Jesus showed Himself, on that Sabbath day, strong and

tender, the Son of God and the servant of men.

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HEALING AND SERVICE

Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever; and straightway they tell

Him of her: 31. And He came and took her by the hand, and raised her

up; and the fever left her, and she ministered unto them.'--Mark i. 30,

31, R. V.

This miracle is told us by three of the four Evangelists, and the

comparison of their brief narratives is very interesting and

instructive. We all know, I suppose, that the common tradition is that

Mark was, in some sense, Peter's mouthpiece in this Gospel. The

truthfulness of that ancient statement is borne out by little morsels

of evidence that crop up here and there throughout the Gospel. There is

one of them in this context. The other two Evangelists tell us that our

Lord, with His four attendant disciples, entered into the house of

Simon'; Mark knows that Simon's brother Andrew shared the house with

him. Who was likely to have told him such an insignificant thing as

that? We seem to hear the Apostle himself recounting the whole story to

his amanuensis.

Then, further, Mark's narrative is distinguished from that of the other

two Evangelists in very minute and yet interesting points, which will

come out as we go along. So I think we may fairly say that we have here

Peter himself telling us the story of his mother-in-law's cure. Now,

one thing that strikes one is that this is a very small miracle. It is

by no means--if we can apply the words great' and small' to these

miraculous events--one of the more striking and significant. Another

point to note is that it was done evidently without the slightest

intention of vindicating Christ's mission, or of preaching any truth

whatever, and so it starts up into a new beauty as being simply and

solely a manifestation of His love. I think, when some people are so

busy in denying, and others in proving, the miraculous element in

Scripture, and others in drawing doctrinal or symbolical lessons out of

it, that there is great need to emphasise this, that the first thing

about all Christ's miracles, and most conspicuously about this one, is

that they were the welling out of His loving heart which responded to

the sight of human sorrow--I was going to say instinctively; but I will

find a better word, and say divinely. The deed that had no purpose

whatsoever except to lighten the burden upon a disciple's heart, and to

heal the passing physical trouble of one poor old woman, is great, just

because it is small; and full of teaching because, to the superficial

eye, it teaches nothing.

The first thing in the story is, as it seems to me--

I. The disciple's intercession.

I wonder if Peter knew that his wife's mother was ill, when he said to

Jesus Christ, after that exciting morning in the synagogue, Come home,

and rest in our house'? Probably not. One can scarcely imagine

hospitality proffered under such circumstances, or with a knowledge of

them. And if we look a little more closely into the preceding narrative

we shall see that it is at least possible that Peter and his brother

had been away from home for some time; so that the old woman might

easily have fallen ill during their temporary absence. But be that as

it may, they expect to find rest and food, and they find a sick woman.

There must have been at least two rooms in the humble house, because

they come to Jesus Christ and tell Him of her.' Now if we turn to the

other Evangelists, we shall find that Matthew says nothing about any

message being communicated to Jesus, but brings Him at once, as It

were, to the side of the sick-bed. That is evidently an incomplete

account. And then we find in Luke's Gospel that, instead of the simple

tell Him of her' of Mark, he intensifies the telling into they besought

Him for her.' Now, I think that Mark's is plainly the more precise

story, because he lets us see that Jesus Christ did not commit such a

breach of courtesy, due to the humblest home, as to go to the woman's

bedside without being summoned, and he also lets us see that the

beseeching' was a simple intimation to Him. They did not ask; they tell

Him; being, perhaps, restrained from definite petitioning partly by

reverence, and partly, no doubt, by hesitation in these early days of

their discipleship--for this incident occurred at the very beginning,

when all the subsequent manifestations of His character were yet

waiting to be flashed upon them--as to whether it might be in

accordance with their new Teacher's very little known disposition and

mind to help. They knew that He could, because He had just healed a

demoniac in the synagogue, but one can understand how, at the beginning

of their discipleship, there was a little faltering of confidence as to

whether they should go so far as to ask Him to do such a thing. So they

tell Him of her,' and do you not think that the tone of petition

vibrated in the intimation, and that there looked out of the eyes of

the impulsive, warm-hearted Peter, an unspoken prayer? So Luke was

perfectly right in his interpretation of the incident, though not

precise in his statement of the external fact, when, instead of saying

they tell Him of her,' he translated that telling into what it meant,

and put it, they besought Him for her.'

Ah! dear brethren, there are a great many things in our lives which,

though we ought to know Jesus Christ better than the first disciples at

first did, scarcely seem to us fit to be turned into subjects of

petition, partly because we have wrong notions as to the sphere and

limits of prayer, and partly because they seem to be such transitory

things that it is a shame to trouble Him about such insignificant

matters. Well, go and tell Him, at any rate. I do not think that

Christians ought to have anything in their heads or hearts that they do

not take to Jesus Christ, and it is an uncommonly good test--and one

very easily applied--of our hopes, fears, purposes, thoughts, deeds,

and desires--Should I like to go and make a clean breast of it to the

Master?'

They tell Him of her,' and that meant petition, and Jesus Christ can

interpret an unspoken petition, and an unexpressed desire appeals to

His sympathetic heart. Although the words be but O Lord! I am troubled,

perplexed; and I do not know what to do,' He translates them into Calm

Thou me; enlighten Thou me; guide Thou me'; and be sure of this, that

as in the story before us, so in our lives, He will answer the unspoken

petition in so far as may be best for us.

The next thing to note in this incident is--

II. The Healers method.

There, again, the three stories diverge, and yet are all one. Matthew

says, He touched her'; Luke says, He stood'-or rather, as the Greek

means, He bent over her--and rebuked the fever.' Perhaps Peter was

close to the pallet, and saw and remembered that there were not a

standing over and rebuking the fever only, but that there was the going

out of His tender sympathy to the sufferer, and that if there were

stern words as of indignation and authority addressed to the disease as

if to an unlawful intruder, there were also compassion and tenderness

for the victim. For Mark tells that it was not a touch only, but that

He took her by the hand and lifted her up,' and the grasp banished

sickness and brought strength.

Now the most precious of the lessons that we can gather from the

variety of Christ's methods of healing is this: that all methods which

He used were in themselves equally powerless, and that the curative

virtue was in neither the word nor the touch, nor the spittle, nor the

clay, nor the bathing in the pool of Siloam, but was purely and simply

in the outgoing of His will. The reasons for the wonderful variety of

ways in which He communicated His healing power are to be sought partly

in the respective moral, and spiritual, and intellectual condition of

the people to be healed, and partly in wider reasons and

considerations. Why did He stoop and touch the woman, and take her by

the hand and gently lift her up? Because His heart went out to her,

because He felt the emotion and sympathy which makes the whole world

kin, and because His heart was a heart of love, and bade Him come into

close contact with the poor fever-ridden woman. Unless we regard that

hand-clasp as being such an instinctive attitude and action of Christ's

sympathetic love, we lose the deepest significance of it. And then,

when we have given full weight to that, the simplest and yet the most

blessed of all the thoughts that cluster round the deed, we can venture

further to say that in that small matter we see mirrored, as a wide

sweep of country in a tiny mirror, or the sun in a bowl of water, the

great truth: He took not hold of angels, but He took hold of the seed

of Abraham, wherefore it behoved Him to be made in all things like unto

His brethren.' The touch upon the fevered hand of that old woman in

Capernaum was as a condensation into one act of the very principle of

the Incarnation and of the whole power which Christ exercises upon a

fevered and sick world. For it is by His touch, by His lifting hand, by

His sympathetic grasp, and by our real contact with Him, that all our

sicknesses are banished, and health and strength come to our souls.

So let us learn a lesson for our own guidance. We can do no man any

real good unless we make ourselves one with him, and benefits that we

bestow will hurt rather than help, if they are flung down upon men as

from a height, or as people cast a bone to a dog. The heart must go

with them; and identification with the sufferer is a condition of

succour. If we would take lepers and blind beggars and poor old women

by the hand--I mean, of course, by giving them our sympathy along with

our help--we should see larger results from, and be more Christ-like

in, our deeds of beneficence.

The last point is--

III. The healed sufferer's service.

She arose'--yes, of course she did, when Christ grasped her. How could

she help it? And she ministered to them,'--how could she help that

either, if she had any thankfulness in her heart? What a lovely, glad,

awe-stricken meal that would be, to which they all sat down in Simon's

house, on that Sabbath night, as the sun was setting! It was a humble

household. There were no servants in it. The convalescent old woman had

to do all the ministering herself, and that she was able to do it was,

of course, as everybody remarks on reading the narrative, the sign of

the completeness of the cure. But it was a great deal more than that.

How could she sit still and not minister to Him who had done so much

for her? And if you and I, dear friends, have any living apprehension

of Christ's healing power, and understand and respond at all to that

for which we have been laid hold of' by Him, our thankfulness will take

the same shape, and we, too, shall become His servants. Up yonder,

amidst the blaze of the glory, He is still capable of being ministered

to by us. The woman who did so on earth had no monopoly of this sacred

office, but it continues still. And every housewife, as she goes about

her duties, and every domestic servant, as she moves round her

mistress's dinner-table, and all of us, in our secular avocations, as

people call them, may indeed serve Christ, if only we have regard to

Him in the doing of them. There is also a yet higher sense in which

that ministration, incumbent upon all the healed, and spontaneous on

their part if they have truly been recipients of the healing grace, is

still possible for us. When saw we Thee. . . in need. . . and served

Thee?' Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these My

brethren, ye did it unto Me.'

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A PARABLE IN A MIRACLE

And there came a leper to Him, beseeching Him, and kneeling down to

Him, and saying unto Him, If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean. 41.

And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth His hand, and touched him,

and saith unto him, I will; he thou clean. 42. And as soon as He had

spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was

cleansed.'--Mark i. 40-42.

Christ's miracles are called wonders--that is, deeds which, by their

exceptional character, arrest attention and excite surprise. Further,

they are called mighty works'--that is, exhibitions of superhuman

power. They are still further called signs'--that is, tokens of His

divine mission. But they are signs in another sense, being, as it were,

parables as well as miracles, and representing on the lower plane of

material things the effects of His working on men's spirits. Thus, His

feeding of the hungry speaks of His higher operation as the Bread of

Life. His giving sight to the blind foreshadows His illumination of

darkened minds. His healing of the diseased speaks of His restoration

of sick souls. His stilling of the tempest tells of Him as the

Peace-bringer for troubled hearts; and His raising of the dead

proclaims Him as the Life-giver, who quickens with the true life all

who believe on Him. This parabolic aspect of the miracles is obvious in

the case before us. Leprosy received exceptional treatment under the

Mosaic law, and the peculiar restrictions to which the sufferer was

subjected, as well as the ritual of his cleansing, in the rare cases

where the disease wore itself out, are best explained by being

considered as symbolical rather than as sanitary. It was taken as an

emblem of sin. Its hideous symptoms, its rotting sores, its slow,

stealthy, steady progress, its defiance of all known means of cure,

made its victim only too faithful a walking image of that worse

disease. Remembering this deeper aspect of leprosy, let us study this

miracle before us, and try to gather its lessons.

I. First, then, notice the leper's cry.

Mark connects the story with our Lord's first journey through Galilee,

which was signalised by many miracles, and had excited much stir and

talk. The news of the Healer had reached the isolated huts where the

lepers herded, and had kindled a spark of hope in one poor wretch,

which emboldened him to break through all regulations, and thrust his

tainted and unwelcome presence into the shrinking crowd. He seems to

have appeared there suddenly, having forced or stolen his way somehow

into Christ's presence. And there he was, with his horrible white face,

with his tightened, glistening skin, with some frowsy rag over his

mouth, and a hunted look as of a wild beast in his eyes. The crowd

shrank back from him; he had no difficulty in making his way to where

Christ is sitting, calmly teaching. And Mark's vivid narrative shows

him to us, flinging himself down before the Lord, and, without waiting

for question or pause, interrupting whatever was going on, with his

piteous cry. Misery and wretchedness make short work of conventional

politeness.

Note the keen sense of misery that impels to the passionate desire for

relief. A leper with the flesh dropping off his bones could not suppose

that there was nothing the matter with him. His disease was too gross

and palpable not to be felt; and the depth of misery measured the

earnestness of desire. The parallel fails us there. The emblem is all

insufficient, for here is the very misery of our deepest misery, that

we are unconscious of it, and sometimes even come to love it. There are

forms of sickness in which the man goes about, and to each inquiry

says, I am perfectly well,' though everybody else can see death written

on his face. And so it is with this terrible malady that has laid its

corrupting and putrefying finger upon us all. The worse we are, the

less we know that there is anything the matter with us; and the deeper

the leprosy has struck its filthy fangs into us, the more ready we are

to say that we are sound. We preachers have it for one of our first

duties to try to rouse men to the recognition of the facts of their

spiritual condition, and all our efforts are too often--as I, for my

part, sometimes half despairingly feel when I stand in the pulpit--like

a firebrand dropped into a pond, which hisses for a moment and then is

extinguished. Men and women sit in pews listening contentedly and

quietly, who, if they saw themselves, I do not say even as God sees

them, but as others see them, would know that the leprosy is deep in

them, and the taint patent to every eye. I do not charge you, my

brother, with gross transgressions of plain moralities; I know nothing

about that. I know this: As face answereth to face in a glass,' so doth

the heart of man to man, and I bring this message, verified to me by my

own consciousness, that we have all gone astray, and wounds and bruises

and putrefying sores' mark us all. If the best of us could see himself

for once, in the light of God, as the worst of us will see himself one

day, the cry would come from the purest lips, Oh! wretched man that I

am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'--this life in

death that I carry, rotting and smelling foul to Heaven, about with me,

wheresoever I go.

Note, further, this man's confidence in Christ's power: Thou canst make

me clean.' He had heard all about the miracles that were being wrought

up and down over the country, and he came to the Worker, with nothing

of the nature of religious faith in Him, but with entire confidence,

based upon the report of previous miracles, in Christ's ability to

heal. I do not suppose that in its nature it was very different from

the trust with which savages will crowd round a traveller who has a

medicine-chest with him, and expect to be cured of their diseases. But

still it was real confidence in our Lord's power to heal. As a rule,

though not without exceptions, He required (we may perhaps say He

needed) such confidence as a condition of His miracle-working power.

If we turn from the emblem to the thing signified, from the leprosy of

the body to that of the spirit, we may be sure of Christ's omnipotent

ability to cleanse from the extremest severity of the disease, however

inveterate and chronic it may have become. Sin dominates men by two

opposite lies. I have said how hard it is to get people's consciences

awakened to see the facts of their moral and religious condition; but

then, when they are waked up, it is almost as hard to keep them from

the other extreme. The devil, first of all, says to a man, It is only a

little sin. Do it; you will be none the worse. You can give it up when

you like, you know. That is the language before the act. Afterwards,

his language is, first, You have done no harm, never mind what people

say about sin. Make yourself comfortable,' and then, when that lie

wears itself out, the mask is dropped, and this is what is said: I have

got you now, and you cannot get away. Done is done! What thou hast

written thou hast written; and neither thou nor anybody else can blot

it out.' Hence the despair into which awakened consciences are apt to

drop, and the feeling, which dogs the sense of evil like a spectre, of

the hopelessness of all attempts to make oneself better. Brethren, they

are both lies; the lie that we are pure is the first; the lie that we

are too black to be purified is the second. If we say that we have no

sin, we deceive ourselves and make God a liar,' but if we say, as some

of us, when once our consciences are stirred, are but too apt to say,

We have sinned, and it cleaves to us for ever,' we deceive ourselves

still worse, and still more darkly and doggedly contradict the sure

word of God. Christ's blood atones for all past sin, and has power to

bring forgiveness to every one. Christ's vital Spirit will enter into

any heart, and, abiding there, has power to make the foulest clean.

Note, again, the leper's hesitation. If Thou wilt'--he had no right to

presume on Christ's good will. He knew nothing about the principles

upon which His miracles were wrought and His mercy extended. He

supposed, no doubt, as he was bound to suppose, in the absence of any

plain knowledge, that it was a mere matter of accident, of caprice, of

momentary inclination and good nature, to whom the gift of healing

should come. And so he draws near with the modest If Thou wilt'; not

pretending to know more than he knew, or to have a claim which he had

not. But his hesitation is quite as much entreaty as hesitation. What

do we mean when we say about a man, He can do it, if he likes,' but to

imply that it is so easy to do it, that it would be cruel not to do it?

And so, when the leper said, If Thou wilt, Thou canst,' he meant, There

is no obstacle standing between me and health but Thy will, and surely

it cannot be Thy will to leave me in this life in death.' He, as it

were, throws the responsibility for his health or disease upon Christ's

shoulders, and thereby makes the strongest appeal to that loving heart.

We stand on another level. The leper's hesitation is our certainty. We

know the principle upon which His mercy is dispensed; we know that it

is a universal, all-embracing love; we know that no caprice nor passing

spasm of good nature lies at the bottom of it. We know that if any men

are not healed, it is not because Christ will not, but because they

will not. If ever there springs in our hearts the dark doubt If Thou

wilt,' which was innocent in this man in the twilight of his knowledge,

but is wrong in us in the full noontide of ours, we ought to be able to

banish it at once, and to lay none of the responsibility of our

continuing unhealed on Christ, but all on ourselves. He has laid it

there, when He lamented, How often would I--and ye would not!' Nothing

can be more in accordance with the will of God, of which Jesus Christ

is the embodiment, than to deliver men from sin, which is the opposite

of His will.

II. Notice, secondly, the Lord's answer.

Mark's record of this incident puts the miracle in very small compass,

and dilates rather upon the attitude and mind of Jesus Christ

preparatory to it. As if, apart altogether from the supernatural

element and the lessons that are to be drawn from it, it was worth our

while to ponder, for the gladdening of our hearts and the strengthening

of our hopes, that lovely picture of sheer simple compassion and

tender-heartedness. Jesus, moved with compassion'--a clause which

occurs only in Mark's account--put forth His hand and touched him, and

said, I will; be thou clean.' Note, then, three things--the compassion,

the touch, the word.

As to the first, is it not a precious boon for us, in the midst of our

many wearinesses and sorrows and sicknesses, to have that picture of

Jesus Christ bending over the leper, and sending, as it were, a gush of

pitying love from His heart to flood away all his miseries? It is a

true revelation of the heart of Jesus Christ. Simple pity is its very

core. That pity is eternal, and subsists as He sits in the calm of the

heavens, even as it was manifest whilst He sat teaching in the humble

house in Galilee. For we have not a High Priest which cannot be touched

with a feeling of our infirmities.' The pitying Christ is near us all.

Nor let us forget that it is this swift shoot of pity which underlies

all that follows--the touch, the word, and the cure. Christ does not

wait to be moved by the prayers that come from these leprous lips, but

He is moved by the leprous lips themselves. The sight of the man

affects His pitying heart, which sets in motion all the wheels of His

healing powers. So we may learn that the impulse to which His redeeming

activity owes its origin wells up from His own heart. Show Him sorrow,

and He answers it by a pity of such a sort that it is restless till it

helps and assuages. We may rise higher. The pity of Jesus Christ is the

summit of His revelation of the Father, and, looking upon that gentle

heart, into whose depths we can see as through a little window by these

words of my text, we must stand with hushed reverence as beholding not

only the compassion of the Man, but therein manifested the pity of the

God who, Like as a father pitieth his children, pitieth them that fear

Him,' and pities yet more the more miserable men who fear and love Him

not. The Christian's God is no impassive Being, indifferent to mankind,

but One who in all our afflictions is afflicted, and, in His love and

in His pity,' redeems and bears and carries.

Note, still further, the Lord's touch. With swift obedience to the

impulse of His pity, Christ thrusts forth His hand and touches the

leper. There was much in that touch, but whatever more we may see in

it, we should not be blind to the loving humanity of the act. Remember

that the man kneeling there had felt no touch of a hand for years; that

the very kisses of his own children and his wife's embrace of love were

denied him. And now Jesus puts out His hand, and, without thinking of

Mosaic restrictions and ceremonial prohibitions, yields to the impulse

of His pity, and gives assurance of His sympathy and His brotherhood,

as He lays His pure fingers upon the rotting ulcers. All men that help

their fellows must be contented thus to identify themselves with them

and to take them by the hand, if they would seek to deliver them from

their evils.

Remember, too, that according to the Mosaic law it was forbidden to any

but the priest to touch a leper. Therefore, in this act, beautiful as

it is in its uncalculated humanity, there may have been something

intended of a deeper kind. Our Lord thereby does one of two

things--either He asserts His authority as overriding that of Moses and

all his regulations, or He asserts His sacerdotal character. Either way

there is a great claim in the act.

Further, we may take that touch of Christ's as being a parable of His

whole work. It was a piece of wonderful sympathy and condescension that

He should put out His hand to touch the leper; but it was the result of

a far greater and more wonderful piece of sympathy and condescension

that He had a hand to touch him with. For the sweet human hands and

lips and eyes' which He wore in this world were assumed by Him in order

that He might make Himself one with all sufferers and bear the burden

of all their sins. So His touch of the leper symbolises His identifying

of Himself with mankind, the foulest and the most degraded; and in this

connection there is a profound meaning in one of the ordinarily trivial

legends of the Rabbis, who, founding upon a word of the fifty-third

chapter of Isaiah, tell us that when Messias comes He will be found

sitting amongst the lepers at the gate of the city. So He was numbered

amongst the transgressors in His life, and with the wicked in His

death.' He touches, and, touching, contracts no impurity, cleansing as

the sunlight and the fire do, by burning up the impurity, and not by

receiving it into Himself.

Note the Lord's word, I will; be thou clean.' It is shaped, convolution

for convolution, so to speak, to match the man's prayer. He ever moulds

His response according to the feebleness and imperfection of the

petitioner's faith. But, at the same time, what a ring of autocratic

authority and conscious sovereignty there is in the brief, calm,

imperative word, I will; be thou clean!' He accepts the leper's

ascription of power; He claims to work the miracle by His own will, and

therein He is either guilty of what comes very near arrogant blasphemy,

or He is rightly claiming for Himself a divine prerogative. If His word

can tell as a force on material things, what is the conclusion? He who

spake and it was done' is Almighty and Divine.

III. Lastly, note the immediate cure.

Mark tells, with his favourite word straightway,' how as soon as Christ

had spoken, the leprosy departed from the leper. And to turn from the

symbol to the fact, the same sudden and complete cleansing is possible

for us. Our cleansing from sin must depend upon the present love and

present power of Jesus Christ. On account of Christ's sacrifice, whose

efficacy is eternal and lies at the foundation of all our blessedness

and our purity until the heavens shall be no more, we are forgiven our

sins and our guilt is taken away. By the present indwelling of that

cleansing Spirit of the ever-living Christ, which will be given to us

each if we seek it, we are cleansed day by day from our evil. The blood

of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin,' not only when shed as

propitiatory, but when applied as sanctifying. We must come to Christ,

and there must be a real living contact between us and Him through our

faith, if we are to possess either the forgiveness or the cleansing

which are wrapped up inseparable in His gift.

Further, the suddenness of this cure and its completeness may be

reproduced in us. People tell us that to believe in sudden conversion

is fanatical. This is not the place to argue that question. It seems to

me that such suddenness is in accordance with analogy. And I, for my

part, preach with full belief and in the hope that the words may not be

spoken altogether in vain to every man, woman, and child listening to

me, irrespective of their condition, character, and past, that there is

no reason why they should not go to Him straightway; no reason why He

should not put out His hand straightway and touch them; no reason why

their leprosy should not pass from them straightway, and they lie down

to sleep to-night accepted in the Beloved' and cleansed in Him. Trust

Him and He will do it.

Only remember, it was of no use to the leper that crowds had been

healed, that floods of blessing had been poured over the land. What he

wanted was that a rill should come and refresh his own lips. If you

wish to have Christ's cleansing you must make personal work of it, and

come with this prayer, On me be all that cleansing shown!' You do not

need to go to Him with an If' nor a prayer, for His gift has not waited

for our asking, and He has anticipated us by coming with healing in His

wings. The parts are reversed, and He prays you to receive the gift,

and stands before each of us with the gentle remonstrance upon His

lips, Why will ye die when I am here ready to cure you?' Take Him at

His word, for He offers to us all, whether we desire it or no, the

cleansing which we need. Take Him at His word, trust Him wholly, trust

to His death for forgiveness, to His sanctifying Spirit for cleansing,

and straightway' your leprosy will depart from you,' and your flesh

shall become like the flesh of a little child, and you shall be clean.

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CHRIST'S TOUCH

Jesus put forth His hand, and touched him.'--Mark i. 41.

Behold the servant of the Lord' might be the motto of this Gospel, and

He went about doing good and healing' the summing up of its facts. We

have in it comparatively few of our Lord's discourses, none of His

longer, and not very many of His briefer ones. It contains but four

parables. This Evangelist gives no miraculous birth as in Matthew, no

angels adoring there as in Luke, no gazing into the secrets of

Eternity, where the Word who afterwards became flesh dwelt in the bosom

of the Father, as in John. He begins with a brief reference to the

Forerunner, and then plunges into the story of Christ's life of service

to man and service for God.

In carrying out his conception the Evangelist omits many things found

in the other Gospels, which involve the idea of dignity and dominion,

while he adds to the incidents which he has in common with them not a

few fine and subtle touches to heighten the impression of our Lord's

toil and eagerness in His patient, loving service. Perhaps it may be an

instance of this that we find more prominence given to our Lord's touch

as connected with His miracles than in the other Gospels, or perhaps it

may merely be an instance of the vivid portraiture, the result of a

keen eye for externals, which is so marked a characteristic of this

gospel. Whatever the reason, the fact is plain, that Mark delights to

dwell on Christ's touch. The instances are these--first, He puts out

His hand, and lifts up' Peter's wife's mother, and immediately the

fever leaves her (i. 31); then, unrepelled by the foul disease, He lays

His pure hand upon the leper, and the living mass of corruption is

healed (i. 41); again, He lays His hand on the clammy marble of the

dead child's forehead, and she lives (v. 41). Further, we have the

incidental statement that He was so hindered in His mighty works by

unbelief that He could only lay His hands on a few sick folk and heal

them (vi. 5). We find next two remarkable incidents, peculiar to Mark,

both like each other and unlike our Lord's other miracles. One is the

gradual healing of that deaf and dumb man whom Christ took apart from

the crowd, laid His hands on him, thrust His fingers into his ears as

if He would clear some impediment, touched his tongue with saliva, said

to him, Be opened'; and the man could hear (vii. 34). The other is, the

gradual healing of a blind man whom our Lord again leads apart from the

crowd, takes by the hand, lays His own kind hands upon the poor,

sightless eyeballs, and with singular slowness of progress effects a

cure, not by a leap and a bound as He generally does, but by steps and

stages; tries it once and finds partial success, has to apply the

curative process again, and then the man can see (viii. 23). In

addition to these instances there are two other incidents which may

also be adduced. It is Mark alone who records for us the fact that He

took little children in His arms, and blessed them. And it is Mark

alone who records for us the fact that when He came down from the Mount

of Transfiguration He laid His hand upon the demoniac boy, writhing in

the grip of his tormentor, and lifted him up.

There is much taught us, if we will patiently consider it, by that

touch of Christ's, and I wish to try to bring out its meaning and

power.

I. Whatever diviner and sacreder aspect there may be in these

incidents, the first thing, and in some senses the most precious thing,

in them is that they are the natural expression of a truly human

tenderness and compassion.

Now we are so accustomed, and as I believe quite rightly, to look at

all Christ's life down to its minutest events as intended to be a

revelation of God, that we are sometimes apt to think about it as if

His motive and purpose in everything was didactic. So an unreality

creeps over our conceptions of Christ's life, and we need to be

reminded that He was not always acting and speaking in order to convey

instruction, but that words and deeds were drawn from Him by the play

of simple human feelings. He pitied not only in order to teach us the

heart of God, but because His own man's heart was touched with a

feeling of men's infirmities. We are too apt to think of Him as posing

before men with the intent of giving the great revelation of the Love

of God. It is the love of Christ Himself, spontaneous, instinctive,

without the thought of anything but the suffering that it sees, which

gushes out and leads Him to put forth His hand to the outcast beggars,

the blind, the deaf, the lepers. That is the first great lesson we have

to learn from this and other stories--the swift human sympathy and

heart of grace and tenderness which Jesus Christ had for all human

suffering, and has to-day as truly as ever.

There is more than this instinctive sympathy taught by Christ's touch,

but it is distinctly taught. How beautifully that comes out in the

story of the leper! That wretched man had long dwelt in his isolation.

The touch of a friend's hand or the kiss of loving lips had been long

denied him. Christ looks on him, and before He reflects, the

spontaneous impulse of pity breaks through the barriers of legal

prohibitions and of natural repugnance, and leads Him to lay His holy

and healing hand on his foulness.

True pity always instinctively leads us to seek to come near those who

are its objects. A man tells his friend some sad story of his

sufferings, and while he speaks, unconsciously his listener lays his

hand on his arm, and, by a silent pressure, speaks his sympathy. So

Christ did with these men--not only in order that He might reveal God

to us, but because He was a man, and therefore felt ere He thought. Out

flashed from His heart the swift sympathy, followed by the tender

pressure of the loving hand--a hand that tried through flesh to reach

spirit, and come near the sufferer that it might succour and remove the

sorrow.

Christ's pity is shown by His touch to have this true characteristic of

true pity, that it overcomes disgust. All real sympathy does that.

Christ is not turned away by the shining whiteness of the leprosy, nor

by the eating pestilence beneath it; He is not turned away by the

clammy marble hand of the poor dead maiden, nor by the fevered skin of

the old woman gasping on her pallet. He lays hold on each, the flushed

patient, the loathsome leper, the sacred dead, with the all-equalising

touch of a universal love and pity, which disregards all that is

repellent, and overflows every barrier and pours itself over every

sufferer. We have the same pity of the same Christ to trust to and to

lay hold of to-day. He is high above us and yet bending over us;

stretching His hand from the throne as truly as He put it out when here

on earth; and ready to take us all to His heart in spite of our

weakness and wickedness, our failings and our shortcomings, the fever

of our flesh and hearts' desires, the leprosy of our many corruptions,

and the death of our sins,--and to hold us ever in the strong, gentle

clasp of His divine, omnipotent, and tender hand. This Christ lays hold

on us because He loves us, and will not be turned from His compassion

by the most loathsome foulness of ours.

II. And now take another point of view from which we may regard this

touch of Christ: namely, as the medium of His miraculous power.

There is nothing to me more remarkable about the miracles of our Lord

than the royal variety of His methods of healing. Sometimes He works at

a distance, sometimes He requires, as it would appear for good reasons,

the proximity of the person to be blessed. Sometimes He works by a

simple word: Lazarus, come forth!' Peace be still!' Come out of him!'

sometimes by a word and a touch, as in the instances before us;

sometimes by a touch without a word; sometimes by a word and a touch

and a vehicle, as in the saliva that was put on the tongue and in the

ears of the deaf, and on the eyes of the blind; sometimes by a vehicle

without a word, without a touch, without His presence, as when He said,

Go wash in the pool of Siloam, and he washed and was clean.' So the

divine worker varies infinitely and at pleasure, yet not arbitrarily

but for profound, even if not always discoverable, reasons, the methods

of His miracle-working power, in order that we may learn by these

varieties of ways that He is tied to no way; and that His hand, strong

and almighty, uses methods and tosses aside methods according to His

pleasure, the methods being vitalised when they are used by His will,

and being nothing at all in themselves.

The very variety of His methods, then, teaches us that the true cause

in every case is His own bare will. A simple word is the highest and

most adequate expression of that will. His word is all-powerful: and

that is the very signature of divinity. Of whom has it been true from

of old that He spake and it was done, He commanded and it stood fast'?

Do you believe in a Christ whose bare will, thrown among material

things, makes them all plastic, as clay in the potter's hands, whose

mouth rebukes the demons and they flee, rebukes death and it looses its

grasp, rebukes the tempest and there is a calm, rebukes disease and

there comes health? But this use of Christ's touch as apparent means

for conveying His miraculous power also serves as an illustration of a

principle which is exemplified in all His revelation, namely, the

employment in condescension to men's weakness, of outward means as the

apparent vehicles of His spiritual power. Just as by the material

vehicle sometimes employed for cure, He gave these poor sense-bound

natures a ladder by which their faith in His healing power might climb,

so in the manner of His revelation and communication of His spiritual

gifts, there is provision for the wants of us men, who ever need some

body for spirit to make itself manifest by, some form for the ethereal

reality, some tabernacle' for the sun.' Sacraments,' outward

ceremonies, forms of worship, are vehicles which the Divine Spirit uses

in order to bring His gifts to the hearts and the minds of men. They

are like the touch of the Christ which heals, not by any virtue in

itself, apart from His will which chooses to make it the apparent

medium of healing. All these externals are nothing, as the pipes of an

organ are nothing, until His breath is breathed through them, and then

the flood of sweet sound pours out.

Do not despise the material vehicles and the outward helps which Christ

uses for the communication of His healing and His life, but remember

that the help that is done upon earth, He does it all Himself. Even

Christ's touch is nothing, if it were not for His own will which flows

through it.

III. Consider Christ's touch as a shadow and symbol of the very heart

of His work.

Go back to the past history of this man. Ever since his disease

declared itself no human being had touched him. If he had a wife he had

been separated from her; if he had children their lips had never kissed

his, nor their little hands found their way into his hard palm. Alone

he had been walking with the plague-cloth over his face, and the cry

Unclean!' on his lips, lest any man should come near him. Skulking in

his isolation, how he must have hungered for the touch of a hand! Every

Jew was forbidden to approach him but the priest, who, if he were

cured, might pass his hand over the place and pronounce him clean. And

here comes a Man who breaks down all the restrictions, stretches a

frank hand out across the walls of separation, and touches him. What a

reviving assurance of love not yet dead must have come to the man as

Christ grasped his hand, even if he saw in Him only a stranger who was

not afraid of him and did not turn from him! But beside this thrill of

human sympathy, which came hope--bringing to the leper, Christ's touch

had much significance, if we remember that, according to the Mosaic

legislation, the priest and the priest alone was to lay his hands on

the tainted skin and pronounce the leper whole. So Christ's touch was a

priest's touch. He lays His hand on corruption and is not tainted. The

corruption with which He comes in contact becomes purity. Are not these

really the profoundest truths as to His whole work in the world? What

is it all but laying hold of the leper and the outcast and the

dead--His sympathy leading to His identification of Himself with us in

our weakness and misery? That sympathetic life-bringing touch is put

forth once for all in His Incarnation and Death. He taketh hold of the

seed of Abraham,' says the Epistle to the Hebrews, looking at our

Lord's work under this same metaphor, and explaining that His laying

hold of men was His being made in all points like unto His brethren.'

Just as he took hold of the fevered woman and lifted her from her bed;

or, as He thrust His fingers into the deaf ears of that poor man

stopped by some impediment, so, in analogous fashion, He becomes one of

those whom He would save and help. In His assumption of humanity and in

His bowing of His head to death, we behold Him laying hold of our

weakness and entering into the fellowship of our pains and of the fruit

of sin.

Just as He touches the leper and in unpolluted, or the fever patient

and receives no contagion, or the dead and draws no chill of mortality

into His warm hand, so He becomes like His brethren in all things, yet

without sin. Being found in the likeness of sinful flesh,' He knows no

sin, but wears His manhood unpolluted and dwells among men blameless

and harmless, the Son of God, without rebuke.' Like a sunbeam passing

through foul water untarnished and unstained; or like some sweet spring

rising in the midst of the salt sea, which yet retains its freshness

and pours it over the surrounding bitterness, so Christ takes upon

Himself our nature and lays hold of our stained hands with the hand

that continues pure while it grasps us, and will make us purer if we

grasp it.

Brethren, let your touch answer to His; and as He lays hold of us, in

His incarnation and His death, let the hand of our faith clasp His

outstretched hand, and though our hold be as faltering and feeble as

that of the trembling, wasted fingers which one timid woman once laid

on His garment's hem, the blessing which we need will flow into our

veins from the contact. There will be cleansing for our leprosy, sight

for our blindness, life driving out death from its throne in our

hearts, and we shall be able to recount our joyful experience in the

old Psalmist's triumphant strains--He sent me from above, He laid hold

upon me, He drew me out of many waters.'

IV. Finally, we may look upon these incidents as being in a very

important sense a pattern for us.

No good is to be done by any man to his fellows except at the cost of

true sympathy which leads to identification and contact. The literal

touch of your hand would do more good to some poor outcasts than much

solemn advice, or even much material help flung to them as from a

height above them. A shake of the hand might be more of a means of

grace than a sermon, and more comforting than ever so many free

breakfasts and blankets given superciliously.

And, symbolically, we may say that we must be willing to take those by

the hand whom we wish to help; that is to say, we must come down to

their level, try to see with their eyes, and to think their thoughts,

and let them feel that we do not think our purity too fine to come

beside their filth, nor shrink from them With repugnance, however we

may show disapproval and pity for their sin. Much work done by

Christian people has no effect, nor ever will have, because it has

peeping through it a poorly concealed I am holier than thou.' An

instinctive movement of repugnance has ruined many a well-meant effort.

Christ has come down to us, and has taken all our nature upon Himself.

If there is an outcast and abandoned soul on earth which may not feel

that Jesus has laid a loving and healing touch on him, Jesus is not the

Saviour for the world. He shrinks from none, He unites Himself with

all, therefore He is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto

God by Him.' His conduct is the pattern and the law for us. A Church is

a poor affair if it is not a body of people whose experience of

Christ's pity and gratitude for the life which has become theirs

through His wondrous making Himself one with them, compels them to do

the like in their degree for the sinful and the outcast. Thank God,

there are many in every communion who know that constraint of the love

of Christ. But the world will not be healed of its sickness till the

great body of Christian people awakes to feel that the task and honour

of each of them is to go forth bearing Christ's pity certified by their

own.

The sins of professing Christian countries are largely to be laid at

the door of the Church. We are idle when we ought to be at work. We

pass by on the other side' when bleeding brethren lie with wounds

gaping to be bound up by us. And even when we are moved to service by

Christ's love, and try to do something for our fellows, our work is

often tainted by a sense of our own superiority, and we patronise when

we should sympathise, and lecture when we should beseech.

We must be content to take lepers by the hand, if we would help them to

purity, and to let every outcast feel the warmth of our pitying, loving

grasp, if we would draw them into the forsaken Father's House. Lay your

hands on the sinful as Christ did, and they will recover. All your

holiness and hope come from Christ's laying hold of you. Keep hold of

Him, and make His great pity and loving identification of Himself with

the world of sinners and sufferers, your pattern as well as your hope,

and your touch, too, will have virtue. Keeping hold of Him who has

taken hold of us, you too may be able to say, Ephphatha, be opened,' or

to lay your hand on the leper, and he will be cleansed.

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CHRIST'S AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE

And again He entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised

that He was in the house. 2. And straightway many were gathered

together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so

much as about the door; and He preached the word unto them. 3. And they

come unto Him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four.

4. And when they could not come nigh unto Him for the press, they

uncovered the roof where He was: and when they had broken it up, they

let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. 6. When Jesus saw

their faith, He said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be

forgiven thee. 6. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there,

and reasoning in their hearts, 7. Why doth this man thus speak

blasphemies! who can forgive sins but God only! 8. And immediately when

Jesus perceived in His spirit that they so reasoned within themselves,

He said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? 9.

Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be

forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk! 10. But

that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive

sins, (He saith to the sick of the palsy,) 11. I say unto thee, Arise,

and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. 12. And

immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all;

insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, laying, We never

saw it on this fashion.'--Mark ii. 1-12.

Mark alone gives Capernaum as the scene of this miracle. The excitement

which had induced our Lord to leave that place had been allowed some

days' to quiet down, after' which He ventures to return, but does not

seem to have sought publicity, but to have remained in the

house'--probably Peter's. There would be at least one woman's heart

there, which would love to lavish grateful service on Him. But He could

not be hid,' and, however little genuine or deep the eagerness might

be, He will not refuse to meet it. Mark paints vividly the crowd

flocking to the humble home, overflowing its modest capacity, blocking

the doorway, and clustering round it outside as far as they could hear

Christ's voice. He was speaking the word to them,' proclaiming His

mission, as He had done in their synagogue, when He was interrupted by

the events which follow, no doubt to the gratification of some of His

hearers, who wanted something more exciting than teaching.'

I. We note the eager group of interrupters. Mark gives one of the

minute touches which betray an eye-witness and a close observer when he

tells us that the palsied man was carried by four friends--no doubt one

at each corner of the bed, which would be some light framework, or even

a mere quilt or mattress. The incident is told from the point of view

of one sitting beside Jesus; they come to Him,' but cannot come near.'

The accurate specification of the process of removing the roof, which

Matthew omits altogether, and Luke tells much more vaguely, seems also

to point to an eye-witness as the source of the narrative, who would,

of course, be Peter, who well remembered all the steps of the

unceremonious treatment of his property. His house was, probably, one

of no great pretensions or size, but like hundreds of poor men's houses

in Palestine still--a one-storied building with a low, flat roof,

mostly earthen, and easily reached from the ground by an outside stair.

It would be somewhat difficult to get a sick man and his bed up there,

however low, and somewhat free-and-easy dealing with another man's

house to burrow through the roof a hole wide enough for the purpose;

but there is no impossibility, and the difficulty is part of the lesson

of the incident, and is recognised expressly in the narrative by

Christ's notice of their faith.' We can fancy the blank looks of the

four bearers, and the disappointment on the sick man's thin face and

weary eyes, as they got to the edge of the crowd, and saw that there

was no hope of forcing a passage. Had they been less certain of a cure,

and less eager, they would have shouldered their burden and carried him

home again. They could well have pleaded sufficient reason for giving

up the attempt. But we cannot' is the coward's word. We must' is the

earnest man's. If we have any real consciousness of our need to get to

Christ, and any real wish to do so, it is not a crowd round the door

that will keep us back. Difficulties test, and therefore increase,

faith. They develop a sanctified ingenuity in getting over them, and

bring a rich harvest of satisfaction when at last conquered. These four

eager faces looked down through the broken roof, when they had

succeeded in dropping the bed right at Christ's feet, with a far keener

pleasure than if they had just carried him in by the door. No doubt

their act was inconvenient; for, however light the roofing, some

rubbish must have come down on the heads of some of the notabilities

below. And, no doubt, it was interfering with property as well as with

propriety. But here was a sick man, and there was his Healer; and it

was their business to get the two together somehow. It was worth

risking a good deal to accomplish. The rabbis sitting there might frown

at rude intrusiveness; Peter might object to the damage to his roof;

some of the listeners might dislike the interruption to His teaching;

but Jesus read the action of the bearers and the consent of the

motionless figure on the couch as the indication of their faith,' and

His love and power responded to its call.

II. Note the unexpected gift with which Christ answers this faith.

Neither the bearers nor the paralytic speak a word throughout the whole

incident. Their act and his condition spoke loudly enough. Obviously,

all five must have had, at all events, so much faith' as went to the

conviction that He could and would heal; and this faith is the occasion

of Christ's gift. The bearers had it, as is shown by their work. It was

a visible faith, manifest by conduct. He can see the hidden heart; but

here He looks upon conduct, and thence infers disposition. Faith, if

worth anything, comes to the surface in act. Was it the faith of the

bearers, or of the sick man, which Christ rewarded? Both. As Abraham's

intercession delivered Lot, as Paul in the shipwreck was the occasion

of safety to all the crew, so one man's faith may bring blessings on

another. But if the sick man too had not had faith, he would not have

let himself be brought at all, and would certainly not have consented

to reach Christ's presence by so strange and, to him, dangerous a

way--being painfully hoisted up some narrow stair, and then perilously

let down, at the risk of cords snapping, or hands letting go, or bed

giving way. His faith, apparently, was deeper than theirs; for Christ's

answer, though it went far beyond his or their expectations, must have

been moulded to meet his deepest sense of need. His heart speaks in the

tender greeting son,' or, as the margin has it, child'--possibly

pointing to the man's youth, but more probably an appellation revealing

the mingled love and dignity of Jesus, and taking this man into the

arms of His sympathy. The palsy may have been the consequence of fast'

living; but, whether it were so or no, Christ saw that, in the dreary

hours of solitary inaction to which it had condemned the sufferer,

remorse had been busy gnawing at his heart, and that pain had done its

best work by leading to penitence. Therefore He spoke to the conscience

before He touched the bodily ailment, and met the sufferer's deepest

and most deeply felt disease first. He goes to the bottom of the malady

with His cure. These great words are not only closely adapted to the

one case before Him, but contain a general truth, worthy to be pondered

by all philanthropists. It is of little use to cure symptoms unless you

cure diseases. The tap-root of all misery is sin; and, until it is

grubbed up, hacking at the branches is sad waste of time. Cure sin, and

you make the heart a temple and the world a paradise. We Christians

should hail all efforts of every sort for making men nobler, happier,

better physically, morally, intellectually; but let us not forget that

there is but one effectual cure for the world's misery, and that it is

wrought by Him who has borne the world's sins.

III. Note the snarl of the scribes. Certain of the scribes,' says

Mark--not being much impressed by their dignity, which, as Luke tells

us, was considerable. He says that they were Pharisees and doctors of

the law . . . out of every village of Galilee and Judaea and Jerusalem

itself, who had come on a formal errand of investigation. Their tempers

would not be improved by the tearing up of the roof, nor sweetened by

seeing the popularity' of this doubtful young Teacher, who showed that

He had the secret, which they had not, of winning men's hearts. Nobody

came crowding to them, nor hung on their lips. Professional jealousy

has often a great deal to do in helping zeal for truth to sniff out

heresy. The whispered cavillings are graphically represented. The

scribes would not speak out, like men, and call on Jesus to defend His

words. If they had been sure of their ground, they should have boldly

charged Him with blasphemy; but perhaps they were half suspicious that

He could show good cause for His speech. Perhaps they were afraid to

oppose the tide of enthusiasm for Him. So they content themselves with

comparing notes among themselves, and wait for Him to entangle Himself

a little more in their nets. They affect to despise Him, This man' is

spoken in contempt. If He were so poor a creature, why were they there,

all the way from Jerusalem, some of them? They overdo their part. The

short, snarling sentences of their muttered objections, as given in the

Revised Version, may be taken as shared among three speakers, each

bringing his quota of bitterness. One says, Why doth He thus speak?'

Another curtly answers, He blasphemeth'; while a third formally states

the great truth on which they rest their indictment. Their principle is

impregnable. Forgiveness is a divine prerogative, to be shared by none,

to be grasped by none, without, in the act, diminishing God's glory.

But it is not enough to have one premise of your syllogism right. Only

God forgives sins; and if this man says that He does, He, no doubt,

claims to be, in some sense, God. But whether He blasphemeth' or no

depends on what the scribes do not stay to ask; namely, whether He has

the right so to claim: and, if He has, it is they, not He, who are the

blasphemers. We need not wonder that they recoiled from the right

conclusion, which is--the divinity of Jesus. Their fault was not their

jealousy for the divine honour, but their inattention to Christ's

evidence in support of His claims, which inattention had its roots in

their moral condition, their self-sufficiency and absorption in

trivialities of externalism. But we have to thank them for clearly

discerning and bluntly stating what was involved in our Lord's claims,

and for thus bringing up the sharp issue--blasphemer, or God manifest

in the flesh.'

IV. Note our Lord's answer to the cavils. Mark would have us see

something supernatural in the swiftness of Christ's knowledge of the

muttered criticisms. He perceived it straightway' and in His spirit,'

which is tantamount to saying by divine discernment, and not by the

medium of sense, as we do. His spirit was a mirror, in which looking He

saw externals. In the most literal and deepest sense, He does not judge

after the sight of His eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of His

ears.'

The absence from our Lord's answer of any explanation that He was only

declaring the divine forgiveness and not Himself exercising a divine

prerogative, shuts us up to the conclusion that He desired to be

understood as exercising it. Unless His pardon is something quite

different from the ministerial announcement of forgiveness, which His

servants are empowered to make to penitents, He wilfully led the

cavillers into error. His answer starts with a counter-question--

another why?' to meet their' why?' It then puts into words what they

were thinking; namely, that it was easy to assume a power the reality

of which could not be tested. To say, Thy sins be forgiven,' and to

say, Take up thy bed,' are equally easy. To effect either is equally

beyond man's power; but the one can be verified and the other cannot,

and, no doubt, some of the scribes were maliciously saying: It is all

very well to pretend to do what cannot be tested. Let Him come out into

daylight, and do a miracle which we can see.' He is quite willing to

accept the challenge to test His power in the invisible realm of

conscience by His power in the visible region. The remarkable

construction of the long sentence in verses 10 and 11, which is almost

verbally identical in the three Gospels, parenthesis and all, sets

before us the suddenness of the turn from the scribes to the patient

with dramatic force. Mark that our Lord claims authority' to forgive,

the same word which had been twice in the people's mouths in reference

to His teaching and to His sway over demons. It implies not only power,

but rightful power, and that authority which He wields as Son of Man'

and on earth.' This is the first use of that title in Mark. It is

Christ's own designation of Himself, never found on other lips except

the dying Stephen's. It implies His Messianic office, and points back

to Daniel's great prophecy; but it also asserts His true manhood and

His unique relation to humanity, as being Himself its sum and

perfection--not a, but the Son of Man. Now the wonder which He would

confirm by His miracle is that such a manhood, walking on earth, has

lodged in it the divine prerogative. He who is the Son of Man must be

something more than man, even the Son of God. His power to forgive is

both derived and inherent, but, in either aspect, is entirely different

from the human office of announcing God's forgiveness.

For once, Christ seems to work a miracle in response to unbelief,

rather than to faith. But the real occasion of it was not the cavils of

the scribes, but the faith and need of the man and His friends; while

the silencing of unbelief, and the enlightenment of honest doubt, were

but collateral benefits.

V. Note the cure and its effect. This is another of the miracles in

which no vehicle of the healing power is employed. The word is enough;

but here the word is spoken, not as if to the disease, but to the

sufferer; and in His obedience he receives strength to obey. Tell a

palsied man to rise and walk when his disease is that he cannot! But if

he believes that Christ has power to heal, he will try to do as he is

bid; and, as he tries, the paralysis steals out of the long-unused

limbs. Jesus makes us able to do what He bids us do. The condition of

healing is faith, and the test of faith is obedience. We do not get

strength till we put ourselves into the attitude of obedience. The cure

was immediate; and the cured man, who was borne of four' into the

healing presence, walked away, with his bed under his arm, before them

all.' They were ready enough to make way for him then. And what said

the wise doctors to it all? We do not hear that any of them were

convinced. And what said the people? They were amazed,' and they

glorified God,' and recognised that they had seen something quite new.

That was all. Their glorifying God cannot have been very deep-seated,

or they would have better learned the lesson of the miracle. Amazement

was but a poor result. No emotion is more transient or less fruitful

than gaping astonishment; and that, with a little varnish of

acknowledgment of God's power, which led to nothing, was all the fruit

of Christ's mighty work. Let us hope that the healed man carried his

unseen blessing in a faithful and grateful heart, and consecrated his

restored strength to the Lord who healed him!

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THE PUBLICANS' FRIEND

And He went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted

unto Him, and He taught them. 14. And as He passed by, he saw Levi the

son of Alph�us sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him,

Follow me. And he arose and followed Him. 15. And it came to pass,

that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat

also together with Jesus and His disciples: for there were many, and

they followed Him. 16. And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eat

with publicans and sinners, they said unto His disciples, How is it

that He eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners! 17. When Jesus

heard it, He saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the

physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous,

but sinners to repentance. 18. And the disciples of John and of the

Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto Him, Why do the

disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Thy disciples fast

not! 19. And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber

fast, while the bridegroom is with them! as long as they have the

bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. 20. But the days will come,

when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they

fast in those days. 21. No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an

old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the

old, and the rent is made worse. 22. And no man putteth new wine into

old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is

spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into

new bottles.'--Mark ii. 13-22.

By calling a publican, Jesus shocked public opinion and outraged

propriety, as the Pharisees and scribes understood it. But He touched

the hearts of the outcasts. A gush of sympathy melts souls frozen hard

by icy winds of scorn. Levi (otherwise Matthew) had probably had

wistful longings after Jesus which he had not dared to show, and

therefore he eagerly and instantly responded to Christ's call, leaving

everything in his custom-house to look after itself. Mark emphasises

the effect of this advance towards the disreputable classes by Jesus,

in his repeated mention of the numbers of them who followed Him. The

meal in Matthew's house was probably not immediately after his call.

The large gathering attracted the notice of Christ's watchful

opponents, who pounced upon His sitting at meat with such shady' people

as betraying His low tastes and disregard of seemly conduct, and, with

characteristic Eastern freedom, pushed in as uninvited spectators. They

did not carry their objection to Himself, but covertly insinuated it

into the disciples' minds, perhaps in hope of sowing suspicions there.

Their sarcasm evoked Christ's own programme' of His mission, for which

we have to thank them.

I. We have, first, Christ's vindication of His consorting with the

lowest. He thinks of Himself as a physician,' just as He did in another

connection in the synagogue of Nazareth. He is conscious of power to

heal all soul-sickness, and therefore He goes where He is most needed.

Where should a doctor be but where disease is rife? Is not his place in

the hospital? Association with degraded and vicious characters is sin

or duty, according to the purpose of it. To go down in the filth in

order to wallow there is vile; to go down in order to lift others up is

Christ's mission and Christ-like.

But what does He mean by the distinction between sick and sound,

righteous and sinners? Surely all need His healing, and there are not

two classes of men. Have not all sinned? Yes, but Jesus speaks to the

cavillers, for the moment, in their own dialect, saying, in effect, I

take you at your own valuation, and therein find My defence. You do not

think that you need a physician, and you call yourselves righteous and

these outcasts sinners.' So you should not be surprised if I, being the

healer, turn away to them, and prefer their company to yours.' But

there is more than taking them at their own estimate in the great

words, for to conceit ourselves whole' bars us off from getting any

good from Jesus. He cannot come to the self-righteous heart. We must

feel our sickness before we can see Him in His true character, or be

blessed by His presence with us. And the apparent distinction, which

seems to limit His work, really vanishes in the fact that we all are

sick and sinners, whatever we may think of ourselves, and that,

therefore, the errand of the great Physician is to us all. The Pharisee

who knows himself a sinner is as welcome as the outcast. The most

outwardly respectable, clean-living, orthodoxly religious formalist

needs Him as much, and may have Him as healingly, as the grossest

criminal, foul with the stench of loathsome disease. That great saying

has changed the attitude towards the degraded and unclean, and many a

stream of pity and practical work for such has been drawn off from that

Nile of yearning love, though all unconscious of its source.

II. We have Christ's vindication of the disciples from ascetic critics.

The assailants in the second charge were reinforced by singular allies.

Pharisees had nothing in common with John's disciples, except some

outward observances, but they could join forces against Jesus. Common

hatred is a wonderful unifier. This time Jesus Himself is addressed,

and it is the disciples with whom fault is found. To speak of His

supposed faults to them, and of theirs to Him, was cunning and

cowardly. His answer opens up many great truths, which we can barely

mention.

First, note that He calls Himself the bridegroom'--a designation which

would surely touch some chords in John's disciples, remembering how

their Master had spoken of the bridegroom' and his friend.' The name

tells us that Jesus claimed the psalms of the bride-groom' as

prophecies of Himself, and claimed the Church that was to be as His

bride. It speaks tenderly of His love and of our possible blessedness.

Next, we note the sweet suggestion of the joyful life of the disciples

in intercourse with Him. We perhaps do not sufficiently regard their

experience in that light, but surely they were happy, being ever with

Him, though they knew not yet all the wonder and blessedness which His

presence involved and brought. They were a glad company, and Christians

ought now to be joyous, because the bridegroom is still with them, and

the more really so by reason of His ascending up where He was before.

We have seen Him again, as He promised, and our hearts should rejoice

with a joy which no man can take from us.

Next, we note Christ's clear prevision of His death, the violence of

which is hinted at in the words, Shall be taken away from them.'

Further, we note the great principle that outward forms must follow

inward realities, and are genuine only when they are the expression of

states of mind and feeling. That is a far-reaching truth, ever being

forgotten in the tyranny which the externals of religion exercise. Let

the free spirit have its own way, and cut its own channels. Laughter

may be as devout as fasting. Joy is to be expressed in religion as well

as grief. No outward form is worth anything unless the inner man

vitalises it, and such a mere form is not simply valueless, but may

quickly become hypocrisy and conscious make-believe.

III. Jesus adds two similes, which are condensed parables, to deal with

a wider question rising out of the preceding principles. The difference

between His disciples' religious demeanour and that of their critics is

not merely that the former are not now in a mood for fasting, but that

a new spirit is beginning to work in them, and therefore it will go

hard with a good many old forms besides fasting.

The essential point in both the similes of the raw cloth stitched on to

the old, and of the new wine poured into stiff old skins, is the

necessary incongruity between old forms and new tendencies. Undressed

cloth is sure to shrink when wetted, and, being stronger than the old,

to draw its frayed edges away. So, if new truth, or new conceptions of

old truth, or new enthusiasms, are patched on to old modes, they will

look out of place, and will sooner or later rend the old cloth. But the

second simile advances on the first, in that it points not only to harm

done to the old by the unnatural marriage, but also to mischief to the

new. Put fermenting wine into a hard, unyielding, old wine-skin, and

there can be but one result,--the strong effervescence will burst the

skin, which may not matter much, and the precious wine will run out and

be lost, sucked up by the thirsty soil, which matters more. The attempt

to confine the new within the limits of the old, or to express it by

the old forms, destroys them and wastes it. The attempt was made to

keep Christianity within the limits of Judaism; it failed, but not

before much harm had been done to Christianity. Over and over again the

effort has been made in the Church, and it has always ended

disastrously,--and it always will. It will be a happy day for both the

old and the new when we all learn to put new wine into new skins, and

remember that God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him, and to every

seed his own body.'

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THE SECRET OF GLADNESS

And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast,

while the bridegroom is with them?'--Mark ii. 19.

This part of our Lord's answer to the question put by John's disciples

as to the reason for the omission of the practice of fasting by His

followers. The answer is very simple. It is--My disciples do not fast

because they are not sad.' And the principle which underlies the answer

is a very important one. It is this: that all outward forms of

religion, appointed by man, ought only to be observed when they

correspond to the feeling and disposition of the worshipper. That

principle cuts up all religious formalism by the very roots. The

Pharisee said: Fasting is a good thing in itself, and meritorious in

the sight of God.' The modern Pharisee says the same about many

externals of ritual and worship; Jesus Christ says, No! The thing has

no value except as an expression of the feeling of the doer.' Our Lord

did not object to fasting; He expressly approved of it as a means of

spiritual power. But He did object to the formal use of it or of any

outward form. The formalist's form, whether it be the elaborate ritual

of the Catholic Church, or the barest Nonconformist service, or the

silence of a Friends' meeting-house, is rigid, unbending, and cold,

like an iron rod. The true Christian form is elastic, like the stem of

a palm-tree, which curves and sways and yields to the wind, and has the

sap of life in it. If any man is sad, let him fast; if any man is

merry, let him sing psalms.' Let his ritual correspond to his spiritual

emotion and conviction.

But the point which I wish to consider now is not so much this, as the

representation that is given here of the reason why fasting was

incongruous with the condition and disposition of the disciples. Jesus

says: We are more like a wedding-party than anything else. Can the

children of the bridechamber fast as long as the bridegroom is with

them?'

The children of the bridechamber' is but another name for those who

were called the friends' or companions of the bridegroom.' According to

the Jewish wedding ceremonial it was their business to conduct the

bride to the home of her husband, and there to spend seven days in

festivity and rejoicing, which were to be so entirely devoted to mirth

and feasting that the companions of the bridegroom were by the Talmudic

ritual absolved even from prayer and from worship, and had for their

one duty to rejoice.

And that is the picture that Christ holds up before the disciples of

the ascetic John as the representation of what He and His friends were

most truly like. Very unlike our ordinary notion of Christ and His

disciples as they walked the earth! The presence of the Bridegroom made

them glad with a strange gladness, which shook off sorrow as the down

on a sea-bird's breast shakes off moisture, and leaves it warm and dry,

though it floats amidst boundless seas. I wish now to meditate on this

secret of imperviousness to sorrow arising from the felt presence of

the Christ.

There are three subjects for consideration arising from the words of my

text: The Bridegroom; the presence of the Bridegroom; the joy of the

Bride-groom's presence.

I. Now with regard to the first, a very few words will suffice. The

first thing that strikes me is the singular appropriateness and the

delicate, pathetic beauty in the employment of this name by Christ in

the existing circumstances. Who was it that had first said: He that

hath the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom that

standeth by and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the

bridegroom's voice. This my joy therefore is fulfilled'? Why, it was

the master of these very men who were asking the question. John's

disciples came and said, Why do not your disciples fast?' and our Lord

reminded them of their own teacher's words, when he said, The friend of

the bridegroom can only be glad.' And so He would say to them, In your

master's own conception of what I am, and of the joy that comes from My

presence, you have an answer to your question. He might have taught you

who I am, and why it is that the men that stand around Me are glad.'

But this is not all. We cannot but connect this name with a whole

circle of ideas found in the Old Testament, especially with that most

familiar and almost stereotyped figure which represents the union

between Israel and Jehovah, under the emblem of the marriage bond. The

Lord is the husband'; and the nation whom He has loved and redeemed and

chosen for Himself, is the wife'; unfaithful and forgetful, often

requiting love with indifference and protection with unthankfulness,

and needing to be put away, and debarred of the society of the husband

who still yearns for her; but a wife still, and in the new time to be

joined to Him by a bond that shall never be broken and a better

covenant.

And so Christ lays His hand upon all that old history and says, It is

fulfilled here in Me.' A familiar note in Old Testament Messianic

prophecy too is caught and echoed here, especially that grand marriage

ode of the forty-fifth psalm, in which he must be a very prosaic or

very deeply prejudiced reader who hears nothing more than the shrill

wedding greetings at the marriage of some Jewish king with a foreign

princess. Its bounding hopes and its magnificent sweep of vision are a

world too wide for such interpretation. The Bridegroom of that psalm is

the Messiah, and the Bride is the Church.

I need only refer in a sentence to what this indicates of Christ's

self-consciousness. What must He, who takes this name as His own, have

thought Himself to be to the world, and the world to Him? He steps into

the place of the Jehovah of the Old Testament, and claims as His own

all these great and wonderful prophecies. He promises love, protection,

communion, the deepest, most mystical union of spirit and heart with

Himself; and He claims quiet, restful confidence in His love, absolute,

loving obedience to His authority, reliance upon His strong hand and

loving heart, and faithful cleaving to Him. The Bridegroom of humanity,

the Husband of the world, if it will only turn to Him, is Christ

Himself.

II. But a word as to the presence of the Bridegroom. It might seem as

if this text condemned us who love an unseen and absent Lord to

exclusion from the joy which is made to depend on His presence. Are we

in the dreary period when the Bridegroom is taken away' and fasting

appropriate? Surely not. The time of mourning for an absent Christ was

only three days; the law for the years of the Church's history between

the moment when the uplifted eyes of the gazers lost Him in the

symbolic cloud and the moment when He shall come again is, Lo, I am

with you alway.' The absent Christ is the present Christ. He is really

with us, not as the memory or the influence of the example of the dead

may be said to remain, not as the spirit of a teacher may be said to

abide with his school of followers. We say that Christ has gone up on

high and sits on the right hand of God.' The right hand of God is His

active power. Where is the right hand of God'? It is wherever His

divine energy works. He that sits at the right hand of God is thereby

declared to be wherever the divine energy is in operation, and to be

Himself the wielder of that divine Power. I believe in a local abode of

the glorified human body of Jesus Christ now, but I believe likewise

that all through God's universe, and eminently in this world, which He

has redeemed, Christ is present, in His consciousness of its

circumstances, and in the activity of His influence, and in whatsoever

other incomprehensible and unspeakable mode Omnipresence belongs to a

divine Person. So that He is with us most really, though the visible,

bodily Form is no longer by our sides.

That Presence which survives, which is true for us here to-day, may be

a far better and more blessed and real thing than the presence of the

mere bodily Form in which He once dwelt. We may have lost something by

His going away in visible form; I doubt whether we have. We have lost

the manifestation of Him to the sense, but we have gained the

manifestation of Him to the spirit. And just as the great men, who are

only men, need to die and go away in order to be measured in their true

magnitude and understood in their true glory; just as when a man is in

amongst the mountains, he cannot tell which peak is the dominant one,

but when he gets away a little space across the sea and looks back,

distance helps to measure magnitude and reveal the sovereign summit

which towers above all the rest, so, looking back across the ages with

the foreground between us and Him of the history of the Christian

Church ever since, and noticing how other heights have sunk beneath the

waves and have been wrapped in clouds and have disappeared behind the

great round of the earth, we can tell how high this One is; and know

better than they knew who it is that moves amongst men in the form of a

servant,' even the Bridegroom of the Church and of the world. It is

expedient for you that I go away,' and Christ is, or ought to be,

nearer to us to-day in all that constitutes real nearness, in our

apprehension of His essential character, in our reception of His

holiest influences, than He ever was to them who walked beside Him on

the earth.

But, brethren, that presence is of no use at all to us unless we daily

try to realise it. He was with these men whether they would or no.

Whether they thought about Him or no, there He was; and just because

His presence did not at all depend upon their spiritual condition, it

was a lower kind of presence than that which you and I have now, and

which depends altogether on our realising it by the turning of our

hearts to Him, and by the daily contemplation of Him amidst all our

bustle and struggle.

Do you, as you go about your work, feel His nearness and try to keep

the feeling fresh and vivid, by occupying heart and mind with Him, by

referring everything to His supreme control? By trusting yourselves

utterly and absolutely in His hand, and gathering round you, as it

were, the sweetness of His love by meditation and reflection, do you

try to make conscious to yourselves your Lord's presence with you? If

you do, that presence is to you a blessed reality; if you do not, it is

a word that means nothing and is of no help, no stimulus, no

protection, no satisfaction, no sweetness whatever to you. The children

of the Bridegroom are glad only when, and as, they know that the

Bridegroom is with them.

III. And now a word, last of all, about the joy of the Bridegroom's

presence. What was it that made these humble lives so glad when Christ

was with them, filling them with strange new sweetness and power? The

charm of personal character, the charm of contact with one whose lips

were bringing to them fresh revelations of truth, fresh visions of God,

whose whole life was the exhibition of a nature beautiful, and noble,

and pure, and tender, and sweet, and loving, beyond anything they had

ever seen before.

Ah! brethren, there is no joy in the world like that of companionship,

in the freedom of perfect love, with one who ever keeps us at our best,

and brings the treasures of ever fresh truth to the mind, as well as

beauty of character to admire and imitate. That is one of the greatest

gifts that God gives, and is a source of the purest joy that we can

have. Now we may have all that and much more in Jesus Christ. He will

be with us if we do not drive Him away from us, as the source of our

purest joy, because He is the all-sufficient Object of our love.

Oh! you men and women who have been wearily seeking in the world for

love that cannot change, for love that cannot die and leave you; you

who have been made sad for life by irrevocable losses, or sorrowful in

the midst of your joy by the anticipated certain separation which is to

come, listen to this One who says to you: I will never leave thee, and

My love shall be round thee for ever'; and recognise this, that there

is a love which cannot change, which cannot die, which has no limits,

which never can be cold, which never can disappoint, and therefore, in

it, and in His presence, there is unending gladness.

He is with us as the source of our joy, because He is the Lord of our

lives, and the absolute Commander of our wills. To have One present

with us whose loving word it is delight to obey, and who takes upon

Himself all responsibility for the conduct of our lives, and leaves us

only the task of doing what we are bid--that is peace, that is

gladness, of such a kind as none else in the world gives.

He is with us as the ground of perfect joy, because He is the adequate

object of all our desires, and the whole of the faculties and powers of

a man will find a field of glad activity in leaning upon Him, and

realising His presence. Like the Apostle whom the old painters loved to

represent lying with his happy head on Christ's heart, and his eyes

closed in a tranquil rapture of restful satisfaction, so if we have Him

with us and feel that He is with us, our spirits may be still, and in

the great stillness of fruition of all our wishes and fulfilment of all

our needs, may know a joy that the world can neither give nor take

away.

He is with us as the source of endless gladness, in that He is the

defence and protection for our souls. And as men live in a victualled

fortress, and care not though the whole surrounding country may be

swept bare of all provision, so when we have Christ with us we may feel

safe, whatsoever befalls, and in the days of famine we shall be

satisfied.'

He is with us as the source of our perfect joy, because His presence is

the kindling of every hope that fills the future with light and glory.

Dark or dim at the best, trodden by uncertain shapes, casting many a

deep shadow over the present, that future lies, unless we see it

illumined by Christ, and have Him by our sides. But if we possess His

companionship, the present is but the parent of a more blessed time to

come; and we can look forward and feel that nothing can touch our

gladness, because nothing can touch our union with our Lord.

So, dear brethren, from all these thoughts and a thousand more which I

have no time to dwell upon, comes this one great consideration, that

the joy of the presence of the Bridegroom is the victorious antagonist

of all sorrow and mourning. Can the children of the bridechamber mourn,

while the bridegroom is with them?' The answer sometimes seems to be,

Yes, they can.' Our own hearts, with their experience of tears, and

losses, and disappointments, seem to say: Mourning is possible, even

whilst He is here. We have our own share, and we sometimes think, more

than our share, of the ills that flesh is heir to.' And we have, over

and above them, in the measure in which we are Christians, certain

special sources of sorrow and trial, peculiar to ourselves alone; and

the deeper and truer our Christianity the more of these shall we have.

But notwithstanding all that, what will the felt presence of the

Bridegroom do for these griefs that will come? Well, it will limit

them, for one thing; it will prevent them from absorbing the whole of

our nature. There will always be a Goshen in which there is light in

the dwelling,' however murky may be the darkness that wraps the land.

There will always be a little bit of soil above the surface, however

weltering and wide may be the inundation that drowns our world. There

will always be a dry and warm place in the midst of the winter, a kind

of greenhouse into which we may get from out of the tempest and fog.

The joy of the Bridegroom's presence will last through the sorrow, like

a spring of fresh water welling up in the midst of the sea. We may have

the salt and the sweet waters mingling in our lives, not sent forth by

one fountain, but flowing in one channel.

Our joy will sometimes be made sweeter and more wonderful by the very

presence of the mourning and the pain. Just as the pillar of cloud,

that glided before the Israelites through the wilderness, glowed into a

pillar of fire as the darkness deepened, so, as the outlook around

becomes less and less cheery and bright, and the night falls thicker

and thicker, what seemed to be but a thin, grey, wavering column in the

blaze of the sunlight will gather warmth and brightness at the heart of

it when the midnight comes. You cannot see the stars at twelve o'clock

in the day; you have to watch for the dark hours ere heaven is filled

with glory. And so sorrow is often the occasion for the full revelation

of the joy of Christ's presence.

Why have so many Christian men so little joy in their lives? Because

they look for it in all sorts of wrong places, and seek to wring it out

of all sorts of sapless and dry things. Do men gather grapes of

thorns?' If you fling the berries of the thorn into the winepress, will

you get sweet sap out of them? That is what you are doing when you take

gratified earthly affections, worldly competence, fulfilled ambitions,

and put them into the press, and think that out of these you can

squeeze the wine of gladness. No! No! brethren, dry and sapless and

juiceless they all are. There is one thing that gives a man worthy,

noble, eternal gladness, and that is the felt presence of the

Bridegroom.

Why have so many Christians so little joy in their lives? A religion

like that of John's disciples and that of the Pharisees is a poor

affair. A religion of which the main features are law and restriction

and prohibition, cannot be joyful. And there are a great many people

who call themselves Christians, and have just religion enough to take

the edge off worldly pleasures, and yet have not enough to make

fellowship with Christ a gladness for them.

There is a cry amongst us for a more cheerful type of religion. I

re-echo the cry, but I am afraid that I do not mean by it quite the

same thing that some of my friends do. A more cheerful type of

Christianity means to many of us a type of Christianity that will

interfere less with our amusements; a more indulgent doctor that will

prescribe a less rigid diet than the old Puritan type used to do. Well,

perhaps they went too far; I do not care to deny that. But the only

cheerful Christianity is a Christianity that draws its gladness from

deep personal experience of communion with Jesus Christ. There is no

way of men being religious and happy except being profoundly religious,

and living very near their Master, and always trying to cultivate that

spirit of communion with Him which shall surround them with the

sweetness and the power of His felt presence. We do not want Pharisaic

fasting, but we do want that the reason for not fasting shall not be

that Christians like eating better, but that their religion must be

joyful because they have Christ with them, and therefore cannot choose

but sing, as a lark cannot choose but carol. Religion has no power over

us, but as it is our happiness,' and we shall never make it our

happiness, and therefore never know its beneficent control, until we

lift it clean out of the low region of outward forms and joyless

service, into the blessed heights of communion with Jesus Christ, Whom

having not seen we love.'

I would that Christian people saw more plainly that joy is a duty, and

that they are bound to make efforts to obey the command, Rejoice in the

Lord always,' no less than to keep other precepts. If we abide in

Christ, His joy will abide in us, and our joy will be full.' We shall

have in our hearts a fountain of true joy which will never be turbid

with earthly stains, nor dried up by heat, nor frozen by cold. If we

set the Lord always before us our days may be at once like the happy

hours of the children of the bridechamber,' bright with gladness and

musical with song; and also saved from the enervation that sometimes

comes from joy, because they are also like the patient vigils of the

servants who wait for the Lord, when He shall return from the wedding.'

So strangely blended of fruition and hope, of companionship and

solitude, of feasting and watching, is the Christian life here, until

the time comes when His friends go in with the Bridegroom to the

banquet, and drink for ever of the new joy of the kingdom.

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WORKS WHICH HALLOW THE SABBATH

And it came to pass, that He went through the cornfields on the Sabbath

day; and His disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn.

24. And the Pharisees said unto Him, Behold, why do they on the Sabbath

day that which is not lawful? 25. And He said unto them, Have ye never

read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they

that were with him? 28. How he went into the house of God in the days

of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not

lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were

with him? 27. And He said unto them, The Sabbath was made for man, and

not man for the Sabbath: 28. Therefore the Son of Man is Lord also of

the Sabbath.'--Mark ii. 23-28.

And He entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there

which had a withered hand. 2. And they watched Him, whether He would

heal him on the Sabbath day; that they might accuse Him. 3. And He

saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. 4. And He

saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do

evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. 5. And when

He had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the

hardness of their hearts, He saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine

hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the

other.'--Mark iii. 1-5.

These two Sabbath scenes make a climax to the preceding paragraphs, in

which Jesus has asserted His right to brush aside Rabbinical ordinances

about eating with sinners and about fasting. Here He goes much further,

in claiming power over the divine ordinance of the Sabbath. Formalists

are moved to more holy horror by free handling of forms than by

heterodoxy as to principles. So we can understand how the Pharisees'

suspicions were exacerbated to murderous hate by these two incidents.

It is doubtful whether Mark puts them together because they occurred

together, or because they bear on the same subject. They deal with the

two classes of works' which later Christian theology has recognised as

legitimate exceptions to the law of the Sabbath rest; namely, works of

necessity and of mercy.

I. Whether we adopt the view that the disciples were clearing a path

through standing corn, or the simpler one, that they gathered the ears

of corn on the edge of a made path as they went, the point of the

Pharisees' objection was that they broke the Sabbath by plucking, which

was a kind of reaping. According to Luke, their breach of the

Rabbinical exposition of the law was an event more dreadful in the eyes

of these narrow pedants; for there was not only reaping, but the

analogue of winnowing and grinding, for the grains were rubbed in the

disciples' palms. What daring sin! What impious defiance of law! But of

what law? Not that of the Fourth Commandment, which simply forbade

labour,' but that of the doctors' expositions of the commandment, which

expended miraculous ingenuity and hair-splitting on deciding what was

labour and what was not. The foundations of that astonishing structure

now found in the Talmud were, no doubt, laid before Christ. This

expansion of the prohibition, so as to take in such trifles as plucking

and rubbing a handful of heads of corn, has many parallels there.

But it is noteworthy that our Lord does not avail Himself of the

distinction between God's commandment and men's exposition of it. He

does not embarrass himself with two controversies at once. At fit times

He disputed Rabbinical authority, and branded their casuistry as

binding grievous burdens on men; but here He allows their assumption of

the equal authority of their commentary and of the text to pass

unchallenged, and accepts the statement that His disciples had been

doing what was unlawful on the Sabbath, and vindicates their breach of

law.

Note that His answer deals first with an example of similar breach of

ceremonial law, and then rises to lay down a broad principle which

governed that precedent, vindicates the act of the disciples, and draws

for all ages a broad line of demarcation between the obligations of

ceremonial and of moral law. Clearly, His adducing David's act in

taking the shewbread implies that the disciples' reason for plucking

the ears of corn was not to clear a path but to satisfy hunger.

Probably, too, it suggests that He also was hungry, and partook of the

simple food.

Note, too, the tinge of irony in that Did ye never read?' In all your

minute study of the letter of the Scripture, did you never take heed to

that page? The principle on which the priest at Nob let the hungry

fugitives devour the sacred bread, was the subordination of ceremonial

law to men's necessities. It was well to lay the loaves on the table in

the Presence, but it was better to take them and feed the fainting

servant of God and his followers with them. Out of the very heart of

the law which the Pharisees appealed to, in order to spin restricting

prohibitions, Jesus drew an example of freedom which ran on all-fours

with His disciples' case. The Pharisees had pored over the Old

Testament all their lives, but it would have been long before they had

found such a doctrine as this in it.

Jesus goes on to bring out the principle which shaped the instance he

gave. He does not state it in its widest form, but confines it to the

matter in hand--Sabbath obligations. Ceremonial law in all its parts is

established as a means to an end--the highest good of men. Therefore,

the end is more important than the means; and, in any case of apparent

collision, the means must give way that the end may be secured.

External observances are not of permanent, unalterable obligation. They

stand on a different footing from primal moral duties, which remain

equally imperative whether doing them leads to physical good or evil.

David and his men were bound to keep these, whether they starved or

not; but they were not bound to leave the shew bread lying in the

shrine, and starve.

Man is made for the moral law. It is supreme, and he is under it,

whether obedience leads to death or not. But all ceremonial regulations

are merely established to help men to reach the true end of their

being, and may be suspended or modified by his necessities. The Sabbath

comes under the class of such ceremonial regulations, and may therefore

be elastic when the pressure of necessity is brought to bear.

But note that our Lord, even while thus defining the limits of the

obligation, asserts its universality. The Sabbath was made for

man'--not for a nation or an age, but for all time and for the whole

race. Those who would sweep away the observance of the weekly day of

rest are fond of quoting this text; but they give little heed to its

first clause, and do not note that their favourite passage upsets their

main contention, and establishes the law of the Sabbath as a possession

for the world for ever. It is not a burden, but a privilege, made and

meant for man's highest good.

Christ's conclusion that He is Lord even of the Sabbath' is based upon

the consideration of the true design of the day. If it is once

understood that it is appointed, not as an inflexible duty, like the

obligation of truth or purity, but as a means to man's good, physical

and spiritual, then He who has in charge all man's higher interests,

and who is the perfect realisation of the ideal of manhood, has full

authority to modify and suspend the ceremonial observance if in His

unerring judgment the suspension is desirable.

This is not an abrogation of the Sabbath, but, on the contrary, a

confirmation of the universal and merciful appointment. It does not

give permission to keep or neglect it, according to whim or for the

sake of amusement, but it does draw, strong and clear, the distinction

between a positive rite which may be modified, and an unchangeable

precept of the moral law which it is better for a man to die than to

neglect or transgress.

The second Sabbath scene deals with the same question from another

point of view. Works of necessity warranted the supercession of Sabbath

law; works of beneficence are no breaches of it. There are

circumstances in which it is right to do what is not lawful' on the

Sabbath, for such works as healing the man with a withered hand are

always lawful.'

We note the cruel indifference to the sufferer's woe which so

characteristically accompanies a religion which is mainly a matter of

outside observances. What cared the Pharisees whether the poor cripple

was healed or no? They wanted him cured only that they might have a

charge against Jesus. Note, too, the strange condition of mind, which

recognised Christ's miraculous power, and yet considered Him an impious

sinner.

Observe our Lord's purpose to make the miracle most conspicuous. He

bids the man stand out in the midst, before all the cold eyes of

malicious Pharisees and gaping spectators. A secret espionage was going

on in the synagogue. He sees it all, and drags it into full light by

setting the man forth and by His sudden, sharp thrust of a question. He

takes the first word this time, and puts the stealthy spies on the

defensive. His interrogation may possibly be regarded as having a

bearing on their conduct, for there was murder in their hearts (verse

6). There they sat with solemn faces, posing as sticklers for law and

religion, and all the while they were seeking grounds for killing Him.

Was that Sabbath work? Whether would He, if He cured the shrunken arm,

or they, if they gathered accusations with the intention of compassing

His death, be the Sabbath-breakers?

It was a sharp, swift cut through their cloak of sanctity; but it has a

wider scope than that. The question rests on the principle that good

omitted is equivalent to evil committed. If we can save, and do not,

the responsibility of loss lies on us. If we can rescue, and let die,

our brother's blood reddens our hands. Good undone is not merely

negative. It is positive evil done. If from regard to the Sabbath we

refrained from doing some kindly deed alleviating a brother's sorrow,

we should not be inactive, but should have done something by our very

not doing, and what we should do would be evil. It is a pregnant saying

which has many solemn applications.

No wonder that they held their peace.' Unless they had been prepared to

abandon their position, there was nothing to be said. That silence

indicated conviction and obstinate pride and rooted hatred which would

not be convinced, conciliated, or softened. Therefore Jesus looked on

them with that penetrating, yearning gaze, which left ineffaceable

remembrances on the beholders, as the frequent mention of it indicates.

The emotions in Christ's heart as He looked on the dogged, lowering

faces are expressed in a remarkable phrase, which is probably best

taken as meaning that grief mingled with His anger. A wondrous glimpse

into that tender heart, which in all its tenderness is capable of

righteous indignation, and in all its indignation does not set aside

its tenderness! Mark that not even the most rigid prohibitions were

broken by the process of cure. It was no breach of the fantastic

restrictions which had been engrafted on the commandment, that Jesus

should bid the man put out his hand. Nobody could find fault with a man

for doing that. These two things, a word and a movement of muscles,

were all. So He did heal on the Sabbath,' and yet did nothing that

could be laid hold of.

But let us not miss the parable of the restoration of the maimed and

shrunken powers of the soul, which the manner of the miracle gives.

Whatever we try to do because Jesus bids us, He will give us strength

to do, however impossible to our unaided powers it is. In the act of

stretching out the hand, ability to stretch it forth is bestowed, power

returns to atrophied muscles, stiffened joints are suppled, the blood

runs in full measure through the veins. So it is ever. Power to obey

attends on the desire and effort to obey.

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THE ANGER AND GRIEF OF JESUS

He looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the

hardness of their hearts.'--Mark iii. 5.

Our Lord goes into the synagogue at Capernaum, where He had already

wrought more than one miracle, and there He finds an object for His

healing power, in a poor man with a withered hand; and also a little

knot of His enemies. The scribes and Pharisees expect Christ to heal

the man. So much had they learned of His tenderness and of His power.

But their belief that He could work a miracle did not carry them one

step towards a recognition of Him as sent by God. They have no eye for

the miracle, because they expect that He is going to break the Sabbath.

There is nothing so blind as formal religionism. This poor man's

infirmity did not touch their hearts with one little throb of

compassion. They had rather that he had gone crippled all his days than

that one of their Rabbinical Sabbatarian restrictions should be

violated. There is nothing so cruel as formal religionism. They only

think that there is a trap laid--and perhaps they had laid it--into

which Christ is sure to go.

So, as our Evangelist tells us, they sat there stealthily watching Him

out of their cold eyes, whether He would heal on the Sabbath day, that

they might accuse Him. Our Lord bids the man stand out into the middle

of the little congregation. He obeys, perhaps, with some feeble glimmer

of hope playing round his heart. There is a quickened attention in the

audience; the enemies are watching Him with gratification, because they

hope He is going to do what they think to be a sin.

And then He reduces them all to silence and perplexity by His

question--sharp, penetrating, unexpected: Is it lawful to do good on

the Sabbath day, or to do evil? You are ready to blame Me as breaking

your Sabbatarian regulations if I heal this man. What if I do not heal

him? Will that be doing nothing? Will not that be a worse breach of the

Sabbath day than if I heal him?'

He takes the question altogether out of the region of pedantic

Rabbinism, and bases His vindication upon the two great principles that

mercy and help hallow any day, and that not to do good when we can is

to do harm, and not to save life is to kill.

They are silenced. His arrow touches them; they do not speak because

they cannot answer; and they will not yield. There is a struggle going

on in them, which Christ sees, and He fixes them with that steadfast

look of His; of which our Evangelist is the only one who tells us what

it expressed, and by what it was occasioned. He looked round about on

them with anger, being grieved.' Mark the combination of emotions,

anger and grief. And mark the reason for both; the hardness,' or as you

will see, if you use the Revised Version, the hardening' of their

hearts--a process which He saw going on before Him as He looked at

them.

Now I do not need to follow the rest of the story, how He turns away

from them because He will not waste any more words on them, else He had

done more harm than good. He heals the man. They hurry from the

synagogue to prove their zeal for the sanctifying of the Sabbath day by

hatching a plot on it for murdering Him. I leave all that, and turn to

the thoughts suggested by this look of Christ as explained by the

Evangelist.

I. Consider then, first, the solemn fact of Christ's anger.

It is the only occasion, so far as I remember, upon which that emotion

is attributed to Him. Once, and once only, the flash came out of the

clear sky of that meek and gentle heart. He was once angry; and we may

learn the lesson of the possibilities that lay slumbering in His love.

He was only once angry, and we may learn the lesson that His perfect

and divine charity is not easily provoked.' These very words from

Paul's wonderful picture may teach us that the perfection of divine

charity does not consist in its being incapable of becoming angry at

all, but only in its not being angry except upon grave and good

occasion.

Christ's anger was part of the perfection of His manhood. The man that

cannot be angry at evil lacks enthusiasm for good. The nature that is

incapable of being touched with generous and righteous indignation is

so, generally, either because it lacks fire and emotion altogether, or

because its vigour has been dissolved into a lazy indifference and easy

good nature which it mistakes for love. Better the heat of the tropics,

though sometimes the thunderstorms may gather, than the white calmness

of the frozen poles. Anger is not weakness, but it is strength, if

there be these three conditions, if it be evoked by a righteous and

unselfish cause, if it be kept under rigid control, and if there be

nothing in it of malice, even when it prompts to punishment. Anger is

just and right when it is not produced by the mere friction of personal

irritation (like electricity by rubbing), but is excited by the

contemplation of evil. It is part of the marks of a good man that he

kindles into wrath when he sees the oppressor's wrong.' If you went out

hence to-night, and saw some drunken ruffian beating his wife or

ill-using his child, would you not do well to be angry? And when

nations have risen up, as our own nation did seventy years ago in a

paroxysm of righteous indignation, and vowed that British soil should

no more bear the devilish abomination of slavery, was there nothing

good and great in that wrath? So it is one of the strengths of man that

he shall be able to glow with indignation at evil.

Only all such emotion must be kept well in hand must never be suffered

to degenerate into passion. Passion is always weak, emotion is an

element of strength.

The gods approve

The depth and not the tumult of the soul.'

But where a man does not let his wrath against evil go sputtering off

aimlessly, like a box of fireworks set all alight at once, then it

comes to be a strength and a help to much that is good.

The other condition that makes wrath righteous and essential to the

perfection of a man, is that there shall be in it no taint of malice.

Anger may impel to punish and not be malicious, if its reason for

punishment is the passionless impulse of justice or the reformation of

the wrong-doer. Then it is pure and true and good. Such wrath is a part

of the perfection of humanity, and such wrath was in Jesus Christ.

But, still further, Christ's anger was part of His revelation of God.

What belongs to perfect man belongs to God in whose image man was made.

People are very often afraid of attributing to the divine nature that

emotion of wrath, very unnecessarily, I think, and to the detriment of

all their conceptions of the divine nature.

There is no reason why we should not ascribe emotion to Him. Passions

God has not; emotions the Bible represents Him as having. The god of

the philosopher has none. He is a cold, impassive Somewhat, more like a

block of ice than a god. But the God of the Bible has a heart that can

be touched, and is capable of something like what we call in ourselves

emotion. And if we rightly think of God as Love, there is no more

reason why we should not think of God as having the other emotion of

wrath; for as I have shown you, there is nothing in wrath itself which

is derogatory to the perfection of the loftiest spiritual nature. In

God's anger there is no self-regarding irritation, no passion, no

malice. It is the necessary displeasure and aversion of infinite purity

at the sight of man's impurity. God's anger is His love thrown back

upon itself from unreceptive and unloving hearts. Just as a wave that

would roll in smooth, unbroken, green beauty into the open door of some

sea-cave is dashed back in spray and foam from some grim rock, so the

love of God, meeting the unloving heart that rejects it, and the purity

of God meeting the impurity of man, necessarily become that solemn

reality, the wrath of the most high God. A God all mercy were a God

unjust.' The judge is condemned when the culprit is acquitted; and he

that strikes out of the divine nature the capacity for anger against

sin, little as he thinks it, is degrading the righteousness and

diminishing the love of God.

Oh, dear brethren, I beseech you do not let any easygoing gospel that

has nothing to say to you about God's necessary aversion from, and

displeasure with, and chastisement of, your sins and mine, draw you

away from the solemn and wholesome belief that there is that in God

which must hate and war against and chastise our evil, and that if

there were not, He would be neither worth loving nor worth trusting.

And His Son, in His tears and in His tenderness, which were habitual,

and also in that lightning flash which once shot across the sky of His

nature, was revealing Him to us. The Gospel is not only the revelation

of God's righteousness for faith, but is also the revelation of His

wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.'

It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.' The ox, with the yoke

on his neck, lashes out with his obstinate heels against the driver's

goad. He does not break the goad, but only embrues his own limbs. Do

not you do that!

II. And now, once more, let me ask you to look at the compassion which

goes with our Lord's anger here; being grieved at the hardness of their

hearts.'

The somewhat singular word rendered here grieved,' may either simply

imply that this sorrow co-existed with the anger, or it may describe

the sorrow as being sympathy or compassion. I am disposed to take it in

the latter application, and so the lesson we gather from these words is

the blessed thought that Christ's wrath was all blended with compassion

and sympathetic sorrow.

He looked upon these scribes and Pharisees sitting there with hatred in

their eyes; and two emotions, which many men suppose as discrepant and

incongruous as fire and water, rose together in His heart: wrath, which

fell on the evil; sorrow, which bedewed the doers of it. The anger was

for the hardening, the compassion was for the hardeners.

If there be this blending of wrath and sorrow, the combination takes

away from the anger all possibility of an admixture of these

questionable ingredients, which mar human wrath, and make men shrink

from attributing so turbid and impure an emotion to God. It is an anger

which lies harmoniously in the heart side by side with the tenderest

pity--the truest, deepest sorrow.

Again, if Christ's sorrow flowed out thus along with His anger when He

looked upon men's evil, then we understand in how tragic a sense He was

a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.' The pain and the burden

and the misery of His earthly life had no selfish basis. They were not

like the pain and the burdens and the misery that so many of us howl

out so loudly about, arising from causes affecting ourselves. But for

Him--with His perfect purity, with His deep compassion, with His heart

that was the most sensitive heart that ever beat in a human breast,

because it was the only perfectly pure one that ever beat there--for

Him to go amongst men was to be wounded and bruised and hacked by the

sharp swords of their sins.

Everything that He touched burned that pure nature, which was sensitive

to evil, like an infant's hand to hot iron. His sorrow and His anger

were the two sides of the medal. His feelings in looking on sin were

like a piece of woven stuff with a pattern on either side, on one the

fiery threads--the wrath; on the other the silvery tints of sympathetic

pity. A warp of wrath, a woof of sorrow, dew and flame married and knit

together.

And may we not draw from this same combination of these two apparently

discordant emotions in our Lord, the lesson of what it is in men that

makes them the true subjects of pity? Ay, these scribes and Pharisees

had very little notion that there was anything about them to

compassionate. But the thing which in the sight of God makes the true

evil of men's condition is not their circumstances but their sins. The

one thing to weep for when we look at the world is not its misfortunes,

but its wickedness. Ah! brother, that is the misery of miseries; that

is the one thing worth crying about in our own lives, or in anybody

else's. From this combination of indignation and pity, we may learn how

we should look upon evil. Men are divided into two classes in their way

of looking at wickedness in this world. One set are rigid and stern,

and crackling into wrath; the other set placid and good-natured, and

ready to weep over it as a misfortune and a calamity, but afraid or

unwilling to say: These poor creatures are to be blamed as well as

pitied.' It is of prime importance that we all should try to take both

points of view, looking on sin as a thing to be frowned at, but also

looking on it as a thing to be wept over; and to regard evil-doers as

persons that deserve to be blamed and to be chastised, and made to feel

the bitterness of their evil, and not to interfere too much with the

salutary laws that bring down sorrow upon men's heads if they have been

doing wrong, but, on the other hand, to take care that our sense of

justice does not swallow up the compassion that weeps for the criminal

as an object of pity. Public opinion and legislation swing from the one

extreme to the other. We have to make an effort to keep in the centre,

and never to look round in anger, unsoftened by pity, nor in pity,

enfeebled by being separated from righteous indignation.

III. Let me now deal briefly with the last point that is here, namely,

the occasion for both the sorrow and the anger, Being grieved at the

hardening of the hearts.'

As I said at the beginning of these remarks, hardness,' the rendering

of our Authorised Version, is not quite so near the mark as that of the

Revised Version, which speaks not so much of a condition as of a

process: He was grieved at the hardening of their hearts,' which He saw

going on there.

And what was hardening their hearts? It was He. Why were their hearts

being hardened? Because they were looking at Him, His graciousness, His

goodness, and His power, and were steeling themselves against Him,

opposing to His grace and tenderness their own obstinate determination.

Some little gleams of light were coming in at their windows, and they

clapped the shutters up. Some tones of His voice were coming into their

ears, and they stuffed their fingers into them. They half felt that if

they let themselves be influenced by Him it was all over, and so they

set their teeth and steadied themselves in their antagonism.

And that is what some of you are doing now. Jesus Christ is never

preached to you, even although it is as imperfectly as I do it, but

that you either gather yourselves into an attitude of resistance, or,

at least, of mere indifference till the flow of the sermon's words is

done; or else open your hearts to His mercy and His grace.

Oh, dear brethren, will you take this lesson of the last part of my

text, that nothing so tends to harden a man's heart to the gospel of

Jesus Christ as religious formalism? If Jesus Christ were to come in

here now, and stand where I am standing, and look round about upon this

congregation, I wonder how many a highly respectable and perfectly

proper man and woman, church and chapel-goer, who keeps the Sabbath

day, He would find on whom He had to look with grief not unmingled with

anger, because they were hardening their hearts against Him now. I am

sure there are some of such among my present audience. I am sure there

are some of you about whom it is true that the publicans and the

harlots will go into the Kingdom of God before you,' because in their

degradation they may be nearer the lowly penitence and the

consciousness of their own misery and need, which will open their eyes

to see the beauty and the preciousness of Jesus Christ.

Dear brother, let no reliance upon any external attention to religious

ordinances; no interest, born of long habit of hearing sermons; no

trust in the fact of your being communicants, blind you to this, that

all these things may come between you and your Saviour, and so may take

you away into the outermost darkness.

Dear brother or sister, you are a sinner. The God in whose hand thy

breath is, and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified.' You

have forgotten Him; you have lived to please yourselves. I charge you

with nothing criminal, with nothing gross or sensual; I know nothing

about you in such matters; but I know this--that you have a heart like

mine, that we have all of us the one character, and that we all need

the one gospel of that Saviour who bare our sins in His own body on the

tree,' and died that whosoever trusts in Him may live here and yonder.

I beseech you, harden not your hearts, but to-day hear His voice, and

remember the solemn words which not I, but the Apostle of Love, has

spoken: He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, he that

believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth

upon him.' Flee to that sorrowing and dying Saviour, and take the

cleansing which He gives, that you may be safe on the sure foundation

when God shall arise to do His strange work of judgment, and may never

know the awful meaning of that solemn word--the wrath of the Lamb.'

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AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST

And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the

Herodlans against Him, how they might destroy Him. 7. But Jesus

withdrew Himself with His disciples to the sea: and a great multitude

from Galilee followed Him, and from Jud�a 8. And from Jerusalem, and

from Idum�a beyond Jordan; and they about Tyre and Sidon, a great

multitude, when they had heard what great things He did, came unto Him.

9. And He spake to His disciples, that a small ship should wait on Him

because of the multitude, lest they should throng Him. 10. For he had

healed many; insomuch that they pressed upon Him for to touch Him, as

many as had plagues. 11. And unclean spirits, when they saw Him, fell

down before Him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God. 12. And He

straitly charged them that they should not make Him known. 13. And He

goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto Him whom He would: and they

came unto Him. 14. And He ordained twelve, that they should be with

Him, and that He might send them forth to preach, 15. And to have power

to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils: 16. And Simon He surnamed

Peter; 17. And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James;

and He surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder: 18. And

Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James

the son of Alph�us Thadd�us Simon the Canaanite, 19. And Judas

Iscariot, which also betrayed Him: and they went into an house.'--Mark

iii. 6-19.

A common object of hatred cements antagonists into strange alliance.

Hawks and kites join in assailing a dove. Pharisees and Herod's

partisans were antipodes; the latter must have parted with all their

patriotism and much of their religion, but both parties were ready to

sink their differences in order to get rid of Jesus, whom they

instinctively felt to threaten destruction to them both. Such alliances

of mutually repellent partisans against Christ's cause are not out of

date yet. Extremes join forces against what stands in the middle

between them.

Jesus withdrew from the danger which was preparing, not from selfish

desire to preserve life, but because His hour' was not yet come.

Discretion is sometimes the better part of valour. To avoid peril is

right, to fly from duty is not. There are times when Luther's Here I

stand; I can do nothing else; God help me! Amen,' must be our motto;

and there are times when the persecuted in one city are bound to flee

to another. We shall best learn to distinguish between these times by

keeping close to Jesus.

But side by side with official hatred, and in some measure the cause of

it, was a surging rush of popular enthusiasm. Pharisees took offence at

Christ's breaches of law in his Sabbath miracles. The crowd gaped at

the wonders, and grasped at the possibility of cures for their

afflicted. Neither party in the least saw below the surface. Mark

describes two multitudes'--one made up of Galileans who, he accurately

says, followed Him'; while the other came to Him' from further afield.

Note the geographical order in the list: the southern country of Judea,

and the capital; then the trans-Jordanic territories beginning with

Idumea in the south, and coming northward to Perea; and then the

north-west bordering lands of Tyre and Sidon. Thus three parts of a

circle round Galilee as centre are described. Observe, also, how turbid

and impure the full stream of popular enthusiasm was.

Christ's gracious, searching, illuminating words had no attraction for

the multitude. The great things He did' drew them with idle curiosity

or desire for bodily healing. Still more impure was the motive which

impelled the evil spirits' to approach Him, drawn by a strange

fascination to gaze on Him whom they knew to be their conqueror, and

hated as the Son of God. Terror and malice drove them to His presence,

and wrung from them acknowledgment of His supremacy. What intenser pain

can any hell have than the clear recognition of Christ's character and

power, coupled with fiercely obstinate and utterly vain rebellion

against Him? Note, further, our Lord's recoil from the tumult. He had

retired before cunning plotters; He withdrew from gaping admirers, who

did not know what they were crowding to, nor cared for His best gifts.

It was no fastidious shrinking from low natures, nor any selfish wish

for repose, that made Him take refuge in the fisherman's little boat.

But His action teaches us a lesson that the best Christian work is

hindered rather than helped by the popularity' which dazzles many, and

is often mistaken for success. Christ's motive for seeking to check

rather than to stimulate such impure admiration, was that it would

certainly increase the rulers' antagonism, and might even excite the

attention of the Roman authorities, who had to keep a very sharp

outlook for agitations among their turbulent subjects. Therefore Christ

first took to the boat, and then withdrew into the hills above the

lake.

In that seclusion He summoned to Him a small nucleus, as it would

appear, by individual selection. These would be such of the multitude'

as He had discerned to be humble souls who yearned for deliverance from

worse than outward diseases or bondage, and who therefore waited for a

Messiah who was more than a physician or a patriot warrior. A personal

call and a personal yielding make true disciples. Happy we if our

history can be summed up in He called them unto Him, and they came.'

But there was an election within the chosen circle.

The choice of the Twelve marks an epoch in the development of Christ's

work, and was occasioned, at this point of time, by both the currents

which we find running so strong at this point in it. Precisely because

Pharisaic hatred was becoming so threatening, and popular enthusiasm

was opening opportunities which He singly could not utilise, He felt

His need both for companions and for messengers. Therefore He

surrounded Himself with that inner circle, and did it then, The

appointment of the Apostles has been treated by some as a masterpiece

of organisation, which largely contributed to the progress of

Christianity, and by others as an endowment of the Twelve with

supernatural powers which are transmitted on certain outward conditions

to their successors, and thereby give effect to sacraments, and are the

legitimate channels for grace. But if we take Mark's statement of their

function, our view will be much simpler. The number of twelve

distinctly alludes to the tribes of Israel, and implies that the new

community is to be the true people of God.

The Apostles were chosen for two ends, of which the former was

preparatory to the latter. The latter was the more important and

permanent, and hence gave the office its name. They were to be with

Christ,' and we may fairly suppose that He wished that companionship

for His own sake as well as for theirs. No doubt, the primary purpose

was their training for their being sent forth to preach. But no doubt,

also, the lonely Christ craved for companions, and was strengthened and

soothed by even the imperfect sympathy and unintelligent love of these

humble adherents. Who can fail to hear tones which reveal how much He

hungered for companions in His grateful acknowledgment, Ye are they

which have continued with Me in My temptations'? It still remains true

that we must be with Christ' much and long before we can go forth as

His messengers.

Note, too, that the miracle-working power comes last as least

important. Peter had understood his office better than some of his

alleged successors, when he made its qualification to be having been

with Jesus during His life, and its office to be that of being

witnesses of His resurrection (Acts i.).

The list of the Apostles presents many interesting points, at which we

can only glance. If compared with the lists in the other Gospels and in

Acts, it brings out clearly the division into three groups of four

persons each. The order in which the four are named varies within the

limits of each group; but none of the first four are ever in the lists

degraded to the second or third group, and none of these are ever

promoted beyond their own class. So there were apparently degrees among

the Twelve, depending, no doubt, on spiritual receptivity, each man

being as close to the Lord, and gifted with as much of the sunshine of

His love, as he was fit for.

Further, their places in relation to each other vary. The first four

are always first, and Peter is always at their head; but in Matthew and

Luke, the pairs of brothers are kept together, while, in Mark, Andrew

is parted from his brother Simon, and put last of the first four. That

place indicates the closer relation of the other three to Jesus, of

which several instances will occur to every one. But Mark puts James

before John, and his list evidently reflects the memory of the original

superiority of James as probably the elder. There was a time when John

was known as James's brother.' But the time came, as Acts shows, when

John took precedence, and was closely linked with Peter as the two

leaders. So the ties of kindred may be loosened, and new bonds of

fellowship created by similarity of relation to Jesus. In His kingdom,

the elder may fall behind the younger. Rank in it depends on likeness

to the king.

The surname of Boanerges, Sons of Thunder,' given to the brothers, can

scarcely be supposed to commemorate a characteristic prior to

discipleship. Christ does not perpetuate old faults in his servants'

new names. It must rather refer to excellences which were heightened

and hallowed in them by following Jesus. Probably, therefore, it points

to a certain majesty of utterance. Do we not hear the boom of

thunder-peals in the prologue to John's Gospel, perhaps the grandest

words ever written?

In the second quartet, Bartholomew is probably Nathanael; and, if so,

his conjunction with Philip is an interesting coincidence with John i.

45, which tells that Philip brought him to Jesus. All three Gospels put

the two names together, as if the two men had kept up their

association; but, in Acts, Thomas takes precedence of Bartholomew, as

if a closer spiritual relationship had by degrees sprung up between

Philip, the leader of the second group, and Thomas, which slackened the

old bond. Note that these two, who are coupled in Acts, are two of the

interlocutors in the final discourses in the upper room (John xiv.).

Mark, like Luke, puts Matthew before Thomas; but Matthew puts himself

last, and adds his designation of publican,'--a beautiful example of

humility.

The last group contains names which have given commentators trouble. I

am not called on to discuss the question of the identity of the James

who is one of its members. Thaddeus is by Luke called Judas, both in

his Gospel and in the Acts; and by Matthew, according to one reading,

Lebbaeus. Both names are probably surnames, the former being probably

derived from a word meaning breast, and the latter from one signifying

heart. They seem, therefore, to be nearly equivalent, and may express

large-heartedness.

Simon the Canaanite' (Auth. Ver.) is properly the Canan�an' (Rev.

Ver.). There was no alien in blood among the Twelve. The name is a late

Aramaic word meaning zealot. Hence Luke translates it for Gentile

readers. He was one of the fanatical sect who would not have anything

to do with Rome, and who played such a terrible part in the final

catastrophe of Israel. The baser elements were purged out of his fiery

enthusiasm when he became Christ's man. The hallowing and curbing of

earthly passion, the ennobling of enthusiasm, are achieved when the

pure flame of love to Christ burns up their dross.

Judas Iscariot closes the list, cold and venomous as a snake.

Enthusiasm in him there was none. The problem of his character is too

complex to be entered on here. But we may lay to heart the warning

that, if a man is not knit to Christ by heart's love and obedience, the

more he comes into contact with Jesus the more will he recoil from Him,

till at last he is borne away by a passion of detestation. Christ is

either a sure foundation or a stone of stumbling.

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HE IS BESIDE HIMSELF'

And when His friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on Him: for

they said, He is beside Himself'--Mark iii. 21.

There had been great excitement in the little town of Capernaum in

consequence of Christ's teachings and miracles. It had been intensified

by His infractions of the Rabbinical Sabbath law, and by His

appointment of the twelve Apostles. The sacerdotal party in Capernaum

apparently communicated with Jerusalem, with the result of bringing a

deputation from the Sanhedrim to look into things, and see what this

new rabbi was about. A plot for His assassination was secretly on foot.

And at this juncture the incident of my text, which we owe to Mark

alone of the Evangelists, occurs. Christ's friends, apparently the

members of His own family--sad to say, as would appear from the

context, including His mother--came with a kindly design to rescue

their misguided kinsman from danger, and laying hands upon Him, to

carry Him off to some safe restraint in Nazareth, where He might

indulge His delusions without doing any harm to Himself. They wish to

excuse His eccentricities on the ground that He is not quite

responsible--scarcely Himself; and so to blunt the point of the more

hostile explanation of the Pharisees that He is in league with

Beelzebub.

Conceive of that! The Incarnate Wisdom shielded by friends from the

accusation that He is a demoniac by the apology that He is a lunatic!

What do you think of popular judgment? But this half-pitying,

half-contemptuous, and wholly benevolent excuse for Jesus, though it be

the words of friends, is like the words of His enemies, in that it

contains a distorted reflection of His true character. And if we will

think about it, I fancy that we may gather from it some lessons not

altogether unprofitable.

I. The first point, then, that I make, is just this--there was

something in the character of Jesus Christ which could be plausibly

explained to commonplace people as madness.

A well-known modern author has talked a great deal about the sweet

reasonableness of Jesus Christ.' His contemporaries called it simple

insanity; if they did not say He hath a devil,' as well as He is mad.'

Now, if we try to throw ourselves back to the life of Jesus Christ, as

it was unfolded day by day, and think nothing about either what

preceded in the revelation of the Old Covenant, or what followed in the

history of Christianity, we shall not be so much at a loss to account

for such explanations of it as these of my text. Remember that charges

like these, in all various keys of contempt or of pity, or of fierce

hostility, have been cast against all innovators, against every man

that has broken a new path; against all teachers that have cut

themselves apart from tradition and encrusted formulas; against every

man that has waged war with the conventionalisms of society; against

all idealists who have dreamed dreams and seen visions; against every

man that has been touched with a lofty enthusiasm of any sort; and,

most of all, against all to whom God and their relations to Him, the

spiritual world and their relations to it, the future life and their

relations to that, have become dominant forces and motives in their

lives.

The short and easy way with which the world excuses itself from the

poignant lessons and rebukes which come from such lives is something

like that of my text, He is beside himself.' And the proof that he is

beside himself is that he does not act in the same fashion as these

incomparably wise people that make up the majority in every age. There

is nothing that commonplace men hate like anything fresh and original.

There is nothing that men of low aims are so utterly bewildered to

understand, and which so completely passes all the calculus of which

they are masters, as lofty self-abnegation. And wherever you get men

smitten with such, or with anything like it, you will find all the

low-aimed people gathering round them like bats round a torch in a

cavern, flapping their obscene wings and uttering their harsh croaks,

and only desiring to quench the light.

One of our cynical authors says that it is the mark of a genius that

all the dullards are against him. It is the mark of the man who dwells

with God that all the people whose portion is in this life with one

consent say, He is beside himself.'

And so the Leader of them all was served in His day; and that purest,

perfectest, noblest, loftiest, most utterly self-oblivious, and

God-and-man-devoted life that ever was lived upon earth, was disposed

of in this extremely simple method, so comforting to the complacency of

the critics--either He is beside Himself,' or He hath a devil.'

And yet, is not the saying a witness to the presence in that wondrous

and gentle career of an element entirely unlike what exists in the most

of mankind? Here was a new star in the heavens, and the law of its

orbit was manifestly different from that of all the rest. That is what

eccentric' means--that the life to which it applies does not move round

the same centre as do the other satellites, but has a path of its own.

Away out yonder somewhere, in the infinite depths, lay the hidden point

which drew it to itself and determined its magnificent and

overwhelmingly vast orbit. These men witness to Jesus Christ, even by

their half excuse, half reproach, that His was a life unique and

inexplicable by the ordinary motives which shape the little lives of

the masses of mankind. They witness to His entire neglect of ordinary

and low aims; to His complete absorption in lofty purposes, which to

His purblind would-be critics seem to be delusions and fond

imaginations that could never be realised. They witness to what His

disciples remembered had been written of Him, The zeal of Thy house

hath eaten Me up'; to His perfect devotion to man and to God. They

witness to His consciousness of a mission; and there is nothing that

men are so ready to resent as that. To tell a world, engrossed in self

and low aims, that one is sent from God to do His will, and to spread

it among men, is the sure way to have all the heavy artillery and the

lighter weapons of the world turned against one.

These characteristics of Jesus seem then to be plainly implied in that

allegation of insanity--lofty aims, absolute originality, utter

self-abnegation, the continual consciousness of communion with God,

devotion to the service of man, and the sense of being sent by God for

the salvation of the world. It was because of these that His friends

said, He is beside Himself.'

These men judged themselves by judging Jesus Christ. And all men do.

There are as many different estimates of a great man as there are

people to estimate, and hence the diversity of opinion about all the

characters that fill history and the galleries of the past. The eye

sees what it brings and no more. To discern the greatness of a great

man, or the goodness of a good one, is to possess, in lower measure,

some portion of that which we discern. Sympathy is the condition of

insight into character. And so our Lord said once, He that receiveth a

prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward,'

because he is a dumb prophet himself, and has a lower power of the same

gift in him, which is eloquent on the prophet's lips.

In like manner, to discern what is in Christ is the test of whether

there is any of it in myself. And thus it is no mere arbitrary

appointment which suspends your salvation and mine on our answer to

this question, What think ye of Christ?' The answer will be--I was

going to say--the elixir of our whole moral and spiritual nature. It

will be the outcome of our inmost selves. This ploughshare turns up the

depths of the soil. That is eternally true which the grey-bearded

Simeon, the representative of the Old, said when he took the Infant in

his arms and looked down upon the unconscious, placid, smooth face.

This Child is set for the rise and fall of many in Israel, that the

thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.' Your answer to that question

discloses your whole spiritual condition and capacities. And so to

judge Christ is to be judged by Him; and what we think Him to be, that

we make Him to ourselves. The question which tests us is not merely,

Whom do men say that I am?' It is easy to answer that; but this is the

all-important interrogation, Whom do ye say that I am?' I pray that we

may each answer as he to whom it was first put answered it, Rabbi, Thou

art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel!'

II. Secondly, mark the similarity of the estimate which will be passed

by the world on all Christ's true followers.

The same elements exist to-day, the same intolerance of anything higher

than the low level, the same incapacity to comprehend simple devotion

and lofty aims, the same dislike of a man who comes and rebukes by his

silent presence the vices in which he takes no part. And it is a great

deal easier to say, Poor fool! enthusiastic fanatic!' than it is to lay

to heart the lesson that lies in such a life.

The one thing, or at least the principal thing, which the Christianity

of this generation wants is a little more of this madness. It would be

a great deal better for us who call ourselves Christians if we had

earned and deserved the world's sneer, He is beside himself.' But our

modern Christianity, like an epicure's rare wines, is preferred iced.

And the last thing that anybody would think of suggesting in connection

with the demeanour--either the conduct or the words--of the average

Christian man of this day is that his religion had touched his brain a

little.

But, dear friends, go in Christ's footsteps and you will have the same

missiles flung at you. If a church or an individual has earned the

praise of the outside ring of godless people because its or his

religion is reasonable and moderate; and kept in its proper place; and

not allowed to interfere with social enjoyments, and political and

municipal corruptions,' and the like, then there is much reason to ask

whether that church or man is Christian after Christ's pattern. Oh, I

pray that there may come down on the professing Church of this

generation a baptism of the Spirit; and I am quite sure that when that

comes, the people that admire moderation and approve of religion, but

like it to be kept in its own place,' will be all ready to say, when

they hear the sons and the daughters prophesying, and the old men

seeing visions, and the young men dreaming dreams,' and the fiery

tongues uttering their praises of God, These men are full of new wine!'

Would we were full of the new wine of the Spirit! Do you think any one

would say of your religion that you were beside yourself,' because you

made so much of it? They said it about your Master, and if you were

like Him it would be said, in one tone or another, about you. We are

all desperately afraid of enthusiasm to-day. It seems to me that it is

the want of the Christian Church, and that we are not enthusiastic

because we don't half believe the truths that we say are our creed.

One more word. Christian men and women have to make up their minds to

go on in the path of devotion, conformity to Christ's pattern,

self-sacrificing surrender, without minding one bit what is said about

them. Brethren, I do not think Christian people are in half as much

danger of dropping the standard of the Christian life by reason of the

sarcasms of the world, as they are by reason of the low tone of the

Church. Don't you take your ideas of what a reasonable Christian life

is from the men round you, howsoever they may profess to be Christ's

followers. And let us keep so near the Master that we may be able to

say, With me it is a very small matter to be judged of you, or of man's

judgment. He that judgeth me is the Lord.' Never mind, though they say,

Beside himself!' Never mind, though they say, Oh! utterly extravagant

and impracticable.' Better that than to be patted on the back by a

world that likes nothing so well as a Church with its teeth drawn, and

its claws cut; which may be made a plaything and an ornament by the

world. And that is what much of our modern Christianity has come to be.

III. Lastly, notice the sanity of the insane.

I have only space to put before you three little pictures, and ask you

what you think of them. I dare say the originals might be found among

us without much search.

Here is one. Suppose a man who, like the most of us, believes that

there is a God, believes that he has something to do with Him, believes

that he is going to die, believes that the future state is, in some way

or other, and in some degree, one of retribution; and from Monday

morning to Saturday night he ignores all these facts, and never allows

them to influence one of his actions. May I venture to speak direct to

this hypothetical person, whose originals are dotted about in my

audience? It would be the very same to you if you said No' instead of

Yes' to all these affirmations. The fact that there is a God does not

make a bit of difference to what you do, or what you think, or what you

feel. The fact that there is a future life makes just as little

difference. You are going on a voyage next week, and you never dream of

getting your outfit. You believe all these things, you are an

intelligent man--you are very likely, in a great many ways, a very

amiable and pleasant one; you do many things very well; you cultivate

congenial virtues, and you abhor uncongenial vices; but you never think

about God; and you have made absolutely no preparation whatever for

stepping into the scene in which you know that you are to live.

Well, you may be a very wise man, a student with high aims, cultivated

understanding, and all the rest of it. I want to know whether, taking

into account all that you are, and your inevitable connection with God,

and your certain death and certain life in a state of retribution--I

want to know whether we should call your conduct sanity or insanity?

Which? Take another picture. Here is a man that believes--really

believes--the articles of the Christian creed, and in some measure has

received them into his heart and life. He believes that Jesus Christ,

the Son of God, died for him upon the Cross, and yet his heart has but

the feeblest tick of pulsating love in answer. He believes that prayer

will help a man in all circumstances, and yet he hardly ever prays. He

believes that self-denial is the law of the Christian life, and yet he

lives for himself. He believes that he is here as a pilgrim' and as a

sojourner,' and yet his heart clings to the world, and his hand would

fain cling to it, like that of a drowning man swept over Niagara, and

catching at anything on the banks. He believes that he is sent into the

world to be a light' of the world, and yet from out of his

self-absorbed life there has hardly ever come one sparkle of light into

any dark heart. And that is a picture, not exaggerated, of the enormous

majority of professing Christians in so-called Christian lands. And I

want to know whether we shall call that sanity or insanity? The last of

my little miniatures is that of a man who keeps in close touch with

Jesus Christ, and so, like Him, can say, Lo! I come; I delight to do

Thy will, O Lord. Thy law is within my heart.' He yields to the strong

motives and principles that flow from the Cross of Jesus Christ, and,

drawn by the mercies of God,' gives himself a living sacrifice' to be

used as God will. Aims as lofty as the Throne which Christ His Brother

fills; sacrifice as entire as that on which his trembling hope relies;

realisation of the unseen future as vivid and clear as His who could

say that He was in Heaven' whilst He walked the earth; subjugation of

self as complete as that of the Lord's, who pleased not Himself, and

came not to do His own will--these are some of the characteristics

which mark the true disciple of Jesus Christ. And I want to know

whether the conduct of the man who believes in the love that God hath

to him, as manifested in the Cross, and surrenders his whole self

thereto, despising the world and living for God, for Christ, for man,

for eternity--whether his conduct is insanity or sanity? The fear of

the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.'

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THE MISTAKES OF CHRIST'S FOES AND FRIENDS

And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub,

and by the prince of the devils casteth He out devils. 23. And He

called them unto Him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan

cast out Satan? 24. And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that

kingdom cannot stand. 25. And if a house be divided against itself,

that house cannot stand. 26. And if Satan rise up against himself, and

be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end. 27. No man can enter into

a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind

the strong man; and then he will spoil his house. 28. Verily I say unto

you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies

wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: 29. But he that shall blaspheme

against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of

eternal damnation: 30. Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.

31. There came then His brethren and His mother, and, standing without,

sent unto Him, calling Him. 32. And the multitude sat about Him, and

they said unto Him, Behold, Thy mother and Thy brethren without seek

for Thee. 33. And He answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my

brethren? 34. And He looked round about on them which sat about Him,

and said, Behold My mother and My brethren! 35. For whosoever shall do

the will of God, the same is My brother, and My sister, and

mother.'--Mark iii. 22-35.

We have in this passage three parts,--the outrageous official

explanation of Christ and His works, the Lord's own solution of His

miracles, and His relatives' well-meant attempt to secure Him, with His

answer to it.

I. The scribes, like Christ's other critics, judged themselves in

judging Him, and bore witness to the truths which they were eager to

deny. Their explanation would be ludicrous, if it were not dreadful.

Mark that it distinctly admits His miracles. It is not fashionable at

present to attach much weight to the fact that none of Christ's enemies

ever doubted these. Of course, the credence of men, in an age which

believed in the possibility of the supernatural, is more easy, and

their testimony less cogent, than that of a jury of twentieth-century

scientific sceptics. But the expectation of miracle had been dead for

centuries when Christ came; and at first, at all events, no

anticipation that He would work them made it easier to believe that He

did.

It would have been a sure way of exploding His pretensions, if the

officials could have shown that His miracles were tricks. Not without

weight is the attestation from the foe that this man casteth out

demons.' The preposterous explanation that He cast out demons by

Beelzebub, is the very last resort of hatred so deep that it will

father an absurdity rather than accept the truth. It witnesses to the

inefficiency of explanations of Him which omit the supernatural. The

scribes recognised that here was a man who was in touch with the

unseen. They fell back upon by Beelzebub,' and thereby admitted that

humanity, without seeing something more at the back of it, never made

such a man as Jesus.

It is very easy to solve an insoluble problem, if you begin by taking

the insoluble elements out of it. That is how a great many modern

attempts to account for Christianity go to work. Knock out the

miracles, waive Christ's own claims as mistaken reports, declare His

resurrection to be entirely unhistorical, and the remainder will be

easily accounted for, and not worth accounting for. But the whole life

of the Christ of the Gospels is adequately explained by no explanation

which leaves out His coming forth from the Father, and His exercise of

powers above those of humanity and nature.'

This explanation is an instance of the credulity of unbelief. It is

more difficult to believe the explanation than the alternative which it

is framed to escape. If like produces like, Christ cannot be explained

by anything but the admission of His divine nature. Serpents' eggs do

not hatch out into doves. The difficulties of faith are gnats' beside

the camels' which unbelief has to swallow.

II. The true explanation of Christ's power over demoniacs. Jesus has no

difficulty in putting aside the absurd theory that, in destroying the

kingdom of evil, He was a servant of evil and its dark ruler.

Common-sense says, If Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against

himself, and his kingdom cannot stand. An old play is entitled, The

Devil is an Ass,' but he is not such an ass as to fight against

himself. As the proverb has it, Hawks do not pick out hawks' eyes.'

It would carry us too far to deal at length with the declarations of

our Lord here, which throw a dim light into the dark world of

supernatural evil. His words are far too solemn and didactic to be

taken as accommodations to popular prejudice, or as mere metaphor. Is

it not strange that people will believe in spiritual communications,

when they are vouched for by a newspaper editor, more readily than when

Christ asserts their reality? Is it not strange that scientists, who

find difficulty in the importance which Christianity attaches to man in

the plan of the universe, and will not believe that all its starry orbs

were built for him (which Christianity does not allege), should be

incredulous of teachings which reveal a crowd of higher intelligences?

Jesus not only tests the futile explanation by common-sense, but goes

on to suggest the true one. He accepts the belief that there is a

prince of the demons.' He regards the souls of men who have not yielded

themselves to God as His goods.' He declares that the lord of the house

must be bound before his property can be taken from him. We cannot stay

to enlarge on the solemn view of the condition of unredeemed men thus

given. Let us not put it lightly away. But we must note how deep into

the centre of Christ's work this teaching leads us. Translated into

plain language it just means that Christ by incarnation, life, death,

resurrection, ascension, and present work from the throne, has broken

the power of evil in its central hold. He has crushed the serpent's

head, his heel is firmly planted on it, and, though the reptile may

still swinge the scaly horror of his folded tail,' it is but the dying

flurries of the creature. He was manifested that He might destroy the

works of the devil.'

No trace of indignation can be detected in Christ's answer to the

hideous charge. But His patient heart overflows in pity for the

reckless slanderers, and He warns them that they are coming near the

edge of a precipice. Their malicious blindness is hurrying them towards

a sin which hath never forgiveness. Blasphemy is, in form, injurious

speaking, and in essence, it is scorn or malignant antagonism. The Holy

Spirit is the divine agent in revealing God's heart and will. To

blaspheme Him is the external symptom of a heart so radically and

finally set against God that no power which God can consistently use

will ever save it.' The sin, therefore, can only be the culmination of

a long course of self-hardening and depraving.' It is unforgivable,

because the soul which can recognise God's revelation of Himself in all

His goodness and moral perfection, and be stirred only to hatred

thereby, has reached a dreadful climax of hardness, and has ceased to

be capable of being influenced by His beseeching. It has passed beyond

the possibility of penitence and acceptance of forgiveness. The sin is

unforgiven, because the sinner is fixed in impenitence, and his

stiffened will cannot bow to receive pardon.

The true reason why that sin has never forgiveness is suggested by the

accurate rendering, Is guilty of an eternal sin' (R.V.). Since the sin

is eternal, the forgiveness is impossible. Practically hardened and

permanent unbelief, conjoined with malicious hatred of the only means

of forgiveness, is the unforgivable sin. Much torture of heart would

have been saved if it had been observed that the Scripture expression

is not sin, but blasphemy. Fear that it has been committed is proof

positive that it has not; for, if it have been, there will be no

relenting in enmity, nor any wish for deliverance.

But let not the terrible picture of the depths of impenitence to which

a soul may fall, obscure the blessed universality of the declaration

from Christ's lips which preludes it, and declares that all sin but the

sin of not desiring pardon is pardoned. No matter how deep the stain,

no matter how inveterate the habit, whosoever will can come and be sure

of pardon.

III. The attempt of Christ's relatives to withdraw Him from publicity,

and His reply to it. Verse 21 tells us that His kindred sent out to lay

hold on Him; for they thought Him beside Himself. He was to be shielded

from the crowd of followers, and from the plots of scribes, by being

kept at home and treated as a harmless lunatic. Think of Jesus defended

from the imputation of being in league with Beelzebub by the excuse

that He was mad! This visit of His mother and brethren must be

connected with their plan to lay hold on Him, in order to apprehend

rightly Christ's answer. If they did not mean to use violence, why

should they have tried to get Him away from the crowd of followers, by

a message, when they could have reached Him as easily as it did? He

knew the snare laid for Him, and puts it aside without shaming its

contrivers. With a wonderful blending of dignity and tenderness, He

turns from kinsmen who were not akin, to draw closer to Himself, and

pour His love over, those who do the will of God.

The test of relationship with Jesus is obedience to His Father. Christ

is not laying down the means of becoming His kinsmen, but the tokens

that we are such. He is sometimes misunderstood as saying, Do God's

will without My help, and ye will become My kindred.' What He really

says is, If ye are My kindred, you will do God's will; and if you do,

you will show that you are such.' So the statement that we become His

kindred by faith does not conflict with this great saying. The two take

hold of the Christian life at different points: the one deals with the

means of its origination, the other with the tokens of its reality.

Faith is the root of obedience, obedience is the blossom of faith.

Jesus does not stand like a stranger till we have hammered out

obedience to His Father, and then reward us by welcoming us as His

brethren, but He answers our faith by giving us a life kindred with,

because derived from, His own, and then we can obey.

It is active submission to God's will, not orthodox creed or devout

emotion, which shows that we are His blood relations. By such

obedience, we draw His love more and more to us. Though it is not the

means of attaining to kinship with Him, it is the condition of

receiving love-tokens from Him, and of increasing affinity with Him.

That relationship includes and surpasses all earthly ones. Each

obedient man is, as it were, all three,--mother, sister, and brother.

Of course the enumeration had reference to the members of the waiting

group, but the remarkable expression has deep truth in it. Christ's

relation to the soul covers all various sweetnesses of earthly bonds,

and is spoken of in terms of many of them. He is the bridegroom, the

brother, the companion, and friend. All the scattered fragrances of

these are united and surpassed in the transcendent and ineffable union

of the soul with Jesus. Every lonely heart may find in Him what it most

needs, and perhaps is bleeding away its life for the loss or want of.

To many a weeping mother He has said, pointing to Himself, Woman,

behold thy son'; to many an orphan He has whispered, revealing His own

love, Son, behold thy mother.'

All earthly bonds are honoured most when they are woven into crowns for

His head; all human love is then sweetest when it is as a tiny mirror

in which the great Sun is reflected. Christ is husband, brother,

sister, friend, lover, mother, and more than all which these sacred

names designate,--even Saviour and life. If His blood is in our veins,

and His spirit is the spirit of our lives, we shall do the will of His

and our Father in heaven.

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CHRIST'S KINDRED

There came then His brethren and His mother, and, standing without,

sent unto Him, calling Him. 32. And the multitude sat about Him; and

they said unto Him, Behold, Thy mother and Thy brethren without seek

for Thee. 33. And He answered them, saying, Who is My mother, or My

brethren? 34. And He looked round about on them which sat about Him,

and said, Behold My mother and My brethren! 35. For whosoever shall do

the will of God, the same is My brother, and My sister, and

mother.'--Mark iii. 31-35.

We learn from an earlier part of this chapter, and from it only, the

significance of this visit of Christ's brethren and mother. It was

prompted by the belief that He was beside Himself,' and they meant to

lay hands on Him, possibly with a kindly wish to save Him from a worse

fate, but certainly to stop His activity. We do not know whether Mary

consented, in her mistaken maternal affection, to the scheme, or

whether she was brought unwillingly to give a colour to it, and

influence our Lord. The sinister purpose of the visit betrays itself in

the fact that the brethren did not present themselves before Christ,

but sent a messenger; although they could as easily have had access to

His presence as their messenger could. Apparently they wished to get

Him by Himself, so as to avoid the necessity of using force against the

force that His disciples would be likely to put forth. Jesus knew their

purpose, though they thought it was hidden deep in the recesses of

their breasts. And that falls in with a great many other incidents

which indicate His superhuman knowledge of the thoughts and intents of

the heart.'

But, however that may be, our Lord here, with a singular mixture of

dignity, tenderness, and decisiveness, puts aside the insidious snare

without shaming its contrivers, and turns from the kinsmen, with whom

He had no real bond, to draw closer to Himself, and pour out His love

over, those who do the will of His Father in heaven. His words go very

deep; let us try to gather some, at any rate, of the surface lessons

which they suggest.

I. First, then, the true token of blood relationship to Jesus Christ is

obedience to God.

Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, and My

sister, and mother.' Now I must not be betrayed into a digression from

my main purpose by dwelling upon what yet is worthy of notice--viz.,

the consciousness, on the part of Jesus Christ, which here is evidently

implied, that the doing of the will of God was the very inmost secret

of His own being. He was conscious, only and always, of delighting to

do the will of God. When, therefore, He found that delight in others,

there He recognised a bond of union between Him and them.

We must carefully observe that these great words of our Lord are not

intended to describe the means by which men become His kinsfolk, but

the tokens that they are such. He is not saying--as superficial readers

sometimes run away with the notion that He is saying--If a man will,

apart from Me, do the will of God, then he will become My true

kinsman,' but He is saying, If you are My kinsman, you will do the will

of God, and if you do it, you will show that you are related to

Myself.' In other words, He is not speaking about the means of

originating this relationship, but about the signs of its reality. And,

therefore, the words of my text need, for their full understanding, and

for placing them in due relation to all the rest of Christ's teaching,

to be laid side by side with other words of His, such as these:--Apart

from Me ye can do nothing.' For the deepest truth in regard to

relationship to Jesus Christ and obedience is this, that the way by

which men are made able to do the will of God is by receiving into

themselves the very life-blood of Jesus Christ. The relationship must

precede the obedience, and the obedience is the sign, because it is the

sequel, of the relationship.

But far deeper down than mere affinity lies the true bond between us

and Christ, and the true means of performing the commandments of God.

There must be a passing over into us of His own life-spirit. By His

inhabiting our hearts, and moulding our wills, and being the life of

our lives and the soul of our souls, are we made able to do the

commandments of the Lord. And so, seeing that actual union with Jesus

Christ, and the reception into ourselves of His life, is the precedent

condition of all true obedience, then the more familiar form of

presenting the bond between Him and us, which runs through the New

Testament, falls into its proper place, and the faith, which is the

condition of receiving the life of Christ into our hearts, is at once

the affinity which makes us His kindred, and the means by which we

appropriate to ourselves the power of obedient submission and

conformity to the will of God. This is the work of God, that ye believe

on Him whom He hath sent.'

So, then, my text does not in the slightest degree contradict or

interfere with the great teaching that the one way by which we become

Christ's brethren is by trusting in Him. For the text and the doctrine

that faith unites us to Him take up the process at different stages:

the one pointing to the means of origination, the other to the tokens

of reality. Faith is the root, obedience is the flower and the fruit.

He that doeth the will of God, does it, not in order that he may

become, but because he already is, possessor of a blood-relationship to

Jesus Christ.

Then, notice, again, with what emphatic decisiveness our Lord here

takes simple, practical obedience in daily life, in little and in great

things, as the manifestation of being akin to Himself. Orthodoxy is all

very well; religious experiences, inward emotions, sweet, precious,

secret feelings and sentiments cannot be over-estimated. External

forms, whether of the more simple or of the more ornate and sensuous

kind, may be helps for the religious life; and are so in view of the

weaknesses that are always associated with it. But all these, a true

creed, a belief in the creed, the joyous and deep and secret emotions

that follow thereupon, and the participation in outward services which

may help to these, all these are but scaffolding: the building is

character and conduct conformed to the will of God.

Evangelical preachers, and those who in the main hold that faith, are

often charged with putting too little stress on practical homely

righteousness. I would that the charge had less substance in it. But

let me lay it upon your consciences, dear brethren, now, that no amount

of right credence, no amount of trust, nor of love and hope and joy

will avail to witness kindred to Christ. It must be the daily life, in

its efforts after conformity to the known will of God, in great things

and in small things, that attests the family resemblance. If Christ's

blood be in our veins, if the law of the spirit of life' in Him is the

law of the spirit of our lives, then these lives will run parallel with

His, in some visible measure, and we, too, shall be able to say, Lo! I

come. I delight to do Thy will; and Thy law is within my heart.'

Obedience is the test of relationship to Jesus.

Then, still further, note how, though we must emphatically dismiss the

mistake that we make our selves Christ's brethren and friends by

independent efforts after keeping the commandments, it is true that, in

the measure in which we do thus bend our wills to God's will, whether

in the way of action or of endurance, we realise more blessedly and

strongly the tie that binds us to the Lord, and as a matter of fact do

receive, in the measure of our obedience, sweet tokens of union with

Him, and of love in His heart to us. No man will fully feel living

contact with Jesus Christ if between Christ and him there is a film of

conscious and voluntary disobedience to the will of God. The smallest

crumb that can come in between two polished plates will prevent their

adherence. A trivial sin will slip your hand out of Christ's hand; and

though His love will still come and linger about you, until the sin is

put out it cannot enter in.

It can but listen at the gate,

And hear the household jar within.'

He that doeth the will of God, the same is'--and feels himself to

be--My brother, and sister, and mother.'

II. This relationship includes all others.

That is a very singular form of expression which our Lord employs.

Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, and sister,

and mother.' We should have expected, seeing that He was speaking about

three different relationships, that He would have used the plural verb,

and said, The same are My brother, and sister, and mother.' And I do

not think that it is pedantic grammatical accuracy to point out this

remarkable form of speech, and even to venture to draw a conclusion

from it--viz., that what our Lord meant was, not that if there were

three people, of different sexes, and of different ages, all doing the

will of God, one of these sweet names of relationship would apply to A,

another to B, and the other to C; but that to each who does the will of

God, all the sweetnesses that are hived in all the names, and in any

other analogous ones that can be uttered, belong. Of course the

selection here of relationships specified has reference to the

composition of that group outside the circle. But there is a great deal

more than that in it. Whether you accept the grammatical remark that I

have made or no, we shall, at least, I suppose, all agree in this,

that, in fact, the bond of kindred that unites a trusting obedient soul

with Jesus Christ does in itself include whatsoever of sweetness, of

power, of protection, of clinging trust, and of any other blessed

emotion that makes a shadow of Eden still upon earth, has ever been

attached to human bonds.

Remember how many of these, Christ, and His servants for Him, have laid

their hands upon, and claimed to be His. Thy Maker is thy husband'; He

that hath the Bride is the bridegroom'; Go tell My brethren'; I have

not called you servants, but friends.' And if there be any other sweet

names, they belong to Him, and in His one pure, all-sufficient love

they are all enclosed. Fragmentary preciousnesses are strewed about us.

There is one pearl of great price.' Many fragrances come from the

flowers that grow on the dunghill of the world, but they are all

gathered in Him whose name is as ointment poured forth,' filling the

house with its fragrance.

For Christ is to us all that all separated lovers and friends can be.

And whatsoever our poor hearts may need most, of human affection and

sympathy, and may see least possibility of finding now, among the

incompletenesses and limitations of earth, that Jesus Christ is waiting

to be. All solitary souls and mourning hearts may turn themselves to,

and rest themselves on, these great words. And as they look at the

empty places in their circle, in their homes, and feel the ache of the

empty places in their hearts, they may hear His voice saying, Behold My

mother and My brethren.' He comes to us all in the character that we

need most. Just as the great ocean, when it flows in amongst the land,

takes the shape imposed upon it by the containing banks of the loch, so

Christ pours Himself into our hearts, and there assumes the form that

the outline of their emptiness tells we need most. To many, in all

generations, who have been weeping over departed joys, He says again,

though with a different application, turning not away from but to

Himself mourning eyes and hearts, Woman, behold thy Son'--not on the

cross nor in the grave, but on the throne--Son, behold Thy mother.'

III. Lastly, this relationship requires always the subordination, and

sometimes the sacrifice, of the lower ones.

We have to think of Christ here as Himself putting away the lower

claims, in order more fully to yield Himself to the higher. It was

because it would have been impossible for Him to do the will of His

Father if He had yielded to the purposes of His brethren and His

mother, that He steeled His heart and made solemn His tone in refusing

to go with them.

That group that had come for Him suggests to us the ways in which

earthly ties may limit heavenly obedience. In regard to them the

situation was complicated, because Jesus Christ was their kinsman

according to the flesh, and their Messiah, according to the spirit. But

in them their earthly love, and familiarity with Him, hid from them His

higher glory; and in them He found impediments to His true

consecration, and would-be thwarters of His highest work. And, in like

manner, all our earthly relationships may become means of obscuring to

us the transcendent brightness and greatness of Jesus Christ as our

Saviour And, in like manner as to Him these, His brethren, became

stumbling blocks' that He had decisively to put behind Him, so in

regard to us a man's foes may be those of his own household'; and not

least his foes when they are most his idols, his comforts, and his

sweetnesses. If our earthly loves and relationships obscure to us the

face of Christ; if we find enough in them for our hearts, and go not

beyond them for our true love; if they make us negligent of duty; if

they bind us to the present; if they make us careless of that loftier

affection which alone can satisfy us; if they clog our steps in the

divine life, then they are our foes. They need to be always

subordinated, and, so subordinated, they are more precious than when

they are placed mistakenly foremost. They are better second than first.

They are full of sweetness when our hearts know a sweetness surpassing

theirs; they are robbed of their possible power to harm when they are

rigidly held in inferiority to the one absolute and supreme love. There

need be no collision--there will be no collision--if the second is

second and the first is first. But sometimes beggars get upon

horseback, and the crew mutinies and would displace the commander, and

then there is nothing for it but sacrifice. If thy hand offend thee,

cut it off and cast it from thee.' I communed not with flesh and

blood,' and we must not, if ever they conflict with our supreme

devotion to Jesus Christ.

These other things and relationships are precious to us, but He is

priceless. They are shadows, but He is the substance. They are brooks

by the way; He is the boundless, bottomless ocean of delights and

loves. Shall we not always subordinate--and sometimes, if needful,

sacrifice--the less to the greater? If we do, we shall get the less

back, greatened by its surrender. He that loveth father or mother more

than Me is not worthy of Me' commands the sacrifice. There is no man

that hath left brethren or sisters, or father or mother, or wife or

children, for My sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive a

hundredfold now, in this time' promises the reward.

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CHRIST'S RELATIONS

Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, and My

sister, and mother.'--Mark iii. 35.

There was a conspiracy to seize Jesus because He is mad,' and Mary was

in the plot!

I. The example for us.

(1) Of how all natural and human ties and affections are to be

subordinated to doing God's will.

Obedience to Him is the first and main thing to which everything else

bows, and which determines everything.

If others compete or interfere, reject them.

Out of that common obedience new ties are formed among men.

(2) Of how all these ties may be doubled in power and preciousness by

being based on that obedience.

II. The promise for us.

Of Christ's loving relationship in which He finds delight; in which He

sustains and transcends all these in His own proper person and to each.

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FOUR SOILS FOR ONE SEED

And when He was alone, they that were about Him with the twelve asked

of Him the parable. 11. And He said unto them, Unto you it is given to

know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without,

all these things are done in parables: 12. That seeing they may see,

and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest

at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven

them. 13. And He said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then

will ye know all parables? 14. The sower soweth the word. 15. And these

are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have

heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown

in their hearts. 16. And these are they likewise which are sown on

stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive

it with gladness; 17. And have no root in themselves, and so endure but

for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the

word's sake, immediately they are offended. 18. And these are they

which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, 19. And the cares

of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other

things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. 20. And

these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word,

and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and

some an hundred.'--Mark iv. 10-20.

Dean Stanley and others have pointed out how the natural features of

the land round the lake of Gennesaret are reflected in the parable of

the sower. But we must go deeper than that to find its occasion. It was

not because Jesus may have seen a sower in a field which had these

three varieties of soil that He spoke, but because He saw the frivolous

crowd gathered to hear His words. The sad, grave description of the

threefold kinds of vainly-sown ground is the transcript of His clear

and sorrowful insight into the real worth of the enthusiasm of the

eager listeners on the beach. He was under no illusions about it; and,

in this parable, He seeks to warn His disciples against expecting much

from it, and to bring its subjects to a soberer estimate of what His

word required of them. The full force and pathos of the parable is felt

only when it is regarded as the expression of our Lord's keen

consciousness of His wasted words. This passage falls into two

parts--Christ's explanation of the reasons for His use of parables, and

His interpretation of the parable itself.

I. Christ was the centre of three circles: the outermost consisting of

the fluctuating masses of merely curious hearers; the second, of true

but somewhat loosely attached disciples, whom Mark here calls they that

were about Him'; and the innermost, the twelve. The two latter appear,

in our first verse, as asking further instruction as to the parable,' a

phrase which includes both parts of Christ's answer. The statement of

His reason for the use of parables is startling. It sounds as if those

who needed light most were to get least of it, and as if the parabolic

form was deliberately adopted for the express purpose of hiding the

truth. No wonder that men have shrunk from such a thought, and tried to

soften down the terrible words. Inasmuch as a parable is the

presentation of some spiritual truth under the guise of an incident

belonging to the material sphere, it follows, from its very nature,

that it may either reveal or hide the truth, and that it will do the

former to susceptible, and the latter to unsusceptible, souls. The eye

may either dwell upon the coloured glass or on the light that streams

through it; and, as is the case with all revelations of spiritual

realities through sensuous mediums, gross and earthly hearts will not

rise above the medium, which to them, by their own fault, becomes a

medium of obscuration, not of revelation. This double aspect belongs to

all revelation, which is both a savour of life unto life and of death

unto death.' It is most conspicuous in the parable, which careless

listeners may take for a mere story, and which those who feel and see

more deeply will apprehend in its depth. These twofold effects are

certain, and must therefore be embraced in Christ's purpose; for we

cannot suppose that issues of His teaching escaped His foresight; and

all must be regarded as part of His design. But may we not draw a

distinction between design and desire? The primary purpose of all

revelation is to reveal. If the only intention were to hide, silence

would secure that, and the parable were needless. But if the twofold

operation is intended, we can understand how mercy and righteous

retribution both preside over the use of parables; how the thin veil

hides that it may reveal, and how the very obscurity may draw some

grosser souls to a longer gaze, and so may lead to a perception of the

truth, which, in its purer form, they are neither worthy nor capable of

receiving. No doubt, our Lord here announces a very solemn law, which

runs through all the divine dealings, To him that hath shall be given;

and from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he

hath.'

II. We turn to the exposition of the parable of the sower, or rather of

the fourfold soils in which he sows the seed. A sentence at the

beginning disposes of the personality of the sower, which in Mark's

version does not refer exclusively to Christ, but includes all who

carry the word to men. The likening of the word' to seed needs no

explanation. The tiny, living nucleus of force, which is thrown

broadcast, and must sink underground in order to grow, which does grow,

and comes to light again in a form which fills the whole field where it

is sown, and nourishes life as well as supplies material for another

sowing, is the truest symbol of the truth in its working on the spirit.

The threefold causes of failure are arranged in progressive order. At

every stage of growth there are enemies. The first sowing never gets

into the ground at all; the second grows a little, but its greenness

soon withers; the third has a longer life, and a yet sadder failure,

because a nearer approach to fertility. The types of character

represented are unreceptive carelessness, emotional facility of

acceptance, and earthly-mindedness, scotched, but not killed, by the

word. The dangers which assault, but too successfully, the seed are the

personal activity of Satan, opposition from without, and conflicting

desires within. On all the soils the seed has been sown by hand; for

drills are modern inventions; and sowing broadcast is the only right

husbandry in Christ's field with Christ's seed. He is a poor workman,

and an unfaithful one, who wants to pick his ground. Sow everywhere;

Thou canst not tell which shall prosper, whether this or that.' The

character of the soil is not irrevocably fixed; but the trodden path

may be broken up to softness, and the stony heart changed, and the soul

filled with cares and lusts be cleared, and any soil may become good

ground. So the seed is to be flung out broadcast; and prayer for seed

and soil will often turn the weeping sower into the joyous reaper.

The seed sown on the trodden footpath running across the field never

sinks below the surface. It lies there, and has no real contact, nor

any chance of growth. It must be in, not on, the ground, if its

mysterious power is to be put forth. A pebble is as likely to grow as a

seed, if both lie side by side, on the surface. Is not this the

description of a mournfully large proportion of hearers of God's truth?

It never gets deeper than their ears, or, at the most, effects a

shallow lodgment on the surface of their minds. So many feet pass along

the path, and beat it into hardness, that the truth has no chance to

take root. Habitual indifference to the gospel, masked by an utterly

unmeaning and unreal acceptance of it, and by equally habitual decorous

attendance on its preaching, is the condition of a dreadfully large

proportion of church-goers. Their very familiarity with the truth robs

it of all penetrating power. They know all about it, as they suppose;

and so they listen to it as they would to the clank of a mill-wheel to

which they were accustomed, missing its noise if it stops, and liking

to be sent to sleep by its hum. Familiar truth often lies bedridden in

the dormitory of the soul, beside exploded errors.'

And what comes of this idle hearing, without acceptance or obedience?

Truth which is common, and which a man supposes himself to believe,

without having ever reflected on it, or let it influence conduct, is

sure to die out. If we do not turn our beliefs into practice they will

not long be our beliefs. Neglected impressions fade; the seed is only

safe when it is buried. There are flocks of hungry, sharp-eyed,

quick-flying thieves ready to pounce down on every exposed grain. So

Mark uses here again his favourite straightway' to express the swift

disappearance of the seed. As soon as the preacher's voice is silent,

or the book closed, the words are forgotten. The impression of a

gliding keel on a smooth lake is not more evanescent.

The distinct reference to Satan as the agent in removing the seed is

not to be passed by lightly. Christ's words about demons have been

emptied of meaning by the allegation that He was only accommodating

Himself to the superstition of the times, but no explanation of that

sort will do in this case. He surely commits Himself here to the

assertion of the existence and agency of Satan; and surely those who

profess to receive His words as the truth ought not to make light of

them, in reference to so solemn and awe-inspiring a revelation.

The seed gets rather farther on the road to fruit in the second case. A

thin surface of mould above a shelf of rock is like a forcing-house in

hot countries. The stone keeps the heat and stimulates growth. The very

thing that prevents deep rooting facilitates rapid shooting. The green

spikelets will be above ground there long before they show in deeper

soil. There would be many such hearers in the very great multitude' on

the shore, who were attracted, they scarcely knew why, and were the

more enthusiastic the less they understood the real scope of Christ's

teaching. The disciple who pressed forward with his excited and unasked

Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest!' was one of

such--well-meaning, perfectly sincere, warmly affected, and completely

unreliable. Lightly come is lightly go. When such people forsake their

fervent purposes, and turn their backs on what they have been so

eagerly pursuing, they are quite consistent; for they are obeying the

uppermost impulse in both cases, and, as they were easily drawn to

follow without consideration, they are easily driven back with as

little. The first taste of supposed good secured their giddy-pated

adhesion; the first taste of trouble ensures their desertion. They are

the same men acting in the same fashion at both times. Two things are

marked by our Lord as suspicious in such easily won discipleship--its

suddenness and its joyfulness. Feelings which are so easily stirred are

superficial. A puff of wind sets a shallow pond in wavelets. Quick

maturity means brief life and swift decay, as every revival' shows. The

more earnestly we believe in the possibility of sudden conversions, the

more we should remember this warning, and make sure that, if they are

sudden, they shall be thorough, which they may be. The swiftness is not

so suspicious if it be not accompanied with the other doubtful

characteristic--namely, immediate joy. Joy is the result of true

acceptance of the gospel; but not the first result. Without

consciousness of sin and apprehension of judgment there is no

conversion. We lay down no rules as to depth or duration of the godly

sorrow' which precedes all well-grounded joy in the Lord'; but the

Christianity which has taken a flying leap over the valley of

humiliation will scarcely reach a firm standing on the rock. He who

straightway with joy' receives the word, will straightway, with equal

precipitation, cast it away when the difficulties and oppositions which

meet all true discipleship begin to develop themselves. Fair-weather

crews will desert when storms begin to blow.

The third sort of soil brings things still farther on before failure

comes. The seed is not only covered and germinating, but has actually

begun to be fruitful. The thorns are supposed to have been cut down,

but their roots have been left, and they grow faster than the wheat.

They take the goodness' out of the ground, and block out sun and air;

and so the stalks, which promised well, begin to get pale and droop,

and the half-formed ear comes to nothing, or, as the other version of

the parable has it, brings forth no fruit to perfection.' There are two

crops fighting for the upper hand on the one ground, and the earlier

possessor wins. The struggle for existence' ends with the survival of

the fittest'; that is, of the worst, to which the natural bent of the

desires and inclinations of the unrenewed man is more congenial. The

cares of this world' and the deceitfulness of riches' are but two sides

of one thing. The poor man has cares; the rich man has the illusions of

his wealth. Both men agree in thinking that this world's good is most

desirable. The one is anxious because he has not enough of it, or fears

to lose what he has; the other man is full of foolish confidence

because he has much. Eager desires after creatural good are common to

both; and, what with the anxiety lest they lose, and the

self-satisfaction because they have, and the mouths watering for the

world's good, there is no force of will, nor warmth of love, nor

clearness of vision, left for better things. That is the history of the

fall of many a professing Christian, who never apostatises, and keeps

up a reputable appearance of godliness to the end; but the old

worldliness, which was cut down for a while, has sprung again in his

heart, and, by slow degrees, the word is choked'--a most expressive

picture of the silent, gradual dying-out of its power for want of sun

and air--and he' or it' becometh unfruitful,' relapsing from a previous

condition of fruit-bearing into sterility. No heart can mature two

crops. We must choose between God and Mammon--between the word and the

world.

There is nothing fixed or necessary in the faults of these three

classes, and they are not so much the characteristics of separate types

of men as evils common to all hearers, against which all have to guard.

They depend upon the will and affections much more than on anything in

temperament fixed and not to be got rid of. So there is no reason why

any one of the three should not become good soil': and it is to be

noted that the characteristic of that soil is simply that it receives

and grows the seed. Any heart that will, can do that; and that is all

that is needed. But to do it, there will have to be diligent care, lest

we fall into any of the evils pointed at in the preceding parts of the

parable, which are ever waiting to entrap us. The true accepting' of

the word requires that we shall not let it lie on the surface of our

minds, as in the case of the first; nor be satisfied with its

penetrating a little deeper and striking root in our emotions, like the

second, of whom it is said with such profound truth, that they have no

root in themselves,' their roots being only in the superficial part of

their being, and never going down to the true central self; nor let

competing desires grow up unchecked, like the third; but cherish the

word of the truth of the gospel' in our deepest hearts, guard it

against foes, let it rule there, and mould all our conduct in

conformity with its blessed principles. The true Christian is he who

can truly say, Thy word have I hid in mine heart.' If we do, we shall

be fruitful, because it will bear fruit in us. No man is obliged, by

temperament or circumstances, to be wayside,' or stony,' or thorny'

ground. Wherever a heart opens to receive the gospel, and keeps it

fast, there the increase will be realised--not in equal measure in all,

but in each according to faithfulness and diligence. Mark arranges the

various yields in ascending scale, as if to teach our hopes and aims a

growing largeness, while Matthew orders them in the opposite fashion,

as if to teach that, while the hundredfold, which is possible for all,

is best, the smaller yield is accepted by the great Lord of the

harvest, who Himself not only sows the seed, but gives it its vitality,

blesses its springing, and rejoices to gather the wheat into His barn.

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LAMPS AND BUSHELS

And Jesus said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel,

or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick?'--Mark iv. 21.

The furniture of a very humble Eastern home is brought before us in

this saying. In the original, each of the nouns has the definite

article attached to it, and so suggests that in the house there was but

one of each article; one lamp, a flat saucer with a wick swimming in

oil; one measure for corn and the like; one bed, raised slightly, but

sufficiently to admit of a flat vessel being put under it without

danger, if for any reason it were desired to shade the light; and one

lampstand.

The saying appeals to common-sense. A man does not light a lamp and

then smother it. The act of lighting implies the purpose of

illumination, and, with everybody who acts logically, its sequel is to

put the lamp on a stand, where it may be visible. All is part of the

nightly routine of every Jewish household. Jesus had often watched it;

and, commonplace as it is, it had mirrored to Him large truths. If our

eyes were opened to the suggestions of common life, we should find in

them many parables and reminders of high matters.

Now this saying is a favourite and familiar one of our Lord, occurring

four times in the Gospels. It is interesting to notice that He, too,

like other teachers, had His favourite maxims, which He turned round in

all sorts of ways, and presented as reflecting light at different

angles and suggesting different thoughts. The four occurrences of the

saying are these. In my text, and in the parallel in Luke's Gospel, it

is appended to the Parable of the Sower, and forms the basis of the

exhortation, Take heed how ye hear.' In another place in Luke's Gospel

it is appended to our Lord's words about the sign of the prophet

Jonah,' which is explained to be the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and

it forms the basis of the exhortation to cultivate the single eye which

is receptive of the light. In the Sermon on the Mount it is appended to

the declaration that the disciples are the lights of the world, and

forms the basis of the exhortation, Let your light so shine before

men.' I have thought that it may be interesting and instructive if in

this sermon we throw together these three applications of this one

saying, and try to study the threefold lessons which it yields, and the

weighty duties which it enforces.

I. So, then, I have to ask you, first, to consider that we have a

lesson as to the apparent obscurities of revelation and of our duty

concerning them.

That is the connection in which the words occur in our text, and in the

other place in Luke's Gospel, to which I have referred. Our Lord has

just been speaking the Parable of the Sower. The disciples' curiosity

has been excited as to its significance. They ask Him for an

explanation, which He gives minutely point by point. Then he passes to

this general lesson of the purpose of the apparent veil which He had

cast round the truth, by throwing it into a parabolic form. In effect

He says: If I had meant to hide My teaching by the form into which I

cast it, I should have been acting as absurdly and as contradictorily

as a man would do who should light a lamp and immediately obscure it.'

True, there is the veil of parable, but the purpose of that relative

concealment is not hiding, but revelation. There is nothing covered but

that it should be made known.' The veil sharpens attention, stimulates

curiosity, quickens effort, and so becomes positively subsidiary to the

great purpose of revelation for which the parable is spoken. The

existence of this veil of sensuous representation carries with it the

obligation, Take heed how ye hear.'

Now all these thoughts have a far wider application than in reference

to our Lord's parables. And I may suggest one or two of the

considerations that flow from the wider reference of the words before

us.

Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed and not

upon a candlestick?' There are no gratuitous and dark places in

anything that God says to us. His revelation is absolutely clear. We

may be sure of that if we consider the purpose for which He spoke at

all. True, there are dark places; true, there are great gaps; true, we

sometimes think, Oh! it would have been so easy for Him to have said

one word more; and the one word more would have been so infinitely

precious to bleeding hearts or wounded consciences or puzzled

understandings.' But is a candle brought to be set under a bushel?' Do

you think that if He took the trouble to light it He would immediately

smother it, or arbitrarily conceal anything that the very fact of the

revelation declares His intention to make known? His own great word

remains true, I have never spoken in secret, in a dark place of the

earth.' If there be, as there are, obscurities, there are none there

that would have been better away.

For the intention of all God's hiding--which hiding is an integral part

of his revealing--is not to conceal, but to reveal. Sometimes the best

way of making a thing known to men is to veil it in a measure, in order

that the very obscurity, like the morning mists which prophesy a

blazing sun in a clear sky by noonday, may demand search and quicken

curiosity and spur to effort. He is not a wise teacher who makes things

too easy. It is good that there should be difficulties; for

difficulties are like the veins of quartz in the soil, which may turn

the edge of the ploughshare or the spade, but prophesy that there is

gold there for the man who comes with fitting tools. Wherever, in the

broad land of God's word to us, there lie dark places, there are

assurances of future illumination. God's hiding is in order to

revelation, even as the prophet of old, when he was describing the

great Theophany which flashed in light from the one side of the heaven

to the other, exclaimed, There was the hiding of His power.'

He hides the purpose of His grace

To make it better known.'

And the end of all the concealments, and apparent and real obscurities,

that hang about His word, is that for many of them patient and diligent

attention and docile obedience should unfold them here, and for the

rest, the day shall declare them.' The lamp is the light for the

night-time, and it leaves many a corner in dark shadow; but, when

night's candles are burnt out, and day sits jocund on the misty

mountain-tops,' much will be plain that cannot be made plain now.

Therefore, for us the lesson from this assurance that God will not

stultify Himself by giving to us a revelation that does not reveal, is,

Take heed how ye hear.' The effort will not be in vain. Patient

attention will ever be rewarded. The desire to learn will not be

frustrated. In this school truth lightly won is truth loosely held; and

only the attentive scholar is the receptive and retaining disciple. A

great man once said, and said, too, presumptuously and proudly, that he

had rather have the search after truth than truth. But yet there is a

sense in which the saying may be modifiedly accepted; for, precious as

is all the revelation of God, not the least precious effect that it is

meant to produce upon us is the consciousness that in it there are

unscaled heights above, and unplumbed depths beneath, and untraversed

spaces all around it; and that for us that Word is like the pillar of

cloud and fire that moved before Israel, blends light and darkness with

the single office of guidance, and gleams ever before us to draw

desires and feet after it. The lamp is set upon a stand. Take heed how

ye hear.'

II. Secondly, the saying, in another application on our Lord's lips,

gives us a lesson as to Himself and our attitude to Him.

I have already pointed out the other instance in Luke's Gospel in which

this saying occurs, in the 11th chapter, where it is brought into

immediate connection with our Lord's declaration that the sign to be

given to His generation was the sign of the prophet Jonah,' which sign

He explains as being reproduced in His own case in His Resurrection.

And then he adds the word of our text, and immediately passes on to

speak about the light in us which perceives the lamp, and the need of

cultivating the single eye.

So, then, we have, in the figure thus applied, the thought that the

earthly life of Jesus Christ necessarily implies a subsequent elevation

from which He shines down upon all the world. God lit that lamp, and it

is not going to be quenched in the darkness of the grave. He is not

going to stultify Himself by sending the Light of the World, and then

letting the endless shades of death muffle and obscure it. But, just as

the conclusion of the process which is begun in the kindling of the

light is setting it on high on the stand, that it may beam over all the

chamber, so the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, His

exaltation to the supremacy from which He shall draw all men unto Him,

are the necessary and, if I may so say, the logical result of the facts

of His incarnation and death.

Then from this there follows what our Lord dwells upon at greater

length. Having declared that the beginning of His course involved the

completion of it in His exaltation to glory, He then goes on to say to

us, You have an organ that corresponds to Me. I am the kindled lamp;

you have the seeing eye.' If the eye were not sunlike,' says the great

German thinker, how could it see the sun?' If there were not in me that

which corresponds to Jesus Christ, He would be no Light of the World,

and no light to me. My reason, my affection, my conscience, my will,

the whole of my spiritual being, answer to Him, as the eye does to the

light, and for everything that is in Christ there is in humanity

something that is receptive of, and that needs, Him.

So, then, that being so, He being our light, just because He fits our

needs, answers our desires, satisfies our cravings, fills the clefts of

our hearts, and brings the response to all the questions of our

understandings--that being the case, if the lamp is lit and blazing on

the lampstand, and you and I have eyes to behold it, let us take heed

that we cultivate the single eye which apprehends Christ. Concentration

of purpose, simplicity and sincerity of aim, a heart centred upon Him,

a mind drawn to contemplate unfalteringly and without distraction of

crosslights His beauty, His supremacy, His completeness, and a soul

utterly devoted to Him--these are the conditions to which that light

will ever manifest itself, and illumine the whole man. But if we come

with divided hearts, with distracted aims, giving Him fragments of

ourselves, and seeking Him by spasms and at intervals, and having a

dozen other deities in our Pantheon, beside the calm form of the Christ

of Nazareth, what wonder is there that we see in Him no beauty that we

should desire Him'? Unite my heart to fear Thy name.' Oh I if that were

our prayer, and if the effort to secure its answer were honestly the

effort of our lives, all His loveliness, His sweetness, His adaptation

to our whole being, would manifest themselves to us. The eye must be

single,' directed to Him, if the heart is to rejoice in His light.

I need not do more than remind you of the blessed consequence which our

Lord represents as flowing from this union of the seeing heart and the

revealing light--viz., Thy whole body shall be full of light.' In every

eye that beholds the flame of the lamp there is a little lamp-flame

mirrored and manifested. And just as what we see makes its image on the

seeing organ of the body, so the Christ beheld is a Christ embodied in

us; and we, gazing upon Him, are changed into the same image from glory

to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit.' Light that remains without

us does not illuminate; light that passes into us is the light by which

we see, and the Christ beheld is the Christ ensphered in our hearts.

III. So, lastly, this great saying gives us a lesson as to the duties

of Christian men as lights in the world.

I pointed out that another instance of the occurrence of the saying is

in the Sermon on the Mount, where it is transferred from the revelation

of God in His written word, and in His Incarnate Word, to the relation

of Christian men to the world in which they dwell. I need not remind

you how frequently that same metaphor occurs in Scripture; how in the

early Jewish ritual the great seven-branched lampstand which stood at

first in the Tabernacle was the emblem of Israel's office in the whole

world, as it rayed out its light through the curtains of the Tabernacle

into the darkness of the desert. Nor need I remind you how our Lord

bare witness to His forerunner by the praise that He was a burning and

a shining light,' nor how He commanded His disciples to have their

loins girt and their lamps burning,' nor how He spoke the Parable of

the Ten Virgins with their lamps.

From all these there follows the same general thought that Christian

men, not so much by specific effort, nor by words, nor by definite

proclamation, as by the raying out from them in life and conduct of a

Christlike spirit, are set for the illumination of the world. The

bearing of our text in reference to that subject is just this--our

obligation as Christians to show forth the glories of Him who hath

called us out of darkness into His marvellous light' is rested upon His

very purpose in drawing us to Himself, and receiving us into the number

of his people. If God in Christ, by communicating to us the light of

the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ,' has

made us lights of the world, it is not done in order that the light may

be smothered incontinently, but His act of lighting indicates His

purpose of illumination. What are you a Christian for? That you may go

to Heaven? Certainly. That your sins may be forgiven? No doubt. But is

that the only end? Are you such a very great being as that your

happiness and well-being can legitimately be the ultimate purpose of

God's dealings with you? Are you so isolated from all mankind as that

any gift which He bestows on you is to be treated by you as a morsel

that you can take into your corner and devour, like a grudging dog, by

yourselves? By no means. God, who commanded the light to shine out of

darkness, hath shined into our hearts in order that' we might impart

the light to others. Or, as Shakespeare has it, in words perhaps

suggested by the Scripture metaphor,

Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,

Not light them for themselves.'

He gave you His Son that you may give the gospel to others, and you

stultify His purpose in your salvation unless you become ministers of

His grace and manifesters of His light.

Then take from this emblem, too, a homely suggestion as to the

hindrances that stand in the way of our fulfilling the Divine intention

in our salvation. It is, perhaps, a piece of fancy, but still it may

point a lesson. The lamp is not hid under a bushel,' which is the

emblem of commerce or business, and is meant for the measurement of

material wealth and sustenance, or under a bed'--the place where people

take their ease and repose. These two loves--the undue love of the

bushel and the corn that is in it, and the undue love of the bed and

the leisurely ease that you may enjoy there--are large factors in

preventing Christian men from fulfilling God's purpose in their

salvation.

Then take a hint as to the means by which such a purpose can be

fulfilled by Christian souls. They are suggested in the two of the

other uses of this emblem by our Lord Himself. The first is when He

said, Let your loins be girded'--they are not so, when you are in

bed--and your lamps burning.' Your light will not shine in a naughty

world without your strenuous effort, and ungirt loins will very shortly

lead to extinguished lamps. The other means to this manifestation of

visible Christlikeness lies in that tragical story of the foolish

virgins who took no oil in their vessels. If light expresses the

outward Christian life, oil, in accordance with the whole tenor of

Scripture symbolism, expresses the inward gift of the Divine Spirit.

And where that gift is neglected, where it is not earnestly sought and

carefully treasured, there may be a kind of smoky illuminations, which,

in the dark, may pass for bright lights, but, when the Lord comes,

shudder into extinction, and, to the astonishment of the witless five

who carried them, are found to be going out.' Brethren, only He who

does not quench the smoking flax but tends it to a flame, will help us

to keep our lamps bright.

First of all, then, let us gaze upon the light in Him, until we become

light in the Lord.' And then let us see to it that, by girt loins and

continual reception of the illuminating principle of the Divine

Spirit's oil, we fill our lamps with deeds of odorous light, and hopes

that breed not shame.' Then,

When the Bridegroom, with his feastful friends,

Passes to bliss on the mid-hour of night,'

we shall have gained our entrance' among the virgins wise and pure.'

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THE STORM STILLED

And the same day, when the even was come, He saith unto them, Let us

pass over unto the other side. 36. And when they had sent away the

multitude, they took Him even as He was in the ship. And there were

also with Him other little ships. 37. And there arose a great storm of

wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. 38.

And He was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they

awake Him, and say unto Him, Master, carest Thou not that we perish?

39. And He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace,

be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. 40. And He

said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?

41. And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner

of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?'--Mark iv.

35-41.

Mark seldom dates his incidents, but he takes pains to tell us that

this run across the lake closed a day of labour, Jesus was wearied, and

felt the need of rest, He had been pressed on all day by a very great

multitude,' and felt the need of solitude. He could not land from the

boat which had been His pulpit, for that would have plunged Him into

the thick of the crowd, and so the only way to get away from the throng

was to cross the lake. But even there He was followed; other boats were

with Him.'

I. The first point to note is the wearied sleeper. The disciples take

Him, . . . even as He was,' without preparation or delay, the object

being simply to get away as quickly as might be, so great was His

fatigue and longing for quiet. We almost see the hurried starting and

the intrusive followers scrambling into the little skiffs on the beach

and making after Him. The multitude' delights to push itself into the

private hours of its heroes, and is devoured with rude curiosity. There

was a leather, or perhaps wooden, movable seat in the stern for the

steersman, on which a wearied-out man might lay his head, while his

body was stretched in the bottom of the boat. A hard pillow' indeed,

which only exhaustion could make comfortable! But it was soft enough

for the worn-out Christ, who had apparently flung Himself down in sheer

tiredness as soon as they set sail. How real such a small detail makes

the transcendent mystery of the Incarnation! Jesus is our pattern in

small common things as in great ones, and among the sublimities of

character set forth in Him as our example, let us not forget that the

homely virtue of hard work is also included. Jonah slept in a storm the

sleep of a skulking sluggard, Jesus slept the sleep of a wearied

labourer.

II. The next point is the terrified disciples. The evening was coming

on, and, as often on a lake set among hills, the wind rose as the sun

sank behind the high land on the western shore astern. The fishermen

disciples were used to such squalls, and, at first, would probably let

their sail down, and pull so as to keep the boat's head to the wind.

But things grew worse, and when the crazy, undecked craft began to fill

and get water-logged, they grew alarmed. The squall was fiercer than

usual, and must have been pretty bad to have frightened such seasoned

hands. They awoke Jesus, and there is a touch of petulant rebuke in

their appeal, and of a sailor's impatience at a landsman lying sound

asleep while the sweat is running down their faces with their hard

pulling. It is to Mark that we owe our knowledge of that accent of

complaint in their words, for he alone gives their Carest Thou not?'

But it is not for us to fling stones at them, seeing that we also often

may catch ourselves thinking that Jesus has gone to sleep when storms

come on the Church or on ourselves, and that He is ignorant of, or

indifferent to, our plight. But though the disciples were wrong in

their fright, and not altogether right in the tone of their appeal to

Jesus, they were supremely right in that they did appeal to Him. Fear

which drives us to Jesus is not all wrong. The cry to Him, even though

it is the cry of unnecessary terror, brings Him to His feet for our

help.

III. The next point is the word of power. Again we have to thank Mark

for the very words, so strangely, calmly authoritative. May we take

Peace!' as spoken to the howling wind, bidding it to silence; and Be

still!' as addressed to the tossing waves, smoothing them to a calm

plain? At all events, the two things to lay to heart are that Jesus

here exercises the divine prerogative of controlling matter by the bare

expression of His will, and that this divine attribute was exercised by

the wearied man, who, a moment before, had been sleeping the sleep of

human exhaustion. The marvellous combination of apparent opposites,

weakness, and divine omnipotence, which yet do not clash, nor produce

an incredible monster of a being, but coalesce in perfect harmony, is a

feat beyond the reach of the loftiest creative imagination. If the

Evangelists are not simple biographers, telling what eyes have seen and

hands have handled, they have beaten the greatest poets and dramatists

at their own weapons, and have accomplished things unattempted yet in

prose or rhyme.'

A word of loving rebuke and encouragement follows. Matthew puts it

before the stilling of the storm, but Mark's order seems the more

exact. How often we too are taught the folly of our fears by

experiencing some swift, easy deliverance! Blessed be God! He does not

rebuke us first and help us afterwards, but rebukes by helping. What

could the disciples say, as they sat there in the great calm, in answer

to Christ's question, Why are ye fearful?' Fear can give no reasonable

account of itself, if Christ is in the boat. If our faith unites us to

Jesus, there is nothing that need shake our courage. If He is our fear

and our dread,' we shall not need to fear their fear,' who have not the

all-conquering Christ to fight for them.

Well roars the storm to them who hear

A deeper voice across the storm.'

Jesus wondered at the slowness of the disciples to learn their lesson,

and the wonder was reflected in the sad question, Have ye not yet

faith?'--not yet, after so many miracles, and living beside Me for so

long? How much more keen the edge of that question is when addressed to

us, who know Him so much better, and have centuries of His working for

His servants to look back on. When, in the tempests that sweep over our

own lives, we sometimes pass into a great calm as suddenly as if we had

entered the centre of a typhoon, we wonder unbelievingly instead of

saying, out of a faith nourished by experience, It is just like Him.'

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THE TOILING CHRIST

They took Him even as He was in the ship. . .. And He was in the hinder

part of the ship, asleep on a pillow.'--Mark iv. 36, 38.

Among the many loftier characteristics belonging to Christ's life and

work, there is a very homely one which is often lost sight of; and that

is, the amount of hard physical exertion, prolonged even to fatigue and

exhaustion, which He endured.

Christ is our pattern in a great many other things more impressive and

more striking; and He is our pattern in this, that in the sweat of His

brow' He did His work, and knew not only what it was to suffer, but

what it was to toil for man's salvation. And, perhaps, if we thought a

little more than we do of such a prosaic characteristic of His life as

that, it might invest it with some more reality for us, besides

teaching us other large and important lessons.

I have thrown together these two clauses for our text now, simply for

the sake of that one feature which they both portray so strikingly.

They took Him even as He was in the ship.' Now many expositors suppose

that in the very form of that phrase there is suggested the extreme of

weariness and exhaustion which He suffered, after the hard day's toil.

Whether that be so or no, the swiftness of the move to the little boat,

although there was nothing in the nature of danger or of imperative

duty to hurry Him away, and His going on board without a moment's

preparation, leaving the crowd on the beach, seem most naturally

accounted for by supposing that He had come to the last point of

physical endurance, and that His frame, worn out by the hard day's

work, needed one thing--rest.

And so, the next that we see of Him is that, as soon as He gets into

the ship He falls fast asleep on the wooden pillow--a hard bed for His

head!--in the stern of the little fishing boat, and there He lies so

tired--let us put it into plain prose and strip away the false veil of

big words with which we invest that nature--so tired that the storm

does not awake Him; and they have to come to Him, and lay their hands

upon Him, and say to Him, Master, carest Thou not that we perish?'

before compassion again beat back fatigue, and quickened Him for fresh

exertions.

This, then, is the one lesson which I wish to consider now, and there

are three points which I deal with in pursuance of my task. I wish to

point out a little more in detail the signs that we have in the Gospels

of this characteristic of Christ's work--the toilsomeness of His

service; then to consider, secondly, the motives which He Himself tells

us impelled to such service; and then, finally, the worth which that

toil bears for us.

I. First, then, let me point out some of the significant hints which

the gospel records give us of the toilsomeness of Christ's service.

Now we are principally indebted for these to this Gospel by Mark, which

ancient tradition has set forth as being especially and eminently the

Gospel of the Servant of God,' therein showing a very accurate

conception of its distinguishing characteristics. Just as Matthew's

Gospel is the Gospel of the King, regal in tone from beginning to end;

just as Luke's is the Gospel of the Man, human and universal in its

tone; just as John's is the Gospel of the Eternal Word, so Mark's is

the Gospel of the Servant. The inscription written over it all might

be, Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God.' Behold my Servant whom I

uphold.'

And if you will take this briefest of all the Gospels, and read it over

from that point of view, you will be surprised to discover what a

multitude of minute traits make up the general impression, and what a

unity is thereby breathed into the narrative.

For instance, did you ever observe the peculiar beginning of this

Gospel? There are here none of the references to the prophecies of the

King, no tracing of His birth through the royal stock to the great

progenitor of the nation, no adoration by the Eastern sages, which we

find in Matthew, no miraculous birth nor growing childhood as in Luke,

no profound unveiling of the union of the Word with God before the

world was, as in John; but the narrative begins with His baptism, and

passes at once to the story of His work. The same ruling idea accounts

for the uniform omission of the title Lord' which in Mark's Gospel is

never applied to Christ until after the resurrection. There is only one

apparent exception, and there good authorities pronounce the word to be

spurious. Even in reports of conversations which are also given in the

other Gospels, and where Lord' occurs, Mark, of set purpose, omits it,

as if its presence would disturb the unity of the impression which he

desires to leave. You will find the investigation of the omissions in

this Gospel full of interest, and remarkably tending to confirm the

accuracy of the view which regards it as the Gospel of the Servant.

Notice then these traits of His service which it brings out.

The first of them I would suggest is--how distinctly it gives the

impression of swift, strenuous work. The narrative is brief and

condensed. We feel, all through these earlier chapters, at all events,

the presence of the pressing crowd coming to Him and desiring to be

healed, and but a word can be spared for each incident as the story

hurries on, trying to keep pace with His rapid service of

quick-springing compassion and undelaying help. There is one word which

is reiterated over and over again in these earlier chapters, remarkably

conveying this impression of haste and strenuous work; Mark's favourite

word is straightway,' immediately,' forthwith,' anon,' which are all

translations of one expression. You will find, if you glance over the

first, second, or third chapters at your leisure, that it comes in at

every turn. Take these instances which strike one's eye at the moment.

Straightway they forsook their nets'; Straightway He entered into the

synagogue'; Immediately His fame spread abroad throughout all the

region'; Forthwith they entered into the house of Simon's mother';

Anon, they tell Him of her'; Immediately the fever left her.' And so it

goes on through the whole story, a picture of a constant succession of

rapid acts of mercy and love. The story seems, as it were, to pant with

haste to keep up with Him as He moves among men, swift as a sunbeam,

and continuous in the outflow of His love as are these unceasing rays.

Again, we see in Christ's service, toil prolonged to the point of

actual physical exhaustion. The narrative before us is the most

striking instance of that which we meet with. It had been a long

wearying day of work. According to this chapter, the whole of the

profound parables concerning the kingdom of God had immediately

preceded the embarkation. But even these, with their explanation, had

been but a part of that day's labours. For, in Matthew's account of

them, we are told that they were spoken on the same day as that on

which His mother and brethren came desiring to speak with Him,--or, as

we elsewhere read, with hostile intentions to lay hold on Him as mad

and needing restraint. And that event, which we may well believe

touched deep and painful chords of feeling in His human heart, and

excited emotions more exhausting than much physical effort, occurred in

the midst of an earnest and prolonged debate with emissaries from

Jerusalem, in the course of which He spoke the solemn words concerning

blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, and Satan casting out Satan, and

poured forth some of His most terrible warnings, and some of His most

beseeching entreaties. No wonder that, after such a day, the hard

pillow of the boat was a soft resting-place for His wearied head; no

wonder that, as the evening quiet settled down on the mountain-girdled

lake, and the purple shadows of the hills stretched athwart the water,

He slept; no wonder that the storm which followed the sunset did not

wake Him; and beautiful, that wearied as He was, the disciples' cry at

once rouses Him, and the fatigue which shows His manhood gives place to

the divine energy which says unto the sea, Peace! be still.' The lips

which, a moment before, had been parted in the soft breathing of

wearied sleep, now open to utter the omnipotent word--so wonderfully

does He blend the human and the divine, the form of a servant' and the

nature of God.

We see, in Christ, toil that puts aside the claims of physical wants.

Twice in this Gospel we read of this The multitude cometh together

again, so that they could not so much as eat bread.' There were many

coming, and they had no leisure so much as to eat.'

We see in Christ's service a love which is at every man's beck and

call, a toil cheerfully rendered at the most unreasonable and

unseasonable times. As I said a moment or two ago, this Gospel makes

one feel, as none other of these narratives do, the pressure of that

ever-present multitude, the whirling excitement that eddied round the

calm centre. It tells us, for instance, more than once, how Christ,

wearied with His toil, feeling in body and in spirit the need of rest

and still communion, withdrew Himself from the crowd. He once departed

alone that He might seek God in prayer; once He went with His wearied

disciples apart into a desert place to rest awhile. On both occasions

the retirement is broken in upon before it is well begun. The sigh of

relief in the momentary rest is scarcely drawn, and the burden laid

down for an instant, when it has to be lifted again. His solitary

prayer is interrupted by the disciples, with All men seek for Thee,'

and, without a murmur or a pause, He buckles to His work again, and

says, Let us go into the next towns that I may preach there also; for

therefore am I sent.'

When He would carry His wearied disciples with Him for a brief

breathing time to the other side of the sea, and get away from the

thronging crowd, the people saw Him departing, and ran afoot out of all

cities,' and, making their way round the head of the lake, were all

there at the landing place before Him. Instead of seclusion and repose

He found the same throng and bustle. Here they were, most of them from

mere curiosity, some of them no doubt with deeper feelings; here they

were, with their diseased and their demoniacs, and as soon as His foot

touches the shore He is in the midst of it all again. And He meets it,

not with impatience at this rude intrusion on His privacy, not with

refusals to help. Only one emotion filled His heart. He forgot all

about weariness, and hunger, and retirement, and He was moved with

compassion towards them, because they were as sheep not having a

shepherd, and He began to teach them many things.' Such a picture may

well shame our languid, self-indulgent service, may stir us to

imitation and to grateful praise.

There is only one other point which I touch upon for a moment, as

showing the toil of Christ, and that is drawn from another Gospel. Did

you ever notice the large space occupied in Matthew's Gospel by the

record of the last day of His public ministry, and how much of all that

we know of His mission and message, and the future of the world and of

all men, we owe to the teaching of these four-and-twenty hours? Let me

put together, in a word, what happened on that day.

It included the conversation with the chief priests and elders about

the baptism of John, the parable of the householder that planted a

vineyard and digged a winepress, the parables of the kingdom of heaven,

the controversy with the Herodians about the tribute money, the

conversation with the Sadducees about the resurrection, with the

Pharisee about the great commandment in the law, the silencing of the

Pharisees by pointing to the 110th Psalm, the warning to the multitude

against the scribes and Pharisees who were hypocrites, protracted and

prolonged up to that wail of disappointed love, Behold! your house is

left unto you desolate.' And, as though that had not been enough for

one day, when He is going home from the Temple to find, for a night, in

that quiet little home of Bethany, the rest that He wants, as He rests

wearily on the slopes of Olivet, the disciples come to Him, Tell us,

when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming?'

and there follows all that wonderful prophecy of the destruction of

Jerusalem and the end of the world, the parable of the fig tree, the

warning not to suffer the thief to come, and the promise of reward for

the faithful and wise servant, the parable of the ten virgins, and in

all probability the parable of the king with the five talents; and the

words, that might be written in letters of fire, that tell us the final

course of all things, and the judgment of life eternal and death

everlasting! All this was the work of one of the days of the Son of

Man.' Of Him it was prophesied long ago, For Jerusalem's sake I will

not rest'; and His life on earth, as well as His life in heaven,

fulfils the prediction--the one by the toilsomeness of His service, the

other by the unceasing energy of His exalted power. He toiled unwearied

here, He works unresting there.

II. In the second place, let me ask you to notice how we get from our

Lord's own words a glimpse into the springs of this wonderful activity.

There are three points which distinctly come out in various places in

the Gospels as His motives for such unresting sedulousness and

continuance of toil. The first is conveyed by such words as these: I

must work the works of Him that sent Me.' Let us preach to other

cities, also: for therefore am I sent.' Wist ye not that I must be

about My Father's business?' My meat is to do the will of Him that sent

Me, and to finish His work.' All these express one thought. Christ

lived and toiled, and bore weariness and exhaustion, and counted every

moment as worthy to be garnered up and precious, as to be filled with

deeds of love and kindness, because wherever He went, and to whatsoever

He set His hand, He had the one consciousness of a great task laid upon

Him by a loving Father whom He loved, and whom, therefore, it was His

joy and His blessedness to serve.

And, remember that this motive made the life homogeneous--of a piece.

In all the variety of service, one spirit was expressed, and,

therefore, the service was one. No matter whether He were speaking

words of grace or of rebuke, or working works of power and love, or

simply looking a look of kindness on some outcast, or taking a little

child in His arms, or stilling with the same arms outstretched the wild

uproar of the storm--it was all the same. To Him life was all one.

There was nothing great, nothing small; nothing so insignificant that

it could be done negligently; nothing so hard that it surpassed His

power. The one motive made all duties equal; obedience to the Father

called forth His whole energy at every moment. To Him life was not

divided into a set of tasks of varying importance, some of which could

be accomplished with a finger's touch, and some of which demanded a

dead lift and strain of all the muscles. But whatsoever His hand found

to do He did with His might and that because He felt, be it great or

little, that it all came, if I may so say, into the day's work, and all

was equally great because the Father that sent Him had laid it upon

Him.

There is one thing that makes life mighty in its veriest trifles,

worthy in its smallest deeds, that delivers it from monotony, that

delivers it from insignificance. All will be great, and nothing will be

overpowering, when, living in communion with Jesus Christ, we say as He

says, My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me.'

And then, still further, another of the secret springs that move His

unwearied activity, His heroism of toil, is the thought expressed in

such words as these:--While I am in the world I am the light of the

world.' I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day; the

night cometh when no man can work.'

Jesus Christ manifested on earth performs indeed a work--the mightiest

which He came to do--which was done precisely then when the night did

come--namely, the work of His death, which is the atonement and

propitiation for the sins of the world.' And, further, the night, when

no man can work,' was not the end of His activity for us; for He

carries on His work of intercession and rule, His work of bestowing the

gifts purchased by His blood, amidst the glories of heaven; and that

perpetual application and dispensing of the blessed issues of His death

He has Himself represented as greater than the works, to which His

death put a period, in which He healed the bodies and spoke to the

hearts of those who heard, and lived a perfect life here upon this

sinful earth. But yet even He recognised the brief hour of sunny life

as being an hour that must be filled with service, and recognised the

fact that there was a task that He could only do when He lived the life

of a man upon earth. And so, if I might so say, He was a miser of the

moments, and carefully husbanding and garnering up every capacity and

every opportunity. He toiled with the toil of a man who has a task

before him, that must be done before the clock strikes six, and who

sees the hands move over the dial, and by every glance that he casts at

it is stimulated to intenser service and to harder toil. Christ felt

that impulse to service which we all ought to feel--The night cometh;

let me fill the day with work.'

And then there is a final motive which I need barely touch. He was

impelled to His sedulous service not only by loving, filial obedience

to the divine law, and by the consciousness of a limited and defined

period into which all the activity of one specific kind must be

condensed, but also by the motive expressed in such words as these, in

which this Gospel is remarkably rich, And Jesus, moved with compassion,

put forth His hand and touched him.' Thus, along with that supreme

consecration, along with that swift ardour that will fill the brief

hours ere nightfall with service, there was the constant pity of that

beating heart that moved the diligent hand. Christ, if I may so say,

could not help working as hard as He did, so long as there were so many

men round about Him that needed His sympathy and His aid.

III. So much then for the motives; and now a word finally as to the

worth of this toil for us.

I do not stay to elucidate one consideration that might be suggested,

viz., how precious a proof it is of Christ's humanity. We find it

easier to bring home His true manhood to our thoughts, when we remember

that He, like us, knew the pressure of physical fatigue. Not only was

it a human spirit that wept and rejoiced, that was moved with

compassion, and sometimes with indignation, but it was a human body,

bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, that, wearied with walking in

the burning sun, sat on the margin of the well; that was worn out and

needed to sleep; that knew hunger, as is testified by His sending the

disciples to buy meat; that was thirsty, as is testified by His saying,

Give Me to drink.' The true corporeal manhood of Jesus Christ, and the

fact that that manhood is the tabernacle of God--without these two

facts the morality and the teaching of Christianity swing loose in

vacuo, and have no holdfast in history, nor any leverage by which they

can move men's hearts! But, when we know that the common necessities of

fatigue, and hunger, and thirst belonged to Him, then we gratefully and

reverently say, Forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and

blood, he also Himself took part of the same.'

This fact of Christ's toil is of worth to us in other ways.

Is not that hard work of Jesus Christ a lesson for us, brethren, in our

daily tasks and toils--a lesson which, if it were learnt and practised,

would make a difference not only on the intensity but upon the spirit

with which we labour? A great deal of fine talk is indulged in about

the dignity of labour and the like. Labour is a curse until communion

with God in it, which is possible through Jesus Christ, makes it a

blessing and a joy. Christ, in the sweat of His brow, won our

salvation; and our work only becomes great when it is work done in, and

for, and by Him.

And what do we learn from His example? We learn these things: the plain

lesson, first,--task all your capacity and use every minute in doing

the duty that is plainly set before you to do. Christian virtues are

sometimes thought to be unreal and unworldly things. I was going to say

the root of them, certainly the indispensable accompaniment for them

all, is the plain, prosaic, most unromantic virtue of hard work.

And beyond that, what do we learn? The lesson that most toilers in

England want. There is no need to preach to the most of us to work any

harder, in one department of work at any rate; but there is great need

to remind us of what it was that at once stirred Jesus Christ into

energy and kept Him calm in the midst of labour--and that was that

everything was equally and directly referred to His Father's will.

People talk nowadays about missions.' The only thing worth giving that

name to is the mission' which He gives us, who sends us into the world

not to do our own will, but to do the will of Him that sent us. There

is a fatal monotony in all our lives--a terrible amount of hard

drudgery in them all. We have to set ourselves morning after morning to

tasks that look to be utterly insignificant and disproportionate to the

power that we bring to bear upon them, so that men are like elephants

picking up pins with their trunks; and yet we may make all our

commonplace drudgery great, and wondrous, and fair, and full of help

and profit to our souls, if, over it all--our shops, our desks, our

ledgers, our studies, our kitchens, and our nurseries--we write, My

meat is to do the will of Him that sent me.' We may bring the greatest

principles to bear upon the smallest duties.

What more do we learn from Christ's toil? The possible harmony of

communion and service. His labour did not break His fellowship with

God. He was ever in the secret place of the Most High,' even while He

was in the midst of crowds. He has taught us that it is possible to be

in the house of the Lord' all the days of our lives, and by His

ensample, as by His granted Spirit, encourages us to aim at so serving

that we shall never cease to behold, and so beholding that we shall

never cease to serve our Father. The life of contemplation and the life

of practice, so hard to harmonise in our experience, perfectly meet in

Christ.

What more do we learn from our Lord's toils? The cheerful constant

postponement of our own ease, wishes, or pleasure to the call of the

Father's voice, or to the echo of it in the sighing of such as be

sorrowful. I have already referred to the instances of His putting

aside His need for rest, and His desire for still fellowship with God,

at the call of whoever needed Him. It was the same always. If a

Nicodemus comes by night, if a despairing father forces his way into

the house of feasting, if another suppliant finds Him in a house, where

He would have remained hid, if they come running to Him in the way, or

drop down their sick before Him through the very roof--it is all the

same. He never thinks of Himself, but gladly addresses Himself to heal

and bless. How such an example followed would change our lives and

amaze and shake the world!--I come, not to do Mine own will.' Even

Christ pleased not Himself.'

But that toil is not only a pattern for our lives; it is an appeal to

our grateful hearts. Surely a toiling Christ is as marvellous as a

dying Christ. And the immensity and the purity and the depth of His

love are shown no less by this, that He labours to accomplish it, than

by this, that He dies to complete it. He will not give blessings which

depend upon mere will, and can be bestowed as a king might fling a

largess to a beggar without effort, and with scarce a thought, but

blessings which He Himself has to agonise and to energise, and to lead

a life of obedience, and to die a death of shame, in order to procure.

I will not offer burnt-offering to God of that which doth cost me

nothing,' says the grateful heart. But in so saying it is but following

in the track of the loving Christ, who will not give unto man that

which cost Him nothing, and who works, as well as dies, in order that

we may be saved.

And, O brethren! think of the contrast between what Christ has done to

save us, and what we do to secure and appropriate that salvation! He

toiled all His days, buying our peace with His life, going down into

the mine and bringing up the jewels at the cost of His own precious

blood. And you and I stand with folded arms, too apathetic to take the

rich treasures that are freely given to us of God! He has done

everything, that we may have nothing to do, and we will not even put

out our slack hands to clasp the grace purchased by His blood, and

commended by His toil! Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed

to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them

slip.'

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THE LORD OF DEMONS

And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of

the Gadarenes. 2. And when He was come out of the ship, immediately

there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, 3. Who had

his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with

chains: 4. Because that he had been often bound with fetters and

chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters

broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. 5. And always, night

and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting

himself with stones. 6. But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and

worshipped Him, 7. And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I

to do with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of the most high God? I adjure Thee by

God, that Thou torment me not. 8. For He said unto him, Come out of the

man, thou unclean spirit. 9. And He asked him, What is thy name? And he

answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many. 10. And he

besought Him much that He would not send them away out of the country.

11. Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine

feeding. 12. And all the devils besought Him, saying, Send us into the

swine, that we may enter into them. 13. And forthwith Jesus gave them

leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine:

and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were

about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea. 14. And they that fed

the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they

went out to see what it was that was done. 15. And they come to Jesus,

and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion,

sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. 16.

And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed

with the devil, and also concerning the swine. 17. And they began to

pray Him to depart out of their coasts. 18. And when He was come into

the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed Him that he

might be with Him. 19. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto

him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord

hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. 20. And he

departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had

done for him: and all men did marvel.'--Mark v. 1-20.

The awful picture of this demoniac is either painted from life, or it

is one of the most wonderful feats of the poetic imagination. Nothing

more terrible, vivid, penetrating, and real was ever conceived by the

greatest creative genius. If it is not simply a portrait, Ƴchylus or

Dante might own the artist for a brother. We see the quiet landing on

the eastern shore, and almost hear the yells that broke the silence as

the fierce, demon-ridden man hurried to meet them, perhaps with hostile

purpose. The dreadful characteristics of his state are sharply and

profoundly signalised. He lives up in the rock-hewn tombs which

overhang the beach; for all that belongs to corruption and death is

congenial to the subjects of that dark kingdom of evil. He has

superhuman strength, and has known no gentle efforts to reclaim, but

only savage attempts to tame' by force, as if he were a beast. Fetters

and manacles have been snapped like rushes by him. Restless, sleepless,

hating men, he has made the night hideous with his wild shrieks, and

fled, swift as the wind, from place to place among the lonely hills.

Insensible to pain, and deriving some dreadful satisfaction from his

own wounds, he has gashed himself with splinters of rock, and howled,

in a delirium of pain and pleasure, at the sight of his own blood. His

sharpened eyesight sees Jesus from afar, and, with the disordered haste

and preternatural agility which marked all his movements, he runs

towards Him. Such is the introduction to the narrative of the cure. It

paints for us not merely a maniac, but a demoniac. He is not a man at

war with himself, but a man at war with other beings, who have forced

themselves into his house of life. At least, so says Mark, and so said

Jesus; and if the story before us is true, its subsequent incidents

compel the acceptance of that explanation. What went into the herd of

swine? The narrative of the restoration of the sufferer has a

remarkable feature, which may help to mark off its stages. The word

besought' occurs four times in it, and we may group the details round

each instance.

I. The demons beseeching Jesus through the man's voice. He was, in the

exact sense of the word, distracted--drawn two ways. For it would seem

to have been the self in him that ran to Jesus and fell at His feet, as

if in some dim hope of rescue; but it is the demons in him that speak,

though the voice be his. They force him to utter their wishes, their

terrors, their loathing of Christ, though he says I' and me' as if

these were his own. That horrible condition of a double, or, as in this

case, a manifold personality, speaking through human organs, and

overwhelming the proper self, mysterious as it is, is the very essence

of the awful misery of the demoniacs. Unless we are resolved to force

meanings of our own on Scripture, I do not see how we can avoid

recognising this. What black thoughts, seething with all rebellious

agitation, the reluctant lips have to utter! The self-drawn picture of

the demoniac nature is as vivid as, and more repellent than, the

Evangelist's terrible portrait of the outward man. Whatever dumb

yearning after Jesus may have been in the oppressed human

consciousness, his words are a shriek of terror and recoil. The mere

presence of Christ lashes the demons into paroxysms: but before the man

spoke, Christ had spoken His stern command to come forth. He is

answered by this howl of fear and hate. Clear recognition of Christ's

person is in it, and not difficult to explain, if we believe that

others than the sufferer looked through his wild eyes, and spoke in his

loud cry. They know Him who had conquered their prince long ago; if the

existence of fallen spirits be admitted, their knowledge is no

difficulty.

The next element in the words is hatred, as fixed as the knowledge is

clear. God's supremacy and loftiness, and Christ's nature, are

recognised, but only the more abhorred. The name of God can be used as

a spell to sway Jesus, but it has no power to touch this fierce hatred

into submission. The devils also believe and tremble.' This, then, is a

dark possibility, which has become actual for real living beings, that

they should know God, and hate as heartily as they know clearly. That

is the terminus towards which human spirits may be travelling. Christ's

power, too, is recognised, and His mere presence makes the flock of

obscene creatures nested in the man uneasy, like bats in a cave, who

flutter against a light. They shrink from Him, and shudderingly

renounce all connection with Him, as if their cries would alter facts,

or make Him relax His grip. The very words of the question prove its

folly. What is there to me and thee?' implies that there were two

parties to the answer; and the writhings of one of them could not break

the bond. To all this is to be added that the torment' deprecated was

the expulsion from the man, as if there were some grim satisfaction and

dreadful alleviation in being there, rather than in the abyss'--as Luke

gives it--which appears to be the alternative. If we put all these

things together, we get an awful glimpse into the secrets of that dark

realm, which it is better to ponder with awe than flippantly to deny or

mock.

How striking is Christ's unmoved calm in the face of all this fury! He

is always laconic in dealing with demoniacs; and, no doubt, His

tranquil presence helped to calm the man, however it excited the demon.

The distinct intention of the question, What is thy name?' is to rouse

the man's self-consciousness, and make him feel his separate existence,

apart from the alien tyranny which had just been using his voice and

usurping his personality. He had said I' and me.' Christ meets him

with, Who is the I'? and the very effort to answer would facilitate the

deliverance. But for the moment the foreign influence is still too

strong, and the answer, than which there is nothing more weird and

awful in the whole range of literature, comes: My name is Legion; for

we are many.' Note the momentary gleam of the true self in the first

word or two, fading away into the old confusion. He begins with my,'

but he drops back to we.' Note the pathetic force of the name. This

poor wretch had seen the solid mass of the Roman legion, the instrument

by which foreign tyrants crushed the nations. He felt himself oppressed

and conquered by their multitudinous array. The voice of the legion'

has a kind of cruel ring of triumph, as if spoken as much to terrify

the victim as to answer the question.

Again the man's voice speaks, beseeching the direct opposite of what he

really would have desired. He was not so much in love with his dreadful

tenants as to pray against their expulsion, but their fell power

coerces his lips, and he asks for what would be his ruin. That prayer,

clean contrary to the man's only hope, is surely the climax of the

horror. In a less degree, we also too often deprecate the stroke which

delivers, and would fain keep the legion of evils which riot within.

II. The demons beseeching Jesus without disguise. There seems to be

intended a distinction between he besought,' in verse 10, and they

besought,' in verse 12. Whether we are to suppose that, in the latter

case, the man's voice was used or no, the second request was more

plainly not his, but theirs. It looks as if, somehow, the command was

already beginning to take effect, and he' and they' were less closely

intertwined. It is easy to ridicule this part of the incident, and as

easy to say that it is incredible; but it is wiser to remember the

narrow bounds of our knowledge of the unseen world of being, and to be

cautious in asserting that there is nothing beyond the horizon but

vacuity. If there be unclean spirits, we know too little about them to

say what is possible. Only this is plain--that the difficulty of

supposing them to inhabit swine is less, if there be any difference,

than of supposing them to inhabit men, since the animal nature,

especially of such an animal, would correspond to their impurity, and

be open to their driving. The house and the tenant are well matched.

But why should the expelled demons seek such an abode? It would appear

that anywhere was better than the abyss,' and that unless they could

find some creature to enter, thither they must go. It would seem, too,

that there was no other land open to them--for the prayer on the man's

lips had been not to send them out of the country,' as if that was the

only country on earth open to them. That makes for the opinion that

demoniacal possession was the dark shadow which attended, for reasons

not discoverable by us, the light of Christ's coming, and was limited

in time and space by His earthly manifestation. But on such matters

there is not ground enough for certainty.

Another difficulty has been raised as to Christ's right to destroy

property. It was very questionable property, if the owners were Jews.

Jesus owns all things, and has the right and the power to use them as

He will; and if the purposes served by the destruction of animal life

or property are beneficent and lofty, it leaves no blot on His

goodness. He used His miraculous power twice for destruction--once on a

fig-tree, once on a herd of swine. In both cases, the good sought was

worth the loss. Whether was it better that the herd should live and

fatten, or that a man should be delivered, and that he and they who saw

should be assured of his deliverance and of Christ's power? Is not a

man much better than a sheep,' and much more than a pig? They are born

to be killed, and nobody cries out cruelty. Why should not Christ have

sanctioned this slaughter, if it helped to steady the poor man's

nerves, or to establish the reality of possession and of his

deliverance? Notice that the drowning of the herd does not appear to

have entered into the calculations of the unclean spirits. They desired

houses to live in after their expulsion, and for them to plunge the

swine into the lake would have defeated their purpose. The stampede was

an unexpected effect of the commingling of the demonic with the animal

nature, and outwitted the demons. The devil is an ass.' There is a

lower depth than the animal nature; and even swine feel uncomfortable

when the demon is in them, and in their panic rush anywhere to get rid

of the incubus, and, before they know, find themselves struggling in

the lake. Which things are an allegory.'

III. The terrified Gerasenes beseeching Jesus to leave them. They had

rather have their swine than their Saviour, and so, though they saw the

demoniac sitting, clothed, and in his right mind,' at the feet of

Jesus, they in turn beseech that He should take Himself away. Fear and

selfishness prompted the prayer. The communities on the eastern side of

the lake were largely Gentile; and, no doubt, these people knew that

they did many worse things than swine-keeping, and may have been afraid

that some more of their wealth would have to go the same road as the

herd. They did not want instruction, nor feel that they needed a

healer. Were their prayers so very unlike the wishes of many of us? Is

there nobody nowadays unwilling to let the thought of Christ into his

life, because he feels an uneasy suspicion that, if Christ comes, a

good deal will have to go? How many trades and schemes of life really

beseech Jesus to go away and leave them in peace! And He goes away. The

tragedy of life is that we have the awful power of severing ourselves

from His influence. Christ commands unclean spirits, but He can only

plead with hearts. And if we bid Him depart, He is fain to leave us for

the time to the indulgence of our foolish and wicked schemes. If any

man open, He comes in--oh, how gladly I but if any man slam the door in

His face, He can but tarry without and knock. Sometimes His withdrawing

does more than His loudest knocking; and sometimes they who repelled

Him as He stood on the beach call Him back, as He moves away to the

boat. It is in the hope that they may, that He goes.

IV. The restored man's beseeching to abide with Christ. No wonder that

the spirit of this man, all tremulous with the conflict, and scarcely

able yet to realise his deliverance, clung to Christ, and besought Him

to let him continue by His side. Conscious weakness, dread of some

recurrence of the inward hell, and grateful love, prompted the prayer.

The prayer itself was partly right and partly wrong. Right, in clinging

to Jesus as the only refuge from the past misery; wrong, in clinging to

His visible presence as the only way of keeping near Him. Therefore, He

who had permitted the wish of the demons, and complied with the

entreaties of the terrified mob, did not yield to the prayer, throbbing

with love and conscious weakness. Strange that Jesus should put aside a

hand that sought to grasp His in order to be safe; but His refusal was,

as always, the gift of something better, and He ever disappoints the

wish in order more truly to satisfy the need. The best defence against

the return of the evil spirits was in occupation. It is the empty'

house which invites them back. Nothing was so likely to confirm and

steady the convalescent mind as to dwell on the fact of his

deliverance. Therefore he is sent to proclaim it to friends who had

known his dreadful state, and amidst old associations which would help

him to knit his new life to his old, and to treat his misery as a

parenthesis. Jesus commanded silence or speech according to the need of

the subjects of His miracles. For some, silence was best, to deepen the

impression of blessing received; for others, speech was best, to engage

and so to fortify the mind against relapse.

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A REFUSED REQUEST

He that had been possessed with the devil prayed Jesus that he might be

with Him. 19. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go

home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done

for thee.'--Mark v. 18,19.

There are three requests, singularly contrasted with each other, made

to Christ in the course of this miracle of healing the Gadarene

demoniac. The evil spirits ask to be permitted to go into the swine;

the men of the country, caring more for their swine than their Saviour,

beg Him to take Himself away, and relieve them of His unwelcome

presence; the demoniac beseeches Him to be allowed to stop beside Him.

Two of the requests are granted; one is refused. The one that was

refused is the one that we might have expected to be granted.

Christ forces Himself upon no man, and so, when they besought Him to

go, He went, and took salvation with Him in the boat. Christ withdraws

Himself from no man who desires Him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not,

and said, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the

Lord hath done for thee.'

Now, do you not think that if we put these three petitions and their

diverse answers together, and look especially at this last one, where

the natural wish was refused, we ought to be able to learn some

lessons? The first thing I would notice is, the clinging of the healed

man to his Healer.

Think of him half an hour before, a raging maniac; now all at once

conscious of a strange new sanity and calmness; instead of lashing

himself about, and cutting himself with stones, and rending his chains

and fetters, sitting clothed, and in his right mind,' at the feet of

Jesus. No wonder that he feared that when the Healer went the demons

would come back--no wonder that he besought Him that he might still

keep within that quiet sacred circle of light which streamed from His

presence, across the border of which no evil thing could pass. Love

bound him to his Benefactor; dread made him shudder at the thought of

losing his sole Protector, and being again left, in that partly heathen

land, solitary, to battle with the strong foes that had so long rioted

in his house of life. And so he begged that he might be with Him.'

That poor heathen man--for you must remember that this miracle was not

wrought on the sacred soil of Palestine--that poor heathen man, just

having caught a glimpse of how calm and blessed life might be, is the

type of us all. And there is something wrong with us if our love does

not, like his, desire above all things the presence of Jesus Christ;

and if our consciousness of impotence does not, in like manner, drive

us to long that our sole Deliverer shall not be far away from us.

Merchant-ships in time of war, like a flock of timid birds, keep as

near as they can to the armed convoy, for the only safety from the guns

of the enemy's cruisers is in keeping close to their strong protector.

The traveller upon some rough, unknown road, in the dark, holds on by

his guide's skirts or hand, and feels that if he loses touch he loses

the possibility of safety. A child clings to his parent when dangers

are round him. The convalescent patient does not like to part with his

doctor. And if we rightly learned who it is that has cured us, and what

is the condition of our continuing whole and sound, like this man we

shall pray that He may suffer us to be with Him. Fill the heart with

Christ, and there is no room for the many evil spirits that make up the

legion that torments it The empty heart invites the devils, and they

come back, Even if it is swept and garnished,' and brought into

respectability, propriety, and morality, they come back, There is only

one way to keep them out; when the ark is in the Temple, Dagon will be

lying, like the brute form that he is, a stump upon the threshold. The

condition of our security is close contact with Jesus Christ. If we

know the facts of life, the temptations that ring us round, the

weakness of these wayward wills of ours, and the strength of this

intrusive and masterful flesh and sense that we have to rule, we shall

know and feel that our only safety is our Master's presence.

Further, note the strange refusal.

Jesus Christ went through the world, or at least the little corner of

it which His earthly career occupied, seeking for men that desired to

have Him, and it is impossible that He should have put away any soul

that desired to be present with Him. Yet, though His one aim was to

draw men to Him, and the prospect that He should be able to exercise a

stronger attraction over a wider area reconciled Him to the prospect of

the Cross, so that He said in triumph, I, when I am lifted up from the

earth, will draw all men unto Me,' he meets this heathen man, feeble in

his crude and recent sanity, with a flat refusal. He suffered him not.'

Most probably the reason for the strange and apparently anomalous

dealing with such a desire was to be found in the man's temperament.

Most likely it was the best thing for him that he should stop quietly

in his own house, and have no continuance of the excitement and

perpetual change which would have necessarily been his lot if he had

been allowed to go with Jesus Christ. We may be quite sure that when

the Lord with one hand seemed to put him away, He was really, with a

stronger attraction, drawing him to Himself; and that the peculiarity

of the method of treatment was determined with exclusive reference to

the real necessities of the person who was subject to it.

But yet, underlying the special case, and capable of being stated in

the most general terms, lies this thought, that Jesus Christ's

presence, the substance of the demoniac's desire, may be as completely,

and, in some cases, will be more completely, realised amongst the

secularities of ordinary life than amidst the sanctities of outward

communion and companionship with Him. Jesus was beginning here to wean

the man from his sensuous dependence upon His localised and material

presence. It was good for him, and it is good for us all, to feel our

feet,' so to speak. Responsibility laid, and felt to be laid, upon us

is a steadying and ennobling influence. And it was better that the

demoniac should learn to stand calmly, when apparently alone, than that

he should childishly be relying on the mere external presence of his

Deliverer.

Be sure of this, that when the Lord went away across the lake, He left

His heart and His thoughts, and His care and His power over there, on

the heathen side of the sea; and that when the people thronged Him' on

the other side, and the poor woman pressed through the crowd, that

virtue might come to her by her touch, virtue was at the same time

raying out across the water to the solitary newly healed demoniac, to

sustain him too.

And so we may all learn that we may have, and it depends upon ourselves

whether we do or do not have, all protection all companionship, and all

the sweetness of Christ's companionship and the security of Christ's

protection just as completely when we are at home amongst our

friends--that is to say, when we are about our daily work, and in the

secularities of our calling or profession--as when we are in the secret

place of the Most High' and holding fellowship with a present Christ.

Oh, to carry Him with us into every duty, to realise Him in all

circumstances, to see the light of His face shine amidst the darkness

of calamity, and the pointing of His directing finger showing us our

road amidst all perplexities of life! Brethren, that is possible. When

Jesus Christ suffered him not to go with Him,' Jesus Christ stayed

behind with the man.

Lastly, we have here the duty enjoined.

Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath

done for thee.' The man went home and translated the injunction into

word and deed. As I said, the reason for the peculiarity of his

treatment, in his request being refused, was probably his peculiar

temperament. So again I would say the reason for the commandment laid

upon him, which is also anomalous, was probably the peculiarity of his

disposition. Usually our Lord was careful to enjoin silence upon those

whom He benefited by His miraculous cures. That injunction of silence

was largely owing to His desire not to create or fan the flame of

popular excitement. But that risk was chiefly to be guarded against in

the land of Israel, and here, where we have a miracle upon Gentile

soil, there was not the same occasion for avoiding talk and notoriety.

But probably the main reason for the exceptional commandment to go and

publish abroad what the Lord had done was to be found in the simple

fact that this man's malady and his disposition were such that external

work of some sort was the best thing to prevent him from relapsing into

his former condition. His declaration to everybody of his cure would

help to confirm his cure; and whilst he was speaking about being

healed, he would more and more realise to himself that he was healed.

Having work to do would take him out of himself, which no doubt was a

great security against the recurrence of the evil from which he had

been delivered. But however that may be, look at the plain lesson that

lies here. Every healed man should be a witness to his Healer; and

there is no better way of witnessing than by our lives, by the

elevation manifested in our aims, by our aversion from all low,

earthly, gross things, by the conspicuous--not made conspicuous by us,

conspicuous because it cannot be hid--concentration and devotion, and

unselfishness and Christlikeness of our daily lives to show that we are

really healed. If we manifest these things in our conduct, then, when

we say it was Jesus Christ that healed me,' people will be apt to

believe us. But if this man had gone away into the mountains and

amongst the tombs as he used to do, and had continued all the former

characteristics of his devil-ridden life, who would have believed him

when he talked about being healed? And who ought to believe you when

you say, Christ is my Saviour,' if your lives are, to all outward

seeming, exactly what they were before? The sphere in which the healed

man's witness was to be borne tested the reality of his healing. Go

home to thy friends, and tell them.' I wonder how many Christian

professors there are who would be least easily believed by those who

live in the same house with them, if they said that Jesus had cast

their devils out of them. It is a great mistake to take recent

converts, especially if they have been very profligate beforehand, and

to hawk them about the country as trophies of God's converting power.

Let them stop at home, and bethink themselves, and get sober and

confirmed, and let their changed lives prove the reality of Christ's

healing power. They can speak to some purpose after that.

Further, remember that there is no better way for keeping out devils

than working for Jesus Christ. Many a man finds that the true

cure--say, for instance, of doubts that buzz about him and disturb him,

is to go away and talk to some one about his Saviour. Work for Jesus

amongst people that do not know Him is a wonderful sieve for sifting

out the fundamental articles of the Christian faith. And when we go to

other people, and tell them of that Lord, and see how the message is

sometimes received, and what it sometimes does, we come away with

confirmed faith.

But, in any case, it is better to work for Him than to sit alone,

thinking about Him. The two things have to go together; and I know very

well that there is a great danger, in the present day, of exaggeration,

and insisting too exclusively upon the duty of Christian work whilst

neglecting to insist upon the duty of Christian meditation. But, on the

other hand, it blows the cobwebs out of a man's brain; it puts vigour

into him, it releases him from himself, and gives him something better

to think about, when he listens to the Master's voice, Go home to thy

friends, and tell them what great things the Lord hath done for thee.'

Master! it is good for us to be here. Let us make three tabernacles.

Stay here; let us enjoy ourselves up in the clouds, with Moses and

Elias; and never mind about what goes on below.' But there was a

demoniac boy down there that needed to be healed; and the father was at

his wits' end, and the disciples were at theirs because they could not

heal him. And so Jesus Christ turned His back upon the Mount of

Transfiguration, and the company of the blessed two, and the Voice that

said, This is My beloved Son,' and hurried down where human woes called

Him, and found that He was as near God, and so did Peter and James and

John, as when up there amid the glory.

Go home to thy friends, and tell them'; and you will find that to do

that is the best way to realise the desire which seemed to be put

aside, the desire for the presence of Christ. For be sure that wherever

He may not be, He always is where a man, in obedience to Him, is doing

His commandments. So when He said, Go home to thy friends,' He was

answering the request that He seamed to reject, and when the Gadarene

obeyed, he would find, to his astonishment and his grateful wonder,

that the Lord had not gone away in the boat, but was with him still. Go

ye into all the world and preach the Gospel. Lo! I am with you always.'

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TALITHA CUMI

And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by

name; and when he saw Him, he fell at His feet, 23. And besought Him

greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray

Thee, come and lay Thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she

shall live. 24. And Jesus went with him; and much people followed Him,

and thronged Him. . .. 35. While He yet spake, there came from the

ruler of the synagogue's house certain which said, Thy daughter is

dead: why troublest thou the Master any further? 36. As soon as Jesus

heard the word that was spoken, He saith unto the ruler of the

synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe. 37. And He suffered no man to

follow Him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James. 38.

And He cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the

tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly. 39. And when He was come

in, He saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is

not dead, but sleepeth. 40. And they laughed Him to scorn. But when He

had put them all out, He taketh the father and the mother of the

damsel, and them that were with Him, and entereth in where the damsel

was lying. 41. And He took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her,

Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee,

arise. 42. And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was of

the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great

astonishment. 43. And He charged them straitly that no man should know

it; and commanded that something should be given her to eat.'--Mark v.

22-24, 35-43.

The scene of this miracle was probably Capernaum; its time, according

to Matthew, was the feast at his house after his call. Mark's date

appears to be later, but he may have anticipated the feast in his

narrative, in order to keep the whole of the incidents relating to

Matthew's apostleship together. Jairus's knowledge of Jesus is implied

in the story, and perhaps Jesus' acquaintance with him.

I. We note, first, the agonised appeal and the immediate answer.

Desperation makes men bold. Conventionalities are burned up by the fire

of agonised petitioning for help in extremity. Without apology or

preliminary, Jairus bursts in, and his urgent need is sufficient

excuse. Jesus never complains of scant respect when wrung hearts cry to

Him. But this man was not only driven by despair, but drawn by trust.

He was sure that, even though his little darling had been all but dead

when he ran from his house, and was dead by this time, for all he knew,

Jesus could give her life. Perhaps he had not faced the stern

possibility that she might already be gone, nor defined precisely what

he hoped for in that case. But he was sure of Jesus' power, and he says

nothing to show that he doubted His willingness. A beautiful trust

shines through his words, based, no doubt, on what he had known and

seen of Jesus' miracles. We have more pressing and deeper needs, and we

have fuller and deeper knowledge of Jesus, wherefore our approach to

Him should be at least as earnest and confidential as Jairus's was. If

our Lord was at the feast when this interruption took place, His

gracious, immediate answer becomes more lovely, as a sign of His

willingness to bring the swiftest help. While they are yet speaking, I

will hear.' Jairus had not finished asking before Jesus was on His feet

to go.

The father's impatience would be satisfied when they were on their way,

but how he would chafe, and think every moment an age, while Jesus

stayed, as if at entire leisure, to deal with another silent

petitioner! But His help to one never interferes with His help to

another, and no case is so pressing as that He cannot spare time to

stay to bless some one else. The poor, sickly, shamefaced woman shall

be healed, and the little girl shall not suffer.

II. We have next the extinction and rekindling of Jairus's glimmer of

hope. Distances in Capernaum were short, and the messenger would soon

find Jesus. There was little sympathy in the harsh, bald announcement

of the death, or in the appended suggestion that the Rabbi need not be

further troubled. The speaker evidently was thinking more of being

polite to Jesus than of the poor father's stricken heart, Jairus would

feel then what most of us have felt in like circumstances,--that he had

been more hopeful than he knew. Only when the last glimmer is quenched

do we feel, by the blackness, how much light had lingered in our sky,

But Jesus knew Jairus's need before Jairus himself knew it, and His

strong word of cheer relit the torch ere the poor father had time to

speak. That loving eye reads our hearts and anticipates our dreary

hopelessness by His sweet comfortings. Faith is the only victorious

antagonist of fear. Jairus had every reason for abandoning hope, and

his only reason for clinging to it was faith. So it is with us all. It

is vain to bid us not be afraid when real dangers and miseries stare us

in the face; but it is not vain to bid us believe,' and if we do that,

faith, cast into the one scale, will outweigh a hundred good reasons

for dread and despair cast into the other.

III. We have next the tumult of grief and the word that calms. The

hired mourners had lost no time, and in Eastern fashion were disturbing

the solemnity of death with their professional shrieks and wailings.

True grief is silent. Woe that weeps aloud is soon consoled.

What a contrast between the noise outside and the still death-chamber

and its occupant, and what a contrast between the agitation of the sham

comforters and the calmness of the true Helper! Christ's great word was

spoken for us all when our hearts are sore and our dear ones go. It

dissolves the dim shape into nothing ness, or, rather, it transfigures

it into a gracious, soothing form. Sleep is rest, and bears in itself

the pledge of waking. So Christ has changed the shadow feared of man'

into beauty, and in the strength of His great word we can meet the last

enemy with Welcome! friend.' It is strange that any one reading this

narrative should have been so blind to its deepest beauty as to suppose

that Jesus was here saying that the child had only swooned, and was

really alive. He was not denying that she was what men call dead,' but

He was, in the triumphant consciousness of His own power, and in the

clear vision of the realities of spiritual being, of which bodily

states are but shadows, denying that what men call death deserves the

name. Death' is the state of the soul separated from God, whether

united to the body or no,--not the separation of body and soul, which

is only a visible symbol of the more dread reality.

IV. We have finally the life-giving word and the life-preserving care.

Probably Jesus first freed His progress from the jostling crowd, and

then, when arrived, made the further selection of the three

apostles,--the first three of the mighty ones--and, as was becoming, of

the father and mother.

With what hushed, tense expectation they would enter the chamber! Think

of the mother's eyes watching Him. The very words that He spoke were

like a caress. There was infinite tenderness in that Damsel!' from His

lips, and so deep an impression did it make on Peter that he repeated

the very words to Mark, and used them, with the change of one letter

(Tabitha' for Talitha'), in raising Dorcas. The same tenderness is

expressed by His taking her by the hand, as, no doubt, her mother had

done, many a morning, on waking her. The father had asked Him to lay

His hand on her, that she might be made whole and live. He did as He

was asked,--He always does--and His doing according to our desire

brings larger blessings than we had thought of. Neither the touch of

His hand nor the words He spoke were the real agents of the child's

returning to life. It was His will which brought her back from whatever

vasty dimness she had entered. The forth-putting of Christ's will is

sovereign, and His word runs with power through all regions of the

universe. The dull, cold ear of death' hears, and they that hear shall

live,' whether they are, as men say, dead, or whether they are dead in

trespasses and sins.' The resurrection of a soul is a mightier act--if

we can speak of degrees of might in His acts--than that of a body.

It would be calming for the child of such strange experiences to see,

for the first thing that met her eyes opening again on the old familiar

home as on a strange land, the bending face of Jesus, and His touch

would steady her spirit and assure of His love and help. The quiet

command to give her food knits the wonder with common life, and teaches

precious lessons as to His economy of miraculous power, like His

bidding others loosen Lazarus's wrappings, and as to His devolution on

us of duties towards those whom He raises from the death of sin. But it

was given, not didactically, but lovingly. The girl was exhausted, and

sustenance was necessary, and would be sweet. So He thought upon a

small bodily need, and the love that gave life took care to provide

what was required to support it. He gives the greatest; He will take

care that we shall not lack the least.

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THE POWER OF FEEBLE FAITH

And a certain woman . . . 27. When she had heard of Jesus, came in the

press behind, and touched His garment. 28. For she said, If I may touch

but His clothes, I shall be whole.'--Mark v. 25, 27, 28.

In all the narratives of this miracle, it is embedded in the story of

Jairus's daughter, which it cuts in twain. I suppose that the

Evangelists felt, and would have us feel, the impression of calm

consciousness of power and of leisurely dignity produced by Christ's

having time to pause even on such an errand, in order to heal by the

way, as if parenthetically, this other poor sufferer. The child's

father with impatient earnestness pleads the urgency of her case--She

lieth at the point of death'; and to him and to the group of disciples,

it must have seemed that there was no time to be lost. But He who knows

that His resources are infinite can afford to let her die, while He

cures and saves this woman. She shall receive no harm, and her sister

suppliant has as great a claim on Him. The eyes of all wait' on His

equal love; He has leisure of heart to feel for each, and fulness of

power for all; and none can rob another of his share in the Healer's

gifts, nor any in all that dependent crowd jostle his neighbour out of

the notice of the Saviour's eye.

The main point of the story itself seems to be the illustration which

it gives of the genuineness and power of an imperfect faith, and of

Christ's merciful way of responding to and strengthening such a faith.

Looked at from that point of view, the narrative is very striking and

instructive.

The woman is a poor shrinking creature, broken down by long illness,

made more timid still by many disappointed hopes of core, depressed by

poverty to which her many doctors had brought her. She does not venture

to stop this new Rabbi-physician, as He goes with the rich church

dignitary to heal his daughter, but lets Him pass before she can make

up her mind to go near Him at all, and then comes creeping up in the

crowd behind, puts out her wasted, trembling hand to His garment's

hem--and she is whole. She would fain have stolen away with her

new-found blessing, but Christ forces her to stand out before the

throng, and there, with all their eyes upon her--cold, cruel eyes some

of them--to conquer her diffidence and shame, and tell all the truth.

Strange kindness that! strangely contrasted with His ordinary care to

avoid notoriety, and with His ordinary tender regard for shrinking

weakness! What may have been the reason? Certainly it was not for His

own sake at all, nor for others' chiefly, but for hers, that He did

this. The reason lay in the incompleteness of her faith. It was very

incomplete--although it was, Christ answered it. And then He sought to

make the cure, and the discipline that followed it, the means of

clearing and confirming her trust in Himself.

I. Following the order of the narrative thus understood, we have here

first the great lesson, that very imperfect faith may be genuine faith.

There was unquestionable confidence in Christ's healing power, and

there was earnest desire for healing. Our Lord Himself recognises her

faith as adequate to be the condition of her receiving the cure which

she desired. Of course, it was a very different thing from the faith

which unites us to Christ, and is the condition of our receiving our

soul's cure; and we shall never understand the relation of multitudes

of the people in the Gospels to Jesus, if we insist upon supposing that

the faith to be healed,' which many of them had, was a religious, or,

as we call it, saving faith.' But still, the trust which was directed

to Him, as the giver of miraculous temporal blessings, is akin to that

higher trust into which it often passed, and the principles regulating

the operation of the loftier are abundantly illustrated in the workings

of the lower.

The imperfections, then, of this woman's faith were many. It was

intensely ignorant trust. She dimly believes that, somehow or other,

this miracle-working Rabbi will heal her, but the cure is to be a piece

of magic, secured by material contact of her finger with His robe. She

has no idea that Christ's will, or His knowledge, much less His pitying

love, has anything to do with it. She thinks that she may get her

desire furtively, and may carry it away out of the crowd, and He, the

source of it, be none the wiser, and none the poorer, for the blessing

which she has stolen from Him. What utter blank ignorance of Christ's

character and way of working! What complete misconception of the

relation between Himself and His gift! What low, gross, superstitious

ideas! Yes, and with them all what a hunger of intense desire to be

whole; what absolute assurance of confidence that one finger-tip on His

robe was enough! Therefore she had her desire, and her Lord recognised

her faith as true, foolish and unworthy as were the thoughts which

accompanied it! Thank God! the same thing is true still, or what would

become of any of us? There may be a real faith in Christ, though there

be mixed with it many and grave errors concerning His work, and the

manner of receiving the blessings which He bestows. A man may have a

very hazy apprehension of the bearing and whole scope of even Scripture

declarations concerning the profounder aspects of Christ's person and

work, and yet be holding fast to Him by living confidence. I do not

wish to underrate for one moment the absolute necessity of clear and

true conceptions of revealed truth, in order to a vigorous and fully

developed faith; but, while there can be no faith worth calling so,

which is not based upon the intellectual reception of truth, there may

be faith based upon the very imperfect intellectual reception of very

partial truth. The power and vitality of faith are not measured by the

comprehensiveness and clearness of belief. The richest soil may bear

shrunken and barren ears; and on the arid sand, with the thinnest layer

of earth, gorgeous cacti may bloom out, and fleshy aloes lift their

sworded arms, with stores of moisture to help them through the heat. It

is not for us to say what amount of ignorance is destructive of the

possibility of real confidence in Jesus Christ. But for ourselves,

feeling how short a distance our eyesight travels, and how little,

after all our systems, the great bulk of men in Christian lands know

lucidly and certainly of theological truth, and how wide are the

differences of opinion amongst us, and how soon we come to towering

barriers, beyond which our poor faculties can neither pass nor look, it

ought to be a joy to us all, that a faith which is clouded with such

ignorance may yet be a faith which Christ accepts. He that knows and

trusts Him as Brother, Friend, Saviour, in whom he receives the pardon

and cleansing which he needs and desires, may have very much

misconception and error cleaving to him, but Christ accepts him. If at

the beginning His disciples know but this much, that they are sick unto

death, and have tried without success all other remedies, and this

more, that Christ will heal them; and if their faith builds upon that

knowledge, then they will receive according to their faith. By degrees

they will be taught more; they will be brought to the higher benches in

His school; but, for a beginning, the most cloudy apprehension that

Christ is the Saviour of the world, and my Saviour, may become the

foundation of a trust which will bind the heart to Him and knit Him to

the heart in eternal union. This poor woman received her healing,

although she said, If I may touch but the hem of His garment, I shall

be whole.'

Her error was akin to one which is starting into new prominence again,

and with which I need not say that I have no sort of sympathy,--that of

people who attach importance to externals as means and channels of

grace, and in whose system the hem of the garment and the touch of the

finger are apt to take the place which the heart of the wearer and the

grasp of faith should hold. The more our circumstances call for

resistance to this error, the more needful is it to remember that,

along with it and uttering itself through it, may be a depth of devout

trust in Christ, which should shame us. Many a poor soul that clasps

the base of the crucifix clings to the cross; many a devout heart,

kneeling before the altar, sees through the incense-smoke the face of

the Christ. The faith that is tied to form, though it be no faith for a

man, though in some respects it darken God's Gospel, and bring it down

to the level of magical superstition, may yet be, and often is,

accepted by Him whose merciful eye recognised, and whose swift power

answered, the mistaken trust of her who believed that healing lay in

the fringes of His robe, rather than in the pity of His heart.

Again, her trust was very selfish. She wanted health; she did not care

about the Healer. She thought much of the blessing in itself, little or

nothing of the blessing as a sign of His love. She would have been

quite contented to have had nothing more to do with Christ if she could

only have gone away cured. She felt but little glow of gratitude to Him

whom she thought of as unconscious of the good which she had stolen

from Him. All this is a parallel to what occurs in the early stages of

many a Christian life. The first inducement to a serious contemplation

of Christ is, ordinarily, the consciousness of one's own sore need.

Most men are driven to Him as a refuge from self, from their own sin,

and from the wages of sin. The soul, absorbed in its own misery, and

groaning in a horror of great darkness, sees from afar a great light,

and stumbles towards it. Its first desire is deliverance, forgiveness,

escape; and the first motions of faith are impelled by consideration of

personal consequences. Love comes after, born of the recognition of

Christ's great love to which we owe our salvation; but faith precedes

love in the natural order of things, however closely love may follow

faith; and the predominant motive in the earlier stages of many men's

faith is distinctly self-regard. Now, that is all right, and as it was

meant to be. It is an overstrained and caricatured doctrine of

self-abnegation, which condemns such a faith as wrong. The most purely

self-absorbed wish to escape from the most rudely pictured hell may be,

and often is, the beginning of a true trust in Christ. Some of our

superfine modern teachers who are shocked at Christianity, because it

lays the foundation of the loftiest, most self-denying morality in

selfishness' of that kind, would be all the wiser for going to school

to this story, and laying to heart the lesson it contains, of how a

desire no nobler than to get rid of a painful disease was the

starting-point of a moral transformation, which turned a life into a

peaceful, thankful surrender of the cured self to the service and love

of the mighty Healer. But while this faith, for the sake of the

blessing to be obtained, is genuine, it is undoubtedly imperfect. Quite

legitimate and natural at first, it must grow into something nobler

when it has once been answered. To think of the disease mainly is

inevitable before the cure, but, after the cure, we should think most

of the Physician. Self-love may impel to His feet; but Christ-love

should be the moving spring of life thereafter. Ere we have received

anything from Him, our whole soul may be a longing to have our gnawing

emptiness filled; but when we have received His own great gift, our

whole soul should be a thank-offering. The great reformation which

Christ produces is, that He shifts the centre for us from ourselves to

Himself; and whilst He uses our sense of need and our fear of personal

evil as the means towards this, He desires that the faith, which has

been answered by deliverance, should thenceforward be a faith which

worketh by love.' As long as we live, either here or yonder, we shall

never get beyond the need for the exercise of the primary form of

faith, for we shall ever be compassed by many needs, and dependent for

all help and blessedness on Him; but as we grow in experience of His

tender might, we should learn more and more that His gifts cannot be

separated from Himself. We should prize them most for His sake, and

love Him more than we do them. We should be drawn to Him as well as

driven to Him. Faith may begin with desiring the blessing rather than

the Christ. It must end with desiring Him more than all besides, and

with losing self utterly in His great love. Its starting-point may

rightly be, Save, Lord, or I perish.' Its goal must be, I live, yet not

I, but Christ liveth in me.'

Again, here is an instance of real faith weakened and interrupted by

much distrust. There was not a full, calm reliance on Christ's power

and love. She dare not appeal to His heart, she shrinks from meeting

His eye. She will let Him pass, and then put forth a tremulous hand.

Cross-currents of emotion agitate her soul. She doubts, yet she

believes; she is afraid, yet emboldened by her very despair; too

diffident to cast herself on His pity, she is too confident not to

resort to His healing virtue.

And so is it ever with our faith. Its ideal perfection would be that it

should be unbroken, undashed by any speck of doubt. But the reality is

far different. It is no full-orbed completeness, but, at the best, a

growing segment of reflected light, with many a rough place in its

jagged outline, prophetic of increase; with many a deep pit of

blackness on its silver surface; with many a storm-cloud sweeping

across its face; conscious of eclipse and subject to change. And yet it

is the light which He has set to rule the night of life, and we may

rejoice in its crescent beam. We are often tempted to question the

reality of faith in ourselves and others, by reason of the unbelief and

disbelief which co-exist with it. But why should we do so? May there

not be an inner heart and centre of true trust, with a nebulous

environment of doubt, through which the nucleus shall gradually send

its attracting and consolidating power, and turn it, too, into firm

substance? May there not be a germ, infinitesimal, yet with a real life

throbbing in its microscopic minuteness, and destined to be a great

tree, with all the fowls of the air lodging in its branches? May there

not be hid in a heart a principle of action, which is obviously marked

out for supremacy, though it has not yet come to sovereign power and

manifestation in either the inward or the outward being? Where do we

learn that faith must be complete to be genuine? Our own weak hearts

say it to us often enough; and our lingering unbelief is only too ready

to hiss into our ears the serpent's whisper, You are deceiving

yourself; look at your doubts, your coldness, your forgetfulness: you

have no faith at all.' To all such morbid thoughts, which only sap the

strength of the spirit, and come from beneath, not from above, we have

a right to oppose the first great lesson of this story--the reality of

an imperfect faith. And, turning from the profitless contemplation of

the feebleness of our grasp of Christ's robe to look on Him, the

fountain of all spiritual energy, let us cleave the more confidently to

Him for every discovery of our own weakness, and cry to Him for help

against ourselves, that He would not quench the smoking flax'; for the

old prayer is never offered in vain, when offered, as at first, with

tears, Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.'

II. The second stage of this story sets forth a truth involved in what

I have already said, but still needing to be dealt with for a moment by

itself--namely, that Christ answers the imperfect faith.

There was no real connection between the touch of His robe and the

cure, but the poor ignorant sufferer thought that there was; and,

therefore, Christ stoops to her childish thought, and allows her to

prescribe the path by which His gift shall reach her. That thin wasted

hand stretched itself up beyond the height to which it could ordinarily

reach, and, though that highest point fell far short of Him, He lets

His blessing down to her level. He does not say, Understand Me, put

away thy false notion of healing power residing in My garment's hem, or

I heal thee not.' But He says, Dost thou think that it is through thy

finger on My robe? Then, through thy finger on My robe it shall be.

According to thy faith, be it unto thee.'

And so it is ever. Christ's mercy, like water in a vase, takes the

shape of the vessel that holds it. On the one hand, His grace is

infinite, and is given to every one of us according to the measure of

the gift of Christ'--with no limitation but His own unlimited fulness;

on the other hand, the amount which we practically receive from that

inexhaustible store is, at each successive moment, determined by the

measure and the purity and the intensity of our faith. On His part

there is no limit but infinity, on our sides the limit is our capacity,

and our capacity is settled by our desires. His word to us ever is,

Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.' Be it unto thee even as thou

wilt.'

A double lesson, therefore, lies in this thought for us all. First, let

us labour that our faith may be enlightened, importunate, and firm: for

every flaw in it will injuriously affect our possession of the grace of

God. Errors in opinion will hinder the blessings that flow from the

truths which we misconceive or reject. Languor of desire will diminish

the sum and enfeeble the energy of the powers that work in us. Wavering

confidence, crossed and broken, like the solar spectrum, by many a dark

line of doubt, will make our conscious possession of Christ's gift

fitful. We have a deep well to draw from. Let us take care that the

vessel with which we draw is in size proportionate to its depth and our

need, that the chain to which it hangs is strong, and that no leaks in

it let the full supply run out, nor any stains on its inner surface

taint and taste the bright treasure.

And the other lesson is this. There can be no faith so feeble that

Christ does not respond to it. The most ignorant, self-regarding, timid

trust may unite the soul to Jesus Christ. To desire is to have; and

whosoever will, may take of the water of life freely.' If you only come

to Him, though He have passed, He will stop. If you come trusting and

yet doubting, He will forgive the doubt and answer the trust. If you

come to Him, knowing but that your heart is full of evil which none

save He can cure, and putting out a lame hand--or even a tremulous

finger-tip--to touch His garment, be sure that anything is possible

rather than that He should turn away your prayer, or His mercy from

you.

III. The last part of this miracle teaches us that Christ corrects and

confirms an imperfect faith by the very act of answering it.

Observe how the process of cure and the discipline which followed are,

in Christ's loving wisdom, made to fit closely to all the faults and

flaws in the suppliant's faith.

She had thought of the healing energy as independent of the Healer's

knowledge and will. Therefore His very first word shows her that He is

aware of her mute appeal, and conscious of the going forth from Him of

the power that cures--Who touched Me?' As was said long ago, the

multitudes thronged Him, but the woman touched.' Amidst all the

jostling of the unmannerly crowd that trod with rude feet on His

skirts, and elbowed their way to see this new Rabbi, there was one

touch unlike all the rest; and, though it was only that of the

finger-tip of a poor woman, wasted to skin and bone with twelve years'

weakening disease, He knew it; and His will and love sent forth the

virtue' which healed. May we not fairly apply this lesson to ourselves?

Christ is, as most of us, I suppose, believe, Lord of all creatures,

administering the affairs of the universe; the steps of His throne and

the precincts of His court are thronged with dependants whose eyes wait

upon Him, and who are fed from His stores; and yet my poor voice may

steal through that chorus-shout of petition and praise, and His ear

will detect its lowest note, and will separate the thin stream of my

prayer from the great sea of supplication which rolls to His seat, and

will answer me. My hand uplifted among the millions of empty and

imploring palms that are raised towards the heaven will receive into

its clasping fingers the special blessing for my special wants.

Again, she had been selfish in her faith, had not cared for any close

personal relation with Him; and so she was taught that He was in all

His gifts, and that He was more than all His gifts. He compels her to

come to His feet that she may learn His heart, and may carry away a

blessing not stolen, but bestowed

With open love, not secret cure,

The Lord of hearts would bless.'

And thus is laid the foundation for a personal bond between her and

Christ, which shall be for the joy of her life, and shall make of that

life a thankful sacrifice to Him, the Healer.

Thus it is with us all. We may go to Him, at first, with no thought but

for ourselves. But we have not to carry away His gift hidden in our

hands. We learn that it is a love-token from Him. And so we find in His

answer to faith the true and only cure for all self-regard; and moved

by the mercies of Christ, are led to do what else were impossible--to

yield ourselves as living sacrifices' to Him.

Again, she had shrunk from publicity. Her womanly diffidence, her

enfeebled health, the shame of her disease, all made her wish to hide

herself and her want from His eye, and to hide herself and her treasure

from men. She would fain steal away unnoticed, as she hoped she had

come. But she is dragged out before all the thronging multitude, and

has to tell the whole. The answer to her faith makes her bold. In a

moment she is changed from timidity to courage; a tremulous invalid

ready to creep into any corner to escape notice, she stretched out her

hand--the instant after, she knelt at His feet in the spirit of a

confessor. This is Christ's most merciful fashion of curing our

cowardice--not by rebukes, but by giving us, faint-hearted though we

be, the gift which out of weakness makes us strong. He would have us

testify to Him before men, and that for our own sakes, since faith

unacknowledged, like a plant in the dark, is apt to become pale and

sickly, and bear no bright blossoms nor sweet fruit. But, ere He bids

us own His name, He pours into our hearts, in answer to our secret

appeal, the health of His own life, and the blissful consciousness of

that great gift which makes the tongue of the dumb sing. Faith at first

may be very timid, but faith will grow bold to witness of Him and not

be ashamed, in the exact proportion in which it is genuine, and

receives from Christ of His fulness.

And then--with a final word to set forth still more clearly that she

had received the blessing from His love, not from His magical power,

and through her confidence, not through her touch--Daughter! thy

faith'--not thy finger--hath made thee whole; go in peace and be

whole'--Jesus confirms by His own authoritative voice the furtive

blessing, and sends her away, perhaps to see Him no more, but to live

in tranquil security, and in her humble home to guard the gift which He

had bestowed on her imperfect faith, and to perfect--we may hope--the

faith which He had enlightened and strengthened by the over-abundance

of His gift.

Dear friends, this poor woman represents us all. Like her, we are sick

of a sore sickness, we have spent our substance in trying physicians of

no value, and are nothing the better, but rather the worse.' Oh! is it

not strange that you should need to be urged to go to the Healer to

whom she went? Do not be afraid, my brother, of telling Him all your

pain and pining--He knows it already. Do not be afraid that your hand

may not reach Him for the crowd, or that your voice may fail to fall on

His ear. Do not be afraid of your ignorance, do not be afraid of your

wavering confidence and many doubts. All these cannot separate you from

Him who Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses.' Fear but

one thing--that He pass on to carry life and health to other souls, ere

you resolve to press to His feet. Fear but one thing--that whilst you

delay, the hem of the garment may be swept beyond the reach of your

slow hand. Imperfect faith may bring salvation to a soul: hesitation

may ruin and wreck a life.

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TOUCH OR FAITH?

If I may touch but His clothes, I shall be whole. . .. Daughter, thy

faith hath made thee whole.'--Mark v. 28,34.

I. The erroneous faith.--In general terms there is here an illustration

of how intellectual error may coexist with sincere faith. The precise

form of error is clearly that she looked on the physical contact with

the material garment as the vehicle of healing--the very same thing

which we find ever since running through the whole history of the

Church, e.g. the exaltation of externals, rites, ordinances,

sacraments, etc.

Take two or three phases of it--

1. You get it formularised into a system in sacramentarianism.

(a) Baptismal regeneration,

(b) Holy Communion.

Religion becomes largely a thing of rites and ceremonies.

2. You get it in Protestant form among Dissenters in the importance

attached to Church membership.

Outward acts of worship.

There is abroad a vague idea that somehow we get good from external

association with religious acts, and so on. This feeling is deep in

human nature, is not confined to the Roman Catholic Church, and is not

the work of priests. There is a strange revival of it to-day, and so

there is need of protest against it in every form.

II. The blessing that comes to an erroneous faith.--The woman here was

too ritualistic.' How many good people there are in that same school

to-day! Yet how blessed for us all, that, even along with many errors,

if we grasp Him we shall not lose the grace.

III. Christ's gentle enlightenment on the error.--Thy faith hath saved

thee.' How wonderfully beautiful! He cures by giving the blessing and

leading on to the full truth. In regard to the woman, it might have

been that her touch did heal; but even there in the physical realm,

since it was He, not His robe, that healed, it was her faith, not her

hand, that procured the blessing. This is universally true in the

spiritual realm.

(a) Salvation is purely spiritual and inward in its nature--not an

outward work, but a new nature, love, joy, peace.' Hence (b) Faith is

the condition of salvation. Faith saves because He saves, and faith is

contact with Him. It is the only thing which joins a soul to Christ.

Then learn what makes a Christian.

(c) Hence, the place of externals is purely subsidiary to faith. If

they help a man to believe and feel more strongly, they are good. Their

only office is the same as that of preaching or reading. In both, truth

is the agent. Their power is in enforcing truth.

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THE LOOKS OF JESUS

And He looked round about to see her that had done this thing.'--Mark

v. 32.

This Gospel of Mark is full of little touches that speak an eye-witness

who had the gift of noting and reproducing vividly small details which

make a scene live before us. Sometimes it is a word of description:

There was much grass in the place.' Sometimes it is a note of Christ's

demeanour: Looking up to heaven, He sighed.' Sometimes it is the very

Aramaic words He spoke: Ephphatha.' Very often the Evangelist tells us

of our Lord's looks, the gleams of pity and melting tenderness, the

grave rebukes, the lofty authority that shone in them. We may well

believe that on earth as in heaven, His eyes were as a flame of fire,'

burning with clear light of knowledge and pure flame of love. These

looks had pierced the soul, and lived for ever in the memory, of the

eye-witness, whoever he was, who was the informant of Mark. Probably

the old tradition is right, and it is Peter's loving quickness of

observation that we have to thank for these precious minutiae. But be

that as it may, the records in this Gospel of the looks of Christ are

very remarkable. My present purpose is to gather them together, and by

their help to think of Him whose meek, patient eye' is still upon them

that fear Him,' beholding our needs and our sins.

Taking the instances in the order of their occurrence, they are

these--He looked round on the Pharisees with anger, being grieved for

the hardness of their hearts' (iii. 5). He looked on His disciples and

said, Behold My mother and My brethren!' (iii. 32). He looked round

about to see who had touched the hem of His garment (v. 32). He turned

and looked on His disciples before rebuking Peter (viii. 33), He looked

lovingly on the young questioner, asking what he should do to obtain

eternal life (x. 21), and in the same context, He looked round about to

His disciples after the youth had gone away sorrowful, and enforced the

solemn lesson of His lips with the light of His eye (x. 23, 27).

Lastly, He looked round about on all things in the temple on the day of

His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (xi. 11). These are the instances in

this Gospel. One look of Christ's is not mentioned in it, which we

might have expected--namely, that which sent Peter out from the

judgment hall to break into a passion of penitent tears. Perhaps the

remembrance was too sacred to be told--at all events, the Evangelist

who gives us so many similar notes is silent about that look, and we

have to learn of it from another.

We may throw these instances into groups according to their objects,

and so bring out the many-sided impression which they produce.

I. The welcoming look of love and pity to those who seek Him.

Two of the recorded instances fall into their place here. The one is

this of our text, of the woman who came behind Christ to touch His

robe, and be healed: the other is that of the young ruler.

Take that first instance of the woman, wasted with disease, timid with

the timidity of her sex, of her long sickness, of her many

disappointments. She steals through the crowd that rudely presses on

this miracle-working Rabbi, and manages somehow to stretch out a wasted

arm through some gap in the barrier of people about Him, and with her

pallid, trembling finger to touch the edge of His robe. The cure comes

at once. It was all that she wanted, but not all that He would give

her. Therefore He turns and lets His eye fall upon her. That draws her

to Him. It told her that she had not been too bold. It told her that

she had not surreptitiously stolen healing, but that He had knowingly

given it, and that His loving pity went with it. So it confirmed the

gift, and, what was far more, it revealed the Giver. She had thought to

bear away a secret boon unknown to all but herself. She gets instead an

open blessing, with the Giver's heart in it.

The look that rested on her, like sunshine on some plant that had long

pined and grown blanched in the shade, revealed Christ's knowledge,

sympathy, and loving power. And in all these respects it is a

revelation of the Christ for all time, and for every seeking timid soul

in all the crowd. Can my poor feeble hand find a cranny anywhere

through which it may reach the robe? What am I, in all this great

universe blazing with stars, and crowded with creatures who hang on

Him, that I should be able to secure personal contact with Him? The

multitude--innumerable companies from every corner of space--press upon

Him and throng Him, and I--out here on the verge of the crowd-how can I

get at Him?--how can my little thin cry live and be distinguishable

amid that mighty storm of praise that thunders round His throne? We may

silence all such hesitancies of faith, for He who knew the difference

between the light touch of the hand that sought healing, and the

jostling of the curious crowd, bends on us the same eye, a God's in its

perfect knowledge, a man's in the dewy sympathy which shines in it.

However imperfect may be our thoughts of His blessing, their

incompleteness will not hinder our reception of His gift in the measure

of our faith, and the very bestowment will teach us worthier

conceptions of Him, and hearten us for bolder approaches to His grace.

He still looks on trembling suppliants, though they may know their own

sickness much better than they understand Him, and still His look draws

us to His feet by its omniscience, pity, and assurance of help.

The other case is very different. Instead of the invalid woman, we see

a young man in the full flush of his strength, rich, needing no

material blessing. Pure in life, and righteous according to even a high

standard of morality, he yet feels that he needs something. Having real

and strong desires after eternal life,' he comes to Christ to try

whether this new Teacher could say anything that would help him to the

assured inward peace and spontaneous goodness for which he longed, and

had not found in all the round of punctilious obedience to unloved

commandments. As he kneels there before Jesus, in his eager haste, with

sincere and high aspirations stamped on his young ingenuous face,

Christ's eyes turn on him, and that wonderful word stands written,

Jesus, beholding him, loved him.'

He reads him through and through, knowing all the imperfection of his

desires after goodness and eternal life, and yet loving him with more

than a brother's love. His sympathy does not blind Jesus to the

limitations and shallowness of the young man's aspirations, but His

clear knowledge of these does not harden the gaze into indifference,

nor check the springing tenderness in the Saviour's heart. And the

Master's words, though they might sound cold, and did embody a hard

requirement, are beautifully represented in the story as the expression

of that love. He cared for the youth too much to deceive him with

smooth things. The truest kindness was to put all his eagerness to the

test at once. If he accepted the conditions, the look told him what a

welcome awaited him. If he started aside from them, it was best for him

to find out that there were things which he loved more than eternal

life. So with a gracious invitation shining in His look, Christ places

the course of self-denial before him; and when he went away sorrowful,

he left behind One more sorrowful than himself. We can reverently

imagine with what a look Christ watched his retreating figure; and we

may hope that, though he went away then, the memory of that glance of

love, and of those kind, faithful words, sooner or later drew him back

to his Saviour.

Is not all this too an everlasting revelation of our Lord's attitude?

We may be sure that He looks on many a heart--on many a young

heart--glowing with noble wishes and half-understood longings, and that

His love reaches every one who, groping for the light, asks Him what to

do to inherit eternal life. His great charity hopeth all things,' and

does not turn away from longings because they are too weak to lift the

soul above all the weights of sense and the world. Rather He would

deepen them and strengthen them, and His eternal requirements addressed

to feeble wills are not meant to quench the smoking flax,' but to

kindle it to decisive consecration and self-surrender. The loving look

interprets the severe words. If once we meet it full, and our hearts

yield to the heart that is seen in it, the cords that bind us snap, and

it is no more hard to count all things but loss,' and to give up

ourselves, that we may follow Him. The sad and feeble and weary who may

be half despairingly seeking for alleviation of outward ills, and the

young and strong and ardent whose souls are fed with high desires, have

but little comprehension of one another, but Christ knows them both,

and loves them both, and would draw them both to Himself.

II. The Lord's looks of love and warning to those who have found Him.

There are three instances of this class. The first is when He looked

round on His disciples and said, Behold My mother and My brethren!'

(iii. 34). Perhaps no moment in all Christ's life had more of

humiliation in it than that. There could be no deeper degradation than

that His own family should believe Him insane. Not His brethren only,

but His mother herself seems to have been shaken from her attitude of

meek obedience so wonderfully expressed in her two recorded sayings, Be

it unto me according to Thy word,' and Whatsoever He saith unto you, do

it.' She too appears to be in the shameful conspiracy, and to have

consented that her name should be used as a lure in the wily message

meant to separate Him from His friends, that He might be seized and

carried off as a madman. What depth of tenderness was in that slow

circuit of His gaze upon the humble loving followers grouped round Him!

It spoke the fullest trustfulness of them, and His rest in their

sympathy, partial though it was. It went before His speech, like the

flash before the report, and looked what in a moment He said, Behold My

mother and My brethren!' It owned spiritual affinities as more real

than family bonds, and proved that He required no more of us than He

was willing to do Himself when He bid us forsake father and mother, and

wife and children' for Him. We follow Him when we tread that road, hard

though it be. In Him every mother may behold her son, in Him we may

find more than the reality of every sweet family relationship. That

same love, which identified Him with those half-enlightened followers

here, still binds Him to us, and He looks down on us from amid the

glory, and owns us for His true kindred.

That look of unutterable love is strangely contrasted with the next

instance. We read (viii. 32) that Peter took Him'--apart a little way,

I suppose--and began to rebuke Him.' He turns away from the rash

Apostle, will say no word to him alone, but summons the others by a

glance, and then, having made sure that all were within hearing, He

solemnly rebukes Peter with the sharpest words that ever fell from His

lips. That look calls them to listen, not that they may be witnesses of

Peter's chastisement, but because the severe words concern them all. It

bids them search themselves as they hear. They too may be Satans.' They

too may shrink from the cross, and mind the things that be of men.'

We may take the remaining instance along with this. It occurs

immediately after the story of the young seeker, to which we have

already referred. Twice within five verses (x. 23-27) we read that He

looked on His disciples,' before He spoke the grave lessons and

warnings arising from the incident. A sad gaze that would be!--full of

regret and touched with warning. We may well believe that it added

weight to the lesson He would teach, that surrender of all things was

needed for discipleship. We see that it had been burned into the memory

of one of the little group, who told long years after how He had looked

upon them so solemnly, as seeming to read their hearts while He spoke.

Not more searching was the light of the eyes which John in Patmos saw,

as a flame of fire.' Still He looks on His disciples, and sees our

inward hankerings after the things of men. All our shrinkings from the

cross and cleaving to the world are known to Him. He comes to each of

us with that sevenfold proclamation, I know thy works,' and from His

loving lips falls on our ears the warning, emphasised by that sad,

earnest gaze, How hard is it for them that have riches to enter into

the Kingdom of God!' But, blessed be His name, the stooping love which

claims us for His brethren shines in His regard none the less tenderly,

though He reads and warns us with His eye. So, we can venture to spread

all our evil before Him, and ask that He would look on it, knowing

that, as the sun bleaches cloth laid in its beams, He will purge away

the evil which He sees, if only we let the light of His face shine full

upon us.

III. The Lord's look of anger and pity on His opponents.

That instance occurs in the account of the healing of a man with a

withered arm, which took place in the synagogue of Capernaum (iii.

1-5). In the vivid narrative, we can see the scribes and Pharisees, who

had already questioned Him with insolent airs of authority about His

breach of the Rabbinical Sabbatic rules, sitting in the synagogue, with

their gleaming eyes watching Him' with hostile purpose. They hope that

He will heal on the Sabbath day. Possibly they had even brought the

powerless-handed man there, on the calculation that Christ could not

refrain from helping him when He saw his condition. They are ready to

traffic in human misery if only they can catch Him in a breach of law.

The fact of a miracle if nothing. Pity for the poor man is not in them.

They have neither reverence for the power of the miracle-worker, nor

sympathy with His tenderness of heart. The only thing for which they

have eyes is the breach of the complicated web of restrictions which

they had spun across the Sabbath day. What a strange, awful power the

pedantry of religious forms has of blinding the vision and hardening

the heart as to the substance and spirit of religion! That Christ

should heal neither made them glad nor believing, but that He should

heal on the Sabbath day roused them to a deadly hatred. So there they

sit, on the stretch of expectation, silently watching. He bids the man

stand forth--a movement, and there the cripple stands alone in the

midst of the seated congregation. Then comes the unanswerable question

which cut so deep, and struck their consciences so hard that they could

answer nothing, only sit and scowl at Him with a murderous light

gleaming in their eyes. He fronts them with a steady gaze that travels

over the whole group, and that showed to at least one who was present

an unforgettable mingling of displeasure and pity. He looked round

about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their

hearts.' In Christ's perfect nature, anger and pity could blend in

wondrous union, like the crystal and fire in the abyss before the

throne.

The soul that has not the capacity for anger at evil wants something of

its due perfection, and goes halting' like Jacob after Peniel. In

Christ's complete humanity, it could not but be present, but in pure

and righteous form. His anger was no disorder of passion, or brief

madness' that discomposed the even motion of His spirit, nor was there

in it any desire for the hurt of its objects, but, on the contrary, it

lay side by side with the sorrow of pity, which was intertwined with it

like a golden thread. Both these two emotions are fitting to a pure

manhood in the presence of evil. They heighten each other. The

perfection of righteous anger is to be tempered by sympathy. The

perfection of righteous pity for the evildoer is to be saved from

immoral condoning of evil as if it were only calamity, by an infusion

of some displeasure. We have to learn the lesson and take this look of

Christ's as our pattern in our dealings with evildoers. Perhaps our day

needs more especially to remember that a righteous severity and recoil

of the whole nature from sin is part of a perfect Christian character.

We are so accustomed to pity transgressors, and to hear sins spoken of

as if they were misfortunes mainly due to environment, or to inherited

tendencies, that we are apt to forget the other truth, that they are

the voluntary acts of a man who could have refrained if he had wished,

and whose not having wished is worthy of blame. But we need to aim at

just such a union of feeling as was revealed in that gaze of Christ's,

and neither to let our wrath dry up our pity nor our pity put out the

pure flame of our indignation at evil.

That look comes to us too with a message, when we are most conscious of

the evil in our own hearts. Every man who has caught even a glimpse of

Christ's great love, and has learned something of himself in the light

thereof, must feel that wrath at evil sits ill on so sinful a judge as

he feels himself to be. How can I fling stones at any poor creature

when I am so full of sin myself? And how does that Lord look at me and

all my wanderings from Him, my hardness of heart, my Pharisaism and

deadness to His spiritual power and beauty? Can there be anything but

displeasure in Him? The answer is not far to seek, but, familiar though

it be, it often surprises a man anew with its sweetness, and meets

recurring consciousness of unworthiness with a bright smile that

scatters fears. In our deepest abasement we may take courage anew when

we think of that wondrous blending of anger shot with pity.

IV. The look of the Lord on the profaned Temple.

On the day of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, apparently the

Sunday before His crucifixion, we find (xi. 11) that He went direct to

the Temple, and looked round about on all things.' The King has come to

His palace, the Lord has suddenly come to His Temple.' How solemn that

careful, all-comprehending scrutiny of all that He found there--the

bustle of the crowds come up for the Passover, the trafficking and the

fraud, the heartless worship! He seems to have gazed upon all, that

evening in silence, and, as the shades of night began to fall, He went

back to Bethany with the Twelve. To-morrow will be time enough for the

whip of small cords,' for to-day enough to have come as Lord to the

temple, and with intent, all-comprehending gaze to have traversed its

courts. Apparently He passed through the crowds there unnoticed, and

beheld all, while Himself unrecognised.

Is not that silent, unobserved Presence, with His keen searching eye

that lights on all, a solemn parable of a perpetual truth? He walks

amidst the seven golden candlesticks' to-day, as in the temple of

Jerusalem, and in the vision of Patmos. His eyes like a flame of fire

regard and scrutinise us too. I know thy works' is still upon His lips.

Silent and by many unseen, that calm, clear-eyed, loving but judging

Christ walks amongst His churches to-day. Alas! what does He see there?

If He came in visible form into any congregation in England to-day,

would He not find merchandise in the sanctuary, formalism and unreality

standing to minister, and pretence and hypocrisy bowing in worship? How

much of all our service could live in the light of His felt presence?

And are we never going to stir ourselves up to a truer devotion and a

purer service by remembering that He is here as really as He was in the

Temple of old? Our drowsy prayers, and all our conventional repetitions

of devout aspirations, not felt at the moment, but inherited from our

fathers, our confessions which have no penitence, our praises without

gratitude, our vows which we never mean to keep, and our creeds which

in no operative fashion we believe--all the hollowness of profession

with no reality below it, like a great cooled bubble on a lava stream,

would crash in and go to powder if once we really believed what we so

glibly say--that Jesus Christ was looking at us. He keeps silence

to-day, but as surely as He knows us now, so surely will He come

to-morrow with a whip of small cords and purge His Temple from

hypocrisy and unreality, from traffic and thieves. All the churches

need the sifting. Christ has done and suffered too much for the world,

to let the power of His gospel be neutralised by the sins of His

professing followers, and Christ loves the imperfect friends that

cleave to Him, though their service be often stained, and their

consecration always incomplete, too well to suffer sin upon them.

Therefore He will come to purify His Temple. Well for us, if we

thankfully yield ourselves to His merciful chastisements, howsoever

they may fall upon us, and believe that in them all He looks on us with

love, and wishes only to separate us from that which separates us from

Him! On us all that eye rests with all these emotions fused and blended

in one gaze of love that passeth knowledge--a look of love and welcome

whensoever we seek Him, either to help us in outward or inward

blessings; a look of love and warning to us, owning us also for His

brethren, and cautioning us lest we stray from His side; a look of love

and displeasure at any sin that blinds us to His gracious beauty; a

look of love and observance of our poor worship and spotted sacrifices.

Let us lay ourselves full in the sunshine of His gaze, and take for

ours the old prayer, Search me, O Christ, and know my heart!' It is

heaven on earth to feel His eye resting upon us, and know that it is

love. It will be the heaven of heaven to see Him face to face,' and to

know even as we are known.'

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THE MASTER REJECTED: THE SERVANTS SENT FORTH

And He went out from thence, and came into His own country; and His

disciples follow Him. 2. And when the Sabbath day was come, He began to

teach in the synagogue: and many hearing Him were astonished, saying,

From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which

is given unto Him, that even such mighty works are wrought by His

hands? 3. Is not this the carpenter, the Son of Mary, the Brother of

James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon! and are not His sisters here

with us? And they were offended at Him. 4. But Jesus said unto them, A

prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his

own kin, and in his own house. 6. And He could there do no mighty work,

save that He laid His hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. 6.

And He marvelled because of their unbelief. And He went round about the

villages, teaching. 7. And He called unto Him the twelve, and began to

send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean

spirits; 8. And commanded them that they should take nothing for their

journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their

purse: 9. But be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats. 10. And

He said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there

abide till ye depart from that place. 11. And whosoever shall not

receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust

under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It

shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment,

than for that city. 12. And they went out, and preached that men should

repent. 13. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many

that were sick, and healed them.'--Mark vi. 1-13.

An easy day's journey would carry Jesus and His followers from

Capernaum, on the lake-side, to Nazareth, among the hills. What took

our Lord back there? When last He taught in the synagogue of Nazareth,

His life had been in danger; and now He thrusts Himself into the wolf's

den. Why? Mark seems to wish us to observe the connection between this

visit and the great group of miracles which he has just recorded; and

possibly the link may be our Lord's hope that the report of these might

have preceded Him and prepared His way. In His patient long-suffering

He will give His fellow-villagers another chance; and His heart yearns

for His own country,' and His own kin,' and His own house,' of which He

speaks so pathetically in the context.

I. We have here unbelief born of familiarity, and its effects on Christ

(verses 1-6). Observe the characteristic avoidance of display, and the

regard for existing means of worship, shown in His waiting till the

Sabbath, and then resorting to the synagogue. He and His hearers would

both remember His last appearance in it; and He and they would both

remember many a time before that, when, as a youth, He had sat there.

The rage which had exploded on His first sermon has given place to

calmer, but not less bitter, opposition. Mark paints the scene, and

represents the hearers as discussing Jesus while He spoke. The decorous

silence of the synagogue was broken by a hubbub of mutual questions.

Many' spoke at once, and all had the same thing to say. The state of

mind revealed is curious. They own Christ's wisdom in His teaching, and

the reality of His miracles, of which they had evidently heard; but the

fact that He was one of themselves made them angry that He should have

such gifts, and suspicious of where He had got them. They seem to have

had the same opinion as Nathanael--that no good thing' could come out

of Nazareth.' Their old companion could not be a prophet; that was

certain. But He had wisdom and miraculous power; that was as certain.

Where had they come from? There was only one other source; and so, with

many headshakings, they were preparing to believe that the Jesus whom

they had all known, living His quiet life of labour among them, was in

league with the devil, rather than believe that He was a messenger from

God.

We note in their questions, first, the glimpse of our Lord's early

life. They bring before us the quiet, undistinguished home and the long

years of monotonous labour. We owe to Mark alone the notice that Jesus

actually wrought at Joseph's handicraft. Apparently the latter was

dead, and, if so, Jesus would be the head of the house, and probably

the breadwinner.' One of the fathers preserves the tradition that He

made plows and yokes, by which He taught the symbols of righteousness

and an active life.' That good father seems to think it needful to find

symbolical meanings, in order to save Christ's dignity; but the prose

fact that He toiled at the carpenter's bench, and handled hammer and

saw, needs nothing to heighten its value as a sign of His true

participation in man's lot, and as the hallowing of manual toil. How

many weary arms have grasped their tools with new vigour and

contentment when they thought of Him as their Pattern in their narrow

toils! The Nazarenes' difficulty was but one case of a universal

tendency. Nobody finds it easy to believe that some village child, who

has grown up beside him, and whose undistinguished outside life he

knows, has turned out a genius or a great man. The last people to

recognise a prophet are always his kindred and his countrymen. Far-away

birds have fine feathers.' Men resent it as a kind of slight on

themselves that the other, who was one of them but yesterday, should be

so far above them to-day. They are mostly too blind to look below the

surface, and they conclude that, because they saw so much of the

external life, they knew the man that lived it. The elders of Nazareth

had seen Jesus grow up, and to them He would be the carpenter's son'

still. The more important people had known the humbleness of His home,

and could not adjust themselves to look up to Him, instead of down. His

equals in age would find their boyish remembrances too strong for

accepting Him as a prophet. All of them did just what the most of us

would have done, when they took it for certain that the Man whom they

had known so well, as they fancied, could not be a prophet, to say

nothing of the Messiah so long looked for. It is easy to blame them;

but it is better to learn the warning in their words, and to take care

that we are not blind to some true messenger of God just because we

have been blessed with close companionship with him. Many a household

has had to wait for death to take away the prophet before they discern

him. Some of us entertain angels unawares,' and have bitterly to feel,

when too late, that our eyes were holden that we should not know them.

These questions bring out strongly what we too often forget in

estimating Christ's contemporaries--namely, that His presence among

them, in the simplicity of His human life, was a positive hindrance to

their seeing His true character. We sometimes wish that we had seen

Him, and heard His voice. We should have found it more difficult to

believe in Him if we had. His flesh' was a veil' in other sense than

the Epistle to the Hebrews means; for, by reason of men's difficulty in

piercing beneath it, it hid from many what it was meant and fitted to

reveal. Only eyes purged beheld the glory of the Word' become flesh

when it dwelt among us'--and even they saw Him more clearly when they

saw Him no more. Let us not be too hard on these simple Nazarenes, but

recognise our kith and kin.

The facts on which the Nazarenes grounded their unbelief are really

irrefragable proof of Christ's divinity. Whence had this man His wisdom

and mighty works? Born in that humble home, reared in that secluded

village, shut out from the world's culture, buried, as it were, among

an exclusive and abhorred people, how came He to tower above all

teachers, and to sway the world? With whom took He counsel? and who

instructed Him, and taught Him?' The character and work of Christ,

compared with the circumstances of His origin and environment, are an

insoluble riddle, except on one supposition--that He was the word and

power of God.

The effects of this unbelief on our Lord were twofold. It limited His

power. Matthew says that He did not many mighty works.' Mark goes

deeper, and boldly days He could not.' It is mistaken jealousy for

Christ's honour to seek to pare down the strong words. The atmosphere

of chill unbelief froze the stream. The power was there, but it

required for its exercise some measure of moral susceptibility. His

miraculous energy followed, in general, the same law as His higher

exercise of saving grace does; that is to say, it could not force

itself upon unwilling men. Christ cannot' save a man who does not trust

Him. He was hampered in the outflow of His healing power by

unsympathetic disparagement and unbelief. Man can thwart God. Faith

opens the door, and unbelief shuts it in His face. He would have

gathered,' but they would not,' and therefore He could not.'

The second effect of unbelief on Him was that He marvelled.' He is

twice recorded to have wondered--once at a Gentile's faith, once at His

townsmen's unbelief. He wondered at the first because it showed so

unusual a susceptibility; at the second, because it showed so

unreasonable a blindness. All sin is a wonder to eyes that see into the

realities of things and read the end; for it is all utterly

unreasonable (though it is, alas! not unaccountable) and suicidal. Be

astonished, O ye heavens, at this.' Unbelief in Christ is, by Himself,

declared to be the very climax of sin, and its most flagrant evidence

(John xvi. 9); and of all the instances of unbelief which saddened His

heart, none struck more chill than that of these Nazarenes. They had

known His pure youth; He might have reckoned on some touch of sympathy

and predisposition to welcome Him. His wonder is the measure of His

pain as well as of their sin.

Nor need we wonder that He wondered; for He was true man, and all human

emotions were His. To one who lives ever in the Father's bosom, what

can seem so strange as that men should prefer homeless exposedness and

dreary loneliness? To one whose eyes ever behold unseen realities, what

so marvellous as men's blindness? To one who knew so assuredly His own

mission and rich freightage of blessing, how strange it must have been

that He found so few to accept His gifts! Jesus knew that bitter wonder

which all men who have a truth to proclaim which the world has not

learned, have to experience--the amazement at finding it so hard to get

any others to see what they see. In His manhood, He shared the fate of

all teachers, who have, in their turn, to marvel at men's unbelief.

II. The new instrument which Christ fashions to cope with unbelief.

What does Jesus do when thus wounded in the house of His friends'? Give

way to despondency? No; but meekly betake Himself to yet obscurer

fields of service, and send out the Twelve to prepare His way, as if He

thought that they might have success where He would fail. What a lesson

for people who are always hankering after conspicuous spheres,' and

lamenting that their gifts are wasted in some obscure corner, is that

picture of Jesus, repulsed from Nazareth, patiently turning to the

villages! The very summary account of the trial mission of the Twelve

here given presents only the salient points of the charge to them, and

in its condensation makes these the more emphatic. Note the interesting

statement that they were sent out two-and-two. The other Evangelists do

not tell us this, but their lists of the Apostles are arranged in

pairs. Mark's list is not so arranged, but he supplies the reason for

the arrangement, which he does not follow; and the other Gospels, by

their arrangement, confirm his statement, which they do not give.

Two-and-two is a wise rule for all Christian workers. It checks

individual peculiarities of self-will, helps to keep off faults,

wholesomely stimulates, strengthens faith by giving another to hear it

and to speak it, brings companionship, and admits of division of

labour. One-and-one are more than twice one.

The first point is the gift of power. Unclean spirits are specified,

but the subsequent verses show that miracle-working power in its other

forms was included. We may call that Christ's greatest miracle. That He

could, by His mere will, endow a dozen men with such power, is more, if

degree come into view at all, than that He Himself should exercise it.

But there is a lesson in the fact for all ages--even those in which

miracles have ceased. Christ gives before He commands, and sends no man

into the field without filling his basket with seed-corn. His gifts

assimilate the receiver to Himself, and only in the measure in which

His servants possess power which is like His own, and drawn from Him,

can they proclaim His coming, or prepare hearts for it. The second step

is their equipment. The special commands here given were repealed by

Jesus when He gave His last commands. In their letter they apply only

to that one journey, but in their spirit they are of universal and

permanent obligation. The Twelve were to travel light. They might carry

a staff to help them along, and wear sandals to save their feet on

rough roads; but that was to be all. Food, luggage, and money, the

three requisites of a traveller, were to be conspicuous by their

absence.' That was repealed afterwards, and instructions given of an

opposite character, because, after His ascension, the Church was to

live more and more by ordinary means; but in this journey they were to

learn to trust Him without means, that afterwards they might trust Him

in the means. He showed them the purpose of these restrictions in the

act of abrogating them. When I sent you forth without purse . . .

lacked ye anything?' But the spirit remains unabrogated, and the

minimum of outward provision is likeliest to call out the maximum of

faith. We are more in danger from having too much baggage than from

having too little. And the one indispensable requirement is that,

whatever the quantity, it should hinder neither our march nor our trust

in Him who alone is wealth and food.

Next comes the disposition of the messengers. It is not to be

self-indulgent. They are not to change quarters for the sake of greater

comfort. They have not gone out to make a pleasure tour, but to preach,

and so are to stay where they are welcomed, and to make the best of it.

Delicate regard for kindly hospitality, if offered by ever so poor a

house, and scrupulous abstinence from whatever might suggest interested

motives, must mark the true servant. That rule is not out of date. If

ever a herald of Christ falls under suspicion of caring more about

life's comforts than about his work, good-bye to his usefulness! If

ever he does so care, whether he be suspected of it or no, spiritual

power will ebb from him.

The next step is the messengers' demeanour to the rejecters of their

message. Shaking the dust off the sandals is an emblem of solemn

renunciation of participation, and perhaps of disclaimer of

responsibility. It meant certainly, We have no more to do with you,'

and possibly, Your blood be on your own heads.' This journey of the

Twelve was meant to be of short duration, and to cover much ground, and

therefore no time was to be spent unnecessarily. Their message was

brief, and as well told quickly as slowly. The whole conditions of work

now are different. Sometimes, perhaps, a Christian is warranted in

solemnly declaring to those who receive not his message, that he will

have no more to say to them. That may do more than all his other words.

But such cases are rare; and the rule that it is safest to follow is

rather that of love which despairs of none, and, though often repelled,

returns with pleading, and, if it have told often in vain, now tells

with tears, the story of the love that never abandons the most

obstinate.

Such were the prominent points of this first Christian mission. They

who carry Christ's banner in the world must be possessed of power, His

gift, must be lightly weighted, must care less for comfort than for

service, must solemnly warn of the consequences of rejecting the

message; and so they will not fail to cast out devils, and to heal many

that are sick.

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CHRIST THWARTED

And He could there do no mighty work, save that He laid His hands upon

a few sick folk, and healed them. And He marvelled because of their

unbelief.'--Mark vi. 5,6.

It is possible to live too near a man to see him. Familiarity with the

small details blinds most people to the essential greatness of any

life. So these fellow-villagers of Jesus in Nazareth knew Him too well

to know Him rightly as they talked Him over; they recognised His wisdom

and His mighty works; but all the impression that these would have made

was neutralised by their acquaintance with His former life, and they

said, Why, we have known Him ever since He was a boy. We used to take

our ploughs and yokes to Him to mend in the carpenter's shop. His

brothers and sisters are here with us. Where did He get His wisdom?' So

they said; and so it has been ever since. A prophet is not without

honour, save in his own country.'

Surrounded thus by unsympathetic carpers, Jesus Christ did not exercise

His full miraculous power. Other Evangelists tell us of these

limitations, but Mark is alone in the strength of his expression. The

others say did no mighty works'; Mark says could do no mighty works.'

Startling as the expression is, it is not to be weakened down because

it is startling, and if it does not fit in with your conceptions of

Christ's nature, so much the worse for the conceptions. Matthew states

the reason for this limitation more directly than Mark does, for he

says, He did no mighty works because of their unbelief.' But Mark

suggests the reason clearly enough in his next clause, when he says: He

marvelled because of their unbelief.' There is another limitation of

Christ's nature, He wondered as at an astonishing and unexpected thing,

We read that He marvelled' twice: once at great faith, once at great

unbelief. The centurion's faith was marvellous; the Nazarenes' unbelief

was as marvellous. The wild grapes' bore clusters more precious than

the tended vines' in the vineyard.' Faith and unbelief do not depend

upon opportunity, but upon the bent of the will and the sense of need.

But I have chosen these words now because they put in its strongest

shape a truth of large importance, and of manifold applications--viz.,

that man's unbelief hampers and hinders Christ's power. Now let me

apply that principle in two or three directions.

I. Let us look at this principle in connection with the case before us

in the text.

You will find that, as a rule and in the general, our Lord's miracles

require faith, either on the part of the persons helped, or on the part

of those who interceded for them. But whilst that is the rule there are

distinct exceptions, as for instance, in the case of the feeding of the

thousands, and in the case of the raising of the widow's son of Nain,

as well as in other examples. And here we find that, though the

prevalent unbelief hindered the flow of our Lord's miraculous power, it

did not so hinder it as to stop some little trickle of the stream. He

laid His hands on a few sick folk, and healed them.' The brook was

shrunken as compared with the abundance of the flood recorded in the

previous chapter.

Now, why was that? There is no such natural connection between faith

and the working of a miracle as that the latter is only possible in

conjunction with the former. And the exceptions show us that Jesus

Christ was not so limited as that men's unbelief could wholly prevent

the flow of His love and His power. But still there was a restriction.

And what sort of a could not' was it that thus hampered Him in His

work? We know far too little about the conditions of miracle-working to

entitle us to dogmatise on such a matter, but I suppose that we may

venture to say this, that the working of the miracles was impossible'

in the absence of faith and the presence of its opposite, regard being

had to the purposes of the miracle and of Christ's whole work. It was

not congruous, it was not morally possible, that He should force His

benefits upon unwilling recipients.

Now, I need not do more than just in a sentence call attention to the

bearing of this fact upon the true notion of the purpose of Christ's

miraculous works. A superficial, and, as I think, very vulgar,

estimate, says that Christ's miracles were chiefly designed to produce

faith in Him and in His mission. If that had been their purpose, the

very place for the most abundant exhibition of them would have been the

place where unbelief was most pronounced. The atmosphere of

non-receptiveness and non-sympathy would have been the very one that

ought to have evoked them most. Where the darkness was the deepest,

there should the torch have flared. Where the stupor was most complete,

there should the rousing shock have been administered. But the very

opposite is the case. Where faith is present already, the miracle

comes. Where faith is absent, miracles fail. Therefore, though a

subsidiary purpose of our Lord's miracles was, no doubt, to evoke faith

in His mission, their chief purpose is not to be found in that

direction. It was a condescension to men's weakness and obstinacy when

He said, If ye believe not Me, believe the works.' But the works were

signs, symbols, manifestations on the lower material platform of what

lie would be and do for men in the higher, and they were the outcome of

His own loving heart and ever-flowing compassion, and only secondarily

were they taken, and have they ever been taken, when Christian faith

has been robust and intelligent, as being evidences of His Messiahship

and Divinity.

But there is another consideration that I would like to suggest in

reference to this limitation of our Lord's power, by reason of the

prevalence of an atmosphere of unbelief, and that is that it is a

pathetic proof of His manhood's being influenced by all the emotions

and circumstances that influence us. We all know how hearts expand in

the warm atmosphere of affection and sympathy, and shut themselves up

like tender flowerets when the cold east wind blows. And just as a

great orator subtly feels the sympathy of his audience, and is buoyed

up by it to higher flights, while in the presence of cold and

indifferent and critical hearers his tongue stammers, and he falls

beneath himself, so we may reverently say Jesus Christ could not put

forth His mightiest and most abundant miraculous powers when the cold

wind of unbelieving criticism blew in His face.

If that is true, what a glimpse it gives us of the conditions of His

earthly life, and how wonderful it makes that love which, though it was

hampered, was never stifled by the presence of scorn and malice and of

hatred. He is our Brother, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh; and

even when the divinity within was in possession of the power of working

the miracle, the humanity in which it dwelt felt the presence of the

cold frost and closed its petals. He could do no mighty works,' and it

was because of their unbelief.'

II. But now, secondly, let us apply this principle in regard to

Christ's working on ourselves.

I have said that there was no such natural connection between faith and

miracle as that miracle was absolutely impossible in the absence of

faith. But when we lift the thought into the higher region of our

religious and spiritual life, we do come across an absolute

impossibility. There, in regard to all that appertains to the inward

life of a soul, Christ can do no mighty works, in the absence of our

faith. By faith, I mean, of course, not the mere intellectual reception

of the Christian narratives or of the Christian doctrines as true, but

I mean what the Bible means by it always, a process subsequent to that

intellectual reception--viz., the motion of the will and of the heart

towards Christ. Faith is belief, but belief is not faith. Faith is

belief plus trust. And it is that which is the condition of all

Christ's gifts being received by any of us.

Now, a great many people seem to think that what Jesus Christ brings to

the world, and offers to each of us, is simply the escape from the

penal consequences of our past transgressions. If you conceive

salvation to be nothing else than shutting the doors of an outward

hell, and opening the doors of an outward Heaven, I can quite

understand why you should boggle at the thought that faith is a

condition of these. For if salvation is such a material, external, and

forensic matter as that, then I do not see why God should not have

given it to everybody, without any conditions at all. But if you will

understand rightly what Christ's gifts are, you will see that they

cannot be bestowed upon men irrespective of the condition of their

wills, desires, and hearts.

For what is salvation? What are the blessings that Jesus Christ

bestows? A new life, a new love, new desires, a new direction of the

whole being, a new spirit within us. These are the gifts; and how can

these be given to a man if he has not trust in the Giver? Salvation is

at bottom that a man's will shall be harmonised with the will of God.

But if a man has not faith, his will is discordant with the will of

God, and how can it be harmonised and discordant at the same time? What

are the powers by which Christ works upon men's hearts? His truth, His

love, His Spirit. How can a truth operate if it is not believed? How

can love bless and cherish if it is not trusted? How can the Spirit

hallow and cleanse if it is not yielded to? The condition is inherent

in the nature of God the Giver, of man the receiver, and of the gifts

bestowed.

And so we understand the metaphors that put that inevitable connection

in various forms. Faith is a door.' How can you enter if the door be

fast closed? He knocks; if any man opens He comes in. If a man does not

open,

He can but listen at the gate,

And hear the household jar within.'

Faith is the connection between the fountain and the reservoir. If

there be no such connection, how can the reservoir be filled? Faith is

the hand with stretched-out empty palms, and widespread fingers for the

reception of the gifts. How can the gifts be put into it if it hangs

listless by the side, or in obstinately closed and pushed behind the

back? He can do no mighty works' on an unbelieving soul.

Now, brethren, let me insist, in one sentence, on this solemn truth;

God would save every man if He could, faith or no faith. But the

condition which brings faith into connection with salvation as its

necessary prerequisite is no arbitrary condition. The love of God

cannot alter it. In the nature of things it must be so. He that

believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be condemned.'

That is no result of an artificial scheme, but of the necessities of

the case.

Again, let me remind you that the measure of our faith is the measure

of our possession of these gifts. Our Lord more than once put the whole

doctrine of this matter, in regard, however, to the lower plane of

miracle, when He said, According to your faith be it unto you,' Open

thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.' We have an inheritance like that

of men who get a piece of land in some mining district: so much as we

peg out and claim is ours, and no more.

Let me narrate a parable of my own making. There was once a king who

told all his people that on a given day the fountain in the

market-place in the centre of the city would flow with wine and other

precious liquors, and that every man was free to bring his vessel and

carry away as much as he would. The man that brought a tiny wineglass

got a glassful; the man that brought a gallon pitcher got that full.

The measure of your desires is the measure of your possessions of

Christ's power. Our faith determines the amount of His cleansing,

healing, vivifying energy which will reside in us. The width of the

bore of the water-pipe that is laid down settles the amount of water

that will come into your cistern. The water may be high outside the

lock. If the lock-gate be kept fast closed, the height of the water

outside produces no raising of the low level of that within, If you

open a chink of the gate a trickle will pass through, and if you fling

the gates wide the levels will be the same on both sides. The only

limit of our possession of God is our faith and desire. The true limit

is His own boundlessness. It is possible that a man may be filled with

all the fulness of God; but the real working limit for each of us is

our own faith. So, brethren, endless progress is possible for us, on

condition of continual trust.

III. Lastly, let us apply this principle in regard to Christ's working

through His people.

Jesus Christ cannot work mightily through a feebly believing Church.

And here is the reason why Christianity has taken so long to do so

little in this world of ours; and why nineteen centuries after the

Cross and Pentecost there remaineth yet so much land to be possessed.

Ye are not straitened in Me, ye are straitened in your own selves.' We

hinder Christ from doing His work through us by reason of our own

unbelief. The men that have done most for the Lord Jesus, and for their

fellows in this world, have been of all sorts, of all conditions, of

all grades of intellectual ability and acquirement; some of them

scholars, some of them tinkers, some of them philosophers, some of them

next door to fools. They have belonged to different communions and have

held different ecclesiastical and theological dogmas, and sometimes,

alas! they have not been able to discern each other's Christlike

lineaments. But there is one thing in which they have all been alike,

and that is that they have been men of faith, intense, operative,

perpetual. And that is why they have succeeded. If we were what we

might be, full of faith.' we should, as the Acts of the Apostles

teaches us, by its collocation in the description of one of its

characters, be full of the Holy Spirit and of power.'

Brethren, you hear a great deal to-day about new ways of Christian

working, about the necessity of adapting the forms of setting forth

Christ's truth to the spirit of the age, and new ideas. Adopt new

methods if you like; methods are not sacred. Fashion new forms of

presenting Christian truths if you please; our forms are only forms.

But you may alter your methods and you may modify your dogmas as you

like, and you will do nothing to move the world unless the Church is

again baptized with the Divine Spirit, which will only be the case if

the Church again puts forth a far mightier faith than it exercises

to-day. If only we will trust Jesus Christ absolutely, and live near

Him by our faith, His power will flow into us, and of us, too, it will

be said, through faith they wrought righteousness . . . subdued

kingdoms . . . waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of

the aliens.' But if the low level of average Christian faith in all the

churches is not elevated, then the attempts to conquer the world by

half-believing Christians will meet with the old fate, and the man in

whom the evil spirit was will leap upon them and overcome them, and

say, Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?' Why could we not

cast him out?' And He answered and said unto them, Because of your

unbelief.'

Brethren, we may starve in the midst of plenty, if we lock our lips. We

can be like some obstinate black rock, washed over for ever by the

Atlantic surges, and yet so close-grained that only the surface is

moistened, and, an inch within, it is dry. Neither life, nor death, nor

angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things

to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, is able to

separate you from the love and power of God which are in Christ Jesus

our Lord,' But you can separate yourselves, and you do separate

yourselves, by your unbelief. The all-sufficiency of Christ's

redemption, and the yearning of His love to bless each of us

individually, will be nothing to us if we lift up between Him and us

the black barrier of unbelief, and so dam back the stream that was

meant to give life to all the world and life to us. Christ infinitely

desires to bless us, but He cannot unless we trust Him. I beseech you,

do not let this be the epitaph on your tombstone:--Christ could there

do no mighty work because of his unbelief.'

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HEROD--A STARTLED CONSCIENCE

But when Herod heard thereof, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded: he

is risen from the dead.'--Mark vi. 16.

The character of this Herod, surnamed Antipas, is a sufficiently common

and a sufficiently despicable one. He was the very type of an Eastern

despot, exactly like some of those half-independent Rajahs, whose

dominions march with ours in India; capricious, crafty, as the epithet

which Christ applied to him, That fox!' shows; cruel, as the story of

the murder of John the Baptist proves; sensuous and lustful; and withal

weak of fibre and infirm of purpose. He, Herodias, and John the Baptist

make a triad singularly like the other triad in the Old Testament, of

Ahab, Jezebel, and Elijah. In both cases we have the weak ruler, the

beautiful she-devil at his side, inspiring him for all evil, and the

stern prophet, the rebuker and the incarnate conscience for them both.

The words that I have read are the terrified exclamation of this weak

and wicked man when he was brought in contact with the light and beauty

of Jesus Christ. And if we think who it was that frightened him, and

ponder the words in which his fear expressed itself, we get, as it

seems to me, some lessons worth the drawing.

I. You have here the voice of a startled conscience.

Herod killed John without much sense of doing wrong. He was sorry, no

doubt, for he had a kind of respect for the man, and he was reluctant

to put him to death. But though there was reluctance, there was no

hesitation. His fantastic sense of honour came in the way. In the one

scale there was the life of a poor enthusiast who had amused him for a

while, but of whom he had got tired. In the other scale there were his

word, the pleasure of Herodias, and the applause of the half-drunken

boon companions that were sitting with them at the table. So, of

course, the prophet was slain, and the pale head brought in to that

wild revel, and, except for the malignant gloating of the woman over

her gratified revenge, the event, no doubt, very quickly passed from

the memories of all concerned.

But then there came stealing into the silken seclusion of the palace,

where he was wallowing in his sensuality like a hog in the sty, the

tidings of another peasant Teacher that had risen up among the people.

Christ's name had been ringing through the land, and been sounded with

blessings in poor men's huts long before it got within the gates of

Herod's palace. That is the place where religious earnestness makes its

mark last of all. But it finally ran thither also; and light gossip

went round concerning this new sensation. Who is He? Who is He?' Each

man had his own theory about Him, but a sudden memory started up in the

frivolous despot's soul, and it was with a trembling heart that he said

to himself, I know! I know! It is John, whom I beheaded! He is risen

from the dead!' His conscience and his memory and his fears all awoke.

Now, my friends, I pray you to lay that simple lesson to heart. We all

of us do evil things with regard to which it is not hard for us to

bribe or to silence our memories and our consciences. The hurry and

bustle of daily life, the very weakness of our characters, the rush of

sensuous delights, may make us blind and deaf to the voice of

conscience; and we think that all chance of the evil deed rising again

to harm us is past. But some trifle touches the hidden spring by mere

accident; as in the old story of the man groping along a wall till his

finger happens to fall upon one inch of it, and immediately the

concealed door flies open, and there is the skeleton. So with us, some

merely fortuitous association may freshen faded memories and wake a

dormant conscience. An apparently trivial circumstance, like some

hooked pole pushed at random into the sea, may bring up by the locks

some pale and drowned memory long plunged in an ocean of oblivion.

Here, in Herod's case, a report reaches him of a new Rabbi who bears

but a very faint resemblance to John, and that is enough to bring his

crime back in its naked atrocity.

My friends, we all have these hibernating serpents in our consciences,

and nobody knows when the needful warmth may come that will wake them

and make them lift their forked heads to sting. The whole landscape of

my past life lies there behind the mists of apparent forgetfulness, and

any light air of suggestion may sweep away the clouds and show it all.

What have you laid up in these memories of yours to start into life

some day: at the last biting like a serpent and stinging like an

adder'? It is John! It is John, whom I beheaded!'

Take this other thought, how, as the story shows us, when once at the

bidding of memory conscience begins to work, all illusions as to the

nature of my action and as to my share in it are swept away.

When the evil deed was done, Herod scarcely felt as if he did it. There

was his plighted troth, there was Herodias's pressure, there was the

excitement of the moment. He seemed forced to do it, and scarcely

responsible for doing it. And no doubt, if he ever thought about it

afterwards, he shuffled off a large percentage of the responsibility of

the guilt upon the shoulders of the others. But when,

In the silent sessions of things past,'

the image and remembrance of the deed come up to him, all the helpers

and tempters have disappeared, and It is John, whom I beheaded!' (There

is emphasis in the Greek upon the I.') Yes, it was I. Herodias tempted

me; Herodias' daughter titillated my lust; I fancied that my oath bound

me; I could not help doing what would please those who sat at the

table--I said all that before I did it. But now, when it is done, they

have all disappeared, every one of them to his quarter; and I and the

ugly thing are left together alone. It was I that did it, and nobody

besides.'

The blackness of the crime, too, presents itself to the startled

conscience as it did not in the doing. There are many euphemisms and

soft words in which, as in cotton-wool, we wrap our evil deeds and so

deceive ourselves as to their hardness and their edge; but when

conscience gets hold of them, and they pass out of the realm of fact

into the mystical region of remembrance, all the wrappings, and all the

apologies, and all the soft phrases drop away; and the ugliest,

briefest, plainest word is the one by which my conscience describes my

own evil. I beheaded him! I, and none else, was the murderer.' Oh! dear

brethren, do you see to it that what you store up in these caves and

treasure-cellars of memory which we all carry with us, are deeds that

will bear being brought out again and looked at in the pure white light

of conscience, and which you will neither be ashamed nor afraid to lay

your hand upon and say: It is mine; I planted and sowed and worked it,

and I am ready to reap the fruit.' If thou be wise thou shalt be wise

for thyself, if thou scornest thou alone shalt bear it.' Take care of

the storehouses of memory and of conscience, and mind what kind of

things you lay up there.

II. Now, once more, I take these words as setting before us an example

of a conscience awakened to the unseen world.

Many commentators tell us that this Herod was a Sadducee; that is to

say that theologically and theoretically he had given up the belief in

a future state and in spiritual existence. I do not know that that can

be sustained, but much more probably he was only a Sadducee in the way

in which a great many of us are Sadducees: he never thought about these

things, he did not think about them enough to know whether he believed

in them or not. He was a practical, if not a theoretical Sadducee; that

is to say, this present was his world, and as for the future, it did

not come much into his mind. But now, notice that when conscience

begins to stir, it at once sends his thoughts into that unseen world

beyond.

There is a very close connection, as all history proves, between

theoretical disbelief in a future life and in spiritual existence, and

superstition. So strong is the bond which unites men with the unseen

world, that if they do not link themselves with that world in the

legitimate and true fashion, it is almost certain to avenge itself upon

them by leading them to all manner of low and abject superstitions.

Spiritualism is the disease of a generation that disbelieves in another

life. The French Revolution, with its infidelities, was also the age of

quacks and impostors such as Cagliostro and the like. The time when

Christ lived presented precisely the same phenomena. If Herod was a

Sadducee, Herod's Sadduceeism, like frost upon the window-panes, was

such a thin layer shutting out the invisible world, that the least

warmth of conscience melted it, and the clear daylight glared in upon

him. And I am afraid that there are a great many of us who may be

half-inclined to reject the belief in another life, who would find

precisely the same thing happening to us.

But be that as it may, it seems to me that whenever a man comes to

think very seriously about his conduct as being wrong in the sight of

God, there at once starts up before him the thought of a future life

and a judgment-bar. And I want to know why and how it is that the

vigorous operation of conscience is always accompanied with a fearful

looking for of judgment and fiery indignation.' I think it is worth

your while to reflect upon the fact, and to try and ascertain for

yourselves the reason of it, that whenever a man's conscience begins to

tell him of his wrong, its message is not only of transgressions but of

judgment, and that beyond the grave.

And, moreover, notice here how the startled conscience, when it becomes

aware of an unseen world beyond the grave, cannot but think that out of

that world there will come evil for it. These words of my text are

obviously the words of a frightened man. It was terror that made Herod

say: It is John, whom I beheaded. He is risen from the dead!' Who was

it that frightened Herod? It was He who came from the bosom of the

Father, with His hands full of blessings and His heart full of love:

who came to quiet all fears, and to cleanse all consciences, and to

satisfy all men's souls with His own sweet love and His perfect

righteousness. And it was this genial and gracious and divine form,

with all its actualities of gentleness and its possibilities of grace,

which the evil conscience of the terrified tetrarch converted into a

messenger of judgment come from the tomb to rebuke and to smite him for

his evils.

That is to say, men may always make that future life and their relation

to it what they will. Either the heavens may pour down their dewy

influences of benediction and fruitfulness upon them, or may pour down

fire and brimstone upon their spirits. Men have the choice which it

shall be. The evil conscience drapes the future in darkness, and is

right in doing it. The evil conscience forebodes chastisement,

judgment, condemnation coming to it from out of the unseen world, and,

with limitations, it is right in doing it. You can make Christ Himself

the Messenger of condemnation and of death to you. My dear friends, do

you choose whether, fronting eternity with an unforgiven burden of sin

upon your shoulders and a conscience unsprinkled by the blood of Jesus

Christ, you make of it one great fear; or whether you make it what it

really is, a lustrous hope, a perfect joy. Is the Messenger that comes

out of the unseen to come to you as a Judge of your buried evils

started into life, or is He to come to you as the Christ that bears in

His hand the price of your redemption, and with His blood sprinkles

your conscience from dead works' and from all its terrors?

III. And now, lastly, I see in this saying an illustration of a

conscience which, partially stirred, soon went finally to sleep again.

Strangely enough, if we pursue the story, this very terror and

clear-eyed perception of the nature of his action led the frivolous

king to nothing more than a curious wish to see this new Teacher. It

was not gratified; and thus by degrees he came to hate Him and to wish

to kill Him. And then, finally, on the eve of the Crucifixion Jesus was

brought into his presence, and Herod was glad that his curiosity was

satisfied at last. His conscience lay perfectly still. There was no

trace of the old convictions or of the old tremor. He questioned Jesus

many things, and Christ answered him nothing,' because He knew it was

of no use to speak to him. So Herod and his men of war mocked Him and

set Him at nought'; and sent Him back to Pilate; and he let his last

chance of salvation go, and never knew what he had done.

Now, there is a lesson for us all. Do not tamper with partially

awakened consciences; do not rest satisfied till they are quieted in

the legitimate way. There was a man who trembled when he heard Paul

remonstrating with him about righteousness and temperance'--both of

which the unjust judge had set at naught--and judgment to come' And he

sent for him often and communed with him gladly,' but we never hear

that Felix trembled any more. It is possible for you so to lull

yourselves into indifference, and, as it were, so to waterproof your

consciences that appeals, threatenings, pleadings, mercies, the words

of men, the Gospel of God, and the beseechings of Christ Himself may

all run off them and leave them dry and hard.

One very potent means of rendering consciences insensible is to neglect

their voice. The convictions which you have not followed out, like the

ruins of a bastion shattered by shell, protect your remaining

fortifications against the impact of God's truth. I believe that there

is no man, woman, or child listening to me at this moment but has had,

some time or other in the course of his or her life, convictions which

only needed to be followed out, gleams of guidance which only required

to be faithfully pursued, to bring him or her into loving fellowship

with, and true faith in, Jesus Christ. But some of you have neglected

them; some of you have choked them with cares and studies and

occupations of different kinds; and you are driving on to this

result,--I do not know that it is ever reached in this life, but a man

may come indefinitely near it,--that you shall stand, like Herod, face

to face with Jesus Christ and feel nothing, and that all His love and

grace shall be offered and not excite the faintest stirring in your

hearts of a desire to accept it.

Oh! my friend, we have all of us evils enough in these charnel-houses

of our memory to make us dread the awakening of conscience, to make us

look with fear and apprehension beyond the veil to a judgment-seat.

And, blessed be God! we have all of us had, and some of us have now,

drawings to which we need but to yield ourselves in order to find that

He who comes from the heavens is no John whom we beheaded,' risen for

judgment, but a mightier than he, that Son of God who came not to

condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.'

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THE MARTYRDOM OF JOHN

For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him

in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had

married her. 18. For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for

thee to have thy brother's wife. 19. Therefore Herodias had a quarrel

against him, and would have killed him; but she could not: 20. For

Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and

observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him

gladly. 21. And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his

birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates

of Galilee; 22. And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and

danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said

unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it

thee. 23. And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I

will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom. 24. And she went forth,

and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of

John the Baptist. 25. And she came in straightway with haste unto the

king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a

charger the head of John the Baptist. 26. And the king was exceeding

sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him,

he would not reject her. 27. And immediately the king sent an

executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and

beheaded him in the prison, 28. And brought his head in a charger, and

gave it to the damsel: and the damsel gave it to her mother.'--Mark vi.

17-28.

This Herod was a son of the grim old tiger who slew the infants of

Bethlehem. He was a true cub of a bad litter, with his father's

ferocity, but without his force. He was sensual, cruel, cunning, and

infirm of purpose. Rome allowed him to play at being a king, but kept

him well in hand. No doubt his anomalous position as a subject prince

helped to make him the bad man he was. Herodias, the Jezebel to this

Ahab, was his brother's wife, and niece to both her husband and Herod.

Elijah was not far off; John's daring outspokenness, of course, made

the indignant woman his implacable enemy.

I. This story gives an example of the waking of conscience. When

Christ's name reached even the court, where such tidings would have no

ready entrance, what was only an occasion of more or less languid

gossip and curiosity to others stirred the sleeping accuser in Herod's

breast. He had no doubt as to who this new Teacher, armed with mightier

powers than John who did no miracles' had ever possessed, was. His

conviction that he was John, come back with increased power, was

immediate, and was held fast, in spite of the buzz of other opinions.

Note the unusual order of the sentence in verse 16: John whom I

beheaded, he is,' etc. The terrified king blurts out the name of his

dread first, then tremblingly takes the guilt of the deed to himself,

and last speaks the terrifying thought that he is risen. A man who has

a sin in his memory can never be sure that its ghost will not suddenly

start up. Trivial incidents will rouse the sleeping conscience. Some

nothing, a chance word, a scent, a sound, the look on a face, the glow

of an evening sky, may bring all the foul past up again. A puff of wind

clears away the mist of oblivion, and the old sin starts into vividness

as if done yesterday. You touch a secret spring, and there yawns in the

floor a gap leading down to a dungeon.

Conscience thus wakened is free from all illusions as to guilt. I

beheaded.' There are no excuses now about Herodias' urgency, or

Salome's beauty, or the rash oath, or the need of keeping it, before

his guests. The deed stands clear of all these, as his own act. It is

ever so. When conscience speaks, sophistications about temptations or

companions, or necessity, or the more learned excuses which

philosophers make about environment and heredity as weakening

responsibility and diminishing guilt, shrivel to nothing. The present

operations of conscience distinctly predict future still more complete

remembrance of, and sense of responsibility for, long past sins. There

will be a resurrection of men's evil deeds, as well as of their bodies,

and each of them will shake its gory locks at its author, and say, Thou

didst it.'

There is no proof that Herod was a Sadducee, disbelieving in a

resurrection; but, whether he was or not, the terrors of conscience

made short work of the difficulties in the way of his supposition. He

was right in believing that evil deeds are gifted with an awful

immortality, and will certainly rise again to shake their doer's soul

with terrors.

II. The narrative harks back to tell the story of John's martyrdom. It

sets vividly forth the inner discord and misery of half-and-half

convictions. Herodias was strong enough to get John put in prison, and

apparently she tried with all the tenacity of a malignant woman to have

him assassinated, by contrived accident or open sentence; but that she

could not manage.

Mark's analysis of the play of contending feeling in the weak king is

barely intelligible in the Authorised Version, but is clearly shown in

the Revised Version. He feared John,'--the jailer afraid of his

prisoner,--knowing that he was a righteous man and an holy.' Goodness

is awful. The worst men know it when they see it, and pay it the homage

of dread, if not of love. And kept him safe' (not ob- but pre-served

him); that is, from Herodias' revenge. And when he heard him, he was

much perplexed.' The reading thus translated differs from that in the

Authorised Version by two letters only, and obviously is preferable.

Herod was a weak-willed man, drawn by two stronger natures pulling in

opposite directions.

So he alternated between lust and purity, between the foul kisses of

the temptress at his side and the warnings of the prophet in his

dungeon. But in all his vacillation he could not help listening to

John, but heard him gladly,' and mind and conscience approved the

nobler voice. Thus he staggered along, with religion enough to spoil

some of his sinful delights, but not enough to make him give them up.

Such a state of partial conviction is not unusual. Many of us know

quite well that, if we would drop some habit, which may not be very

grave, we should be less encumbered in some effort which it is our

interest or duty to make; but the conviction has not gone deeper than

the understanding. Like a shot which has only got half way through the

armoured skin of a man-of-war, it has done no execution, nor reached

the engine-room where the power that drives the life is. In more

important matters such imperfect convictions are widespread. The

majority of slaves to vice know perfectly well that they should give it

up. And in regard to the salvation which is in Christ, there are

multitudes who know in their inmost consciousness that they ought to be

Christians.

Such a condition is one liable to unrest and frequent inner conflict.

Truly, he is much perplexed' whose conscience pulls him one way, and

his inclinations another. There is no more miserable condition than

that of the man whose will is cleft in twain, and who has a continual

battle raging within. Conscience may be bound and thrust down into a

dungeon, like John, and lust and pride may be carousing overhead, but

their mirth is hollow, and every now and then the stern voice comes up

through the gratings, and the noisy revelry is hushed, while it speaks

doom.

Such a state of inner strife comes often from unwillingness to give up

one special evil. If Herod could have plucked up resolve to pack

Herodias about her business, other things might have come right. Many

of us are ruined by being unwilling to let some dear delight go. If

thine eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out.'

We do not make up for such cowardly shrinking from doing right by

pleasure in the divine word which we are not obeying. Herod no doubt

thought that his delight in listening to John went some way to atone

for his refusal to get rid of Herodias. Some of us think ourselves good

Christians because we assent to truth, and even like to hear it,

provided the speaker suit our tastes. Glad hearing only aggravates the

guilt of not doing. It is useless to admire John if you keep Herodias.

III. The end of the story gives an example of the final powerlessness

of such half-convictions. One need not repeat the grim narrative of the

murder. We all know it. One knows not which is the more repugnant--the

degradation of the poor child Salome to the level of a dancing-girl,

the fell malignity of the mother who would shame her daughter for such

an end, the maudlin generosity of Herod, flushed with wine and excited

passion, the hideous request from lips so young, the ineffectual sorrow

of Herod, his fantastic sense of obligation, which scrupled to break a

wicked promise and did not scruple to murder a prophet, or the ghastly

picture of the girl hurrying to her mother with the freshly severed

head, dripping on to the platter and staining her fair young hands.

This was what all the convictions of John's righteousness had come to.

So had ended the half yielding to his brave rebukes and the ineffectual

aspirations after cleaner living. That chaos of lust and blood teaches

that partial reformation is apt to end in a deeper plunge into fouler

mire. If a man is false to his feeblest conviction, he makes himself a

worse man all through. A partial thaw is generally followed by keener

frost than before. A soul half melted and cooled again is harder to

melt than before. An abortive slave-rising rivets the chains.

The incident teaches that simple weakness may come to be the parent of

great sin. In a world like this, where there are always more voices

soliciting to wrong than to right, to be weak is in the long run to be

wicked. Fatal facility of disposition ruins hundreds of unthinking men.

Nothing is more needful than that young people should learn to say No,'

and should cultivate a wholesome obstinacy which is afraid of nothing

but of sinning against God.

If we look onwards to this Herod's last appearance in Scripture, we get

further lessons. He desired to see Jesus that he might see a miracle

done to amuse him, like a conjuring trick. Convictions and terrors had

faded from his frivolous soul. He has forgotten that he once thought

Jesus to be John come again. He sees Christ, and sees nothing in Him;

and Christ says nothing to Herod, because He knew it would be useless.

It is an awful thing to put one's self beyond the hearing of that

voice, which all that are in the graves shall hear.' The most effectual

stopping for our ears is neglect of what we know to be His will. If we

will not listen to Him, we shall gradually lose the power of hearing

Him, and then He will lock His lips, and answer nothing. We dare not

say that Jesus is dumb to any man while life lasts, but we dare not

refrain from saying that that condition of utter insensibility to His

voice may be indefinitely approached by us, and that neglected

convictions bring us terribly far on the way towards it.

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THE WORLD'S BREAD

And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told Him

all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught. 31. And

He said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and

rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no

leisure so much as to eat. 32. And they departed into a desert place by

ship privately. 33. And the people saw them departing, and many knew

Him, and ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent them, and

came together unto Him. 34. And Jesus, when he came out, saw much

people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as

sheep not having a shepherd: and He began to teach them many things.

35. And when the day was now far spent, His disciples came unto Him,

and said, This is a desert place, and now the time is far passed: 36.

Send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into

the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat.

37. He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they say

unto Him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give

them to eat? 38. He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? go and

see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes. 39. And he

commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass.

40. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties. 41. And

when He had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, He looked up to

heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to His

disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided He among them

all. 42. And they did all eat, and were filled. 43. And they took up

twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes. 44. And they

that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men.'--Mark vi.

30-44.

This is the only miracle recorded by all four Evangelists. Matthew

brings it into immediate connection with John's martyrdom, while Mark

links it with the Apostles' return from their first mission. His

account is, as usual, full of graphic touches, while John shows more

intimate knowledge of the parts played by the Apostles, and sets the

whole incident in a clearer light.

I. Mark brings out the preceding events, and especially the seeking for

solitude, which was baulked by popular enthusiasm. The Apostles came

back to Jesus full of wondering joy, and were eager to tell what they

had done and taught. Note that order, which hints that they thought

more of the miracles than of the message. They were flushed and excited

by success, and needed calming down even more than physical rest. So

Jesus, knowing their need, bids them come with Him into healing

solitude, and rest awhile.

After any great effort, the body cries for repose, but still more does

the soul's health demand quiet after exciting and successful work for

Christ. Without much solitary communion with Jesus, effort for Him

tends to become mechanical, and to lose the elevation of motive and the

suppression of self which give it all its power. It is not wasted time

which the busiest worker, confronted with the most imperative calls for

service, gives to still fellowship in secret with God. There can never

be too much activity in Christian work, but there is often

disproportioned activity, which is too much for the amount of time

given to meditation and communion. That is one reason why there is so

much sowing and so little reaping in Christian work to-day.

But, on the other hand, we have sometimes to do as Jesus was driven to

do in this incident; namely, to forgo cheerfully, after brief repose,

the blessed and strengthening hour of quiet. The motives of the crowds

that hurried round the head of the lake while the boat was pulled

across, and so got to the other side before it, were not very pure.

Curiosity drove them as much as any nobler impulse. But we must not be

too particular about the reasons that induce men to resort to Jesus,

and if we can give them more than they sought, so much the better. Let

us be thankful if, for any reason, we can get them to listen.

Jesus came forth'; that is, probably from a short withdrawal with the

Twelve. Brief repose snatched, He turned again to the work. The great

multitude' did not make Him impatient, though, no doubt, some of the

Apostles were annoyed. But He saw deeply into their condition, and pity

welled in His heart. If we looked on the crowds in our great cities

with Christ's eyes, their spiritual state would be the most prominent

thing in sight. And if we saw that as He saw it, disgust, condemnation,

indifference, would not be uppermost, as they too often are, but some

drop of His great compassion would trickle into our hearts. The masses

are still as sheep without a shepherd,' ignorant of the way, and

defenceless against their worst foes. Do we habitually try to cultivate

as ours Christ's way of looking at men, and Christ's emotions towards

men? If we do, we shall imitate Christ's actions for men, and shall

recognise that, to reproduce as well as we can the many things' which

He taught them, is the best contribution which His disciples can make

to healing the misery of a Christless world.

II. The difference between John and Mark in regard to the conversation

of Jesus with the disciples about finding food for the crowd, is easily

harmonised. John tells us what Jesus said at the first sight of the

multitude; Mark takes up the narrative at the close of the day. We owe

to John the knowledge that the exigency was not first pointed out by

the disciples, but that His calm, loving prescience saw it, and

determined to meet it, long before they spoke. No needs arise

unforeseen by Christ, and He requires no prompting to help.

Difficulties which seem insoluble to us, when we too late wake to

perceive them, have long ago been taken into account and solved by Him.

The Apostles, according to Mark, came with a suggestion of helpless

embarrassment. They could think of nothing but to disperse the crowd,

and so get rid of responsibility. He answers with a paradox of

conscious power, which commands a seeming impossibility, and therein

prophesies endowment that will make it possible. Has not the Church

ever since been but too often faithless enough to let the multitudes

drift away to the cities and villages round about,' and there, amid

human remedies for their sore needs, buy themselves,' with much

expenditure, a scanty provision? Are we not all tempted to shuffle off

responsibility for the world's hunger? Do we not often think that our

resources are absurdly insufficient, and so, faintheartedly make them

still less? Is not His command still, Give ye them to eat'? Let us rise

to the height of our duties and of our power, and be sure that whoever

has Christ has enough for the world's hunger, and is bound to call men

from that which is not bread,' and to feed them with Him who is.

Philip's morning calculation (curiously in keeping with his character)

seems to have been repeated by the Apostles, as, no doubt, he had been

saying the same thing all day at intervals. They had made a rough

calculation of how much would be wanted. It was a sum far beyond their

means. It was as much as about ?7. And where was such wealth as that in

that company? But calculations which leave out Christ's power are not

quite conclusive. The Apostles had reckoned up the requirement, but

they had not taken stock of their resources. So they were sent to hunt

up what they could, and John tells us that it was Andrew who found the

boy with five barley loaves and two fishes. How came a boy to be so

provident? Probably he had come to try a bit of trade on his own

account. At all events, the Twelve seem to have been able to buy his

little stock, which done, they went back to tell Jesus, no doubt

thinking that such a meagre supply would end all talk of their giving

the crowd to eat. Jesus would have us count our own resources, not that

we may fling up His work in despair, but that we may realise our

dependence on Him, and that the consciousness of our own insufficiency

may not diminish one jot our sense of obligation to feed the multitude.

It is good to learn our own weakness if it drives us to lean on His

strength. Five loaves and two fishes,' plus Jesus Christ, come to a

good deal more than two hundred pennyworth of bread.'

III. The miracle is told with beautiful vividness and simplicity.

Mark's picturesque words show the groups sitting by companies of

hundreds or of fifties. He uses a word which means the square garden

plots in which herbs are grown.' So they sat on the green grass, which

at that Passover season would be fresh and abundant. What half-amused

and more than half-incredulous wonder as to what would come next would

be in the people! Many of them would be saying in their hearts, and

perhaps some in words, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?' (Ps.

lxxviii. 19). In that small matter Jesus shows that He is not the

Author of confusion,' but of order. The rush of five thousand hungry

men struggling to get a share of what seemed an insufficient supply

would have been unseemly and dangerous to the women and children, but

the seated groups become as companies of guests, and He the orderer of

the feast. To get at the numbers would be easy, while the passage of

the Apostles through the groups was facilitated, and none would be

likely to remain unsupplied or passed over.

The point at which the miraculous element entered is not definitely

stated, but if each portion passed through the hands of Christ to the

servers, and from them to the partakers, the multiplication of the

bread must have been effected while it lay in His hand; that is to say,

the loaves were not diminished by His giving. That is true about all

divine gifts. He bestows, and is none the poorer. The streams flow from

the golden vase, and, after all outpouring, it is brimful.

Many irrelevant difficulties have been raised about the mode of the

miracle, and many lame analogies have been suggested, as if it but

hastened ordinary processes. But these need not detain us. Note rather

the great lesson which John records that our Lord Himself drew from

this miracle. It was a symbol, in the material region, of His work in

the spiritual, as all His miracles were. He is the Bread of the world.

Ho gives Himself still, and in a yet more wonderful sense He gave His

flesh for the life of the world. He gives us Himself for our own

nourishment, and also that we may give Him to others. It was an honour

to the Twelve that they should be chosen to be His almoners. It should

be felt an honour by all Christians that through them Christ wills to

feed a hungry world.

A somewhat different application of the miracle reminds us that Jesus

uses our resources, scanty and coarse as five barley loaves, for the

basis of His wonders. He did not create the bread, but multiplied it.

Our small abilities, humbly acknowledged to be small, and laid in His

hands, will grow. There is power enough in the Church, if the power

were consecrated, to feed the world.

All four Gospels tell the command to gather up the broken pieces' (not

the fragments left by the eaters, but the unused pieces broken by

Christ). This union of economy with creative power could never have

been invented. Unused resources are retained. The exercise of Christian

powers multiplies them, and after the feeding of thousands more remains

than was possessed before. There is that scattereth, and yet

increaseth.'

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CHILDREN AND LITTLE DOGS

And from thence He arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon,

and entered Into an house, and would have no man know it: but He could

not be hid. 25. For a certain woman, whose young daughter had an

unclean spirit, heard of Him, and came and fell at His feet: 26. The

woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought Him that

He would cast forth the devil out of her daughter. 87. But Jesus said

unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take

the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs. 28. And she

answered and said unto Him, Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat

of the children's crumbs. 29. And He said unto her, For this saying go

thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter. 30. And when she was

come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid

upon the bed.'--Mark vii. 24-30.

Our Lord desired to withdraw from the excited crowds who were flocking

after Him as a mere miracle-worker and from the hostile espionage of

emissaries of the Pharisees, which had come from Jerusalem.' Therefore

He sought seclusion in heathen territory. He, too, knew the need of

quiet, and felt the longing to plunge into privacy, to escape for a

time from the pressure of admirers and of foes, and to go where no man

knew Him. How near to us that brings Him! And how the remembrance of it

helps to explain His demeanour to the Syrophcenician woman, so unlike

His usual tone! Naturally the presence of Jesus leaked out, and perhaps

the very effort to avoid notice attracted it. Rumour would have carried

His name across the border, and the tidings of His being among them

would stir hope in some hearts that felt the need of His help. Of such

was this woman, whom Mark describes first, generally, as a Greek' (that

is, a Gentile), and then particularly as a Syrophcenician by race';

that is, one of that branch of the Phoenician race who inhabited

maritime Syria, in contradistinction from the other branch inhabiting

North-eastern Africa, Carthage, and its neighbourhood. Her deep need

made her bold and persistent, as we learn in detail from Matthew, who

is in this narrative more graphic than Mark. He tells us that she

attacked Jesus in the way, and followed Him, pouring out her loud

petitions, to the annoyance of the disciples. They thought that they

were carrying out His wish for privacy in suggesting that it would be

best to send her away' with her prayer granted, and so stop her crying

after us,' which might raise a crowd, and defeat the wish. We owe to

Matthew the further facts of the woman's recognition of Jesus as the

Son of David,' and of the strange ignoring of her cries, and of His

answer to the disciples' suggestion, in which He limited His mission to

Israel, and so explained to them His silence to her. Mark omits all

these points, and focuses all the light on the two things--Christ's

strange and apparently harsh refusal, and the woman's answer, which won

her cause.

Certainly our Lord's words are startlingly unlike Him, and as

startlingly like the Jewish pride of race and contempt for Gentiles.

But that the woman did not take them so is clear; and that was not due

only to her faith, but to something in Him which gave her faith a

foothold. We are surely not to suppose that she drew from His words an

inference which He did not perceive in them, and that He was, as some

commentators put it, caught in His own words.' Mark alone gives us the

first clause of Christ's answer to the woman's petition: Let the

children first be filled.' And that first' distinctly says that their

prerogative is priority, not monopoly. If there is a first,' there will

follow a second. The very image of the great house in which the

children sit at the table, and the little dogs' are in the room,

implies that children and dogs are part of one household; and Jesus

meant by it just what the woman found in it,--the assurance that the

meal-time for the dogs would come when the children had done. That is

but a picturesque way of stating the method of divine revelation

through the medium of the chosen people, and the objections to Christ's

words come at last to be objections to the committing' of the oracles

of God' to the Jewish race; that is to say, objections to the only

possible way by which a historical revelation could be given. It must

have personal mediums, a place and a sequence. It must prepare fit

vehicles for itself and gradually grow in clearness and contents. And

all this is just to say that revelation for the world must be first the

possession of a race. The fire must have a hearth on which it can be

kindled and burn, till it is sufficient to bear being carried thence.

Universalism was the goal of the necessary restriction. Pharisaism

sought to make the restriction permanent. Jesus really threw open the

gates to all in this very saying, which at first sounds so harsh.

First' implies second, children and little dogs are all parts of the

one household. Christ's personal ministry was confined to Israel for

obvious and weighty reasons. He felt, as Matthew tells us, that He said

in this incident that He was not sent but to the lost sheep of that

nation. But His world-wide mission was as clear to Him as its temporary

limit, and in His first discourse in the synagogue at Nazareth He

proclaimed it to a scowling crowd. We cannot doubt that His sympathetic

heart yearned over this poor woman, and His seemingly rough speech was

meant partly to honour the law which ruled His mission even in the act

of making an exception to it, and partly to test, and so to increase,

her faith.

Her swift laying of her finger on the vulnerable point in the apparent

refusal of her prayer may have been due to a woman's quick wit, but it

was much more due to a mother's misery and to a suppliant's faith.

There must have been something in Christ's look, or in the cadence of

His voice, which helped to soften the surface harshness of His words,

and emboldened her to confront Him with the plain implications of His

own words. What a constellation of graces sparkles in her ready reply!

There is humility in accepting the place He gives her; insight in

seeing at once a new plea in what might have sent her away despairing;

persistence in pleading; confidence that He can grant her request and

that He would gladly do so. Our Lord's treatment of her was amply

justified by its effects. His words were like the hard steel that

strikes the flint and brings out a shower of sparks. Faith makes

obstacles into helps, and stones of stumbling into stepping-stones to

higher things.' If we will take the place which He gives us, and hold

fast our trust in Him even when He seems silent to us, and will so far

penetrate His designs as to find the hidden purpose of good in apparent

repulses, the honey secreted deep in the flower, we shall share in this

woman's blessing in the measure in which we share in her faith.

Jesus obviously delighted in being at liberty to stretch His commission

so as to include her in its scope. Joyful recognition of the ingenuity

of her pleading, and of her faith's bringing her within the circle of

the children,' are apparent in His word, For this saying go thy way.'

He ever looks for the disposition in us which will let Him, in

accordance with His great purpose, pour on us His full-flowing tide of

blessing, and nothing gladdens Him more than that, by humble acceptance

of our assigned place, and persistent pleading, and trust that will not

be shaken, we should make it possible for Him to see in us recipients

of His mercy and healing grace.

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THE PATTERN OF SERVICE

He touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, He sighed, and saith

Ephphatha, that is, Be opened.'--Mark vii. 33, 34.

For what reason was there this unwonted slowness in Christ's healing

works? For what reason was there this unusual emotion ere He spoke the

word which cleansed? As to the former question, a partial answer may

perhaps be that our Lord is here on half-heathen ground, where aids to

faith were much needed, and His power had to be veiled that it might be

beheld. Hence the miracle is a process rather than an act; and,

advancing as it does by distinct stages, is conformed in appearance to

men's works of mercy, which have to adapt means to ends, and creep to

their goal by persevering toil. As to the latter, we know not why the

sight of this one poor sufferer should have struck so strongly on the

ever-tremulous chords of Christ's pitying heart; but we do know that it

was the vision brought before His spirit by this single instance of the

world's griefs and sicknesses--in which mass, however, the special case

before Him was by no means lost--that raised His eyes to heaven in mute

appeal, and forced the groan from His breast.

The missionary spirit' is but one aspect of the Christian spirit. We

shall only strengthen the former as we invigorate the latter. Harm has

been done, both to ourselves and to that great cause, by seeking to

stimulate compassion and efforts for heathen lands by the use of other

excitements, which have tended to vitiate even the emotions they have

aroused, and are apt to fail as when we need them most. It may

therefore be profitable if we turn to Christ's own manner of working,

and His own emotions in His merciful deeds, set forth in this

remarkable narrative, as containing lessons for us in our missionary

and evangelistic work. I must necessarily omit more than a passing

reference to the slow process of healing which this miracle exhibits.

But that, too, has its teaching for us, who are so often tempted to

think ourselves badly used, unless the fruit of our toil grows up, like

Jonah's gourd, before our eyes. If our Lord was content to reach His

end of blessing step by step, we may well accept patient continuance in

well-doing' as the condition indispensable to reaping in due season.

But there are other thoughts still more needful which suggest

themselves. Those minute details which this Evangelist ever delights to

give of our Lord's gestures, words, looks, and emotions, not only add

graphic force to the narrative but are precious glimpses into the very

heart of Christ. That fixed gaze into heaven, that groan which neither

the glories seen above nor the conscious power to heal could stifle,

that most gentle touch, as if removing material obstacles from the deaf

ears, and moistening the stiff tongue that it might move more freely in

the parched mouth, that word of authority which could not be wanting

even when His working seemed likest a servant's, do surely carry large

lessons for us. The condition of all service, the cost of feeling at

which our work must be done, the need that the helpers should identify

themselves with the sufferers, and the victorious power of Christ's

word over all deaf ears--these are the thoughts which I desire to

connect with our text and to commend to your meditation now.

I. We have here set forth, in the Lord's heavenward look, the

foundation and condition of all true work for God.

The profound questions which are involved in the fact that, as man,

Christ held communion with God in the exercise of faith and aspiration,

the same in kind as ours, do not concern us here. I speak to those who

believe that Jesus is for us the perfect example of complete manhood,

and who therefore believe that He is the leader of faith,' the head of

the long processions of those who in every age have trusted in God and

been lightened.' But, perhaps, though that conviction holds its place

in our creeds, it has not been as completely incorporated with our

thoughts as it should have been. There has, no doubt, been a tendency,

operating in much of our evangelical teaching, and in the common stream

of orthodox opinion, to except, half unconsciously, the exercises of

the religious life from the sphere of Christ's example, and we need to

be reminded that Scripture presents His vow, I will put my trust in

Him,' as the crowning proof of His brotherhood, and that the prints of

His kneeling limbs have left their impressions where we kneel before

the throne. True, the relation of the Son to the Father involves more

than communion-namely, unity. But if we follow the teaching of the

Bible, we shall not presume that the latter excludes the former, but

understand that the unity is the foundation of perfect communion, and

the communion the manifestation, so far as it can be manifested, of the

unspeakable unity. The solemn words which shine like stars--starlike in

that their height above us shrinks their magnitude and dims their

brightness, and in that they are points of radiance partially

disclosing, and separated by, abysses of unlighted infinitude--tell us

that in the order of eternity, before creatures were, there was

communion, for the Word was with God,' and there was unity, for the

Word was God.' And in the records of the life manifested on earth the

consciousness of unity loftily utters itself in the unfathomable

declaration, I and my Father are one'; whilst the consciousness of

communion, dependent like ours on harmony of will and true obedience,

breathes peacefully in the witness which He leaves to Himself: The

Father has not left Me alone, for I do always the things that please

Him.'

We are fully warranted, then, in supposing that that wistful gaze to

heaven means, and may be taken to symbolise, our Lord's conscious

direction of thought and spirit to God as He wrought His work of mercy.

There are two distinctions to be noted between His communion with God

and ours before we can apply the lesson to ourselves. His heavenward

look was not the renewal of interrupted fellowship, but rather, as a

man standing firmly on firm rock may yet lift his foot to plant it

again where it was before, and settle himself in his attitude before he

strikes with all his might; so we may say Christ fixes Himself where He

always stood, and grasps anew the hand that He always held, before He

does the deed of power. The communion that had never been broken was

renewed; how much more the need that in our work for God the renewal of

the--alas! too sadly sundered--fellowship should ever precede and

always accompany our efforts! And again, Christ's fellowship was with

the Father, while ours must be with the Father through the Son. The

communion to which we are called is with Jesus Christ, in whom we find

God.

The manner of that intercourse, and the various discipline of ourselves

with a view to its perfecting which Christian prudence prescribes, need

not concern us here. As for the latter, let us not forget that a

wholesome and wide-reaching self-denial cannot be dispensed with. Hands

that are full of gilded toys and glass beads cannot grasp durable

riches, and eyes that have been accustomed to glaring lights see only

darkness when they look up to the violet heaven with all its stars. As

to the former, every part of our nature above the simply animal is

capable of God, and the communion ought to include our whole being.

Christ is truth for the understanding, authority for the will, love for

the heart, certainty for the hope, fruition for all the desires, and

for the conscience at once cleansing and law. Fellowship with Him is no

indolent passiveness, nor the luxurious exercise of certain emotions,

but the contact of the whole nature with its sole adequate object and

rightful Lord.

Such intercourse, brethren, lies at the foundation of all work for God.

It is the condition of all our power. It is the measure of all our

success. Without it we may seem to realise the externals of prosperity,

but it will be all illusion. With it we may perchance seem to spend our

strength for nought'; but heaven has its surprises; and those who

toiled, nor left their hold of their Lord in all their work, will have

to say at last with wonder, as they see the results of their poor

efforts, Who hath begotten me these? behold, I was left alone; these,

where had they been?'

Consider in few words the manifold ways in which the indispensable

prerequisite of all right effort for Christ may be shown to be

communion with Christ.

The heavenward look is the renewal of our own vision of the calm

verities in which we trust, the recourse for ourselves to the realities

which we desire that others should see. And what is equal in persuasive

power to the simple utterance of one's own intense conviction? He only

will infuse his own religion into other minds, whose religion is not a

set of hard dogmas, but is fused by the heat of personal experience

into a river of living fire. It will flow then, not otherwise. The only

claim which the hearts of men will listen to, in those who would win

them to spiritual beliefs, is that ancient one: That which we have seen

with our eyes, which we have looked upon, declare we unto you.'

Mightier than all arguments, than all proofs of the truth of the

Christian religion,' and penetrating into a sphere deeper than that of

the understanding, is the simple proclamation, We have found the

Messias.' If we would give sight to the blind, we must ourselves be

gazing into heaven. Only when we testify of that which we see, as one

might who, standing in a beleaguered city, discerned on the horizon the

filmy dust-cloud through which the spearheads of the deliverers flashed

at intervals, shall we win any to gaze with us till they too behold and

know themselves set free.

The heavenward look draws new strength from the source of all our

might. In our work, dear brethren, contemplating as it ought to do

exclusively spiritual results, what we do depends largely on what we

are, and what we are depends on what we receive, and what we receive

depends on the depth and constancy of our communion with God. The help

which is done upon earth He doeth it all Himself.' We and our

organisations are but the channels through which this might is poured;

and if we choke the bed with turbid masses of drift and heavy rocks of

earthly thoughts, or build from bank to bank thick dams of worldliness

compact with slime of sin, how shall the full tide flow through us for

the healing of the salt and barren places? Will it not leave its former

course silted up with sand, and cut for itself new outlets, while the

useless quays that once rang with busy life stand silent, and the

cities are solitary that were full of people'? We are

The trumpet at Thy lips, the clarion

Full of Thy cry, sonorous with Thy breath.'

Let us see to it that by fellowship with Christ we keep the passage

clear, and become recipients of the inspiration which shall thrill our

else-silent spirits into the blast of loud alarum and the ringing

proclamation of the true King.

The heavenward look will guard us from the temptations which surround

all our service, and the distractions which lay waste our lives. It is

habitual communion with Christ that alone will give the persistency

that makes systematic, continuous efforts for Him possible, and yet

will keep systematic work from degenerating, as it ever tends to do,

into mechanical work. There is no greater virtue in irregular desultory

service than in systematised labour. The one is not freer from

besetting temptations than the other, only the temptations are of

different sorts. Machinery saves manual toil, and multiplies force. But

we may have too heavy machinery for what engineers call the boiler

power,--too many wheels and shafts for the steam we have to drive them

with. What we want is not less organisation, or other sorts of it, but

more force. Any organisation will do if we have God's Spirit breathing

through it. None will be better than so much old iron if we have not.

We are ever apt to trust to our work, to do it without a distinct

recurrence at each moment to the principles on which it rests, and the

motives by which it should be actuated,--to become so absorbed in

details that we forget the purpose which alone gives them meaning, to

over-estimate the external aspects of it, to lose sight of the solemn

truths which make it so grand, and to think of it as commonplace

because it is common, as ordinary because it is familiar. And from

these most real dangers, which beset us all, there is no refuge but the

frequent, the habitual, gaze into the open heavens, which will show us

again the realities of things, and bring to our spirits, dwarfed even

by habits of goodness, the renewal of former motives by the vision of

Jesus Christ.

Such constant communion will further surround us with an atmosphere

through which none of the many influences which threaten our Christian

life and our Christian work can penetrate. As the diver in his bell

sits dry at the bottom of the sea, and draws a pure air from the free

heavens far above him, and is parted from that murderous waste of green

death that clings so closely round the translucent crystal walls which

keep him safe; so we, enclosed in God, shall repel from ourselves all

that would overflow to destroy us and our work, and may by His grace

lay deeper than the waters some courses in the great building that

shall one day rise, stately and many-mansioned, from out of the

conquered waves. For ourselves, and for all that we do for Him, living

communion with God is the means of power and peace, of security and

success.

It was never more needful than now. Feverish activity rules in all

spheres of life. The iron wheels of the car which bears the modern idol

of material progress whirl fast, and crush remorselessly all who cannot

keep up the pace. Christian effort is multiplied and systematised

beyond all precedent. And all these facts make calm fellowship with God

hard to compass. The measure of the difficulty is the measure of the

need. I, for my part, believe that there are few Christian duties more

neglected than that of meditation, the very name of which has fallen of

late into comparative disuse, that augurs ill for the frequency of the

thing. We are so busy thinking, discussing, defending, inquiring; or

preaching, and teaching, and working, that we have no time and no

leisure of heart for quiet contemplation, without which the exercise of

the intellect upon Christ's truth will not feed, and busy activity in

Christ's cause may starve, the soul. There are few things which the

Church of this day in all its parts needs more than to obey the

invitation, Come ye yourselves apart into a lonely place, and rest a

while.'

Christ has set us the example. Let our prayers ascend as His did, and

in our measure the answers which came to Him will not fail us. For us,

too, praying, the heavens' shall be opened,' and the peace-bringing

spirit fall dove-like on our meek hearts. For us, too, when the shadow

of our cross lies black and gaunt upon our paths, and our souls are

troubled, communion with heaven will bring the assurance, audible to

our ears at least, that God will glorify Himself even in us. If, after

many a weary day, we seek to hold fellowship with God as He sought it

on the Mount of Olives, or among the solitudes of the midnight hills,

or out in the morning freshness of the silent wilderness, like Him we

shall have men gathering around us to hear us speak when we come forth

from the secret place of the Most High.' If our prayer, like His, goes

before our mighty deeds, the voice that first pierced the skies will

penetrate the tomb, and make the dead stir in their grave-clothes. If

our longing, trustful look is turned to the heavens, we shall not speak

in vain on earth when we say, Be opened!'

Brethren, we cannot do without the communion which our Master needed.

Do we delight in what strengthened Him? Does our work rest upon the

basis of inward fellowship with God which underlay His? Alas! that our

Pattern should be our rebuke, and that the readiest way to force home

our faults on our consciences should be the contemplation of the life

which we say that we try to copy!

II. We have here pity for the evils we would remove, set forth by the

Lord's sigh.

The frequency with which this Evangelist records our Lord's emotions on

the sight of sin and sorrow has been often noticed. In his pages we

read of Christ's grief at the hardness of men's hearts, of His

marvelling because of their unbelief, of His being moved with

compassion for an outcast leper and a hungry multitude, of His sighing

deeply in His spirit when prejudiced hostility, assuming the appearance

of candid inquiry, asked of Him a sign from heaven. All these instances

of true human feeling, like His tears at the grave of Lazarus, and His

weariness as He sat on the well, and His tired sleep in the stern of

the little fishing-boat, and His hunger and His thirst, are very

precious as aids in realising His perfect manhood; but they have a

worth beyond even that. They show us how the manifold ills and evils of

man's fate and conduct appealed to the only pure heart that ever beat,

and how quickly and warmly it, by reason of its purity, throbbed in

sympathy with all the woe. One might have thought that in the present

case the consciousness that His help was so near would have been

sufficient to repress the sigh. One might have thought that the

heavenward look would have stayed the tears. But neither the happiness

of active benevolence, nor the knowledge of immediate cure, nor the

glories above flooding His vision, could lift the burden from His

labouring breast. And surely in this too, we may discern a law for all

our efforts, that their worth shall be in proportion to the expense of

feeling at which they are done. Men predict the harvests in Egypt by

the height which the river marks on the gauge of the inundation. So

many feet there represent so much fertility. Tell me the depth of a

Christian man's compassion, and I will tell you the measure of his

fruitfulness.

What was it that drew that sigh from the heart of Jesus? One poor man

stood before him, by no means the most sorely afflicted of the many

wretched ones whom He healed. But He saw in him more than a solitary

instance of physical infirmities. Did there not roll darkly before His

thoughts that whole weltering sea of sorrow that moans round the world

of which here is but one drop that He could dry up? Did there not rise

black and solid, against the clear blue to which He had been looking,

the mass of man's sin, of which these bodily infirmities were but a

poor symbol as well as a consequence? He saw, as none but He could bear

to see, the miserable realities of human life. His knowledge of all

that man might be, of all that the most of men were becoming, His power

of contemplating in one awful aggregate the entire sum of sorrows and

sins, laid upon His heart a burden which none but He has ever endured.

His communion with heaven deepened the dark shadow on earth, and the

eyes that looked up to God and saw Him, could not but see foulness

where others suspected none, and murderous messengers of hell walking

in darkness unpenetrated by mortal sight. And all that pain of clearer

knowledge of the sorrowfulness of sorrow, and the sinfulness of sin,

was laid upon a heart in which was no selfishness to blunt the sharp

edge of the pain nor any sin to stagnate the pity that flowed from the

wound. To Jesus Christ, life was a daily martyrdom before death had

made the sacrifice complete,' and He bore our griefs and carried our

sorrows' through many a weary hour before He bare them in His own body

on the tree.' Therefore, Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil

the law' which Christ obeyed, becomes a command for all who would draw

men to Him. And true sorrow, a sharp and real sense of pain, becomes

indispensable as preparation for, and accompaniment to, our work.

Mark how in us, as in our Lord, the sigh of compassion is to be

connected with the look to heaven. It follows upon that gaze. The evils

become more real, more terrible, by their startling contrast with the

unshadowed light which lives above cloudracks and mists. It is a sharp

shock to turn from the free sweep of the heavens, starry and radiant,

to the sights that meet us in this dim spot which men call earth.' Thus

habitual communion with God is the root of the truest and purest

compassion. It does not withdraw us from our fellow feeling with our

brethren, it cultivates no isolation for undisturbed beholding of God.

It at once supplies a standard by which to measure the greatness of

man's godlessness, and therefore of his gloom, and a motive for laying

the pain of these upon our hearts, as if they were our own. He has

looked into the heavens to little purpose who has not learned how bad

and how sad the world now is, and how God bends over it in pitying

love.

And that same fellowship which will clear our eyes and soften our

hearts, is also the one consolation which we have when our sense of all

the ills that flesh is heir to' becomes deep nearly to despair. When

one thinks of the real facts of human life, and tries to conceive of

the frightful meanness and passion and hate and wretchedness that have

been howling and shrieking and gibbering and groaning through dreary

millenniums, one's brain reels, and hope seems to be absurdity, and joy

a sin against our fellows, as a feast would be in a house next door to

where was a funeral. I do not wonder at settled sorrow falling upon men

of vivid imagination, keen moral sense, and ordinary sensitiveness,

when they brood long on the world as it is. But I do wonder at the

superficial optimism which goes on with its little prophecies about

human progress, and its rose-coloured pictures of human life, and sees

nothing to strike it dumb for ever in men's writhing miseries, blank

failures, and hopeless end. Ah! brethren, if it were not for the

heavenward look, how could we bear the sight of earth? We see not yet

all things put under Him.' No! God knows, far enough off from that.

Man's folly, man's submission to the creatures he should rule, man's

agonies, and man's transgression, are a grim contrast to the Psalmist's

vision. If we had only earth to look to, despair of the race, expressed

in settled melancholy apathy or in fierce cynicism, were the wisest

attitude. But there is more within our view than earth; we see Jesus';

we look to the heaven, and as we behold the true Man, we see more than

ever, indeed, how far from that pattern we all are; but we can bear the

thought of what men as yet have been, when we see that perfect Example

of what men shall be. The root and the consolation of our sorrow for

men's evils is communion with God.

Let me remind you, too, that still more dangerous than the pity which

is not based upon, and corrected by, the look to heaven, is the pity

which does not issue in strenuous work. It is easy to excite people's

emotions; but it is perilous for both the operator and the subject,

unless they be excited through the understanding, and pass on the

impulse to the will and the practical powers. The surest way to petrify

a heart is to stimulate the feelings, and give them nothing to do. They

will never recover their original elasticity if they have been wantonly

drawn forth thus. Coldness, hypocrisy, spurious sentimentalism, and a

whole train of affectations and falsehoods follow the steps of an

emotional religion, which divorces itself from active work. Pity is

meant to impel to help. Let us not be content with painting sad and

true pictures of men's woes,--of the gloomy hopelessness of idolatry,

for instance--but let us remember that every time our compassion is

stirred, and no action ensues, our hearts are in some measure

indurated, and the sincerity of our religion in some degree impaired.

White-robed Pity is meant to guide the strong powers of practical help

to their work. She is to them as eyes to go before them and point their

tasks. They are to her as hands to execute her gentle will. Let us see

to it that we rend them not apart; for idle pity is unblessed and

fruitless as a sigh cast into the fragrant air, and unpitying work is

more unblessed and fruitless still. Let us remember, too, that

Christlike and indispensable as Pity is, she is second, and not first.

Let us take heed that we preserve that order in our own minds, and in

our endeavours to stimulate one another. For if we reverse it, we shall

surely find the fountains of compassion drying up long before the wide

stretches of thirsty land are watered, and the enterprises which we

have sought to carry on by appealing to a secondary motive, languishing

when there is most need for vigour. Here is the true sequence which

must be observed in our missionary and evangelistic work, Looking up to

heaven, He sighed.'

Dear brethren! must we not all acknowledge woful failures in this

regard? How much of our service, our giving, our preaching, our

planning, has been carried on without one thought of the ills and

godlessness we profess to be seeking to cure! If some angel's touch

could annihilate all that portion of our activity, what gaps would be

left in all our subscription lists, our sermons, and our labours both

at home and abroad! Annihilate, do I say? It is done already. Such work

is nothing, and comes to nothing. Yea, it shall not be planted; yea, it

shall not be sown; and He shall also blow upon it, and it shall

wither.'

The hindrances to such abiding consciousness of and pity for the

world's woes run all down to the one tap-root of all sin, selfishness.

The remedies run all up to the common form of all goodness, the

self-absorbing communion with Jesus Christ. And besides that

mother-tincture of everything wrong, subsidiary impediments may be

found in the small amounts of time and effort which any of us give to

bring the facts of the world's condition vividly before our minds. The

destruction of all emotion is the indolent acquiescence in general

statements which we are too lazy or busy to break up into individual

cases. To talk about hundreds of millions of idolaters leaves the heart

untouched. But take one soul out of all that mass, and try to feel what

his life is in its pitchy darkness, broken only by lurid lights of fear

and sickly gleams of hope, in its passions ungoverned by love, its

remorse uncalmed by pardon, its affections feeling like the tendrils of

some climbing plant for the stay they cannot find, and in the cruel

blackness that swallows it up irrevocably at last. Follow it from the

childhood that knows no discipline to the grave that knows no waking,

and will not the solitary instance come nearer our hearts than the

millions? But however that may be, the sluggishness of our

imaginations, the very familiarity with the awful facts, our own feeble

hold on Christ, our absorption in personal interests, the

incompleteness and desultoriness of our communion with our Lord, do all

concur with our natural selfishness to make a sadly large proportion of

our apparent labours for God and men utterly cold and unfeeling, and

therefore utterly worthless. Has the benighted world ever caused us as

much pain as some trivial pecuniary loss has done? Have we ever felt

the smart of the gaping wounds through which our brothers' blood is

pouring forth as much as we do the tiniest scratch on our own fingers?

Does it sound to us like exaggerated rhetoric when a prophet breaks

out, Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears,

that I might weep night and day!' or when an Apostle in calmer tones

declares, I have great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart'? Some

seeds are put to steep and swell in water, that they may be tested

before sowing. The seed which we sow will not germinate unless it be

saturated with our tears. And yet the sorrow must be blended with joy;

for it is glad labour which is ordinarily productive labour--just as

the growing time is the changeful April, and one knows not whether the

promise of harvest is most sure in the clouds that drop fatness, or in

the sunshine that makes their depths throb with whitest light, and

touches the moist-springing blades into emeralds and diamonds. The

gladness comes from the heavenward look, the pain is breathed in the

deep-drawn sigh; both must be united in us if we would approve

ourselves as the servants of God--as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.'

III. We have here loving contact with those whom we would help set

forth in the Lord's touch.

The reasons for the variety observable in Christ's method of

communicating supernatural blessing were, probably, too closely

connected with unrecorded differences in the spiritual conditions of

the recipients to be distinctly traceable by us. But though we cannot

tell why a particular method was employed in a given case, why now a

word, and now a symbolic action, now the touch of His hand, and now the

hem of His garment, appeared to be the vehicles of His power, we can

discern the significance of these divers ways, and learn great lessons

from them all.

His touch was sometimes obviously the result of what one may venture to

call instinctive tenderness, as when He lifted the little children in

His arms and laid His hands upon their heads. It was, I suppose, always

the spontaneous expression of love and compassion, even when it was

something more. The touch of His hand on the ghastly glossiness of the

leper's skin was, no doubt, His assertion of priestly functions, and of

elevation above all laws of defilement; but what was it to the poor

outcast, who for years had never felt the warm contact of flesh and

blood? It always indicated that He Himself was the source of healing

and life. It always expressed His identification of Himself with sorrow

and sickness. So that it is in principle analogous to, and may be taken

as illustrative of, that transcendent act whereby He became flesh, and

dwelt among us.' Indeed, the very word by which our Lord's taking the

blind man by the hand is described in the chapter following our text,

is that employed in the Epistle to the Hebrews when, dealing with the

true brotherhood of Jesus, the writer says, He took not hold of angels,

but of the seed of Abraham He taketh hold.' Christ's touch is His

willing contact with man's infirmities and sins, that He may strengthen

and hallow.

And the lesson is one of universal application. Wherever men would help

their fellows, this is a prime requisite, that the would-be helper

should come down to the level of those whom he desires to aid. If we

wish to teach, we must stoop to think the scholar's thoughts. The

master who has forgotten his boyhood will have poor success. If we

would lead to purer emotions, we must try to enter into the lower

feelings which we labour to elevate. It is of no use to stand at the

mouth of the alleys we wish to cleanse, with our skirts daintily

gathered about us, and smelling-bottle in hand, to preach homilies on

the virtues of cleanliness. We must go in among the filth, and handle

it, if we want to have it cleared away. The degraded must feel that we

do not shrink from them, or we shall do them no good. The leper,

shunned by all, and ashamed of himself because everybody loathes him,

hungers in his hovel for the grasp of a hand that does not care for

defilement, if it can bring cleansing. Even in regard to common

material helps the principle holds good. We are too apt to cast our

doles to the poor like bones to a dog, and then to wonder at what we

are pleased to think men's ingratitude. A benefit may be so conferred

as to hurt more than a blow; and we cannot be surprised if so-called

charity which is given with contempt and a sense of superiority, should

be received with a scowl, and chafe a man's spirit like a fetter. Such

gifts bless neither him who gives nor him who takes. We must put our

hearts into them, if we would win hearts by them. We must be ready,

like our Master, to take blind beggars by the hand, if we would bless

or help them. The despair and opprobrium of our modern civilisation;

the gulf growing wider and deeper between Dives and Lazarus, between

Belgravia and Whitechapel; the mournful failure of legalised help, and

of delegated efforts to bridge it over, the darkening ignorance, the

animal sensuousness, the utter heathenism that lives in every town of

England, within a stone's-throw of Christian houses, and near enough to

hear the sound of public worship--will yield to nothing but that sadly

forgotten law which enjoins personal contact with the sinful and the

suffering, as one chief condition of raising them from the black mire

in which they welter.

But the same law has its special application in regard to the

enterprise of Christian missions.

It defines the spirit in which Christian men should proclaim the

Gospel. The effect of much well-meant Christian effort is simply to

irritate. People are very quick to catch delicate intonations which

reveal a secret sense, how much better, wiser, more devout I am than

these people!' and wherever a trace of that appears in our work, the

good of it is apt to be marred. We all know how hackneyed the charge of

spiritual pride and Pharisaic self-complacency is, and, thank God, how

unjust it often is. But averse as men may be to the truths which

humble, and willing as they may be to assume that the very effort on

our parts to present these to others implies a claim which they resent,

we may at least learn from the threadbare calumny, what strikes men

about our position, and what rouses their antagonism to us. It is

allowable to be taught by our enemies, especially when it is such a

lesson as this, that we must carefully divest our evangelistic work of

apparent pretensions to superiority, and take our stand by the side of

those to whom we speak. We cannot lecture men into the love of Christ,

We can win them to it only by showing Christ's love to them; and not

the least important element in that process is the exhibition of our

own love. We have a Gospel to speak of which the very heart is that the

Son of God stooped to become one with the lowliest and most sinful; and

how can that Gospel be spoken with power unless we too stoop like Him?

We have to echo the invitation, Learn of Me, for I am lowly in heart';

and how can such divine words flow from lips into which like grace has

not been poured? Our theme is a Saviour who shrank from no sinner, who

gladly consorted with publicans and harlots, who laid His hand on

pollution, and His heart, full of God and of love, on hearts reeking

with sin; and how can our message correspond with our theme if, even in

delivering it, we are saying to ourselves, The Temple of the Lord are

we: this people which knoweth not the law is cursed'? Let us beware of

the very real danger which besets us in this matter, and earnestly seek

to make ourselves one with those whom we would gather into Christ, by

actual familiarity with their condition, and by identification of

ourselves in feeling with them, after the example of that greatest of

Christian teachers who became all things to all men, that by all means

he might gain some'; after the higher example, which Paul followed, of

that dear Lord who, being Highest, descended to the lowest, and in the

days of His humiliation was not content with speaking words of power

from afar, nor abhorred the contact of mortality and disease and

loathsome corruption; but laid His hands upon death, and it lived; upon

sickness, and it was whole; on rotting leprosy, and it was sweet as the

flesh of a little child.

The same principle might be further applied to our Christian work, as

affecting the form in which we should present the truth. The

sympathetic identification of ourselves with those to whom we try to

carry the Gospel will certainly make us wise to know how to shape our

message. Seeing with their eyes, we shall be able to graduate the

light. Thinking their thoughts, and having in some measure succeeded,

by force of sheer community of feeling, in having, as it were, got

inside their minds, we shall unconsciously, and without effort, be led

to such aspects of Christ's all-comprehensive truth as they most need.

There will be no shooting over people's heads, if we love them well

enough to understand them. There will be no toothless generalities,

when our interest in men keeps their actual condition and temptations

clear before us. There will be no flinging fossil doctrines at them

from a height, as if Christ's blessed Gospel were, in another than the

literal sense, a stone of offence,' if we have taken our place on their

level. And without such sympathy, these and a thousand other weaknesses

and faults will certainly vitiate much of our Christian effort.

Let me not be misunderstood when I speak of adapting our presentation

of the Gospel to the wants of those to whom we carry it. That general

statement may express the plainest dictate of Christian prudence or the

most dangerous practical error. The one great truth of the Gospel wants

no adaptation, by our handling, to any soul of man. It is fitted for

all, and demands only plain, loving, earnest statement. There must be

no tampering with central verities, nor any diplomatic reserve on the

plea of consulting the needs of the men whom we address. Every sinful

spirit needs the simple Gospel of salvation by Jesus Christ more than

it needs anything else. Nor does adaptation mean deferential stretching

a point to meet man's wishes in our presentation of the truth. Their

wishes have to be contravened, that their wants may be met. The truth

which a man or a generation requires most is the truth which he or it

likes least; and the true Christian teacher's adaptation of his message

will consist quite as much in opposing the desires and contradicting

the lies, as in seeking to meet the felt wants, of the world. Nauseous

medicines or sharp lancets are adapted to the sick man, quite as truly

as pleasant food and soothing ointment.

But remembering all this, we still have a wide field for the operation

of practical wisdom and loving common-sense, in determining the form of

our message and the manner of our action. And not the least important

of qualifications for solving the problems connected therewith is

cheerful identification of ourselves with the thoughts and feelings of

those whom we would fain draw to the love of God. Such contact with men

will win their hearts, as well as soften ours, It will make them

willing to hear, as well as us wise to speak. It will enrich our own

lives with wide experience and multiplied interests. It will lift us

out of the enchanted circle which selfishness draws around us. It will

silently proclaim the Lord from whom we have learnt it. The clasp of

the hand will be precious, even apart from the virtue that may flow

from it, and may be to many a soul burdened with a consciousness of

corruption, the dawning of belief in a love that does not shrink even

from its foulness. Let us preach the Lord's touch as the source of all

cleansing. Let us imitate it in our lives, that if any will not hear

the word, they may without the word be won.'

IV. We have here the true healing power and the consciousness of

wielding it set forth in the Lord's authoritative word.

All the rest of His action was either the spontaneous expression of His

true participation in human sorrow, or a merciful veiling of His glory

that sense-bound eyes might see it the better. But the word was the

utterance of His will, and that was omnipotent. The hand laid on the

sick, the blind or the deaf was not even the channel of His power. The

bare putting forth of His energy was all-sufficient. In these we see

the loving, pitying man. In this blazes forth, yet more loving, yet

more compassionate, the effulgence of manifest God. Therefore so often

do we read the very syllables with which His voice then shook the

earth,' vibrating through all the framework of the material universe.

Therefore do the Gospels bid us listen when He rebukes the fever, and

it departs; when He says to the demons Go,' and they go; when one word

louder in its human articulation than the howling wind hushes the

surges; when Talitha cumi' brings back the fair young spirit from

dreary wanderings among the shades of death. Therefore was it a height

of faith not found in Israel when the Gentile soldier, whose training

had taught him the power of absolute authority, as heathenism had

driven him to long for a man who should speak with the imperial sway of

a god, recognised in His voice an all-commanding power. From of old,

the very signature of divinity has been declared to be, He spake, and

it was done'; and He, the breath of whose lips could set in motion

material changes, is that Eternal Word, by whom all things were made.

What unlimited consciousness of sovereign dominion sounds in that

imperative from His autocratic lips! It is spoken in deaf ears, but He

knows that it will be heard. He speaks as the fontal source, not as the

recipient channel, of healing. He anticipates no delay, no resistance.

There is neither effort nor uncertainty in the curt command. He is sure

that He has power, and He is sure that the power is His own.

There is no analogy here between us and Him. Alone, fronting the whole

race of man, He stands--utterer of a word which none can say after Him,

possessor of unshared might, and of His fulness do all we receive.' But

even from that divine authority and solitary sovereign consciousness we

may gather lessons of infinite value for all Christian workers. Of His

fulness we have received, and the power of the word on His lips may

teach us that of His word even on ours, as the victorious certainty

with which He spake His will of healing may remind us of the confidence

with which it becomes us to proclaim His name.

His will was almighty then. Is it less mighty or less loving now? Does

it not gather all the world in the sweep of its mighty purpose of

mercy? His voice pierced then into the dull, cold ear of death, and has

it become weaker since? His word spoken by Him was enough to banish the

foul spirits that run riot, swine-like, in the garden of God in man's

soul, trampling down and eating up its flowers and fruitage; is the

word spoken of Him less potent to cast them out? Were not all the

mighty deeds which He wrought by the breath of His lips on men's bodies

prophecies of the yet mightier ones which His Will of love, and the

utterance of that Will by stammering lips, may work on men's souls? Let

us not in our faintheartedness number up our failures, the deaf that

will not hear, the dumb that will not speak His praise, nor

unbelievingly say, Christ's own word was mighty, but the word

concerning Christ is weak on our lips.' Not so; our lips are unclean,

and our words are weak, but His word--the utterance of His loving Will

that men should be saved--is what it always was and always will be. We

have it, brethren, to proclaim. Did our Master countenance the

faithless contrast between the living force of His word when He dwelt

on earth, and the feebleness of it as He speaks through His servant? If

He did, what did He mean when He said, He that believeth on Me, the

works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he

do, because I go unto the Father'? And the reflection of Christ's

triumphant consciousness of power should irradiate our spirits as we do

His work, like the gleam from gazing on God's glory which shone on the

lawgiver's stern face while he talked with men. We have everything to

assure us that we cannot fail. The manifest fitness of the Gospel to be

the food of all souls; the victories of nineteen centuries, which at

least prove that all conditions of society, all classes of

civilisation, all varieties of race, all peculiarities of individual

temperament, all depths of degradation and distances of alienation, are

capable of receiving the word, which, like corn, can grow in every

latitude, and, though it be an exotic everywhere, can anywhere be

naturalised; the firm promises of unchanging faithfulness, the

universal aspect of Christ's work, the prevalence of His continual

intercession, the indwelling of His abiding Spirit, and, not least, the

unerring voice of our own experience of the power of the truth to bless

and save--all these are ours. In view of these, what should make us

doubt? Unwavering confidence is the only attitude that corresponds to

such certainties. We have a rock to build on; let us build on it with

rock. Putting fear and hesitancy far from us, let us gird ourselves

with the joyful strength of assured victory, striking as those who know

that conquest is bound to their standard, and who through all the dust

of the field see the fair vision of the final triumph. The work is done

before we begin it. It is finished' was a clarion blast proclaiming

that all was won when all seemed lost. Weary ages have indeed to roll

away before the great voice from heaven shall declare, It is done'; but

all that lies between the two is but the gradual unfolding and

appropriating of the results which are already secured. The strong man'

is bound; what remains is but the spoiling of his house.' The head is

bruised; what remains is but the dying lashing of the snaky horror's

powerless coils. I send you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no

labour.' The tearful sowing in the stormy winter's day has been done by

the Son of Man. For us there remains the joy of harvest--hot and hard

work, indeed, but gladsome too.

Then, however languor and despondency may sometimes tempt us, thinking

of slow advancement and of dying men who fade from the place of the

living before the gradual light has reached their eyes, our duty is

plain--to be sure that the word we carry cannot fail. You remember the

old story how, when Jerusalem was in her hour of direst need, and the

army of Babylon lay around her battered walls, the prophet was bid to

buy the field that is in Anathoth, in the country of Benjamin,' for a

sign that the transient fury of the invader would be beaten back, that

Israel might again dwell safely in the land. So with us, the host of

our King's enemies comes up like a river strong and mighty; but all

this world, held though it be by the usurper is still Thy land, O

Immanuel,' and over it all Thy peaceful rule shall be established! Many

things in this day tempt the witnesses of God to speak with doubting

voice. Angry opposition, contemptuous denial, complacent assumption

that a belief in old-fashioned evangelical truth is, ipso facto, a

proof of mental weakness, abound. Let them not rob us of our

confidence. Shame on us if we let ourselves be frightened from it by a

sarcasm or a laugh! Do you fall back on all these grounds for assured

reliance to which I have referred, and make the good old answer yours,

Why, herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not whence He is, and

yet--He hath opened mine eyes'! Trust the word which you have to speak.

Speak it and work for its diffusion as if you did trust it. Do not

preach it as if it were a notion of your own. In so far as it is, it

will share the fate of all human conceptions of divine realities--will

have its day, and cease to be.' Do not speak it as if it were some new

nostrum for curing the ills of humanity, which might answer or might

not. Speak it as if it were what it is--the word of God which liveth

and abideth for ever.' Speak it as if you were what you are, neither

its inventors nor its discoverers, but only its messengers, who have

but to preach the preaching which He bids' you. And to all the

widespread questionings of this day, filmy and air-filling as the

gossamers of an autumn evening, to all the theories of speculation, and

all the panaceas of unbelieving philanthropy, present the solid

certainties of your inmost experience, and the yet more solid certainty

of that all-loving name and all-sufficient work on which these repose.

We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

And we know that the Son of God is come.' Then our proclamation, This

is the true God and eternal life,' will not be in vain; and our loving

entreaty, Keep yourselves from idols,' will be heard and yielded to in

many a land.

The sum of the whole matter is briefly this. The root of all our

efficiency in this great task to which we, unworthy, have been called,

is in fellowship with Jesus Christ. The branch cannot bear fruit of

itself; without Me ye can do nothing.' Living near Him, and growing

like Him by gazing upon Him, His beauty will pass into our faces, His

tender pity into our hearts, His loving identification of Himself with

men's pains and sins will fashion our lives; and the word which He

spoke with authority and assured confidence will be strong when we

speak it with like calm certainty of victory. If the Church of Christ

will but draw close to her Lord till the fulness of His life and the

gentleness of His pity flow into her heart and limbs, she will then be

able to breathe the life which she has received into the prostrate bulk

of a dead world. Only she must do as the meekest of the prophets did in

a like miracle. She must not shrink from the touch of the cold clay nor

the odour of incipient corruption, but lip to lip and heart to heart

must lay herself upon the dead and he will live.

The pattern for our work, dear brethren, is before us in the Lord's

look, His sigh, His touch, His word. If we take Him for the example,

and Him for the motive, Him for the strength, Him for the theme, Him

for the reward, of our service, we may venture to look to Him as the

prophecy of our success, and to be sure that when our own faint hearts

or an unbelieving world question the wisdom of our enterprise or the

worth of our efforts, we may answer as He did, Go and show again those

things which ye do hear and see; 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.'

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THE PATIENT TEACHER, AND THE SLOW SCHOLARS

And when Jesus knew It, He saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye

have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your

heart yet hardened? 18. Having eyes, see ye not? having ears, hear ye

not? and do ye not remember?'--Mark viii. 17,18.

How different were the thoughts of Christ and of His disciples, as they

sat together in the boat, making their way across the lake! He was

pursuing a train of sad reflections which, the moment before their

embarkation, had caused Him to sigh deeply in His spirit and say, Why

doth this generation seek after a sign?' Absorbed in thought, He spoke,

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees,' who had been asking that

question.

So meditated and spoke Jesus in the stern, and amidships the disciples'

thoughts were only concerned about the negligent omission, very

excusable in the hurry of embarkation, by which they had forgotten to

lay in a fresh supply of provisions, and had set sail with but one loaf

left in the boat. So taken up were they with this petty trouble that

they twisted the Master's words as they fell from His lips, and thought

that He was rebuking them for what they were rebuking themselves for.

So apt are we to interpret others' sayings by the thoughts uppermost in

our own minds.

And then our Lord poured out this altogether unusual--perhaps I may say

unique--hail of questions which indicate how deeply moved from His

ordinary calm He was by this strange slowness of apprehension on the

part of His disciples. There is no other instance that I can recall in

the whole Gospels, with the exception of Gethsemane, where our Lord's

words seem to indicate such agitation of the windless sea of His spirit

as this rapid succession of rebuking interrogations. They give a

glimpse into the depths of His mind, showing us what He generally kept

sacredly shut up, and let us see how deeply He was touched and pained

by the slowness of apprehension of His servants.

Let us look at these questions as suggesting to us two things--the

grieved Teacher and the slow scholars.

I. The grieved Teacher.

I have said that the revelation of the depths of our Lord's experience

here is unexampled. We can understand the mood of which it is the

utterance; the feeling of despair that sometimes comes over the most

patient instructor when he finds that all his efforts to hammer some

truth into, or to print some impression on, the brain or heart of man

or boy, have been foiled, and that years, it may be, of patient work

have scarcely left more traces on unretentive minds than remain on the

ocean of the passage through it of a keel.

Christ felt that; and I do not think we half enough realise how large

an element in the sorrows of the Man of Sorrows, and of the grief with

which He was acquainted, was His necessary association with people who,

He felt, did not in the least degree understand Him, however truly,

blindly, and almost animally, they might love Him. It was His

disciples' misconception that stung him most. If I might so say, He

calculated upon being misunderstood by Pharisees and outsiders, but

that these followers who had been gathered round about Him all these

months, and had been the subjects of His sedulous toil, should blurt

out such words as these which precede the question of my text, cut deep

into that loving heart. It was not only the pain of being

misunderstood, but also the pain of feeling that the people who cared

most for Him did not understand Him, and were so hard to drag up to the

level where they could even catch a glimpse of His meaning, that struck

His heart with almost a kind of despair; and, as I said, made Him pour

out this rain of questions.

And what do the questions suggest? Not only emotion very unusual in

Him, yet truly human, and showing Him to be our Brother; but they

suggest three distinct types of emotion, all of them dashed with pain.

Why reason ye? Having eyes, see ye not? Do ye not remember?' That

speaks of His astonishment. Do not start at the word, or suppose that

it in any degree contradicts the lofty beliefs that I suppose most of

us have with regard to the Deity of our Lord and Saviour. We find in

another place in the Gospels, not by inference as here, but in plain

words, the ascription to Him of wonder; He marvelled at their

unbelief.' And we read of a more blessed kind of surprise as having

once been His, when He wondered at the faith of the heathen centurion.

But here His astonishment is that after all these years of toil, and of

sympathy, and of discipleship, and of listening and trying to get hold

of His meaning, His disciples were so far away from any understanding

of what He was driving at. He had to learn by experience the depths of

men's stupidity and ignorance. And although He was the Word of God made

flesh, we recognise here the token of a true brother in that He was

capable not only of the physical feelings of weariness, and hunger, and

thirst, and pain, but that He, too, had that emotion which only a

limited understanding can have--the emotion of wonder. And it was drawn

out by His disciples' denseness and inertness.

Ah! dear friends, does He not wonder at us? One of the prophets says,

Be astonished, O heavens!' And be sure of this, that the manhood of

Jesus Christ is not now so lifted up above what it was upon earth as

that that same sensation--twin-sister to yours and mine--of surprise,

does not sometimes visit Him when He looks down upon us; and has to say

to us--as, alas! He has to say--what He once said to one of the Twelve,

Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me,

Philip?' Is not the same question coming to us? Why is it that we do

not understand? Wonder, then, is the first emotion that is expressed in

this question. There is another one: Pain. And there again I fall back

not upon inference, but upon plain words of another part of the

Gospels. He looked round upon them with anger, being grieved at the

hardness of their hearts.' It seems daring to venture to say that the

exalted and glorified humanity of Jesus Christ to-day is, in any

measure, capable of feeling analogous to that; but it will not seem so

daring if you remember the solemn charge of one of the Apostles, Grieve

not the Holy Spirit of God.' It is Christ's disciples that pain Him

most. They vexed His Holy Spirit, therefore He fought against them.'

Brethren, let us look into our own hearts and our own lives, and ask

ourselves if there is not something there that gives a pang even to the

heart of the glorified Master, and makes Him sigh deeply within

Himself? May I add one more emotion which seems to me to be

unmistakably expressed by this rapid fusilade of questions? That is

indignation. Again I fall back upon plain words: He looked round about

upon them with anger, being grieved.' The two things were braided

together in His heart, and did not conflict with each other There were

infinite sorrow, infinite pity, and real displeasure. You must take all

notions of passion and of malignity, and of desire to do harm to the

subject, out of the conception of anger as applied to God or to Christ

who is the revelation of God. But it seems to me that it is a maimed

Christ that we put before the world unless we say that in the Love

there lie the possibilities of Wrath. Behold the Lion of the tribe of

Judah, and I beheld, and lo! a Lamb!' Wrath and gentleness are in Him

inseparably united, neither of them limiting nor making impossible the

other.

So here we have a self-revelation, as by one glimpse into a great

chamber, of the deep heart of Christ, the great Teacher, moved to

astonishment, grief, and indignation.

II. Now let me say a word about the slow scholars.

I have spoken of these questions as being rapid and repeated, and as a

rain of what we may almost call fiery interrogation. But they are by no

means tautology or useless and aimless repetition. If we look at them

closely, I think we shall see that they open out to us several

different sides and phases of the fault in His disciples that moves

these emotions.

There is, first, His scholars' stolid insensibility, which moves Him to

anger, to astonishment, and to grief. Are your hearts yet hardened?' by

which is meant, not hardened in the sense of being suddenly and stiffly

set in antagonism to Him, but simply in the sense of being--may I use

the word?--so pachydermatous, so thick-skinned, that nothing can go

through them. They showed it is a dull, stolid insensibility, and it

marks some of us professing Christians, on whom promises and

invitations and revelations of truth all fall with equal

ineffectiveness, and from whom they glide off with equal rapidity. You

may rain upon a black basalt rock to all eternity, and nothing will

grow upon it. All the drops will run down the polished sides, and a

quarter of an inch below the surface it will be as dry as it was before

the first drop fell. And here are we Christian ministers,

talk--talk--talking, week in and week out; and here is Christ, by His

providences and by His word, speaking far more loudly than any of us;

and it all falls with absolute impotence on hosts of people that call

themselves Christians. Ah! brethren, it is not only unbelievers who

have their hearts hardened. Orthodox professors are often guilty of the

same. If I might alter the metaphor, many of us have waterproofed our

minds, and the ingredients of the mixture by which we have waterproofed

them are our knowledge of the plan of salvation,' our connection with a

Christian community, our membership in a church, our obedience to the

formalisms of the devout life. All these have only made a

non-transmitting medium interposed between ourselves and the

concentrated electric energy that ever flashes from Jesus Christ. Our

hardened hearts, with their stolid insensibility, amaze our Master, and

no wonder that they do.

But that is not all. There is not only what I have ventured to call

stolid insensibility, but, as a result of it, there is the not using

the capacities that we have. Having eyes, see ye not? Having ears, hear

ye not?' We are not like children that cannot, but like careless,

untrained schoolboys that will not, learn. We have the capacity, and it

is our own fault that we are dunces in the school, and at the bottom of

the class. Use the power that you have, and unto him that hath shall be

given, and he shall have in abundance.' There are fishes in the caverns

of North America that have lived so long in the dark, underground

channels, that the present generation of them has no eyes. We are doing

our best to deprive ourselves of our capacities of beholding by

refusing to use them. Having eyes, see ye not?' Our non-use of the

powers we have amazes and grieves our Master.

Further, the reason why there are this stolid insensibility and this

non-use of capacity lies here: Ye reason about the bread.' The

absorption of our minds and efforts and time with material things, that

perish with the using, come in between us and our apprehension of

Christ's teaching. Ah! brethren, it is not only the rich man that is

swallowed up with the present world; the poor man may be so as really.

All of us, by reason of the absolute necessities of our lives, are in

danger of getting our hearts so filled and crowded with the things that

are seen and temporal' that we have no time, nor room, for the things

that are unseen and eternal.' I do not need to elaborate that point. We

all know that it is there that our danger, in various forms, lies. If

you in the bows of the ship are reasoning about bread, you will

misunderstand Christ in the stern warning against the leaven of the

Pharisees.'

The last suggestion from these questions is that the cure for all that

stolid insensibility, and its resulting misuse of capacity, and the

absorption in daily visible things, is remembrance of His and our

past--Do ye not remember?' It was only that same morning, or the day

before at the furthest, that one of the miracles of feeding the

thousands had been performed. Christ wonders, as well He might, at the

short memories of the disciples who, with the baskets-full of fragments

scarcely eaten yet, could worry themselves because there was only one

loaf in the locker. Do ye not remember, when I broke the loaves among

the thousands, how many baskets took ye up? And they said, seven. And

He said, How is it that ye do not understand?' Yes, Memory is the one

wing and Hope the other, that lift our heaviness from earth towards

heaven. And any man who will bethink himself of what Jesus Christ has

been for him, did for him on earth, and has done for him during his

life, will not be so absorbed in worldly cares as that he will have no

eyes to see the things unseen and eternal; and the hard, dead

insensibility of his heart will melt into thankful consecration, and so

he will rise nearer and nearer to intelligent apprehension of the lofty

and deep things that the Incarnate Word says to him. We are here in

Christ's school, and it depends upon the place in the class that we

take here where we shall be put at what schoolboys call the next

remove.' If here we have indeed learned of Him the truth as it is in

Jesus,' we shall be put up into the top classes yonder, and get larger

and more blessed lessons in the Father's house above.

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THE RELIGIOUS USES OF MEMORY

Do ye not remember!'--Mark viii. 18.

The disciples had misunderstood our Lord's warning against the leaven

of the Pharisees,' which they supposed to have been occasioned by their

neglect to bring with them bread. Their blunder was like many others

which they committed, but it seems to have singularly moved our Lord,

who was usually so patient with His slow scholars. The swift rain of

questions, like bullets rattling against a cuirass, of which my text is

one, shows how much He was moved, if not to impatience or anger, at

least to wonder.

But what I wish particularly to notice is that He traces the disciples'

slowness of perception and distrust mainly to forgetfulness. There was

a special reason for that, of course, in that the two miracles of the

feeding the multitude, one of which had just before occurred, ought to

have delivered them from any uneasiness, and to have led them to

apprehend His higher meaning.

But there is a wider reason for the collocation of questions than this.

There is no better armour against distrust, nor any surer purge of our

spiritual sight, than religious remembrance. So my text falls in with

what I hope are, or at any rate should be, thoughts which are busy in

many of our hearts now. Every Sunday is the last Sunday of a year. But

we are influenced by the calendar, even though there is nothing in

reality to correspond with the apparent break, and though time runs on

in a continuous course. I would fain say a word or two now which may

fit in with thoughts that are wholesome for us always, but, I suppose,

come with most force to most of us at such a date as this. And, if you

will let me, I will put my observations in the form of exhortations.

I. First of all, then, remember and be thankful.

There are few of us who have much time for retrospect, and there is a

very deep sense in which it is wise to forget the things that are

behind,' for the remembrance of them may burden us with a miserable

entail of failure; may weaken us by vain regrets, may unfit us for

energetic action in the living and available present. But oblivion is

foolish, if it is continual, and a remembered past has treasures in it

which we can little afford to lose.

Chiefest of these is the power of memory, when applied to our own past

lives, to bring out, more clearly than was possible while that past was

being lived, the perception of the ever-present care and working of our

Father, God. It is hard to recognise Him in the bustle and hurry of our

daily lives, and the meaning of each event can only be seen when it is

seen in its relation to the rest of a life. Just as a landscape, which

we may look at without the smallest perception of its beauty, becomes

another thing when the genius of a painter puts it on canvas, and its

symmetry and proportion become more manifest, and an ethereal clearness

broods over it, and its colours are seen to be deeper than our eyes had

discerned, so the common events of life, trivial and insignificant

while they are passing, become, when painted on the canvas of memory,

nobler and greater, and we understand them more completely than we can

do whilst we are living in them.

We need to be at the goal in order to judge of the road. The parts are

only explicable when we see the whole. The full interpretation of

to-day is reserved for eternity. But, by combining and massing and

presenting the consequences of the apparently insignificant and

isolated events of the past, memory helps us to a clearer perception of

God, and a better understanding of our own lives, On the

mountain-summit a man can look down all along the valley by which he

has wearily plodded, and understand the meaning of the divergences in

the road, and the rough places do not look quite so rough when their

proportion to the whole is a little more clearly in his view.

Only, brethren, if we are wisely to exercise remembrance, and to

discover God in the lives which, whilst they are passing, had little

perception of Him, we must take into account what the meaning of all

life is--that is, to make men of us after the pattern of His will.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,

Is our destined end or way.'

But the growth of Christlike and God-pleasing character is the divine

purpose, and should be the human aim, of all lives. Our tasks, our

joys, our sorrows, our gains, our losses--these are all but the

scaffolding, and the scaffolding is only there in order that, course

upon course, may rise the temple-palace of a spirit, devoted to, shaped

and inhabited by, our Father, God.

So I venture to say that thankful remembrance should exclude no single

incident, however bitter, however painful, of any life. There is a

remembrance of vanished hands, of voices for ever stilled, which is

altogether wrong and weakening. There is a regret, a vain regret which

comes with memory for some of us, that interferes with thankfulness.

But it is possible--and, if we understand that the meaning of all is to

make us Godlike, it is not hard--to remember vanished joys, and to

confer upon them by remembrance a kind of gentle immortality. And, thus

remembered, they are ennobled; for all the gross material body of them,

as it were, is got rid of, and only the fine spirit is left. The roses

bloom, and over bloom, and drop, but a poignant perfume is distilled

from the fallen petals. The departed are greatened by distance; when

they are gone we recognise the angels' that we entertained unawares':

and that recognition is no illusion, but it is the disclosure of their

real character, to which they were sometimes untrue, and we were often

blind. Therefore I say, Thou shalt remember all the way by which the

Lord thy God hath led thee,' and in the thankfulness include departed

joys, vanished hands, present sorrows, the rough places as well as the

smooth, the crooked things as well as the straight.

II. Secondly, let me say, remember and repent.

Memory is not wise unless it is, so to speak, the sergeant-at-arms of

Conscience, and brings our past before the bar of that judge within,

and puts into the hands of that judge the law of the Lord by which to

estimate our deeds. We all have been making up our accounts to the 31st

of December--or are going to do it to-morrow. And what I plead for is

that we should take stock of our own characters and aims, and sum up

our accounts with duty and with God.

We look back upon a past, of which God gave us the warp and we had to

put in the woof. The warp is all bright and pure. The threads that have

crossed it from our shuttles are many of them very dark, and all of

them stained in some part. So, dear brethren, let us take the year that

has gone, and spread them out by the agency of this servant of the

court, Memory, before the supreme judge, Conscience.

Let us remember that we may be warned and directed. We shall understand

the true moral character of our actions a great deal better when we

look back upon them calmly, and when all the rush of temptation and the

reducing whispers of our own weak wills are silenced. There is nothing

more terrible, in one aspect, there is nothing more salutary and

blessed in another, than the difference between the front and the back

view of any temptation to which we yield--all radiant and beautiful on

the hither side, and when we get past it and look back at it, all

hideous. Like some of those painted canvases upon the theatre-stage:

seen from this side, with the delusive brilliancy of the footlights

thrown upon them, they look beautiful works of art; seen at the back,

dirty and cobwebbed canvas, all splashes and spots and uglinesses. Let

us be thankful if memory can show us the reverse side of the

temptations that on the near side were so seductive.

It is when you see your life in retrospect that you understand the

significance of the single deeds in it. We are so apt to isolate our

actions that we are startled--and it is a wholesome shock--when we see

how, without knowing it, we have dropped into a habit. When each

temptation comes, as the moments are passing, we say, Oh, just this

once, just this once.' And the onces' come nearer and nearer together;

and what seem to be distinctly separated points, coalesce into a line;

and the acts that we thought isolated we find out to our horror--our

wholesome horror--have become a chain that binds and holds us. Look

back over the year, and drag its events to the bar of Conscience, and I

shall be surprised if you do not discover that you have fallen into

wrong habits that you never dreamed had dominion over you. So, I say,

remember and repent.

Brethren, I do not wish to exaggerate, I do not wish to urge upon you

one-sided views of your character or conduct. I give all credit to many

excellences, many acts of sacrifice, many acts of service; and yet I

say that the main reason why any of us have a good opinion of ourselves

is because we have no knowledge of ourselves; and that the safest

attitude for all of us, in looking back over what we have made of life,

is, hands on mouths, and mouths in dust, and the cry coming from them,

Unclean! unclean!' A little mud in a stream may not be perceptible when

you take a wine-glassful of it and look at it, but if you saw a

river-full or a lake-full you would soon discover the taint. Summon up

the past year to the sessions of silent thought, and let the light of

God's will pour in upon it, and you will find how dark has been the

flow of the river of your lives.

The best use which the memory can serve for us is that it should drive

us closer to Jesus Christ, and make us cling more closely to Him. That

past can be cancelled, these multitudinous sins can be forgiven. Memory

should be one of the strongest strands in the cord that binds our

helplessness to the all-forgiving and all-cleansing Christ.

III. Lastly, let me say, remember and hope.

Memory and Hope are twins. The latter can only work with the materials

supplied by the former. Hope could paint nothing on the blank canvas of

the future unless its palette were charged by Memory. Memory brings the

yarn which Hope weaves.

Our thankful remembrance of a past which was filled and moulded by

God's perpetual presence and care ought to make us sure of a future

which will in like manner be moulded. Thou hast been my help'--if we

can say that, then we may confidently pray, and be sure of the answer,

Leave me not nor forsake me, O God of my salvation.' And if we feel, as

memory teaches us to feel, that God has been working for us, and with

us, we can say with another Psalmist: Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for

ever. Forsake not the work of Thine own hands'; and we can rise to his

confidence, The Lord with perfect that which concerneth me.'

Our remembrance, even of our imperfections and our losses and our

sorrows, may minister to our hope. For surely the life of every man on

earth, but most eminently the life of a Christian man, is utterly

unintelligible, a mockery and a delusion and an incredibility, if there

be a God at all, unless it prophesies of a region in which imperfection

will be ended, aspirations will be fulfilled, desires will be

satisfied. We have so much, that unless we are to have a great deal

more, we had better have had nothing. We have so much, that if there be

a God at all, we must have a great deal more. The new moon, with a

ragged edge, even in its imperfection beautiful,' is a prophet of the

complete resplendent orb. On earth the broken arc, in heaven the

perfect round.'

Further, the memory of defeat may be the parent of the hope of victory.

The stone Ebenezer, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us,' was set up to

commemorate a victory that had been won on the very site where Israel,

fighting the same foes, had once been beaten. There is no remembrance

of failure so mistaken as that which takes the past failure as certain

to be repeated in the future. Surely, though we have fallen seventy

times seven--that is 490, is it not?--at the 491st attempt we may, and

if we trust in God we shall, succeed.

So, brethren, let us set our faces to a new year with thankful

remembrance of the God who has shaped the past, and will mould the

future. Let us remember our failures, and learn wisdom and humility and

trust in Christ from our sins. Let us set our hope on God, and not

forget the works of God, but keep His commandments.'

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THE GRADUAL HEALING OF THE BLIND MAN

And Jesus cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto Him, and

besought Him to touch him. 23. And He took the blind man by the hand,

and led him out of the town; and when He had spit on his eyes, and put

His hands upon Him, He asked him if he saw ought. 24. And he looked up,

and said, I see men as trees, walking. 25. After that He put His hands

again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw

every man clearly.'--Mark viii. 22-25.

This miracle, which is only recorded by the Evangelist Mark, has about

it several very peculiar features. Some of these it shares with one

other of our Lord's miracles, which also is found only in this Gospel,

and which occurred nearly about the same time--that miracle of healing

the deaf and dumb man recorded in the previous chapter. Both of them

have these points in common: that our Lord takes the sufferer apart and

works His miracle in privacy; that in both there is an abundant use of

the same singular means--our Lord's touch and the saliva upon His

finger; and that in both there is the urgent injunction of entire

secrecy laid upon the recipient of the benefit.

But this miracle had another peculiarity in which it stands absolutely

alone, and that is that the work is done in stages; that the power

which at other times has but to speak and it is done, here seems to

labour, and the cure comes slowly; that in the middle Christ pauses,

and, like a physician trying the experiment of a drug, asks the patient

if any effect is produced, and, getting the answer that some mitigation

is realised, repeats the application, and perfect recovery is the

result.

Now, how unlike that is to all the rest of Christ's miraculous working

we do not need to point out; but the question may arise, What is the

meaning, and what the reason, and what the lessons of this unique and

anomalous form of miraculous working? It is to that question that I

wish to turn now; for I think that the answer will open up to us some

very precious things in regard to that great Lord, the revelation of

whose heart and character is the inmost and the loftiest meaning of

both His words and His works.

I take these three points of peculiarity to which I have referred: the

privacy, the strange and abundant use of means veiling the miraculous

power, and the gradual, slow nature of the cure. I see in them these

three things: Christ isolating the man that He would heal; Christ

stooping to the sense-bound nature by using outward means; and Christ

making His power work slowly, to keep abreast of the man's slow faith.

I. First, then, here we have Christ isolating the man whom He wanted to

heal.

Now, there may have been something about our Lord's circumstances and

purposes at the time of this miracle which accounted for the great

urgency with which at this period He impressed secrecy upon all around

Him. What that was it is not necessary for us to inquire here, but this

is worth noticing, that in obedience to this wish, on His own part, for

privacy at the time, He covers over with a veil His miraculous working,

and does it quietly, as one might almost say, in a corner. He never

sought to display His miraculous working; here He absolutely tries to

hide it. That fact of Christ's taking pains to conceal His miracle

carries in it two great truths--first, about the purpose and nature of

miracles in general, and second, about His character--as to each of

which a few words may be said.

This fact, of a miracle done in intended secrecy, and shrouded in deep

darkness, suggests to us the true point of view from which to look at

the whole subject of miracles.

People say they were meant to be attestations of His divine mission.

Yes, no doubt that is true partially; but that was never the sole nor

even the main purpose for which they were wrought; and when any one

asked Jesus Christ to work a miracle for that purpose only, He rebuked

the desire and refused to gratify it. He wrought His miracles, not

coldly, in order to witness to His mission, but every one of them was

the token, because it was the outcome, of His own sympathetic heart

brought into contact with human need. And instead of the miracles of

Jesus Christ being cold, logical proofs of His mission, they were all

glowing with the earnestness of a loving sympathy, and came from Him at

sight of sorrow as naturally as rays beam out from the sun.

Then, on the other hand, the same fact carries with it, too, a lesson

about His character. Is not He here doing what He tells us to do; Let

not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth'? He dares not wrap

His talent in a napkin, He would be unfaithful to His mission if He hid

His light under a bushel. All goodness does good by stealth,' even if

it does not blush to find it fame'--and that universal mark of true

benevolence marked His. He had to solve in His human life what we have

to solve, the problem of keeping the narrow path between ostentation of

powers and selfish concealment of faculty; and He solved it thus,

leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps.'

But that is somewhat aside from the main purpose to which I intended to

turn in these first remarks. Christ did not invest the miracle with any

of its peculiarities for His own sake only. All that is singular about

it, will, I think, find its best explanation in the condition and

character of the subject, the man on whom it was wrought. What sort of

a man was he? Well, the narrative does not tell us much, but if we use

our historical imagination and our eyes we may learn something about

him. First he was a Gentile; the land in which the miracle was wrought

was the half-heathen country on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. In

the second place, it was other people that brought him; he did not come

of his own accord. Then again, it is their prayer that is mentioned,

not his--he asked nothing.

You see him standing there hopeless, listless; not believing that this

Jewish stranger is going to do anything for him; with his impassive

blind face glowing with no entreaty to reinforce his companions'

prayers. And suppose he was a man of that sort, with no expectation of

anything from this Rabbi, how was Christ to get at him? It is of no use

to speak to him. His eyes are shut, so cannot see the sympathy beaming

in His face. There is one thing possible--to lay hold of Him by the

hand; and the touch, gentle, loving, firm, says this at least: Here is

a man that has some interest in me, and whether He can do anything or

not for me, He is going to try something.' Would not that kindle an

expectation in him? And is it not in parable just exactly what Jesus

Christ does for the whole world? Is not that act of His by which He put

out His hand and seized the unbelieving limp hand of the blind man that

hung by his side, the very same in principle as that by which He taketh

hold of the seed of Abraham,' and is made like to His brethren? Are not

the mystery of the Incarnation and the meaning of it wrapped up as in a

germ in that little simple incident, He put out His hand and touched

him'?

Is there not in it, too, a lesson for all you good-hearted Christian

men and women, in all your work? If you want to do anything for your

afflicted brethren, there is only one way to do it-to come down to

their level and get hold of their hands, and then there is some chance

of doing them good. We must be content to take the hands of beggars if

we are to make the blind to see.

And then, having thus drawn near to the man, and established in his

heart some dim expectation of something coming, He gently led him away

out of the little village. I wonder no painter has ever painted that,

instead of repeating ad nauseam two or three scenes out of the Gospels.

I wonder none of them has ever seen what a parable it is--the Christ

leading the blind man out into solitude before He can say to him,

Behold!' How, as they went, step by step, the poor blind eyes not

telling the man where they were going, or how far away he was being

taken from his friends, his conscious dependence upon this stranger

would grow! How he would feel more and more at each step, I am at His

mercy; what is He going to do with me?' And how thus there would be

kindled in his heart some beginnings of an expectation, as well as some

surrendering of himself to Christ's guidance! These two things, the

expectation and the surrender, have in them, at all events, some faint

beginnings and rude germs of the highest faith, to lead up to which is

the purpose of all that Christ here does.

And is not that what He does for us all? Sometimes by sorrows,

sometimes by sick-beds, sometimes by shutting us out from chosen

spheres of activity, sometimes by striking down the dear ones at our

sides, and leaving us lonely in the desert-is He not saying to us in a

thousand ways, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place'? As Israel

was led into the wilderness that God might speak to her heart,' so

often Christ draws us aside, if not by outward providences such as

these, yet by awaking in us the solemn sense of personal responsibility

and making us feel our solitude, that He may lead us to feel His

all-sufficient companionship.

Ah! brethren, here is a lesson from all this--if you wish Jesus Christ

to give you His highest gifts and to reveal to you His fairest beauty,

you must be alone with Him. He loves to deal with single souls. Our

lives, many of them, can never be outwardly alone. We are jammed up

against one another in such a fashion, and the hurry and pressure of

city life is so great with us all, that it is often impossible for us

to secure outward secrecy and solitude. But a man maybe alone in a

crowd; the heart may be gathered up into itself, and there may be a

still atmosphere round about us in the shop and in the market and

amongst the busy ways of men, in which we and Christ shall be alone

together. Unless there be, I do not think any of us will see the King

in His beauty or the far-off land. I was left alone, and I saw this

great vision,' is the law for all true beholding.

So, dear brethren, try to feel how awful this earthly life of ours is

in its necessary solitude; that each of us by himself must shape out

his own destiny, and make his own character; that every unit of the

swarms upon our streets is a unit that has to face the solemn facts of

life for and by itself; that alone we live, that alone we shall die;

that alone we shall have to give account of ourselves before God, and

in the solitude let the hand of your heart feel for His hand that is

stretched out to grasp yours, and listen to Him saying, Lo! I am with

you always, even to the end of the world.' There was no dreariness in

the solitude when it was Christ that took the blind man by the hand and

led him out of the city.'

II. We have Christ stooping to a sense-bound nature by the use of

material helps.

No doubt there was something in the man, as I have said, which made it

advisable that these methods should be adopted. If he were the sort of

person that I have described, slow of faith, not much caring about the

possibility of cure, and not having much hope that any cure would come

to pass--then we can see the fitness of the means adopted: the hand

laid upon the eyes, the finger, possibly moistened with saliva,

touching the ball, the pausing to question, the repeated application.

These make a ladder by which his hope and confidence might climb to the

apprehension of the blessing. And that points to a general principle of

the divine dealings. God stoops to a feeble faith, and gives to it

outward things by which it may rise to an apprehension of spiritual

realities.

Is not that the meaning of the whole complicated system of Old

Testament revelation? Is not that the meaning of the altars, and

priests, and sacrifices, and the old cumbrous apparatus of the Mosaic

law? Was it not all a picture-book in which the infant eyes of the race

might see in a material form deep spiritual realities? Was not that the

meaning and explanation of our Lord's parabolic teaching? He veils

spiritual truth in common things that He may reveal it by common

things--taking fishermen's boats, their nets, a sower's basket, a

baker's dough, and many another homely article, and finding in them the

emblems of the loftiest truth.

Is not that the meaning of His own Incarnation? It is of no use to talk

to men about God--let them see Him; no use to preach about

principles--give them the facts of His life. Revelation does not

consist in the setting forth of certain propositions about God, but in

the exhibition of the acts of God in a human life.

And so the Word had breath, and wrought

With human hands the creed of creeds.'

And still further, may we not say that this is the inmost meaning and

purpose of the whole frame of the material universe? It exists in order

that, as a parable and a symbol, it may proclaim the things that are

unseen and eternal. Its depths and heights, its splendours and its

energies are all in order that through them spirits may climb to the

apprehension of the King, eternal, immortal, invisible,' and the

realities of His spiritual kingdom.

So in regard to all the externals of Christianity, forms of worship,

ordinances, and so on--all these, in like manner, are provided in

condescension to our weakness, in order that by them we may be lifted

above themselves; for the purpose of the Temple is to prepare for the

time and the place where the seer saw no temple therein.' They are but

the cups that carry the wine, the flowers whose chalices bear the

honey, the ladders by which the soul may climb to God Himself, the

rafts upon which the precious treasure may be floated into our hearts.

If Christ's touch and Christ's saliva healed, it was not because of

anything in them; but because He willed it so; and He Himself is the

source of all the healing energy. Therefore, let us keep these

externals in their proper place of subordination, and remember that in

Him, not in them, lies the healing power; and that even Christ's touch

may become the object of superstitious regard, as it was when that poor

woman came through the crowd to lay her finger on the hem of His

garment, thinking that she could bear away a surreptitious blessing

without the conscious outgoing of His power. He healed her because

there was a spark of faith in her superstition, but she had to I earn

that it was not the hem of the garment but the loving will of Christ

that cured, in order that the dross of superstitious reliance on the

outward vehicle might be melted away, and the pure gold of faith in His

love and power might remain.

III. Lastly, we have Christ accommodating the pace of His power to the

slowness of the man's faith.

The whole story, as I have said, is unique, and especially this part of

it--He put His hands upon him, and asked him if he saw aught.' One

might have expected an answer with a little more gratitude in it, with

a little more wonder in it, with a little more emotion in it. Instead

of these it is almost surly, or at any rate strangely reticent-a

matter-of-fact answer to the question, and there an end. As our Revised

Version reads it better: I see men, for I behold them as trees

walking.' Curiously accurate! A dim glimmer had come into the eye, but

there is not yet distinctness of outline nor sense of magnitude, which

must be acquired by practice. The eye has not yet been educated, and it

was only because these blurred figures were in motion that he knew they

were not trees. After that He put His hands upon his eyes and made him

look up,' or, as the Revised Version has it with a better reading, and

he looked steadfastly,' with an eager straining of the new faculty to

make sure that he had got it, and to test its limits and its

perfection. And he was restored and saw all things clearly.'

Now I take it that the worthiest view of that strangely protracted

process, broken up into two halves by the question that is dropped into

the middle, is this, that it was determined by the man's faith, and was

meant to increase it. He was healed slowly because he believed slowly.

His faith was a condition of his cure, and the measure of it determined

the measure of the restoration; and the rate of the growth of his faith

settled the rate of the perfecting of Christ's work on him. As a rule,

faith in His power to heal was a condition of Christ's healing, and

that mainly because our Lord would rather make men believing than sound

of body. They often wanted only the outward miracle, but He wanted to

make it the means of insinuating a better healing into their spirits.

And so, not that there was any necessary connection between their faith

and the exercise of His miraculous power, but in order that He might

bless them with His best gifts, He usually worked on the principle

According to your faith be it unto you.' And here, as a nurse or a

mother with her child might do, He keeps step with the little steps,

and goes slowly because the man goes slowly.

Now, both the gradual process of illumination and the rate of that

process as determined by faith, are true for us. How dim and partial a

glimmer of light comes to many a soul at the outset of the Christian

life! How little a new convert knows about God and self and the starry

truths of His great revelation! Christian progress does not consist in

seeing new things, but in seeing the old things more clearly: the same

Christ, the same Cross, only more distinctly and deeply apprehended,

and more closely incorporated into my very being. We do not grow away

from Him, but we grow into knowledge of Him. The first lesson that we

get is the last lesson that we shall learn, and He is the Alpha' at the

beginning, and the Omega' at the end of that alphabet, the letters of

which make up our knowledge for earth and heaven.

But then let me remind you that just in the measure in which you expect

blessing of any kind, illumination and purifying and help of all sorts

from Jesus Christ, just in that measure will you get it. You can limit

the working of Almighty power, and can determine the rate at which it

shall work on you. God fills the water-pots to the brim,' but not

beyond the brim; and if, like the woman in the Old Testament story, we

stop bringing vessels, the oil will stop flowing. It is an awful thing

to think that we have the power, as it were, to turn a stopcock, and so

increase or diminish, or cut off altogether, the supply of God's mercy

and Christ's healing and cleansing love in our hearts. You will get as

much of God as you want and no more. The measure of your desire is the

measure of your capacity, and the measure of your capacity is the

measure of God's gift. Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it!' And if

your faith is heavily shod and steps slowly, His power and His grace

will step slowly along with it, keeping rank and step. According to

your faith shall it be unto you.'

Ah! dear friends, Ye are not straitened in Me, ye are straitened in

yourselves.' Desire Him to help and bless you, and He will do it.

Expect Him to do it, and He will do it. Go to Him like the other blind

man and say to Him--Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me, that I

may receive my sight,' and He will lay His hand upon you, and at any

rate a glimmer will come, which will grow in the measure of your

humble, confident desire, until at last He takes you by the hand and

leads you out of this poor little village of a world and lays His

finger for a brief moment of blindness upon your eyes and asks you if

you see aught. Then you will look up, and the first face that you will

behold will be His, whom you saw as through a glass darkly' with your

dim eyes in this twilight world.

May that be your experience and mine, through His mercy!

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CHRIST'S CROSS, AND OURS

And Jesus went out, and His disciples, into the towns of Caesarea

Philippi: and by the way He asked His disciples, saying unto them, Whom

do men say that I am? 28. And they answered, John the Baptist: but some

say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets. 29. And He saith unto

them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto

Him, Thou art the Christ. 30. And He charged them that they should tell

no man of Him. 31. And He began to teach them, that the Son of Man must

suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief

priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

32. And He spake that saying openly. And Peter took Him, and began to

rebuke Him. 33. But when He had turned about and looked on His

disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for

thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of

men. 34. And when He had called the people unto Him with His disciples

also, He said unto them, Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny

himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 35. For whosoever will

save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for My

sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. 36 For what shall it

profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

37. Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? 38. Whosoever

therefore shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and

sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He

cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. IX. 1. And He

said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that

stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the

kingdom of God come with power.'--Mark viii. 27-ix. 1.

Our Lord led His disciples away from familiar ground into the

comparative seclusion of the country round Caesarea Philippi, in order

to tell them plainly of His death. He knew how terrible the

announcement would be, and He desired to make it in some quiet spot,

where there would be collectedness and leisure to let it sink into

their minds. His consummate wisdom and perfect tenderness are equally

and beautifully shown in His manner of disclosing the truth which would

try their faithfulness and fortitude. From the beginning He had given

hints, gradually increasing in clearness; and now the time had come for

full disclosure. What a journey that was! He, with the heavy secret

filling His thoughts; they, dimly aware of something absorbing Him, in

which they had no part. And at last, in the way,' as if moved by some

sudden impulse--like that which we all know, leading us to speak out

abruptly what we have long waited to say--He gives them a share in the

burden of His thought. But, even then, note how He leads up to it by

degrees. This passage has the announcement of the Cross as its centre,

prepared for, on the one hand, by a question, and followed, on the

other, by a warning that His followers must travel the same road.

I. Note the preparation for the announcement of the Cross (verses

27-30). Why did Christ begin by asking about the popular judgment of

His personality? Apparently in order to bring clearly home to the

disciples that, as far as the masses were concerned, His work and

theirs had failed, and had, for net result, total misconception. Who

that had the faintest glimmer of what He was could suppose that the

stern, fiery spirits of Elijah or John had come to life again in Him?

The second question, But whom say ye that I am?' with its sharp

transition, is meant to force home the conviction of the gulf between

His disciples and the whole nation. He would have them feel their

isolation, and face the fact that they stood alone in their faith; and

He would test them whether, knowing that they did stand alone, they had

courage and tenacity to re-assert it. The unpopularity of a belief

drives away cowards, and draws the brave and true. If none else

believed in Him, that was an additional reason for loving hearts to

cleave to Him; and those only truly know and love Him who are ready to

stand by Him, if they stand alone-- Athanasius contra mundum. Mark,

too, that this is the all-important question for every man. Our own

individual thought' of Him determines our whole worth and fate.

Mark gives Peter's confession in a lower key, as it were, than Matthew

does, omitting the full-toned clause, The Son of the living God.' This

is not because Mark has a lower conception than his brother Evangelist,

for the first words of this Gospel announce that it is the Gospel of

Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God.' And, as he has identified the two

conceptions at the outset, he must, in all fairness, be supposed to

consider that the one implies the other, and to include both here. But

possibly there is truth in the observation that the omission is one of

a number of instances in which this Gospel passes lightly over the

exalted side of Christ's nature, in accordance with its purpose of

setting Him forth rather as the Servant than as the Lord. It is not

meant that that exalted side was absent from Mark's thoughts, but that

his design led him rather to emphasise the other. Matthew's is the

Gospel of the King; Mark's, of the Worker.

The omission of Christ's eulogium on Peter has often been pointed out

as an interesting corroboration of the tradition that he was Mark's

source; and perhaps the failure to record the praise, and the

carefulness to tell the subsequent rebuke, reveal the humble-hearted

elder' into whom the self-confident young Apostle had grown. Flesh

delights to recall praise; faith and self-knowledge find more profit in

remembering errors forgiven and rebukes deserved, and in their

severity, most loving. How did these questions and their answers serve

as introduction to the announcement of the Cross? In several ways. They

brought clearly before the disciples the hard fact of Christ's

rejection by the popular voice, and defined their own position as

sharply antagonistic. If His claims were thus unanimously tossed aside,

a collision must come. A rejected Messiah could not fail to be, sooner

or later, a slain Messiah. Then clear, firm faith in His Messiahship

was needed to enable them to stand the ordeal to which the

announcement, and, still more, its fulfilment, would subject them. A

suffering Messiah might be a rude shock to all their dreams; but a

suffering Jesus, who was not Messiah, would have been the end of their

discipleship. Again, the significance and worth of the Cross could only

be understood when seen in the light of that great confession. Even as

now, we must believe that He who died was the Son of the living God

before we can see what that Death was and did. An imperfect conception

of who Jesus is takes the meaning and the power out of all His life,

but, most of all, impoverishes the infinite preciousness of His Death.

The charge of silence contrasts singularly with the former employment

of the Apostles as heralds of Jesus. The silence was partly punitive

and partly prudential. It was punitive, inasmuch as the people had

already had abundantly the proclamation of His gospel, and had cast it

away. It was in accordance with the solemn law of God's retributive

justice that offers rejected should be withdrawn; and from them that

had not, even that which they had should be taken away. Christ never

bids His servants be silent until men have refused to hear their

speech. The silence enjoined was also prudential, in order to avoid

hastening on the inevitable collision; not because Christ desired

escape, but because He would first fulfil His day.

II. We have here the announcement of the Cross (verses 31-33). There

had been many hints before this; for Christ saw the end from the

beginning, however far back in the depths of time or eternity we place

that beginning. We do not sufficiently realise that His Death was

before Him, all through His days, as the great purpose for which He had

come. If the anticipation of sorrow is the multiplication of sorrow,

even when there is hope of escaping it, how much must His have been

multiplied, and bitterness been diffused through all His life, by that

foresight, so clear and constant, of the certain end! How much more

gracious and wonderful His quick sympathy, His patient self

forgetfulness, His unwearied toil, show against that dark background!

Mark here the solemn necessity. Why must' He suffer? Not because of the

enmity of the three sets of rejecters. He recognises no necessity which

is imposed by hostile human power. The cords which bind this sacrifice

to the horns of the altar were not spun by men's hands. The great must'

which ruled His life was a cable of two strands-- obedience to the

Father, and love to men. These haled Him to the Cross, and fastened Him

there. He would save; therefore He must' die. The same must' stretches

beyond death. Resurrection is a part of His whole work; and, without

it, His Death has no power, but falls into the undistinguished mass of

human mortality. Bewildered as the disciples were, that assurance of

resurrection had little present force, but even then would faintly hint

at some comfort and blessed mystery. What was to them a nebulous hope

is to us a sun of certitude and cheer, Christ that died' is no gospel

until you go on to say, Yea, rather, that is risen again.'

Peter's rash rebuke,' like most of his appearances in the Gospel, is

strangely compounded of warm-hearted, impulsive love and presumptuous

self-confidence. No doubt, the praise which he had just received had

turned his head, not very steady in these early days at its best, and

the dignity which had been promised him would seem to him to be sadly

overclouded by the prospect opened in Christ's forecast. But he was not

thinking of himself; and when he said, This shall not be unto Thee,'

probably he meant to suggest that they would all draw the sword to

defend their Master. Mark's use of the word rebuke,' which is also

Matthew's, seems to imply that he found fault with Christ. For what?

Probably for not trusting to His followers' arms, or for letting

Himself become a victim to the must,' which Peter thought of as

depending only on the power of the ecclesiastics in Jerusalem. He

blames Christ for not hoisting the flag of a revolt.

This blind love was the nearest approach to sympathy which Christ

received; and it was repugnant to Him, so as to draw the sharpest words

from Him that He ever spoke to a loving heart. In his eagerness, Peter

had taken Jesus on one side to whisper his suggestion; but Christ will

have all hear His rejection of the counsel. Therefore He turned about,'

facing the rest of the group, and by the act putting Peter behind Him,

and spoke aloud the stern words. Not thus was He wont to repel ignorant

love, nor to tell out faults in public; but the act witnessed to the

recoil of His fixed spirit from the temptation which addressed His

natural human shrinking from death, as well as to His desire that once

for all, every dream of resistance by force should be shattered. He

hears in Peter's voice the tone of that other voice, which, in the

wilderness, had suggested the same temptation to escape the Cross and

win the crown by worshipping the Devil; and he puts the meaning of His

instinctive gesture into the same words in which he had rejected that

earlier seducing suggestion. Jesus was a man, and the things that be of

men' found a response in His sinless nature. It shrank from pain and

the Cross with innocent and inevitable shrinking. Does not the very

severity of the rebuke testify to its having set some chords vibrating

in His soul? Note that it may be the work of Satan' to appeal to the

things that be of men,' however innocent, if by so doing obedience to

God's will is hindered. Note, too, that a Simon may be Peter' at one

moment, and Satan' at the next.

III. We have here the announcement of the Cross as the law for the

disciples too (verses 34-38). Christ's followers must follow, but men

can choose whether they will be His followers or not. So the must' is

changed into let him,' and the if any man will' is put in the

forefront. The conditions are fixed, but the choice as to accepting the

position is free. A wider circle hears the terms of discipleship than

heard the announcement of Christ's own sufferings. The terms are for

all and for us. The law is stated in verse 34, and then a series of

reasons for it, and motives for accepting it, follow.

The law for every disciple is self-denial and taking up his cross. How

present His own Cross must have been to Christ's vision, since the

thought is introduced here, though He had not spoken of it, in

foretelling His own death! It is not Christ's Cross that we have to

take up. His sufferings stand alone, incapable of repetition and

needing none; but each follower has his own. To slay the life of self

is always pain, and there is no discipleship without crucifying the old

man.' Taking up my cross does not merely mean meekly accepting God-sent

or men-inflicted sorrows, but persistently carrying on the special form

of self-denial which my special type of character requires. It will

include these other meanings, but it goes deeper than they. Such

self-immolation is the same thing as following Christ; for, with all

the infinite difference between His Cross and ours, they are both

crosses, and on the one hand there is no real discipleship without

self-denial, and on the other there is no full self-denial without

discipleship.

The first of the reasons for the law, in verse 35, is a paradox, and a

truth with two sides. To wish to save life is to lose it; to lose it

for Christ's sake is to save it. Both are true, even without taking the

future into account. The life of self is death; the death of the lower

self is the life of the true self. The man who lives absorbed in the

miserable care for his own well-being is dead to all which makes life

noble, sweet, and real. Flagrant vice is not needed to kill the real

life. Clean, respectable selfishness does the work effectually. The

deadly gas is invisible, and has no smell. But while all selfishness is

fatal, it is self-surrender and sacrifice, for My sake and the

gospel's,' which is life-giving. Heroism, generous self-devotion

without love to Christ, is noble, but falls short of discipleship, and

may even aggravate the sin of the man who exhibits it, because it shows

what treasures he could lay at Christ's feet, if he would. It is only

self-denial made sweet by reference to Him that leads to life. Who is

this who thus demands that He should be the motive for which men shall

hate' their own lives, and calmly assumes power to reward such

sacrifice with a better life? The paradox is true, if we include a

reference to the future, which is usually taken to be its only meaning;

but on that familiar thought we need not enlarge.

The for' of verse 36 seems to refer back to the law in verse 34, and

the verse enforces the command by an appeal to self-interest, which, in

the highest sense of the word, dictates self-sacrifice. The men who

live for self are dead, as Christ has been saying. Suppose their

self-living had been successful' to the highest point, what would be

the good of all the world to a dead man? Shrouds have no pockets.' He

makes a poor bargain who sells his soul for the world. A man gets rich,

and in the process drops generous impulses, affections, interest in

noble things, perhaps principle and religion. He has shrivelled and

hardened into a mere fragment of himself; and so, when success comes,

he cannot much enjoy it, and was happier, poor and sympathetic and

enthusiastic and generous, than he is now, rich and dwindled. He who

loses himself in gaining the world does not win it, but is mastered by

it. This motive, too, like the preceding, has a double application--to

the facts of life here, when they are seen in their deepest reality,

and to the solemn future.

To that future our Lord passes, as His last reason for the command and

motive for obeying it, in verse 38. One great hindrance to out-and-out

discipleship is fear of what the world will say. Hence come compromises

and weak compliance on the part of disciples too timid to stand alone,

or too sensitive to face a sarcasm and a smile. A wholesome contempt

for the world's cackle is needed for following Christ. The geese on the

common hiss at the passer-by who goes steadily through the flock. How

grave and awful is that irony, if we may call it so, which casts the

retribution in the mould of the sin! The judge shall be ashamed' of

such unworthy disciples--shall blush to own such as His. May we venture

to put stress on the fact that He does not say that He will reject

them? They who were ashamed of Him were secret and imperfect disciples.

Perhaps, though He be ashamed of them, though they have brought Him no

credit, He will not wholly turn from them.

How marvellous the transition from the prediction of the Cross to this

of the Throne! The Son of Man must suffer many things, and the same Son

of Man shall come, attended by hosts of spirits who own Him for their

King, and surrounded by the uncreated blaze of the glory of God in

which He sits throned as His native abode. We do not know Jesus unless

we know Him as the crucified Sacrifice for the world's sins, and as the

exalted Judge of the world's deeds.

He adds a weighty word of enigmatical meaning, lest any should think

that He was speaking only of some far-off judgment. The destruction of

Jerusalem seems to be the event intended, which was, in fact, the

beginning of retribution for Israel, and the starting-point of a more

conspicuous manifestation of the kingdom of God. It was, therefore, a

kind of rehearsal, or picture in little, of that coming and ultimate

great day of the Lord, and was meant to be a sign' that it should

surely come.

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THE TRANSFIGURATION

And after six days Jesus taketh with Him Peter, and James, and John,

and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and He

was transfigured before them. 3. And His raimemt became shining,

exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. 4.

And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking

with Jesus. 5. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good

for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for Thee, and

one for Moses, and one for Elias. 6. For he wist not what to say; for

they were sore afraid. 7. And there was a cloud that overshadowed them:

and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son: hear

Him. 8. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man

any more, save Jesus only with themselves. 9. And as they came down

from the mountain, He charged them that they should tell no man what

things they had seen, till the Son of Man were risen from the dead. 10.

And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another

what the rising from the dead should mean. 11. And they asked Him,

saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come? 12. And He

answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all

things; and how it is written of the Son of Man, that He must suffer

many things, and be set at nought. 13. But I say unto you, That Elias

is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as

it is written of him.'--Mark ix. 2-13.

All three Evangelists are careful to date the Transfiguration by a

reference to the solemn new teaching at Caesarea, and Mark's six days'

plainly cover the same time as Luke's eight'--the former reckoning

excluding in the count, and the latter including, the days on which the

two incidents occurred. If we would understand the Transfiguration,

then, we must look at it as the sequel to Jesus' open announcement of

His death. His seeking the seclusion of the hills, attended only by the

innermost group of the faithful three, is a touching token of the

strain to which that week had subjected Him. How Peter's heart must

have filled with thankfulness that, notwithstanding the stern rebuke,

he was taken with the other two! There were three stages in the complex

incident which we call the Transfiguration--the change in Jesus'

appearance, the colloquy with Moses and Elijah, and the voice from the

cloud.

Luke, who has frequent references to Jesus' prayers, tells us that the

change in our Lord's countenance and raiment took place as He prayed';

and probably we are reverently following his lead if we think of Jesus'

prayer as, in some sense, the occasion of the glorious change. So far

as we know, this was the only time when mortal eyes saw Him absorbed in

communion with the Father. It was only when He ceased praying' in a

certain place that they came to Him' asking to be taught to pray (Luke

xi. 1); and in Gethsemane the disciples slept while He prayed beneath

the olives quivering in the moonlight. It may be that what the three

then saw did not occur then only. In such an hour of high communion

with' His Father the elevated spirit may have more than ordinarily

illuminated the pure body, and the pure body may have been more than

ordinarily transparent. The brighter the light, fed by fragrant oil

within an alabaster lamp, the more the alabaster will glow. Faint

foreshadowings of the spirit's power to light up the face with

unearthly beauty of holiness are not unknown among us. It may be that

the glory which always shone in the depths of His perfectly holy

manhood rose, as it were, to the surface for that one time, a witness

of what He really was, a prophecy of what humanity may become.

Did Jesus will His transfiguration, or did it come about without His

volition, or perhaps even without His consciousness? Did it continue

during all the time on the mountain, or did it pass when the second

stage of the incident began? We cannot tell. Matthew and Mark both say

that Jesus was transfigured before' the three, as if the making visible

of the glory had special regard to them. It may be that Jesus, like

Moses, knew not that the skin of His face shone'; at all events, it was

the second stage of the incident, the conversation with Elijah and

Moses, that had a special message of strength for Him. The first and

third stages were, apparently, intended for the three and for us all;

and the first is a revelation, not only of the veiled glory that dwelt

in Jesus, but of the beauty that may pass into a holy face, and of the

possibilities of a bodily frame becoming a spiritual body,' the

adequate organ and manifestation of a perfect spirit. Paul teaches the

prophetic aspect of the Transfiguration when he says that Jesus shall

change the body of our humiliation that it may be fashioned like unto

the body of His glory.'

Luke adds two very significant points to the accounts by Matthew and

Mark--namely, the disciples' sleep, and the subject on which Moses and

Elijah talked with Jesus. Mark lays the main stress on the fact that

the two great persons of the old economy, its founder and its restorer,

the legislator and the chief of the prophets, came from the dim region

to which one of them had passed in a chariot of fire, and stood by the

transfigured Christ, as if witnessing to Him as the greater, to whom

their ministries were subordinate, and in whom their teachings centred.

Jesus is the goal of all previous revelation, mightier than the

mightiest who are honoured by being His attendants. He is the Lord both

of the dead and of the living, and the spirits of just men made

perfect' bow before Him, and reverently watch His work on earth.

So much did that appearance proclaim to the mortal three, but their

slumber showed that they were not principally concerned, and that the

other three had things to speak which they were not fit to hear. The

theme was the same which had been, a week before, spoken to them, and

had doubtless been the subject of all Jesus' teachings for these six

days.' No doubt, their horror at the thought, and His necessary

insistence on it, had brought Him to need strengthening. And these two

came, as did the angel in Gethsemane, and, like him, in answer to

Christ's prayer, to bring the sought-for strength. How different it

would be to speak to them of the decease which He should accomplish at

Jerusalem,' from speaking to the reluctant, protesting Twelve! And how

different to listen to them speaking of that miracle of divine love

expressed in human death from the point of view of the principalities

and powers in heavenly places,' as over against the remonstrances and

misunderstandings with which He had been struggling for a whole week!

The appearance of Moses and Elijah teaches us the relation of Jesus to

all former revelation, the interest of the dwellers in heavenly light

in the Cross, and the need which Jesus felt for strengthening to endure

it.

Peter's foolish words, half excused by his being scarcely awake, may be

passed by with the one remark that it was like him to say something,

though he did not know what to say, and that it would therefore have

been wise to say nothing.

The third part of this incident, the appearance of the cloud and the

voice from it, was for the disciples. Luke tells us that it was a

bright' cloud, and yet it overshadowed them.' That sets us on the right

track and indicates that we are to think of the cloud of glory, which

was the visible token of the divine presence, the cloud which shone

lambent between the cherubim, the cloud which at last received Him out

of their sight.' Luke tells, too, that they entered into it.' Who

entered? Moses and Elijah had previously departed from Him.' Jesus and

the disciples remained, and we cannot suppose that the three could have

passed into that solemn glory, if He had not led them in. In that

sacred moment He was the way,' and keeping close to Him, mortal feet

could pass into the glory which even a Moses had not been fit to

behold. The spiritual significance of the incident seems to require the

supposition that, led by Jesus, they entered the cloud. They were men,

therefore they were afraid; Jesus was with them, therefore they stood

within the circle of that light and lived.

The voice repeated the attestation of Jesus as the beloved Son' of the

Father, which had been given at the baptism, but with the addition,

Hear Him,' which shows that it was now meant for the disciples, not, as

at the baptism, for Jesus Himself. While the command to listen to His

voice as to the voice from the cloud is perfectly general, and lays all

His words on us as all God's words, it had special reference to the

disciples, and that in regard to the new teaching which had so

disturbed them--the teaching of the necessity for His death. The

offence of the Cross' began with the first clear statement of it, and

in the hearts that loved Him best and came most near to understanding

Him. To fail in accepting His teaching that it behoved the Son of Man

to suffer,' is to fail in accepting it in the most important matter.

There are sounds in nature too low-pitched to be audible to untrained

ears, and the message of the Cross is unheard unless the ears of the

deaf are unstopped. If we do not hear Jesus when He speaks of His

passion, we may almost as well not hear Him at all.

Moses and Elijah had vanished, having borne their last testimony to

Jesus. Peter had wished to keep them beside Jesus, but that could not

be. Their highest glory was to fade in His light. They came, they

disappeared; He remained--and remains. They saw no man any more, save

Jesus only with themselves.' So should it be for us in life. So may it

be with us in death! Hear Him,' for all other voices are but for a

time, and die into silence, but Jesus speaks for eternity, and His

words shall not pass away.' When time is ended, and the world's history

is all gathered up into its final issue, His name shall stand out alone

as Author and End of all.

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THIS IS MY BELOVED SON: HEAR HIM'

And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of

the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son: hear Him.'--Mark ix. 7.

With regard to the first part of these words spoken at the

Transfiguration, they open far too large and wonderful a subject for me

to do more than just touch with the tip of my finger, as it were, in

passing, because the utterance of the divine words, This is My beloved

Son,' in all the depth of their meaning and loftiness, is laid as the

foundation of the two words that come after, which, for us, are the

all-important things here. And so I would rather dwell upon them than

upon the mysteries of the first part, but a sentence must be spared. If

we accept this story before us as the divine attestation of the mystery

of the person and nature of Jesus Christ, we must take the words to

mean--as these disciples, no doubt, took them to mean--something

pointing to a unique and solitary revelation which He bore to the

Divine Majesty. We have to see in them the confirmation of the great

truth that the manhood of Jesus Christ was the supernatural creation of

a direct divine power. Conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin

Mary'; therefore, that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be

called the Son of God.' And we have to go, as I take it, farther back

than the earthly birth, and to say, No man hath seen God at any

time--the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father.' He

was the Son here by human birth, and was in the bosom of the Father all

through that human life. He hath declared Him,' and so not only is

there here the testimony to the miraculous incarnation, and to the true

and proper Divinity and Deity of Jesus Christ, but there is also the

witness to the perfectness of His character in the great word, This is

My beloved Son,' which points us to an unbroken communion of love

between Him and the Father, which tells us that in the depths of that

divine nature there has been a constant play of mutual love, which

reveals to us that in His humanity there never was anything that came

as the faintest film of separation between His will and the will of the

Father, between His heart and the heart of God.

But this revelation of the mysterious personality of the divine Son,

the perfect harmony between Him and God, is here given as the ground of

the command that follows: Hear Him.' God's voice bids you listen to

Christ's voice--God's voice bids you listen to Christ's voice as His

voice. Listen to Him when He speaks to you about God--do not trust your

own fancy, do not trust your own fear, do not trust the dictates of

your conscience, do not consult man, do not listen to others, do not

speculate about the mysteries of the earth and the heavens, but go to

Him, and listen to the only begotten Son in the bosom of the Father. He

declares unto us God; in Him alone we have certain knowledge of a

loving Father in heaven. Hear Him when He tells us of God's tenderness

and patience and love. Hear Him above all when He says to us, As Moses

lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be

lifted up.' Hear Him when He says, The Son of Man came to give His life

a ransom for many.' Hear Him when He speaks of Himself as Judge of you

and me and all the world, and when He says, The Son of Man shall come

in His glory, and before Him shall be gathered all nations.' Hear Him

then. Hear Him when He calls you to Himself. Hear Him when He says to

you, Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden.' Hear Him

when He says, If any man come unto Me he shall never thirst.' Hear Him

when He says, Cast your burden upon Me, and I will sustain you.' Hear

Him when He commands. Hear Him when He says, If ye love Me keep My

commandments,' and when He says, Abide in Me and I in you,' hear Him

then. In all time of our tribulation, in all time of our well-being, in

the hour of death, and in the day of judgment,' let us listen to Him.

Dear friends there is no rest anywhere else; there is no peace, no

pleasure, no satisfaction--except close at His side. Speak Lord! for

Thy servant heareth.' To whom shall we go but unto Thee? Thou hast the

words of eternal life.' Look how these disciples, grovelling there on

their faces, were raised by the gentle hand laid upon their shoulder,

and the blessed voice that brought them back to consciousness, and how,

as they looked about them with dazed eyes, all was gone. The vision,

the cloud, Moses and Elias--the lustre and radiance and the dread voice

were past, and everything was as it used to be. Christ stood alone

there like some solitary figure relieved against a clear daffodil sky

upon some extended plain, and there was nothing else to meet the eye

but He. Christ is there, and in Him is all.

That is a summing up of all Divine revelation. God, who at sundry times

and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the

prophets, hath, in these last days, spoken unto us by His Son.' Moses

dies, Elijah fades, clouds and symbols and voices and all mortal things

vanish, but Jesus Christ stands before us, the manifest God, for ever

and ever, the sole illumination of the world, It is also a summing up

of all earthly history. All other people go. The beach of time is

strewed with wrecked reputations and forgotten glories. And I am not

ashamed to say that I believe that, as the ages grow, and the world

gets further away in time from the Cross upon Calvary, more and more

everything else will sink beneath the horizon, and Christ alone be left

to fill the past as He fills the present and the future.

We may make that scene the picture of our lives. Distractions and

temptations that lie all round us are ever seeking to drag us away.

There is no peace anywhere but in having Christ only--my only pattern,

my only hope, my only salvation, my only guide, my only aim, my only

friend. The solitary Christ is the sufficient Christ, and that for

ever. Take Him for your only friend, and you need none other. Then at

death there may be a brief spasm of darkness, a momentary fear,

perchance, but then the touch of a Brother's hand will be upon us as we

lie there prone in the dust, and we shall lift up our eyes, and lo!

life's illusions are gone, and life's noises are fallen dumb, and we

see no man any more, save Jesus only,' with ourselves.

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JESUS ONLY!

They saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.'--Mark ix.

8.

The Transfiguration was the solemn inauguration of Jesus for His

sufferings and death.

Moses, the founder, and Elijah, the restorer, of the Jewish polity, the

great Lawgiver and the great Prophet, were present. The former had died

and been mysteriously buried, the latter had been translated without

seeing death.' So both are visitors from the unseen world, appearing to

own that Jesus is the Lord of that dim land, and that there they draw

their life from Him. The conversation is about Christ's decease,' the

wonderful event which was to constitute Him Lord of the living and of

the dead. The divine voice of command, Hear Him!' gives the meaning of

their disappearance. At that voice they depart and Jesus is left alone.

The scene is typical of the ultimate issue of the world's history. The

King's name only will at last be found inscribed on the pyramid.

Typical, too, is it not, of a Christian's blessed death? When the

cloud' is past no man is seen any more but Jesus only.'

I. The solitary Saviour.

The disciples are left alone with the divine Saviour.

1. He is alone in His nature. Son of God.'

2. He is alone in the sinlessness of His manhood. My Beloved Son!'

3. He is alone as God's Voice to men. Hear Him!'

The solitary Saviour, because sufficient. Thou, O Christ, art all I

want.'

Sufficient, too, for ever.

His life is eternal.

His love is eternal.

The power of His Cross Is eternal.

II. The vanishing witnesses.

1. The connection of the past with Christ. The authority of the two

representatives of the Old Covenant was only (a) derived and

subordinate; (b) prophetic; (c) transient.

2. The thought may be widened into that of the relation of all teachers

and guides to Jesus Christ.

3. The two witness to the relation of the unseen world to Jesus Christ.

(a) Its inhabitants are undying.

(b) Are subject to the sway of Jesus.

(c) Are expectantly waiting a glorious future.

4. They witness to the central point of Christ's work--His decease.'

This great event is the key to the world's history.

III. The waiting disciples.

1. What Christian life should be. Giving Him our sole trust and

allegiance.

(a) Seeing Him in all things.

(b) Constant communion. Abide in Me.'

(c) Using everything as helps to Him.

2. What Christian death may become.

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CHRIST'S LAMENT OVER OUR FAITHLESSNESS

He answereth him and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be

with you? how long shall I suffer you?'--Mark ix. 19.

There is a very evident, and, I think, intentional contrast between the

two scenes, of the Transfiguration, and of this healing of the maniac

boy. And in nothing is the contrast more marked than in the demeanour

of these enfeebled and unbelieving Apostles, as contrasted with the

rapture of devotion of the other three, and with the lowly submission

and faith of Moses and Elias. Perhaps, too, the difference between the

calm serenity of the mountain, and the hell-tortured misery of the

plain--between the converse with the sainted perfected dead, and the

converse with their unworthy successors--made Christ feel more sharply

and poignantly than He ordinarily did His disciples' slowness of

apprehension and want of faith. At any rate, it does strike one as

remarkable that the only occasion on which there came from His lips

anything that sounded like impatience and a momentary flash of

indignation was, when in sharpest contrast with This is my beloved Son:

hear Him,' He had to come down from the mountain to meet the

devil-possessed boy, the useless agony of the father, the sneering

faces of the scribes, and the impotence of the disciples. Looking on

all this, He turns to His followers--for it is to the Apostles that the

text is spoken, and not to the crowd outside--with this most remarkable

exclamation: O faithless generation! how long shall I be with you? how

long shall I suffer you?'

Now, I said that these words at first sight looked almost like a

momentary flash of indignation, as if for once a spot had come on His

pallid cheek--a spot of anger--but I do not think that we shall find it

so if we look a little more closely.

The first thing that seems to be in the words is not anger, indeed, but

a very distinct and very pathetic expression of Christ's infinite pain,

because of man's faithlessness. The element of personal sorrow is most

obvious here. It is not only that He is sad for their sakes that they

are so unreceptive, and He can do so little for them--I shall have

something to say about that presently--but that He feels for Himself,

just as we do in our poor humble measure, the chilling effect of an

atmosphere where there is no sympathy. All that ever the teachers and

guides and leaders of the world have in this respect had to bear--all

the misery of opening out their hearts in the frosty air of unbelief

and rejection--Christ endured. All that men have ever felt of how hard

it is to keep on working when not a soul understands them, when not a

single creature believes in them, when there is no one that will accept

their message, none that will give them credit for pure motives--Jesus

Christ had to feel, and that in an altogether singular degree. There

never was such a lonely soul on this earth as His, just because there

never was one so pure and loving. The little hills rejoice together? as

the Psalm says, on every side,' but the great Alpine peak is alone

there, away up amongst the cold and the snows. Thus lived the solitary

Christ, the uncomprehended Christ, the unaccepted Christ. Let us see in

this exclamation of His how humanly, and yet how divinely, He felt the

loneliness to which His love and purity condemned Him.

The plain felt soul-chilling after the blessed communion of the

mountain. There was such a difference between Moses and Elias and the

voice that said, This is My beloved Son: hear Him,' and the disbelief

and slowness of spiritual apprehension of the people down below there,

that no wonder that for once the pain that He generally kept absolutely

down and silent, broke the bounds even of His restraint, and shaped for

itself this pathetic utterance: How long shall I be with you? how long

shall I suffer you?'

Dear friends, here is a little window through which we may see a great

matter' if we will only think of how all that solitude, and all that

sorrow of uncomprehended aims, was borne lovingly and patiently, right

away on to the very end, for every one of us. I know that there are

many of the aspects of Christ's life in which Christ's griefs tell more

on the popular apprehension; but I do not know that there is one in

which the title of The Man of Sorrows' is to all deeper thinking more

pathetically vindicated than in this--the solitude of the

uncomprehended and the unaccepted Christ and His pain at His disciples'

faithlessness.

And then do not let us forget that in this short sharp cry of

anguish--for it is that--there may be detected by the listening ear not

only the tone of personal hurt, but the tone of disappointed and

thwarted love. Because of their unbelief He knew that they could not

receive what He desired to give them. We find Him more than once in His

life, hemmed in, hindered, baulked of His purpose, thwarted, as I may

say, in His design, simply because there was no one with a heart open

to receive the rich treasure that He was ready to pour out. He had to

keep it locked up in His own spirit, else it would have been wasted and

spilled upon the ground. He could do no mighty works there because of

their unbelief'; and here He is standing in the midst of the men that

knew Him best, that understood Him most, that were nearest to Him in

sympathy; but even they were not ready for all this wealth of

affection, all this infinitude of blessing, with which His heart is

charged. They offered no place to put it. They shut up the narrow

cranny through which it might have come, and so He has to turn from

them, bearing it away unbestowed, like some man who goes out in the

morning with his seed-basket full, and finds the whole field where he

would fain have sown covered already with springing weeds or encumbered

with hard rock, and has to bring back the germs of possible life to

bless and fertilise some other soil. He that goeth forth weeping,

bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with joy'; but He

that comes back weeping, bearing the precious seed that He found no

field to sow in, knows a deeper sadness, which has in it no prophecy of

joy. It is wonderfully pathetic and beautiful, I think, to see how

Jesus Christ knew the pains of wounded love that cannot get expressed

because there is not heart to receive it.

Here I would remark, too, before I go to another point, that these two

elements--that of personal sorrow and that of disappointed love and

baulked purposes--continue still, and are represented as in some

measure felt by Him now. It was to disciples that He said, O faithless

generation!' He did not mean to charge them with the entire absence of

all confidence, but He did mean to declare that their poor, feeble

faith, such as it was, was not worth naming in comparison with the

abounding mass of their unbelief. There was one spark of light in them,

and there was also a great heap of green wood that had not caught the

flame and only smoked instead of blazing. And so He said to them, O

faithless generation!'

Ay, and if He came down here amongst us now, and went through the

professing Christians in this land, to how many of us--regard being had

to the feebleness of our confidence and the strength of our

unbelief--He would have to say the same thing, O faithless generation!'

The version of that clause in Matthew and Luke adds a significant

word,--faithless and perverse generation.' The addition carries a grave

lesson, as teaching us that the two characteristics are inseparably

united; that the want of faith is morally a crime and sin; that

unbelief is at once the most tragic manifestation of man's perverse

will, and also in its turn the source of still more obstinate and

wide-spreading evil. Blindness to His light and rejection of His love,

He treats as the very head and crown of sin. Like intertwining snakes,

the loathly heads are separate; but the slimy convolutions are twisted

indistinguishably together, and all unbelief has in it the nature of

perversity, as all perversity has in it the nature of unbelief. He will

convince the world of sin, because they believe not on Me.'

May we venture to say, as we have already hinted, that all this pain is

in some mysterious way still inflicted on His loving heart? Can it be

that every time we are guilty of unbelieving, unsympathetic rejection

of His love, we send a pang of real pain and sorrow into the heart of

Christ? It is a strange, solemn thought. There are many difficulties

which start up, if we at all accept it. But still it does appear as if

we could scarcely believe in His perpetual manhood, or think of His

love as being in any real sense a human love, without believing that He

sorrows when we sin; and that we can grieve, and wound, and cause to

recoil upon itself, as it were, and close up that loving and gracious

Spirit that delights in being met with answering love. If we may

venture to take our love as in any measure analogous to His--and unless

we do, His love is to us a word without meaning--we may believe that it

is so. Do not we know that the purer our love, and the more it has

purified us, the more sensitive it becomes, even while the less

suspicious it becomes? Is not the purest, most unselfish, highest love,

that by which the least failure in response is felt most painfully?

Though there be no anger, and no change in the love, still there is a

pang where there is an inadequate perception, or an unworthy reception,

of it. And Scripture seems to countenance the belief that Divine Love,

too, may know something, in some mysterious fashion, like that feeling,

when it warns us, Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are

sealed unto the day of redemption.' So we may venture to say, Grieve

not the Christ of God, who redeems us; and remember that we grieve Him

most when we will not let Him pour His love upon us, but turn a sullen,

unresponsive unbelief towards His pleading grace, as some glacier shuts

out the sunshine from the mountain-side with its thick-ribbed ice.

Another thought, which seems to me to be expressed in this wonderful

exclamation of our Lord's, is--that this faithlessness bound Christ to

earth, and kept Him here. As there is not anger, but only pain, so

there is also, I think, not exactly impatience, but a desire to depart,

coupled with the feeling that He cannot leave them till they have grown

stronger in faith. And that feeling is increased by the experience of

their utter helplessness and shameful discomfiture during His brief

absence They had shown that they were not fit to be trusted alone. He

had been away for a day up in the mountain there, and though they did

not build an altar to any golden calf, like their ancestors, when their

leader was absent, still when He comes back He finds things all gone

wrong because of the few hours of His absence. What would they do if He

were to go away from them altogether? They would never be able to stand

it at all. It is impossible that He should leave them thus--raw,

immature. The plant has not yet grown sufficiently strong to take away

the prop round which it climbed. How long must I be with you?' says the

loving Teacher, who is prepared ungrudgingly to give His slow scholars

as much time as they need to learn their lesson. He is not impatient,

but He desires to finish the task; and yet He is ready to let the

scholars' dulness determine the duration of His stay. Surely that is

wondrous and heart-touching love, that Christ should let their slowness

measure the time during which He should linger here, and refrain from

the glory which He desired. We do not know all the reasons which

determined the length of our Lord's life upon earth, but this was one

of them,--that He could not go away until He had left these men strong

enough to stand by themselves, and to lay the foundations of the

Church. Therefore He yielded to the plea of their very faithlessness

and backwardness, and with this wonderful word of condescension and

appeal bade them say for how many more days He must abide in the plain,

and turn His back on the glories that had gleamed for a moment on the

mountain of transfiguration.

In this connection, too, is it not striking to notice how long His

short life and ministry appeared to our Lord Himself? There is to me

something very pathetic in that question He addressed to one of His

Apostles near the end of His pilgrimage: Have I been so long time with

you, and yet hast thou not known Me?' It was not so very long--three

years, perhaps, at the outside--and much less, if we take the shortest

computation; and yet to Him it had been long. The days had seemed to go

tardily. He longed that the fire' which He came to fling on earth were

already kindled,' and the moments seemed to drop so slowly from the urn

of time. But neither the holy longing to consummate His work by the

mystery of His passion, to which more than one of His words bear

witness, nor the not less holy longing to be glorified with the glory

which He had with the Father before the world was,' which we may

reverently venture to suppose in Him, could be satisfied till his slow

scholars were wiser, and His feeble followers stronger.

And then again, here we get a glimpse into the depth of Christ's

patient forbearance. We might read these other words of our text, How

long shall I suffer you?' with such an intonation as to make them

almost a threat that the limits of forbearance would soon be reached,

and that lie was not going to suffer them' much longer. Some

commentators speak of them as expressing holy indignation,' and I quite

believe that there is such a thing, and that on other occasions it was

plainly spoken in Christ's words. But I fail to catch the tone of it

here. To me this plaintive question has the very opposite of

indignation in its ring. It sounds rather like a pledge that as long as

they need forbearance they will get it; but, at the same time, a

question of how long' that is to be. It implies the inexhaustible

riches and resources of His patient mercy. And Oh, dear brethren! that

endless forbearance is the only refuge and ground of hope we have. His

perfect charity is not soon angry; beareth all things,' and never

faileth.' To it we have all to make the appeal--

Though I have most unthankful been

Of all that e'er Thy grace received;

Ten thousand times Thy goodness seen,

Ten thousand times Thy goodness grieved;

Yet, Lord, the chief of sinners spare.'

And, thank God! we do not make our appeal in vain.

There is rebuke in His question, but how tender a rebuke it is! He

rebukes without anger. He names the fault plainly. He shows distinctly

His sorrow, and does not hide the strain on His forbearance. That is

His way of cure for His servants' faithlessness. It was His way on

earth; it is His way in heaven. To us, too, comes the loving rebuke of

this question, How long shall I suffer you?'

Thank God that our answer may be cast into the words of His own

promise: I say not unto thee, until seven times; but until seventy

times seven.' Bear with me till Thou hast perfected me; and then bear

me to Thyself, that I may be with Thee for ever, and grieve Thy love no

more.' So may it be, for with Him is plenteous redemption,' and His

forbearing mercy endureth for ever.'

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THE OMNIPOTENCE OF FAITH

Jesus said unto him, If them canst believe, all things are possible to

him that believeth.'--Mark ix. 23.

The necessity and power of faith is the prominent lesson of this

narrative of the healing of a demoniac boy, especially as it is told by

the Evangelist Mark, The lesson is enforced by the actions of all the

persons in the group, except the central figure, Christ. The disciples

could not cast out the demon, and incur Christ's plaintive rebuke,

which is quite as much sorrow as blame: O faithless generation I how

long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?' And then, in

the second part of the story, the poor father, heart-sick with hope

deferred, comes into the foreground. The whole interest is shifted to

him, and more prominence is given to the process by which his doubting

spirit is led to trust, than to that by which his son is healed.

There is something very beautiful and tender in Christ's way of dealing

with him, so as to draw him to faith. He begins with the question, How

long is it ago since this came unto him?' and so induces him to tell

all the story of the long sorrow, that his burdened heart might get

some ease in speaking, and also that the feeling of the extremity of

the necessity, deepened by the very dwelling on all his boy's cruel

sufferings, might help him to the exercise of faith. Truly He knew what

was in man,' and with tenderness born of perfect knowledge and perfect

love, He dealt with sore and sorrowful hearts. This loving artifice of

consolation, which drew all the story from willing lips, is one more

little token of His gentle mode of healing. And it is profoundly wise,

as well as most tender. Get a man thoroughly to know his need, and

vividly to feel his helpless misery, and you have carried him a long

way towards laying hold of the refuge from it.

How wise and how tender the question is, is proved by the long

circumstantial answer, in which the pent-up trouble of a father's heart

pours itself out at the tiny opening which Christ has made for it. He

does not content himself with the simple answer, Of a child,' but with

the garrulousness of sorrow that has found a listener that sympathises,

goes on to tell all the misery, partly that he may move his hearer's

pity, but more in sheer absorption with the bitterness that had

poisoned the happiness of his home all these years. And then his

graphic picture of his child's state leads him to the plaintive cry, in

which his love makes common cause with his son, and unites both in one

wretchedness. If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help

us.'

Our Lord answers that appeal in the words of our text. There are some

difficulties in the rendering and exact force of these words with which

I do not mean to trouble you. We may accept the rendering as in our

Bible, with a slight variation in the punctuation. If we take the first

clause as an incomplete sentence, and put a break between it and the

last words, the meaning will stand out more clearly: If thou canst

believe--all things are possible to him that believeth.' We might

paraphrase it somewhat thus: Did you say If thou canst do anything'?

That is the wrong if.' There is no doubt about that. The only if' in

the question is another one, not about me, but about you. If thou canst

believe--' and then the incomplete sentence might be supposed to be

ended with some such phrase as That is the only question. If thou canst

believe--all depends on that. If thou canst believe, thy son will be

healed,' or the like. Then, in order to explain and establish what He

had meant in the half-finished saying, He adds the grand, broad

statement, on which the demand for the man's faith as the only

condition of his wish being answered reposes: All things are possible

to him that believeth.'

That wide statement is meant, I suppose, for the disciples as well as

for the father. All things are possible' both in reference to benefits

to be received, and in reference to power to be exercised. If thou

canst believe, poor suppliant father, thou shalt have thy desire. If

thou canst believe, poor devil-ridden son, thou shalt be set free. If

ye can believe, poor baffled disciples, you will be masters of the

powers of evil.'

Do you remember another if' with which Christ was once besought? There

came a leper to Him, beseeching Him, and kneeling down to Him, and

saying unto Him, If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.' In some

respects that man had advanced beyond the father in our story, for he

had no doubt at all about Christ's power, and he spoke to Him as Lord.'

But he was somehow not quite sure about Christ's heart of pity. On the

other hand, the man in our narrative has no doubt about Christ's

compassion. He may have seen something of His previous miracles, or

there may still have been lying on our Lord's countenance some of the

lingering glory of the Transfiguration--as indeed the narrative seems

to hint, in its emphatic statement of the astonishment and reverential

salutations of the crowd when He approached--or the tenderness of our

Lord's listening sympathy may have made him feel sure of His

willingness to help. At any rate, the leper's if' has answered itself

for him. His own lingering doubt, Christ waives aside as settled. His

if' is answered for ever. So these two ifs' in reference to Christ are

beyond all controversy; His power is certain, and His love. The third

if' remains, the one that refers to us--If thou canst believe'; all

hinges on that, for all things are possible to him that believeth.'

Here, then, we have our Lord telling us that faith is omnipotent. That

is a bold word; He puts no limitations; all things are possible.' I

think that to get the true force of these words we should put alongside

of them the other saying of our Lord's, With God all things are

possible.' That is the foundation of the grand prerogative in our text.

The power of faith is the consequence of the power of God. All things

are possible to Him; therefore, all things are possible to me,

believing in Him. If we translate that into more abstract words, it

just comes to the principle that the power of faith consists in its

taking hold of the power of God. It is omnipotent because it knits us

to Omnipotence. Faith is nothing in itself, but it is that which

attaches us to God, and then His power flows into us. Screw a pipe on

to a water main and turn a handle, and out flows the water through the

pipe and fills the empty vessel. Faith is as impotent in itself as the

hollow water pipe is, only it is the way by which the connection is

established between the fulness of God and the emptiness of man. By it

divinity flows into humanity, and we have a share even in the divine

Omnipotence. My strength is made perfect in weakness.' In itself

nothing, it yet grasps God, and therefore by it we are strong, because

by it we lay hold of His strength. Great and wonderful is the grace

thus given to us, poor, struggling, sinful men, that, looking up to the

solemn throne, where He sits in His power, we have a right to be sure

that a true participation in His greatness is granted to us, if once

our hearts are fastened to Him.

And there is nothing arbitrary nor mysterious in this flowing of divine

power into our hearts on condition of our faith. It is the condition of

possessing Christ, and in Christ, salvation, righteousness, and

strength, not by any artificial appointment, but in the very nature of

things. There is no other way possible by which God could give men what

they receive through their faith, except only their faith.

In all trust in God there are two elements: a sense of need and of evil

and weakness, and a confidence more or less unshaken and strong in Him,

His love and power and all-sufficiency; and unless both of these two be

in the heart, it is, in the nature of things, impossible, and will be

impossible to all eternity, that purity and strength and peace and joy,

and all the blessings which Christ delights to give to faith, should

ever be ours.

Unbelief, distrust of Him, which separates us from Him and closes the

heart fast against His grace, must cut us off from that which it does

not feel that it needs, nor cares to receive; and must interpose a

non-conducting medium between us and the electric influences of His

might. When Christ was on earth, man's want of faith dammed back His

miracle-working power, and paralysed His healing energy. How strange

that paradox sounds at first hearing, which brings together Omnipotence

and impotence, and makes men able to counter-work the loving power of

Christ. He could there do no mighty work.' The Evangelist intends a

paradox, for he uses two kindred words to express the inability and the

mighty work; and we might paraphrase the saying so as to bring out the

seeming contradiction: He there had no power to do any work of power.'

The same awful, and in some sense mysterious, power of limiting and

restraining the influx of His love belongs to unbelief still, whether

it take the shape of active rejection, or only of careless, passive

non-reception. For faith makes us partakers of divine power by the very

necessity of the case, and that power can attach itself to nothing

else. So, if thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that

believeth.'

Still further, we may observe that there is involved here the principle

that our faith determines the amount of our power. That is true in

reference to our own individual religious life, and it is true in

reference to special capacities for Christ's service. Let me say a word

or two about each of these. They run into each other, of course, for

the truest power of service is found in the depth and purity of our own

personal religion, and on the other hand our individual Christian

character will never be deep or pure unless we are working for the

Master. Still, for our present purpose, these two inseparable aspects

of the one Christian life may be separated in thought.

As to the former, then, the measure of my trust in Christ is the

measure of all the rest of my Christian character. I shall have just as

much purity, just as much peace, just as much wisdom or gentleness or

love or courage or hope, as my faith is capable of taking up, and, so

to speak, holding in solution. The point of saturation' in a man's

soul, the quantity of God's grace which he is capable of absorbing, is

accurately measured by his faith. How much do I trust God? That will

settle how much I can take in of God.

So much as we believe, so much can we contain. So much as we can

contain, so much shall we receive. And in the very act of receiving the

portion of our Father's goods that falleth' to us, we shall feel that

there is a boundless additional portion ready to come as soon as we are

ready for it, and thereby we shall be driven to larger desires and a

wider opening of the lap of faith, which will ever be answered by good

measure, pressed together and running over, measured into our bosoms.'

But there will be no waste by the bestowment of what we cannot take.

According to your faith, be it unto you.' That is the accurate

thermometer which measures the temperature of our spiritual state. It

is like the steam-gauge outside the boiler, which tells to a fraction

the pressure of steam within, and so the power which can at the moment

be exerted.

May I make a very simple, close personal application of this thought?

We have as much religious life as we desire; that is, we have as much

as our faith can take. There is the reason why such hosts of so-called

Christians have such poor, feeble Christianity. We dare not say of any,

They have a name to live, and are dead.' There is only one Eye who can

tell when the heart has ceased to beat. But we may say that there are a

mournful number of people who call themselves Christians, who look so

like dead that no eye but Christ's can tell the difference. They are in

a syncope that will be death soon, unless some mighty power rouse them.

And then, how many more of us there are, not so bad as that, but still

feeble and languid, whose Christian history is a history of weakness,

while God's power is open before us, of starving in the midst of

abundance, broken only by moments of firmer faith, and so of larger,

happier possession, that make the poverty-stricken ordinary days appear

ten times more poverty-stricken. The channel lies dry, a waste chaos of

white stones and driftwood for long months, and only for an hour or two

after the clouds have burst on the mountains does the stream fill it

from bank to bank. Do not many of us remember moments of a far deeper

and more earnest trust in Christ than marks our ordinary days? If such

moments were continuous, should not we be the happy possessors of

beauties of character and spiritual power, such as would put our

present selves utterly to shame? And why are they not continuous? Why

are our possessions in God so small, our power so weak? Dear friends!

ye are not straitened in yourselves.' The only reason for defective

spiritual progress and character is defective faith.

Then look at this same principle as it affects our faculties for

Christian service. There, too, it is true that all things are possible

to him that believeth. The saying had an application to the disciples

who stood by, half-ashamed and half-surprised at their failure to cast

out the demon, as well as to the father in his agony of desire and

doubt. For them it meant that the measure of Christian service was

mainly determined by the measure of their faith. It would scarcely be

an exaggeration to say that in Christ's service a man can do pretty

nearly what he believes he can do, if his confidence is built, not on

himself, but on Christ.

If those nine Apostles, waiting there for their Master, had thought

they could cast out the devil from the boy, do you not think that they

could have done it? I do not mean to say that rash presumption,

undertaking in levity and self-confidence unsuitable kinds of work,

will be honoured with success. But I do mean to say that, in the line

of our manifest duty, the extent to which we can do Christ's work is

very much the extent to which we believe, in dependence on Him, that we

can do it. If we once make up our minds that we shall do a certain

thing by Christ's help and for His sake, in ninety cases out of a

hundred the expectation will fulfil itself, and we shall do it. Why

could not we cast him out?' They need not have asked the question. Why

could not you cast him out? Why, because you did not think you could,

and with your timid attempt, making an experiment which you were not

sure would succeed, provoked the failure which you feared.' The Church

has never believed enough in its Christ-given power to cast out demons.

We have never been confident enough that the victory was in our hands

if we knew how to use our powers.

The same thing is true of each one of us. Audacity and presumption are

humility and moderation, if only we feel that our sufficiency is of

God.' I can do all things' is the language of simple soberness, if we

go on to say through Christ which strengthened me.'

There is one more point, drawn from these words, viz., our faith can

only take hold on the divine promises. Such language as this of my text

and other kindred sayings of our Lord's has often been extended beyond

its real force, and pressed into the service of a mistaken enthusiasm,

for want of observing that very plain principle. The principle of our

text has reference to outward things as well as to the spiritual life.

But there are great exaggerations and misconceptions as to the province

of faith in reference to these temporal things, and consequently there

are misconceptions and exaggerations on the part of many very good

people as to the province of prayer in regard to them.

It seems to me that we shall be saved from these, if we distinctly

recognise a very obvious principle, namely, that faith' can never go

further than God's clear promises, and that whatever goes beyond God's

word is not faith, but something else assuming its appearance.

For instance, suppose a father nowadays were to say: My child is sore

vexed with sickness. I long for his recovery. I believe that Christ can

heal him. I believe that He will. I pray in faith, and I know that I

shall be answered.' Such a prayer goes beyond the record. Has Christ

told you that it is His will that your child shall be healed? If not,

how can you pray in faith that it is? You may pray in confidence that

he will be healed, but such confident persuasion is not faith. Faith

lays hold of Christ's distinct declaration of His will, but such

confidence is only grasping a shadow, your own wishes. The father in

this story was entitled to trust, because Christ told him that his

trust was the condition of his son's being healed. So in response to

the great word of our text, the man's faith leaped up and grasped our

Lord's promise, with Lord, I believe.' But before Christ spoke, his

desires, his wistful longing, his imploring cry for help, had no

warrant to pass into faith, and did not so pass.

Christ's word must go before our faith, and must supply the object for

our faith, and where Christ has not spoken, there is no room for the

exercise of any faith, except the faith, It is the Lord; let Him do

what seemeth to Him good.' That is the true prayer of faith in regard

to all matters of outward providence where we have no distinct word of

God's which gives unmistakable indication of His will. The if' of the

leper, which has no place in the spiritual region, where we know that

this is the will of God, even our sanctification,' has full force in

the temporal region, where we do not know before the event what the

will of the Lord is, If Thou wilt, Thou canst,' is there our best

prayer.

Wherever a distinct and unmistakable promise of God's goes, it is safe

for faith to follow; but to outrun His word is not faith, but

self-will, and meets the deserved rebuke, Should it be according to thy

mind?' There are unmistakable promises about outward things on which we

may safely build. Let us confine our expectations within the limits of

these, and turn them into the prayer of faith, so shooting back whence

they came His winged words, This is the confidence that we have, that

if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us.' Thus coming to

Him, submitting all our wishes in regard to this world to His most

loving will, and widening our confidence to the breadth of His great

and loving purpose in regard to our own inward life, as well as in

regard to our practical service, His answer will ever be, Great is thy

faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt.'

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UNBELIEVING BELIEF

And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears,

Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.'--Mark ix. 24.

We owe to Mark's Gospel the fullest account of the pathetic incident of

the healing of the demoniac boy. He alone gives us this part of the

conversation between our Lord and the afflicted child's father. The

poor man had brought his child to the disciples, and found them unable

to do anything with him. A torrent of appeal breaks from his lips as

soon as the Lord gives him an opportunity of speaking. He dwells upon

all the piteous details with that fondness for repetition which sorrow

knows so well. Jesus gives him back his doubts. The father said, If

thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us.' Christ's

answer, according to the true reading, is not as it stands in our

Authorised Version, If thou canst believe'--throwing, as it were, the

responsibility on the man--but it is a quotation of the father's own

word, If Thou canst,' as if He waved it aside with superb recognition

of its utter unfitness to the present case. Say not, If Thou canst.

That is certain. All things are possible to thee' (not to do, but to

get) if'--which is the only if' in the case--thou believest. I can, and

if thy faith lays hold on My Omnipotence, all is done.'

That majestic word is like the blow of steel upon flint; it strikes a

little spark of faith which lights up the soul and turns the smoky

pillar of doubt into clear flame of confidence. Lord, I believe; help

Thou mine unbelief.'

I think in these wonderful words we have four things--the birth, the

infancy, the cry, and the education, of faith. And to these four I turn

now.

I. First, then, note here the birth of faith.

There are many ways to the temple, and it matters little by which of

them a man travels, if so be he gets there. There is no royal road to

the Christian faith which saves the soul. And yet, though identity of

experience is not to be expected, men are like each other in the

depths, and only unlike on the surfaces, of their being. Therefore one

man's experience carefully analysed is very apt to give, at least, the

rudiments of the experience of all others who have been in similar

circumstances. So I think we can see here, without insisting on any

pedantic repetition of the same details in every case, in broad

outline, a sketch-map of the road. There are three elements here: eager

desire, the sense of utter helplessness, and the acceptance of Christ's

calm assurances. Look at these three.

This man knew what he wanted, and he wanted it very sorely. Whosoever

has any intensity and reality of desire for the great gifts which Jesus

Christ comes to bestow, has taken at least one step on the way to

faith. Conversely, the hindrances which block the path of a great many

of us are simply that we do not care to possess the blessings which

Jesus Christ in His Gospel offers. I am not talking now about the

so-called intellectual hindrances to belief, though I think that a

great many of these, if carefully examined, would be found, in the

ultimate analysis, to repose upon this same stolid indifference to the

blessings which Christianity offers. But what I wish to insist upon is

that for large numbers of us, and no doubt for many men and women whom

I address now, the real reason why they have not trust in Jesus Christ

is because they do not care to possess the blessings which Jesus Christ

brings. Do you desire to have your sins forgiven? Has purity any

attraction for you? Do you care at all about the calm and pure

blessings of communion with God? Would you like to live always in the

light of His face? Do you want to be the masters of your own lusts and

passions? I do not ask you, Do you want to go to Heaven or to escape

Hell, when you die? but I ask, Has that future in any of its aspects

any such power over you as that it stirs you to any earnestness and

persistency of desire, or is it all shadowy and vain, ineffectual and

dim? What we Christian teachers have to fight against is that we are

charged to offer to men a blessing that they do not want, and have to

create a demand before there can be any acceptance of the supply. Give

us the leeks and garlics of Egypt,' said the Hebrews in the wilderness;

our soul loatheth this light bread.' So it is with many of us; we do

not want God, goodness, quietness of conscience, purity of life,

self-consecration to a lofty ideal, one-thousandth part as much as we

want success in our daily occupations, or some one or other of the

delights that the world gives. I remember Luther, in his rough way, has

a story--I think it is in his Table-talk--about a herd of swine to whom

their keeper offered some rich dainties, and the pigs said, Give us

grains.' That is what so many men do when Jesus Christ comes with His

gifts and His blessings. They turn away, but if they were offered some

poor earthly good, all their desires would go out towards it, and their

eager hands would be scrambling who should first possess it.

Oh brethren, if we saw things as they are, and our needs as they are,

nothing would kindle such intensity of longing in our hearts as that

rejected or neglected promise of life eternal and divine which Jesus

Christ brings. If I could only once wake in some indifferent heart this

longing, that heart would have taken at least the initial step to a

life of Christian godliness.

Further, we have here the other element of a sense of utter

helplessness. How often this poor father had looked at his boy in the

grip of the fiend, and had wrung his hands in despair that he could not

do anything for him! That same sense of absolute impotence is one which

we all, if we rightly understand what we need, must cherish. Can you

forgive your own sins? Can you cleanse your own nature? Can you make

yourselves other than you are by any effort of volition, or by any

painfulness of discipline? To a certain small extent you can. In regard

to superficial culture and eradication, your careful husbandry of your

own wills may do much, but you cannot deal with your deepest needs. If

we understand what is required, in order to bring one soul into harmony

and fellowship with God, we shall recognise that we ourselves can do

nothing to save, and little to help ourselves. Every man his own

redeemer,' which is the motto of some people nowadays, may do very well

for fine weather and for superficial experience, but when the storm

comes it proves a poor refuge, like the gay pavilions that they put up

for festivals, which are all right whilst the sun is shining and the

flags are fluttering, but are wretched shelters when the rain beats and

the wind howls. We can do nothing for ourselves. The recognition of our

own helplessness is the obverse, so to speak, and underside, of

confidence in the divine help. The coin, as it were, has its two faces.

On the one is written, Trust in the Lord'; on the other is written,

Nothing in myself.' A drowning man, if he tries to help himself, only

encumbers his would-be rescuer, and may drown him too. The truest help

he can give is to let the strong arm that has cleft the waters for his

sake fling itself around him and bear him safe to land. So, eager

desire after offered blessings and consciousness of my own impotence to

secure them--these are the initial steps of faith.

And the last of the elements here is, listening to the calm assurance

of Jesus Christ: If Thou canst! Do not say that to Me; I can, and

because I can, all things are possible for thee to receive.' In like

manner He stands at the door of each of our hearts and speaks to each

of our needs, and says: I can satisfy it. Rest for thy soul, cleansing

for thy sins, satisfaction for thy desires, guidance for thy

pilgrimage, power for thy duties, patience in thy sufferings--all these

will come to thee, if thou layest hold of My hand.' His assurance helps

trembling confidence to be born, and out of doubt the great calm word

of the Master smites the fire of trust. And we, dear brethren, if we

will listen to Him, shall surely find in Him all that we need. Think

how marvellous it is that this Jewish peasant should plant Himself in

the front of humanity, over against the burdened, sinful race of men,

and pledge Himself to forgive and to cleanse their sins, to bear all

their sicknesses, to be their strength in weakness, their comfort in

sorrow, the rest of their hearts, their heaven upon earth, their life

in death, their glory in heaven, and their all in all; and not only

should pledge Himself, but in the blessed experience of millions should

have more than fulfilled all that He promised. They trusted in Him, and

were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed.' Will you not answer

His sovereign word of promise with your Lord, I believe'?

II. Then, secondly, we have here the infancy of faith.

As soon as the consciousness of belief dawned upon the father, and the

effort to exercise it was put forth, there sprang up the consciousness

of its imperfection. He would never have known that he did not believe

unless he had tried to believe. So it is in regard to all excellences

and graces of character. The desire of possessing some feeble degree of

any virtue or excellence, and the effort to put it forth, is the surest

way of discovering how little of it we have. On the other side, sorrow

for the lack of some form of goodness is itself a proof of the partial

possession, in some rudimentary and incipient form, of that goodness.

The utterly lazy man never mourns over his idleness; it is only the one

that would fain work harder than he does, and already works tolerably

hard, who does so. So the little spark of faith in this man's heart,

like a taper in a cavern, showed the abysses of darkness that lay

unillumined round about it.

Thus, then, in its infancy, faith may and does coexist with much

unfaith and doubt. The same state of mind, looked at from its two

opposite ends, as it were, may be designated faith or unbelief; just as

a piece of shot silk, according to the angle at which you hold it, may

show you only the bright colours of its warp or the dark ones of its

weft. When you are travelling in a railway train with the sun streaming

in at the windows, if you look out on the one hand you will see the

illumined face of every tree and blade of grass and house; and if you

look out on the other, you will see their shadowed side. And so the

same landscape may seem to be all lit up by the sunshine of belief, or

to be darkened by the gloom of distrust. If we consider how great and

how perfect ought to be our confidence, to bear any due proportion to

the firmness of that upon which it is built, we shall not be slow to

believe that through life there will always be the presence in us, more

or less, of these two elements. There will be all degrees of progress

between the two extremes of infantile and mature faith.

There follows from that thought this practical lesson, that the

discovery of much unbelief should never make a man doubt the reality or

genuineness of his little faith. We are all apt to write needlessly

bitter things against ourselves when we get a glimpse of the

incompleteness of our Christian life and character. But there is no

reason why a man should fancy that he is a hypocrite because he finds

out that he is not a perfect believer. But, on the other hand, let us

remember that the main thing is not the maturity, but the progressive

character, of faith. It was most natural that this man in our text, at

the very first moment when he began to put his confidence in Jesus

Christ as able to heal his child, should be aware of much tremulousness

mingling with it. But is it not most unnatural that there should be the

same relative proportion of faith and unbelief in the heart and

experience of men who have long professed to be Christians? You do not

expect the infant to have adult limbs, but you do expect it to grow.

True, faith at its beginning may be like a grain of mustard seed, but

if the grain of mustard seed be alive it will grow to a great tree,

where all the fowls of the air can lodge in the branches. Oh! it is a

crying shame and sin that in all Christian communities there should be

so many grey-headed babies, men who have for years and years been

professing to be Christ's followers, and whose faith is but little, if

at all, stronger--nay! perhaps is even obviously weaker--than it was in

the first days of their profession. Ye have need of milk, and not of

strong meat,' very many of you. And the vitality of your faith is made

suspicious, not because it is feeble, but because it is not growing

stronger.

III. Notice the cry of infant faith.

Help Thou mine unbelief' may have either of two meanings. The man's

desire was either that his faith should be increased and his unbelief

helped' by being removed by Christ's operation upon his spirit, or that

Christ would help' him and his boy by healing the child, though the

faith which asked the blessing was so feeble that it might be called

unbelief. There is nothing in the language or in the context to

determine which of these two meanings is intended; we must settle it by

our own sense of what would be most likely under the circumstances. To

me it seems extremely improbable that, when the father's whole soul was

absorbed in the healing of his son, he should turn aside to ask for the

inward and spiritual process of having his faith strengthened. Rather

he said, Heal my child, though it is unbelief as much as faith that

asks Thee to do it.'

The lesson is that, even when we are conscious of much tremulousness in

our faith, we have a right to ask and expect that it shall be answered.

Weak faith is faith. The tremulous hand does touch. The cord may be

slender as a spider's web that binds a heart to Jesus, but it does

bind. The poor woman in the other miracle who put out her wasted

finger-tip, coming behind Him in the crowd, and stealthily touching the

hem of His garment, though it was only the end of her finger-nail that

was laid on the robe, carried away with her the blessing. And so the

feeblest faith joins the soul, in the measure of its strength, to Jesus

Christ.

But let us remember that, whilst thus the cry of infant faith is heard,

the stronger voice of stronger faith is more abundantly heard. Jesus

Christ once for all laid down the law when He said to one of the

suppliants at His feet, According to your faith be it unto you.' The

measure of our belief is the measure of our blessing. The wider you

open the door, the more angels will crowd into it, with their white

wings and their calm faces. The bore of the pipe determines the amount

of water that flows into the cistern. Every man gets, in the measure in

which he desires. Though a tremulous hand may hold out a cup into which

Jesus Christ will not refuse to pour the wine of the kingdom, yet the

tremulous hand will spill much of the blessing; and he that would have

the full enjoyment of the mercies promised, and possible, must ask in

faith, nothing wavering.' The sensitive paper which records the hours

of sunshine in a day has great gaps upon its line of light answering to

the times when clouds have obscured the sun; and the communication of

blessings from God is intermittent, if there be intermittency of faith.

If you desire an unbroken line of mercy, joy, and peace, keep up an

unbroken continuity of trustful confidence.

IV. Lastly, we have here the education of faith.

Christ paid no heed in words to the man's confession of unbelief, but

proceeded to do the work which answered his prayer in both its possible

meanings. He responded to imperfect confidence by His perfect work of

cure, and, by that perfect work of cure, He strengthened the imperfect

confidence which it had answered.

Thus He educates us by His answers--His over-answers--to our poor

desires; and the abundance of His gifts rebukes the poverty of our

petitions more emphatically than any words of remonstrance beforehand

could have done. He does not lecture us into faith, but He blesses us

into it. When the Apostle was sinking in the flood, Jesus Christ said

no word of reproach until He had grasped him with His strong hand and

held him safe. And then, when the sustaining touch thrilled through all

the frame, then, and not till then, He said--as we may fancy, with a

smile on His face that the moonlight showed--as knowing how

unanswerable His question was, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst

thou doubt?' That is how He will deal with us if we will;

over-answering our tremulous petitions, and so teaching us to hope more

abundantly that we shall praise Him more and more.'

The disappointments, the weaknesses, the shameful defeats which come

when our confidence fails, are another page of His lesson-book. The

same Apostle of whom I have been speaking got that lesson when,

standing on the billows, and, instead of looking at Christ, looking at

their wrath and foam, his heart failed him, and because his heart

failed him he began to sink. If we turn away from Jesus Christ, and

interrupt the continuity of our faith by calculating the height of the

breakers and the weight of the water that is in them, and what will

become of us when they topple over with their white crests upon our

heads, then gravity will begin to work, and we shall begin to sink. And

well for us if, when we have sunk as far as our knees, we look back

again to the Master and say, Lord, save me; I perish!' The weakness

which is our own when faith sleeps, and the rejoicing power which is

ours because it is His, when faith wakes, are God's education of it to

fuller and ampler degrees and depth. We shall lose the meaning of life,

and the best lesson that joy and sorrow, calm and storm, victory and

defeat, can give us, unless all these make us rooted and grounded in

faith.'

Dear friend, do you desire your truest good? Do you know that you

cannot win it, or fight for it to gain it, or do anything to obtain it,

in your own strength? Have you heard Jesus Christ saying to you, Come

. . . and I will give you rest'? Oh! I beseech you, do not turn away

from Him, but like this agonised father in our story, fall at His feet

with Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief,' and He will confirm

your feeble faith by His rich response.

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RECEIVING AND FORBIDDING

And He came to Capernaum: and being in the house He asked them, What

was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? 34. But they held

their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who

should be the greatest. 35. And He sat down, and called the Twelve, and

saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last

of all, and servant of all. 36. And He took a child, and set him in the

midst of them: and when He had taken him in His arms, He said unto

them, 37. Whosoever shall receive one of such children in My name,

receiveth Me: and whosoever shall receive Me, receiveth not Me, but Him

that sent Me. 38. And John answered Him, saying, Master, we saw one

casting out devils in Thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad

him, because he followeth not us. 39. But Jesus said, Forbid him not:

for there is no man which shall do a miracle in My name, that can

lightly speak evil of Me. 40. For he that is not against us is on our

part. 41. For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in My

name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not

lose his reward. 42. And whosoever shall offend one of these little

ones that believe in Me, it is better for him that a millstone were

hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.'--Mark ix. 33-42.

Surely the disciples might have found something better to talk about on

the road from Caesarea, where they had heard from Jesus of His

sufferings, than this miserable wrangle about rank! Singularly enough,

each announcement of the Cross seems to have provoked something of the

sort. Probably they understood little of His meaning, but hazily

thought that the crisis was at hand when He should establish the

kingdom; and so their ambition, rather than their affection, was

stirred. Perhaps, too, the dignity bestowed on Peter after his

confession, and the favour shown to the three witnesses of the

Transfiguration, may have created jealousy. Matthew makes the quarrel

to have been about future precedence; Mark about present. The one was

striven for with a view to the other. How chill it must have struck on

Christ's heart, that those who loved Him best cared so much more for

their own petty superiority than for His sorrows!

I. Note the law of service as the true greatness (verses 33-35). When

He was in the house, He asked them.' He had let them talk as they would

on the road, walking alone in front, and they keeping, as they thought,

out of ear-shot; but, when at rest together in the house (perhaps

Peter's) where He lived in Capernaum, He lets them see, by the question

and still more by the following teaching, that He knew what He asked,

and needed no answer. The tongues that had been so loud on the road

were dumb in the house--silenced by conscience. His servants still do

and say many things on the road which they would not do if they saw Him

close beside them, and they sometimes fancy that these escape Him. But

when they are in the house' with Him, they will find that He knew all

that was going on; and when He asks the account of it, they, too, will

be speechless. A thing which does not appear wrong by itself shows its

true character when brought to the judgment of God and the knowledge of

Jesus Christ. ( Bengel).

Christ deals with the fault with much solemnity, seating Himself, as

Teacher and Superior, and summoning the whole Twelve to hear. We do not

enter on the difficult question of the relation of Mark's report of our

Lord's words to those of the other Evangelists, but rather try to bring

out the significance of their form and connection here. Note, then,

that here we have not so much the nature of true greatness, as the road

to it. If any man would be first,' he is to be least and servant, and

thereby he will reach his aim. Of course, that involves the conception

of the nature of true greatness as service, but still the distinction

is to be kept in view. Further, last of all' is not the same as servant

of all.' The one phrase expresses humility; the other, ministry. An

indolent humility, so very humble that it does nothing for others, and

a service which if not humble, are equally incomplete, and neither

leads to or is the greatness at which alone a Christian ought to aim.

There are two paradoxes here. The lowest is the highest, the servant is

the chief; and they may be turned round with equal truth--the highest

is the lowest, and the chief is the servant. The former tells us how

things really are, and what they look like, when seen from the centre

by His eye. The latter prescribes the duties and responsibilities of

high position. In fact and truth, to sink is the way to rise, and to

serve is the way to rule--only the rise and the rule are of another

sort than contents worldly ambition, and the Christian must rectify his

notions of what loftiness and greatness are. On the other hand,

distinguishing gifts of mind, heart, leisure, position, possessions, or

anything else, are given us for others, and bind us to serve. Both

things follow from the nature of Christ's kingdom, which is a kingdom

of love; for in love the vulgar distinctions of higher and lower are

abolished, and service is delight. This is no mere pretty sentiment,

but a law which grips hard and cuts deep. Christ's servants have not

learned it yet, and the world heeds it not; but, till it governs all

human society, and pulls up ambition, domination, and pride of place by

the roots, society will groan under ills which increase with the

increase of wealth and culture in the hands of a selfish few.

II. Note the exhibition of the law in a life. Children are quick at

finding out who loves them, and there would always be some hovering

near for a smile from Christ. With what eyes of innocent wonder the

child would look up at Him, as He gently set him there, in the open

space in front of Himself! Mark does not record any accompanying words,

and none were needed, The unconsciousness of rank, the spontaneous

acceptance of inferiority, the absence of claims to consideration and

respect, which naturally belong to childhood as it ought to be, and

give it winningness and grace, are the marks of a true disciple, and

are the more winning in such because they are not of nature, but

regained by self-abnegation. What the child is we have to become. This

child was the example of one-half of the law, being least of all,' and

perfectly contented to be so; but the other half was not shown in him,

for his little hands could do but small service. Was there, then, no

example in this scene of that other requirement? Surely there was; for

the child was not left standing, shy, in the midst, but, before

embarrassment became weeping, was caught up in Christ's arms, and

folded to His heart. He had been taken as the instance of humility, and

he then became the subject of tender ministry. Christ and he divided

the illustration of the whole law between them, and the very inmost

nature of true service was shown in our Lord's loving clasp and

soothing pressure to His heart. It is as if He had said, Look! this is

how you must serve; for you cannot help the weak unless you open your

arms and hearts to them.' Jesus, with the child held to His bosom, is

the living law of service, and the child nestling close to Him, because

sure of His love, is the type of the trustful affection which we must

evoke if we are to serve or help. This picture has gone straight to the

hearts of men; and who can count the streams of tenderness and

practical kindliness of which it has been the source? Christ goes on to

speak of the child, not as the example of service, but of being served.

The deep words carry us into blessed mysteries which will recompense

the lowly servants, and lift them high in the kingdom. Observe the

precision of the language, both as regards the persons received and the

motive of reception. One of such little children' means those who are

thus lowly, unambitious, and unexacting. In My name' defines the motive

as not being simple humanity or benevolence, but the distinct

recognition of Christ's command and loving obedience to His revealed

character. No doubt, natural benevolence has its blessings for those

who exercise it; but that which is here spoken of is something much

deeper than nature, and wins a far higher reward.

That reward is held forth in unfathomable words, of which we can but

skim the surface. They mean more than that such little ones are so

closely identified with Him that, in His love, He reckons good done to

them as done to Him. That is most blessedly true. Nor is it true only

because He lovingly reckons the deed as done to Him, though it really

is not; but, by reason of the derived life which all His children

possess from Him, they are really parts of Himself; and in that most

real though mystic unity, what is done to them is, in fact, done to

Him. Further, if the service be done in His name, then, on whomsoever

it may be done, it is done to Him. This great saying unveils the true

sacredness and real recipient of all Christian service. But more than

that is in the words. When we receive' Christ's little ones by help and

loving ministry, we receive Him, and in Him God, for joy and strength.

Unselfish deeds in His name open the heart for more of Christ and God,

and bring on the doer the blessing of fuller insight, closer communion,

more complete assimilation to his Lord. Therefore such service is the

road to the true superiority in His kingdom, which depends altogether

on the measure of His own nature which has flowed into our emptiness.

III. The Apostles' conscience-stricken confession of their breach of

the law (verses 38-40). Peter is not spokesman this time, but John,

whose conscience was more quickly pricked. At first sight, the

connection of his interruption with the theme of the discourse seems to

be merely the recurrence of the phrase, in Thy name'; but, besides

that, there is an obvious contrast between receiving' and forbidding.'

The Apostle is uneasy when he remembers what they had done, and, like

an honest man, he states the case to Christ, half-confessing, and

half-asking for a decision. He begins to think that perhaps the man

whom they had silenced was one such little child,' and had deserved

more sympathetic treatment. How he came to be so true a disciple as to

share in the power of casting out devils, and yet not to belong to the

closer followers of Jesus, we do not know, and need not guess. So it

was; and John feels, as he tells the story, that perhaps their motives

had not been so much their Master's honour as their own. He followeth

not us,' and yet he is trenching on our prerogatives. The greater fact

that he and they followed Christ was overshadowed by the lesser that he

did not follow them. There spoke the fiery spirit which craved the

commission to burn up a whole village, because of its inhospitality.

There spoke the spirit of ecclesiastical intolerance, which in all ages

has masqueraded as zeal for Christ, and taken following us' and

following Him' to be the same thing. But there spoke, too, a glimmering

consciousness that gagging men was not precisely receiving' them, and

that if in Thy name' so sanctified deeds, perhaps the unattached

exorcist, who could cast out demons by it, was a little one' to be

taken to their hearts, and not an enemy to be silenced. Pity that so

many listen to the law, and do not, like John, feel it prick them!

Christ forbids such forbidding,' and thereby sanctions irregularities'

and unattached' work, which have always been the bugbears of sticklers

for ecclesiastical uniformity, and have not seldom been the life of

Christianity. That authoritative, unconditional forbid him not' ought,

long ago, to have rung the funeral knell of intolerance, and to have

ended the temptation to idolise conformity,' and to confound union to

organised forms of the Christian community with union to Christ. But

bigotry dies hard. The reasons appended serve to explain the position

of the man in question. If he had wrought miracles in Christ's name, he

must have had some faith in it; and his experience of its power would

deepen that. So there was no danger of his contradicting himself by

speaking against Jesus. The power of faith in the Name' to hallow

deeds, the certainty that rudimentary faith will, when exercised,

increase, the guarantee of experience as sure to lead to blessing from

Jesus, are all involved in this saying. But its special importance is

as a reason for the disciples' action. Because the man's action gives

guarantees for his future, they are not to silence him. That implies

that they are only to forbid those who do speak evil of Christ; and

that to all others, even if they have not reached the full perception

of truth, they are to extend patient forbearance and guidance. The

mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped'; but the mouth that

begins to stammer His name is to be taught and cherished.

Christ's second reason still more plainly claims the man for an ally.

Commentators have given themselves a great deal of trouble to reconcile

this saying with the other--He that is not with Me is against Me.' If

by reconciling is meant twisting both to mean the same thing, it cannot

be done. If preventing the appearance of contradiction is meant, it

does not seem necessary. The two sayings do not contradict, but they

complete, each other. They apply to different classes of persons, and

common-sense has to determine their application. This man did, in some

sense, believe in Jesus, and worked deeds that proved the power of the

Name. Plainly, such work was in the same direction as the Lord's and

the disciples'. Such a case is one for the application of tolerance.

But the principle must be limited by the other, else it degenerates

into lazy indifference. He that is not against us is for us,' if it

stood alone, would dissolve the Church, and destroy distinctions in

belief and practice which it would be fatal to lose. He that is not

with Me is against Me,' if it stood alone, would narrow sympathies, and

cramp the free development of life. We need both to understand and get

the good of either.

IV. We have the reward of receiving Christ's little ones set over

against the retribution that seizes those who cause them to stumble

(verses 41, 42). These verses seem to resume the broken thread of verse

37, whilst they also link on to the great principle laid down in verse

40. He that is not against' is for,' even if he only gives a cup of

water' to Christ's disciple because he is Christ's. That shows that

there is some regard for Jesus in him. It is a germ which may grow.

Such an one shall certainly have his reward. That does not mean that he

will receive it in a future life, but that here his deed shall bring

after it blessed consequences to himself. Of these, none will be more

blessed than the growing regard for the Name, which already is, in some

degree, precious to him. The faintest perception of Christ's beauty,

honestly lived out, will be increased. Every act strengthens its

motive. The reward of living our convictions is firmer and more

enlightened conviction. Note, too, that the person spoken of belongs to

the same class as the silenced exorcist, and that this reads the

disciples a further lesson. Jesus will look with love on the acts which

even a John wished to forbid. Note, also, that the disciples here are

the recipients of the kindness. They are no longer being taught to

receive the little ones,' but are taught that they themselves belong to

that class, and need kindly succour from these outsiders, whom they had

proudly thought to silence.

The awful, reticent words, which shadow forth and yet hide the fate of

those who cause the feeblest disciple to stumble, are not for us to

dilate upon. Jesus saw the realities of future retribution, and

deliberately declares that death is a less evil than such an act. The

little ones' are sacred because they are His. The same relation to Him

which made kindness to them so worthy of reward, makes harm to them so

worthy of punishment. Under the one lies an incipient love to Him;

under the other, a covert and perhaps scarcely conscious opposition. It

is devil's work to seduce simple souls from allegiance to Christ. There

are busy hands to-day laying stumbling-blocks in the way, especially of

young Christians--stumbling-blocks of doubt, of frivolity, of slackened

morality, and the like. It were better, says One who saw clearly into

that awful realm beyond, if a heavy millstone were knotted about their

necks, and they were flung into the deepest place of the lake that lay

before Him as he spoke. He does not speak exaggerated words; and if a

solemn strain of vehemence, unlike His ordinary calm, is audible here,

it is because what He knew, and did not tell, gave solemn earnestness

to His veiled and awe-inspiring prophecy of doom. What imagination

shall fill out the details of the worse than' which lurks behind that

better'?

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AN UNANSWERED QUESTION

What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?'--Mark ix.

33.

Was it not a strange time to squabble when they had just been told of

His death? Note--

I. The variations of feeling common to the disciples and to us all: one

moment exceeding sorrowful,' the next fighting for precedence.

II. Christ's divine insight into His servants' faults. This question

was put because He knew what the wrangle had been about. The disputants

did not answer, but He knew without an answer, as His immediately

following warnings show. How blessed to think that Psalm cxxxix.

applies to Him--There is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord! Thou

knowest it altogether,'

III. The compassion of Christ seeking to cure the sins He sees. His

question is not to rebuke, but to heal; so His perfect knowledge is

blended with perfect love.

IV. The test of evil. They were ashamed to tell Him the cause of their

dispute.

V. The method of cure. The presence of Christ is the end of strife and

of sin in general.

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SALTED WITH FIRE

Every one shall be salted with fire.'--Mark ix. 49.

Our Lord has just been uttering some of the most solemn words that ever

came from His gracious lips. He has been enjoining the severest

self-suppression, extending even to mutilation and excision of the eye,

the hand, or the foot, that might cause us to stumble. He has been

giving that sharp lesson on the ground of plain common sense and

enlightened self-regard. It is better, obviously, to live maimed than

to die whole. The man who elects to keep a mortified limb, and thereby

to lose life, is a suicide and a fool. It is a solemn thought that a

similar mad choice is possible in the moral and spiritual region.

To these stern injunctions, accompanied by the awful sanctions of that

consideration, our Lord appends the words of my text. They are obscure

and have often been misunderstood. This is not the place to enter on a

discussion of the various explanations that have been proposed of them.

A word or two is all that is needful to put us in possession of the

point of view from which I wish to lay them on your hearts at this

time.

I take the every one' of my text to mean not mankind generally, but

every individual of the class whom our Lord is addressing--that is to

say, His disciples. He is laying down the law for all Christians. I

take the paradox which brings together salting' and fire,' to refer,

not to salt as a means of communicating savour to food, but as a means

of preserving from putrefaction. And I take the fire' here to refer,

not to the same process which is hinted at in the awful preceding

words, the fire in not quenched,' but to be set in opposition to that

fire, and to mean something entirely different. There is a fire that

destroys, and there is a fire that preserves; and the alternative for

every man is to choose between the destructive and the conserving

influences. Christian disciples have to submit to be salted with fire,'

lest a worse thing befall them,

I. And so the first point that I would ask you to notice here is--that

fiery cleansing to which every Christian must yield.

Now I have already referred to the relation between the words of my

text and those immediately preceding, as being in some sense one of

opposition and contrast. I think we are put on the right track for

understanding the solemn words of this text if we remember the great

saying of John the Baptist, where, in precisely similar fashion, there

are set side by side the two conceptions of the chaff being cast into

the unquenchable fire (the same expression as in our text), and He

shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.'

The salting fire, then, which cleanses and preserves, and to which

every Christian soul must submit itself, to be purged thereby, is, as I

take it, primarily and fundamentally the fire of that Divine Spirit

which Christ Himself told us that He had come to cast upon the earth,

and yearned, in a passion of desire, to see kindled. The very frequent

use of the emblem in this same signification throughout Scripture, I

suppose I need not recall to you. It seems to me that the only worthy

interpretation of the words before us, which goes down into their

depths and harmonises with the whole of the rest of the teaching of

Scripture, is that which recognises these words of my text as no

unwelcome threat, as no bitter necessity, but as a joyful promise

bringing to men, laden and burdened with their sins, the good news that

it is possible for them to be purged from them entirely by the fiery

ministration of that Divine Spirit. Just as we take a piece of foul

clay and put it into the furnace, and can see, as it gets red-hot, the

stains melt away, as a cloud does in the blue, from its surface, so if

we will plunge ourselves into the influences of that divine power which

Christ has come to communicate to the world, our sin and all our

impurities will melt from off us, and we shall be clean. No amount of

scrubbing with soap and water will do it. The stain is a great deal too

deep for that, and a mightier solvent than any that we can apply, if

unaided and unsupplied from above, is needed to make us clean. Who can

bring a clean thing out of an unclean,' especially when the would-be

bringer is himself the unclean thing? Surely not one. Unless there be a

power ab extra, unparticipant of man's evils, and yet capable of

mingling with the evil man's inmost nature, and dealing with it, then I

believe that universal experience and our individual experience tell us

that there is no hope that we shall ever get rid of our transgressions.

Brethren, for a man by his own unaided effort, however powerful,

continuous, and wisely directed it may be, to cleanse himself utterly

from his iniquity, is as hopeless as it would be for him to sit down

with a hammer and a chisel and try by mechanical means to get all the

iron out of a piece of ironstone. The union is chemical, not

mechanical. And so hammers and chisels will only get a very little of

the metal out. The one solvent is fire. Put the obstinate crude ore

into your furnace, and get the temperature up, and the molten metal

will run clear. There should be mountains of scoriae, the dross and

relics of our abandoned sins, around us all.

If we desire to be delivered, let us go into the fire. It will burn up

all our evil, and it will burn up nothing else. Keep close to Christ.

Lay your hearts open to the hallowing influences of the motives and the

examples that lie in the story of His life and death. Seek for the

fiery touch of that transforming Spirit, and be sure that you quench

Him not, nor grieve Him. And then your weakness will be reinvigorated

by celestial powers, and the live coal upon your lips will burn up all

your iniquity.

But, subordinately to this deepest meaning, as I take it, of the great

symbol of our text, let me remind you of another possible application

of it, which follows from the preceding. God's Spirit cleanses men

mainly by raising their spirits to a higher temperature. For coldness

is akin to sin, and heavenly warmth is akin to righteousness.

Enthusiasm always ennobles, delivers men, even on the lower reaches of

life and conduct from many a meanness and many a sin. And when it

becomes a warmth of spirit kindled by the reception of the fire of God,

then it becomes the solvent which breaks the connection between me and

my evil. It is the cold Christian who makes no progress in conquering

his sin. The one who is filled with the love of God, and has the ardent

convictions and the burning enthusiasm which that love ought to produce

in our hearts, is the man who will conquer and eject his evils.

Nor must we forget that there is still another possible application of

the words. For whilst, on the one hand, the Divine Spirit's method of

delivering us is very largely that of imparting to us the warmth of

ardent, devout emotion; on the other hand, a part of this method is the

passing of us through the fiery trials and outward disciplines of life.

Every one shall be salted with fire' in that sense. And we have

learned, dear brethren, but little of the loving kindness of the Lord

if we are not able to say, I have grown more in likeness to Jesus

Christ by rightly accepted sorrows than by anything besides.' Be not

afraid of calamities; be not stumbled by disaster. Take the fiery trial

which is sent to you as being intended to bring about, at the last, the

discovery unto praise and honour and glory' of your faith, that is much

more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire.'

Every one shall be salted with fire,' the Christian law of life is,

Submit to the fiery cleansing. Alas! alas! for the many thousands of

professing Christians who are wrapping themselves in such thick folds

of non-conducting material that that fiery energy can only play on the

surface of their lives, instead of searching them to the depths. Do you

see to it, dear brethren, that you lay open your whole natures, down to

the very inmost roots, to the penetrating, searching, cleansing power

of that Spirit. And let us all go and say to Him, Search me, O God! and

try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me.'

II. Notice the painfulness of this fiery cleansing.

The same ideas substantially are conveyed in my text as are expressed,

in different imagery, by the solemn words that precede it. The salting

with fire' comes substantially to the same thing as the amputation of

the hand and foot, and the plucking out of the eye, that cause to

stumble. The metaphor expresses a painful process. It is no pleasant

thing to submit the bleeding stump to the actual cautery, and to press

it, all sensitive, upon the hot plate that will stop the flow of blood.

But such pain of shrinking nerves is to be borne, and to be courted, if

we are wise, rather than to carry the hand or the eye that led astray

unmutilated into total destruction. Surely that is common sense.

The process is painful because we are weak. The highest ideal of

Christian progress would be realised if one of the metaphors with which

our Lord expresses it were adequate to cover the whole ground, and we

grew as the wheat grows, first the blade, then the ear, after that the

full corn in the ear.' But the tranquillity of vegetable growth, and

the peaceful progress which it symbolises, are not all that you and I

have to expect. Emblems of a very different kind have to be associated

with that of the quiet serenity of the growing corn, in order to

describe all that a Christian man has to experience in the work of

becoming like his Master. It is a fight as well as a growth; it is a

building requiring our continuity of effort, as well as a growth. There

is something to be got rid of as well as much to be appropriated. We do

not only need to become better, we need to become less bad. Squatters

have camped on the land, and cling to it and hold it vi et armis; and

these have to be ejected before peaceful settlement is possible.

One might go on multiplying metaphors ad libitum, in order to bring out

the one thought that it needs huge courage to bear being sanctified,

or, if you do not like the theological word, to bear being made better.

It is no holiday task, and unless we are willing to have a great deal

that is against the grain done to us, and in us, and by us, we shall

never achieve it. We have to accept the pain. Desires have to be

thwarted, and that is not pleasant. Self has to be suppressed, and that

is not delightsome. A growing conviction of the depth of one's own evil

has to be cherished, and that is not a grateful thought for any of us.

Pains external, which are felt by reason of disciplinary sorrows, are

not worthy to be named in the same day as those more recondite and

inward agonies. But, brother, they are all light' as compared with the

exceeding weight of glory,' coming from conformity to the example of

our Master, which they prepare for us.

And so I bring you Christ's message: He will have no man to enlist in

His army under false pretences. He will not deceive any of us by

telling us that it is all easy work and plain sailing. Salting by fire

can never be other than to the worse self an agony, just because it is

to the better self a rapture. And so let us make up our minds that no

man is taken to heaven in his sleep, and that the road is a rough one,

judging from the point of view of flesh and sense; but though rough,

narrow, often studded with sharp edges, like the plough coulters that

they used to lay in the path in the old rude ordeals, it still leads

straight to the goal, and bleeding feet are little to pay for a seat at

Christ's right hand.

III. Lastly, notice the preservative result of this painful cleansing.

Our Lord brings together, in our text, as is often His wont, two

apparently contradictory ideas, in order, by the paradox, to fix our

attention the more vividly upon His words. Fire destroys; salt

preserves. They are opposites. But yet the opposites may be united in

one mighty reality, a fire which preserves and does not destroy. The

deepest truth is that the cleansing fire which the Christ will give us

preserves us, because it destroys that which is destroying us. If you

kill the germs of putrefaction in a hit of dead flesh, you preserve the

flesh; and if you bring to bear upon a man the power which will kill

the thing that is killing him, its destructive influence is the

condition of its conserving one.

And so it is, in regard to that great spiritual influence which Jesus

Christ is ready to give to every one of us. It slays that which is

slaying us, for our sins destroy in us the true life of a man, and make

us but parables of walking death. When the three Hebrews were cast into

the fiery furnace in Babylon, the flames burned nothing but their

bonds, and they walked at liberty in the fire. And so it will be with

us. We shall be preserved by that which slays the sins that would

otherwise slay us.

Let me lay on your hearts before I close the solemn alternative to

which I have already referred, and which is suggested by the connection

of my text with the preceding words. There is a fire that destroys and

is not quenched. Christ's previous words are much too metaphorical for

us to build dogmatic definitions upon. But Jesus Christ did not

exaggerate. If here and now sin has so destructive an effect upon a

man, O, who will venture to say that he knows the limits of its

murderous power in that future life, when retribution shall begin with

new energy and under new conditions? Brethren, whilst I dare not

enlarge, I still less dare to suppress; and I ask you to remember that

not I, or any man, but Jesus Christ Himself, has put before each of us

this alternative--either the fire unquenchable, which destroys a man,

or the merciful fire, which slays his sins and saves him alive.

Social reformers, philanthropists, you that have tried and failed to

overcome your evil, and who feel the loathly thing so intertwisted with

your being that to pluck it from your heart is to tear away the very

heart's walls themselves, here is a hope for you. Closely as our evil

is twisted in with the fibres of our character, there is a hand that

can untwine the coils, and cast away the sin, and preserve the soul.

And although we sometimes feel as if our sinfulness and our sin were so

incorporated with ourselves that it made oneself, with a man's head and

a serpent's tail, let us take the joyful assurance that if we trust

ourselves to Christ, and open our hearts to His power, we can shake off

the venomous beast into the fire and live a fuller life, because the

fire has consumed that which would otherwise have consumed us.

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SALT IN YOURSELVES'

Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.'--Mark ix.

50.

In the context salt' is employed to express the preserving, purifying,

divine energy which is otherwise spoken of as fire.' The two emblems

produce the same result. They both salt--that is, they cleanse and

keep. And if in the one we recognise the quick energy of the Divine

Spirit as the central idea, no less are we to see the same typified

under a slightly different aspect in the other. The fire transforms

into its own substance and burns away all the grosser particles. The

salt arrests corruption, keeps off destruction, and diffuses its

sanative influence through all the particles of the substance with

which it comes in contact. And in both metaphors it is the operation of

God's cleansing Spirit, in its most general form, that is set forth,

including all the manifold ways by which God deals with us to purge us

from our iniquity, to free us from the death which treads close on the

heels of wrongdoing, the decomposition and dissolution which surely

follow on corruption.

This the disciples are exhorted to have in themselves that they may be

at peace one with another. Perhaps we shall best discover the whole

force of this saying by dealing--

I. With the symbol itself and the ideas derived from it.

The salt cleanses, arrests corruption which impends over the dead

masses, sweetens and purifies, and so preserves from decay and

dissolution. It works by contact, and within the mass. It thus stands

as an emblem of the cleansing which God brings, both in respect (a) to

that on which it operates, (b) to the purpose of its application, and

(c) to the manner in which it produces its effects.

(a) That on which it operates.

There is implied here a view of human nature, not flattering but true.

It is compared with a dead thing, in which the causes that bring about

corruption are already at work, with the sure issue of destruction.

This in its individual application comes to the assertion of sinful

tendency and actual sin as having its seat and root in all our souls,

so that the present condition is corruption, and the future issue is

destruction. The consequent ideas are that any power which is to

cleanse must come from without, not from within; that purity is not to

be won by our own efforts, and that there is no disposition in human

nature to make these efforts. There is no recuperative power in human

nature. True, there may be outward reformation of habits, etc., but, if

we grasp the thought that the taproot of sin is selfishness, this

impotence becomes clearer, and it is seen that sin affects all our

being, and that therefore the healing must come from beyond us.

(b) The purpose--namely, cleansing.

In salt we may include the whole divine energy; the Word, the Christ,

the Spirit. So the intention of the Gospel is mainly to make clean.

Preservation is a consequence of that.

(c) The manner of its application.

Inward, penetrating, by contact; but mainly the great peculiarity of

Christian ethics is that the inner life is dealt with first, the will

and the heart, and afterwards the outward conduct.

II. The part which we have to take in this cleansing process.

Have salt' is a command; and this implies that while all the cleansing

energy comes from God, the working of it on our souls depends on

ourselves.

(a) Its original reception depends on our faith.

The salt' is here, but our contact with it is established by our

acceptance of it. There is no magical cleansing; but it must be

received within if we would share in its operation.

(b) Its continuous energy is not secured without our effort.

Let us just recall the principle already referred to, that the salt'

implies the whole cleansing divine energies, and ask what are these?

The Bible variously speaks of men as being cleansed by the blood of

Christ,' by the truth,' by the Spirit.' Now, it is not difficult to

bring all these into one focus, viz., that the Spirit of God cleanses

us by bringing the truth concerning Christ to bear on our

understandings and hearts.

We are sanctified in proportion as we are coming under the influence of

Christian truth, which, believed by our understandings and our hearts,

supplies motives to our wills which lead us to holiness by copying the

example of Christ.

Hence the main principle is that the cleansing energy operates on us in

proportion as we are influenced by the truths of the Gospel.

Again, it works in proportion as we seek for, and submit to, the

guidance of God's Holy Spirit.

In proportion as we are living in communion with Christ.

In proportion as we seek to deny ourselves and put away those evil

things which quench the Spirit.'

This great grace, then, is not ours without our own effort. No original

endowment is enough to keep us right. There must be the daily contact

with, and constant renewing of the Holy Ghost. Hence arises a solemn

appeal to all Christians.

Note the independence of the Christian character.

In yourselves.' The water that I shall give him shall be in him a

fountain,' etc. Not, therefore, derived from the world, nor at

second-hand from other men, but you have access to it for yourselves.

See that you use the gift. Hold fast that which thou hast,' for there

are enemies to withstand--carelessness, slothfulness, and

self-confidence, etc.

III. The relation to one another of those who possess this energy.

In proportion as Christians have salt in themselves, they will be at

peace with one another. Remember that all sin is selfishness; therefore

if we are cleansed from it, that which leads to war, alienation, and

coldness will be removed. Even in this world there will be an

anticipatory picture of the perfect peace which will abound when all

are holy. Even now this great hope should make our mutual Christian

relations very sweet and helpful.

Thus emerges the great principle that the foundation of the only real

love among men must be laid in holiness of heart and life. Where the

Spirit of God is working on a heart, there the seeds of evil passions

are stricken out. The causes of enmity and disturbance are being

removed. Men quarrel with each other because their pride is offended,

or because their passionate desires after earthly things are crossed by

a successful rival, or because they deem themselves not sufficiently

respected by others. The root of all strife is self-love. It is the

root of all sin. The cleansing which takes away the root removes in the

same proportion the strife which grows from it. We should not be so

ready to stand on our rights if we remembered how we come to have any

hopes at all. We should not be so ready to take offence if we thought

more of Him who is not soon angry. All the train of alienations,

suspicions, earthly passions, which exist in our minds and are sure to

issue in quarrels or bad blood, will be put down if we have salt in

ourselves.'

This makes a very solemn appeal to Christian men. The Church is the

garden where this peace should flourish. The disgrace of the Church is

its envyings, jealousies, ill-natured scandal, idle gossip, love of

preeminence, willingness to impute the worst possible motives to one

another, sharp eyes for our brother's failings and none for our own. I

am not pleading for any mawkish sentimentality, but for a manly

peacefulness which comes from holiness. The holiest natures are always

the most generous.

What a contrast the Church ought to present to the prevailing tone in

the world! Does it? Why not? Because we do not possess the salt.' The

dove flees from the cawing of rooks and the squabbling of kites and

hawks.

The same principle applies to all our human affections. Our loves of

all sorts are safe only when they are pure. Contrast the society based

on common possession of the one Spirit with the companionships which

repose on sin, or only on custom or neighbourhood. In all these there

are possibilities of moral peril.

The same principle intensified gives us a picture of heaven and of

hell. In the one are the solemn troops and sweet societies'; in the

other, no peace, no confidence, no bonds, only isolation, because sin

which is selfishness lies at the foundation of the awful condition.

Friends, without that salt our souls are dead and rotting. Here is the

great cure. Make it your own. So purified, you will be preserved, but,

on the other hand, unchecked sin leads to quick destruction.

The dead, putrefying carcass--what a picture of a soul abandoned to

evil and fit only for Gehenna!

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CHILDREN AND CHILDLIKE MEN

And they brought young children to Him, that He should touch them: and

His disciples rebuked those that brought them. 14. But when Jesus saw

it, He was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little

children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the

kingdom of God. 15. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive

the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.'

--Mark x. 13-15.

It was natural that the parents should have wanted Christ's blessing,

so that they might tell their children in later days that His hand had

been laid on their heads, and that He had prayed for them. And Christ

did not think of it as a mere superstition. The disciples were not so

akin to the children as He was, and they were a great deal more tender

of His dignity than He. They thought of this as an interruption

disturbing their high intercourse with Christ. These children are

always in the way, this is tiresome,' etc.

I. Christ blessing children.

It is a beautiful picture: the great Messiah with a child in His arms.

We could not think of Moses or of Paul in such an attitude. Without it,

we should have wanted one of the sweetest, gentlest, most human traits

in His character; and how world-wide in its effect that act has been!

How many a mother has bent over her child with deeper love; how many a

parent has felt the sacredness of the trust more vividly; how many a

mother has been drawn nearer to Christ; and how many a little child has

had childlike love to Him awakened by it; how much of practical

benevolence and of noble sacrifice for children's welfare, how many

great institutions, have really sprung from this one deed! And, if we

turn from its effects to its meaning, it reveals Christ's love for

children:--in its human side, as part of His character as man; in its

deeper aspect as a revelation of the divine nature. It corrects

dogmatic errors by making plain that, prior to all ceremonies or to

repentance and faith, little children are loved and blessed by Him.

Unconscious infants as these were folded in His arms and love. It puts

away all gloomy and horrible thoughts which men have had about the

standing of little children.

This is an act of Christ to infants expressive of His love to them, His

care over them, their share in His salvation. Baptism is an act of

man's, a symbol of his repentance and dying to sin and rising to a new

life in Christ, a profession of his faith, an act of obedience to his

Lord. It teaches nothing as to the relation of infants to the love of

Jesus or to salvation. It does not follow that because that love is

most sure and precious, baptism must needs be a sign of it. The

question, what does baptism mean, must be determined by examination of

texts which speak about baptism; not by a side-light from a text which

speaks about something else. There is no more reason for making baptism

proclaim that Jesus Christ loves children than for making it proclaim

that two and two make four.

II. The child's nearness to Christ.

Of such is the kingdom.' Except ye be converted and become like little

children,' etc. Now this does not refer to innocence; for, as a matter

of fact, children are not innocent, as all schoolmasters and nurses

know, whatever sentimental poets may say. Innocence is not a

qualification for admission to the kingdom. And yet it is true that

heaven lies about us in our infancy,' and that we are further off from

it than when we were children. Nor does it mean that children are

naturally the subjects of the kingdom, but only that the

characteristics of the child are those which the man must have, in

order to enter the kingdom; that their natural disposition is such as

Christ requires to be directed to Him; or, in other words, that

childhood has a special adaptation to Christianity. For instance, take

dependence, trust, simplicity, unconsciousness, and docility.

These are the very characteristics of childhood, and these are the very

emotions of mind and heart which Christianity requires. Add the child's

strong faculty of imagination and its implicit belief; making the form

of Christianity as the story of a life so easy to them. And we may add

too: the absence of intellectual pride; the absence of the habit of

dallying with moral truth. Everybody is to the child either a good' man

or a bad.' They have an intense realisation of the unseen; an absence

of developed vices and hard worldliness; a faculty of living in the

present, free from anxious care and worldly hearts. But while thus they

have special adaptation for receiving, they too need to come to Christ.

These characteristics do not make Christians. They are to be directed

to Christ. Suffer them to come unto Me,' the youngest child needs to,

can, ought to, come to Christ. And how beautiful their piety is, Out of

the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise.' Their

fresh, unworn trebles struck on Christ's ear. Children ought to grow up

in Christian households, innocent from much transgression.' We ought to

expect them to grow up Christian.

III. The child and the Church.

The child is a pattern to us men. We are to learn of them as well as

teach them; what they are naturally, we are to strive to become, not

childish but childlike. Even as a weaned child' (see Psalm cxxxi.). The

child-spirit is glorified in manhood. It is possible for us to retain

it, and lose none of the manhood. In malice be ye children, but in

understanding be men.' The spirit of the kingdom is that of immortal

youth.

The children are committed to our care.

The end of all training and care is that they should by voluntary act

draw near to Him. This should be the aim in Sunday schools, for

instance, and in families, and in all that we do for the poor around

us.

See that we do not hinder their coming. This is a wide principle, viz.,

not to do anything which may interfere with those who are weaker and

lower than we are finding their way to Jesus. The Church, and we as

individual Christians, too often hinder this coming.'

Do not hinder by the presentation of the Gospel in a repellent form,

either hardly dogmatic or sour.

Do not hinder by the requirement of such piety as is unnatural to a

child.

Do not hinder by inconsistencies. This is a warning for Christian

parents in particular.

Do not hinder by neglect. Despise not one of these little ones.'

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ALMOST A DISCIPLE

And when He was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and

kneeled to Him, and asked Him. Good Master, what shall I do that I may

inherit eternal life! 18. And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou Me

good! there is none good but one, that is, God. 19. Thou knowest the

commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not

bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. 20. And

he answered and said unto Him, Master, all these have I observed from

my youth, 21. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him,

One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give

to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, take up

the cross, and follow Me. 22. And he was sad at that saying, and went

away grieved: for he had great possessions. 23. And Jesus looked round

about and saith unto His disciples, How hardly shall they that have

riches enter into the kingdom of God! 24. And the disciples were

astonished at His words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto

them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter

into the kingdom of God! 25. It is easier for a camel to go through the

eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

26. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves,

Who then can be saved? 27. And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men

it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are

possible.'--Mark x. 17-27.

There were courage, earnestness, and humility in this young ruler's

impulsive casting of himself at Christ's feet in the way, with such a

question. He was not afraid to recognise a teacher in Him whom his

class scorned and hated; he was deeply sincere in his wish to possess

eternal life, and in his belief that he was ready to do whatever was

necessary for that end; he bowed himself as truly as he bent his knees

before Jesus, and the noble enthusiasm of youth breathed in his

desires, his words, and his gesture.

But his question betrayed the defect which poisoned the much that was

right and lovable in him. He had but a shallow notion of what was

good,' as is indicated by his careless ascription of goodness to one of

whom he knew so little as he did of Jesus, and by his conception that

it was a matter of deeds. He is too sure of himself; for he thinks that

he is ready and able to do all good deeds, if only they are pointed out

to him.

How little he understood the resistance of the mind of the flesh' to

discerned duty! Probably he had had no very strong inclinations to

contend against, in living the respectable life that had been his. It

is only when we row against the stream that we find out how fast it

runs. He was wrong about the connection of good deeds and eternal life,

for he thought of them as done by himself, and so of buying it by his

own efforts. Fatal errors could not have been condensed in briefer

compass, or presented in conjunction with more that is admirable, than

in his eager question, asked so modestly and yet so presumptuously.

Our Lord answers with a coldness which startles; but it was meant to

rouse, like a dash of icy water flung in the face. Why callest thou Me

good?' is more than a waving aside of a compliment, or a lesson in

accuracy of speech. It rebukes the young man's shallow conception of

goodness, as shown by the facility with which he bestowed the epithet.

None is good save one, even God,' cuts up by the roots his notion of

the possibility of self-achieved goodness, since it traces all human

goodness to its source in God. If He is the only good, then we cannot

perform good acts by our own power, but must receive power from Him.

How, then, can any man inherit eternal life' by good deeds, which he is

only able to do because God has poured some of His own goodness into

him? Jesus shatters the young man's whole theory, as expressed in his

question, at one stroke.

But while His reply bears directly on the errors in the question, it

has a wider significance. Either Jesus is here repudiating the notion

of His own sinlessness, and acknowledging, in contradiction to every

other disclosure of His self-consciousness, that He too was not through

and through good, or else He is claiming to be filled with God, the

source of all goodness, in a wholly unique manner. It is a tremendous

alternative, but one which has to be faced. While one is thankful if

men even imperfectly apprehend the character and nature of Jesus, one

cannot but feel that the question may fairly be put to the many who

extol the beauty of His life, and deny His divinity, Why callest thou

Me good?' Either He is God manifest in the flesh,' or He is not good.'

The remainder of Christ's answer tends to deepen the dawning conviction

of the impossibility of meriting eternal life by acts of goodness,

apart from dependence on God. He refers to the second half of the

Decalogue only, not as if the first were less important, but because

the breaches of the second are more easily brought to consciousness. In

thus answering, Jesus takes the standpoint of the law, but for the

purpose of bringing to the very opposite conviction from that which the

young ruler expresses in reply. He declares that he has kept them all

from his youth. Jesus would have had him confess that in them was a

code too high to be fully obeyed. By the law is the knowledge of sin,'

but it had not done its work in this young man. His shallow notion of

goodness besets and blinds him still. He is evidently thinking about

external deeds, and is an utter stranger to the depths of his own

heart. It was an answer betraying great shallowness in his conception

of duty and in his self-knowledge.

It is one which is often repeated still. How many of us are there who,

if ever we cast a careless glance over our lives, are quite satisfied

with their external respectability! As long as the chambers that look

to the street are fairly clean, many think that all is right. But what

is there rotting and festering down in the cellars? Do we ever go down

there with the candle of the Lord' in our hands? If we do, the ruler's

boast, All these have I kept,' will falter into All these have I

broken.'

But let us be thankful for the love that shone in Christ's eyes as He

looked on him. We may blame; He loved. Jesus saw the fault, but He saw

the longing to be better. The dim sense of insufficiency which had

driven this questioner to Him was clear to that all-knowing and

all-loving heart. Do not let us harshly judge the mistakes of those who

would fain be taught, nor regard the professions of innocence, which

come from defective perception, as if they were the proud utterances of

a Pharisee.

But Christ's love is firm, and can be severe. It never pares down His

requirements to make discipleship easier. Rather it attracts by

heightening them, and insisting most strenuously on the most difficult

surrender. That is the explanation of the stringent demand next made by

Him. He touched the poisonous swelling as with a sharp lancet when He

called for surrender of wealth. We may be sure that it was this man's

money which stood between him and eternal life. If something else had

been his chief temptation, that something would have been signalised as

needful to be given up. There is no general principle of conduct laid

down here, but a specific injunction determined by the individual's

character. All diseases are not treated with the same medicines. The

command is but Christ's application of His broad requirement, If thine

eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out.' The principle involved is,

surrender what hinders entire following of Jesus. When that sacrifice

is made, we shall be in contact with the fountain of goodness, and have

eternal life, not as payment, but as a gift.

His countenance fell,' or, according to Mark's picturesque word, became

lowering,' like a summer sky when thunder-clouds gather. The hope went

out of his heart, and the light faded from his eager face. The prick of

the sharp spear had burst the bubble of his superficial earnestness. He

had probably never had anything like so repugnant a duty forced upon

him, and he cannot bring himself to yield. Like so many of us, he says,

I desire eternal life,' but when it comes to giving up the dearest

thing he recoils. Anything else, Lord, thou shalt have, and welcome,

but not that.' And Christ says, That, and nothing else, I must have, if

thou art to have Me.' So this man went away sorrowful.' His earnestness

evaporated; he kept his possessions, and he lost Christ. A prudent

bargain! But we may hope that, since he went away sorrowful,' he felt

the ache of something lacking, that the old longings came back, and

that he screwed up his resolution to make the great surrender,' and

counted his wealth but dung, that he might win Christ.'

What a world of sad and disappointed love there would be in that look

of Jesus to the disciples, as the young ruler went away with bowed

head! How graciously He anticipates their probable censure, and turns

their thoughts rather on themselves, by the acknowledgment that the

failure was intelligible, since the condition was hard! How pityingly

His thoughts go after the retreating figure! How universal the

application of His words! Riches may become a hindrance to entering the

kingdom. They do so when they take the first place in the affections

and in the estimates of good. That danger besets those who have them

and those who have them not. Many a poor man is as much caught in the

toils of the love of money as the rich are. Jesus modifies the form of

His saying when He repeats it in the shape of How hardly shall they

that trust in riches,' etc. It is difficult to have, and not to trust

in them. Rich men's disadvantages as to living a self-sacrificing

Christian life are great. To Christ's eyes, their position was one to

be dreaded rather than to be envied.

So opposed to current ideas was such a thought, that the disciples,

accustomed to think that wealth meant happiness, were amazed. If the

same doctrine were proclaimed in any great commercial centre to-day, it

would excite no less astonishment. At least, many Christians and others

live as if the opposite were true. Wealth possessed, and not trusted

in, but used aright, may become a help towards eternal life; but wealth

as commonly regarded and employed by its possessors, and as looked

longingly after by others, is a real, and in many cases an insuperable,

obstacle to entering the strait gate. As soon drive a camel, humps and

load and all, through a needle's eye,' as get a man who trusts in the

uncertainty of riches squeezed through that portal. No communities need

this lesson more than our great cities.

No wonder that the disciples thought that, if the road was so difficult

for rich men, it must be hard indeed. Christ goes even farther. He

declares that it is not only hard, but impossible,' for a man by his

own power to tread it. That was exactly what the young man had thought

that he could do, if only he were directed.

So our Lord's closing words in this context apply, not only to the

immediately preceding question by the disciples, but may be taken as

the great truth conveyed by the whole incident, Man's efforts can never

put him in possession of eternal life. He must have God's power flowing

into him if he is to be such as can enter the kingdom. It is the germ

of the subsequent teaching of Paul; The gift of God is eternal life.'

What we cannot do, Christ has done for us, and does in us. We must

yield ourselves to Him, and surrender ourselves, and abandon what

stands between us and Him, and then eternal life will enter into us

here, and we shall enter into its perfect possession hereafter.

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CHRIST ON THE ROAD TO THE CROSS

And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before

them: and they were amazed; and as they followed they were afraid.'

--Mark x. 32.

We learn from John's Gospel that the resurrection of Lazarus

precipitated the determination of the Jewish authorities to put Christ

to death; and that immediately thereafter there was held the council at

which, by the advice of Caiaphas, the formal decision was come to.

Thereupon our Lord withdrew Himself into the wilderness which stretches

south and east of Jerusalem; and remained there for an unknown period,

preparing Himself for the Cross. Then, full of calm resolve, He came

forth to die. This is the crisis in our Lord's history to which my text

refers. The graphic narrative of this Evangelist sets before us the

little company on the steep rocky mountain road that leads up from

Jericho to Jerusalem; our Lord, far in advance of His followers, with a

fixed purpose stamped upon His face, and something of haste in His

stride, and that in His whole demeanour which shed a strange

astonishment and awe over the group of silent and uncomprehending

disciples.

That picture has not attracted the attention that it deserves. I think

if we ponder it with sympathetic imagination helping us, we may get

from it some very great lessons and glimpses of our Lord's inmost heart

in the prospect of His Cross. And I desire simply to set forth two or

three of the aspects of Christ's character which these words seem to me

to suggest.

I. We have here, then, first, what, for want of a better name, I would

call the heroic Christ.

I use the word to express simply strength of will brought to bear in

the resistance to antagonism; and although that is a side of the Lord's

character which is not often made prominent, it is there, and ought to

have its due importance.

We speak of Him, and delight to think of Him, as the embodiment of all

loving, gracious, gentle virtues, but Jesus Christ as the ideal man

unites in Himself what men are in the habit, somewhat superciliously,

of calling the masculine virtues, as well as those which they somewhat

contemptuously designate the feminine. I doubt very much whether that

is a correct distinction. I think that the heroism of endurance, at all

events, is far more an attribute of a woman than of a man. But be that

as it may, we are to look to Jesus Christ as presenting before us the

very type of all which men call heroism in the sense that I have

explained, of an iron will, incapable of deflection by any antagonism,

and which coerces the whole nature to obedience to its behests.

There is nothing to be done in life without such a will. To be weak is

to be miserable, doing or suffering.' And our Master has set us the

example of this; that unless there run through a man's life, like the

iron framework on the top of the spire of Antwerp Cathedral, on which

graceful fancies are strung in stone, the rigid bar of an iron purpose

that nothing can bend, the life will be nought and the man will be a

failure. Christ is the pattern of heroic endurance, and reads to us the

lesson to resist and persist, whatever stands between us and our goal.

So here, the Cross before Him flung out no repelling influence towards

Him, but rather drew Him to itself. There is no reason that I can find

for believing the modern theory of the rationalists' school that our

Lord, in the course of His mission, altered His plan, or gradually had

dawning upon His mind the conviction that to carry out His purposes He

must be a martyr. That seems to me to be an entire misreading of the

Gospel narrative which sets before us much rather this, that from the

beginning of our Lord's public career there stood unmistakably before

Him the Cross as the goal. He entertained no illusions as to His

reception. He did not come to do certain work, and, finding that He

could not do it, accepted the martyr's death; but He came for the

twofold purpose of serving by His life, and of redeeming by His death.

He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His

life a ransom for the many.' And this purpose stood clear before Him,

drawing Him to itself all through His career.

But, further, Christ's character teaches us what is the highest form of

such strength and tenacity, viz., gentleness. There is no need to be

brusque, obstinate, angular, self-absorbed, harsh, because we are fixed

and determined in our course. These things are the caricatures and the

diminutions, not the true forms nor the increase, of strength. The most

tenacious steel is the most flexible, and he that has the most fixed

and definite resolve may be the man that has his heart most open to all

human sympathies, and is strong with the almightiness of gentleness,

and not with the less close-knit strength of roughness and of hardness.

Christ, because He is perfect love, is perfect power, and His will is

fixed because it is love that fixes it. So let us take the lesson that

the highest type of strength is strength in meekness, and that the

Master who, I was going to say, kept His strength of will under, but I

more correctly say, manifested His strength of will through, His

gentleness, is the pattern for us.

II. Then again, we see here not only the heroic, but what I may call

the self-sacrificing Christ.

We have not only to consider the fixed will which this incident

reveals, but to remember the purpose on which it was fixed, and that He

was hastening to His Cross. The very fact of our Lord's going back to

Jerusalem, with that decree of the Sanhedrim still in force, was

tantamount to His surrender of Himself to death. It was as if, in the

old days, some excommunicated man with the decree of the Inquisition

pronounced against him had gone into Rome and planted himself in the

front of the piazza before the buildings of the Holy Office, and lifted

up his testimony there. So Christ, knowing that this council has been

held, that this decree stands, goes back, investing of set purpose His

return with all the publicity that He can bring to bear upon it. For

this once He seems to determine that He will cause His voice to be

heard in the streets'; He makes as much of a demonstration as the

circumstances will allow, and so acts in a manner opposite to all the

rest of His life. Why? Because He had determined to bring the

controversy to an end. Why? Was He flinging away His life in mere

despair? Was He sinfully neglecting precautions? Was the same

fanaticism of martyrdom which has often told upon men, acting upon Him?

Were these His reasons? No, but He recognised that now that hour' of

which He spoke so much had come, and of His own loving will offered

Himself as our Sacrifice.

It is all-important to keep in view that Christ's death was His own

voluntary act. Whatever external forces were brought to bear in the

accomplishment of it, He died because He chose to die. The cords' which

bound this sacrifice to the horns of the altar were cords woven by

Himself.

So I point to the incident of my text, as linking in along with the

whole series of incidents marking the last days of our Lord's life, in

order to stamp upon His death unmistakably this signature, that it was

His own act. Therefore the publicity that was given to His entry;

therefore His appearance in the Temple; therefore the increased

sharpness and unmistakableness of His denunciations of the ruling

classes, the Pharisees and the scribes. Therefore the whole history of

the Passion, all culminating in leaving this one conviction, that He

had power to lay down His life,' that neither Caiaphas nor Annas, nor

Judas, nor the band, nor priests, nor the Council, nor Pilate, nor

Herod, nor soldiers, nor nails, nor cross, nor all together, killed

Jesus, but that Jesus died because He would. The self-sacrifice of the

Lord was not the flinging away of the life that He ought to have

preserved, nor carelessness, nor the fanaticism of a martyr, nor the

enthusiasm of a hero and a champion, but it was the voluntary death of

Him who of His own will became in His death the oblation and

satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.' Love to us, and

obedience to the Father whose will He made His own, were the cords that

bound Christ to the Cross on which He died. His sacrifice was

voluntary; witness this fact that when He saw the Cross at hand He

strode before His followers to reach that, the goal of His mission.

III. I venture to regard the incident as giving us a little glimpse of

what I may call the shrinking Christ.

Do we not see here a trace of something that we all know? May not part

of the reason for Christ's haste have been that desire which we all

have, when some inevitable grief or pain lies before us, to get it over

soon, and to abbreviate the moments that lie between us and it? Was

there not something of that feeling in our Lord's sensitive nature when

He said, for instance, I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am

I straitened until it be accomplished'? I am come to send fire upon the

earth, and O! how I wish that it were already kindled!' Was there not

something of the same feeling, which we cannot call impatient, but

which we may call shrinking from the Cross, and therefore seeking to

draw the Cross nearer, and have done with it, in the words which He

addressed to the betrayer, That thou doest, do quickly,' as if He were

making a last appeal to the man's humanity, and in effect saying to

him, If you have a heart at all, shorten these painful hours, and let

us have it over'? And may we not see, in that swift advance in front of

the lagging disciples, some trace of the same feeling which we

recognise to be so truly human? Christ did shrink from His Cross. Let

us never forget that He recoiled from it, with the simple, instinctive,

human shrinking from pain and death which is a matter of the physical

nervous system, and has nothing to do with the will at all. If there

had been no shrinking from it there had been no fixed will. If there

had been no natural instinctive drawing back of the physical nature and

its connections from the prospect of pain and death, there had been

none of the heroism of which I am speaking. Though it does not become

us to dogmatise about matters of which we know so little, I think we

may fairly say that that shrinking never rose up into the regions of

Christ's will; never became a desire; never became a purpose. Howsoever

the ship might be tossed by the waves, the will always kept its level

equilibrium. Howsoever the physical nature might incline to this side

or to that, the will always kept parallel with the great underlying

divine will, the Father's purpose which He had come to effect. There

was shrinking which was instinctive and human, but it never disturbed

the fixed purpose to die. It had so much power over Him as to make Him

march a little faster to the Cross, but it never made Him turn from it.

And so He stands before us as the Conqueror in a real conflict, as

having yielded Himself up by a real surrender, as having overcome a

real difficulty, for the joy that was set before Him, having endured

the Cross, despising the shame.'

IV. So, lastly, I would see here the lonely Christ.

In front of His followers, absorbed in the thought of what was drawing

so near, gathering together His powers in order to be ready for the

struggle, with His heart full of the love and the pity which impelled

Him, He is surrounded as with a cloud which shuts Him out from their

sight,' as afterwards the cloud of glory received Him.'

What a gulf there was between them and Him, between their thoughts and

His, as He passed up that rocky way! What were they thinking about? By

the way they had disputed amongst themselves which of them should be

the greatest.' So far did they sympathise with the Master! So far did

they understand Him! Talk about men with unappreciated aims, heroes

that have lived through a lifetime of misunderstanding and never have

had any one to sympathise with them! There never was such a lonely man

in the world as Jesus Christ. Never was there one that carried so deep

In His heart so great a purpose and so great a love, which none cared a

rush about. And those that were nearest Him, and loved Him best, loved

Him so blunderingly and so blindly that their love must often have been

quite as much of a pain as of a joy.

In His Passion that solitude reached the point of agony. How touching

in its unconscious pathos is His pleading request, Tarry ye here, and

watch with Me!' How touching in their revelation of a subsidiary but

yet very real addition to His pains are His words, All ye shall be

offended because of Me this night.' Oh, dear brethren! every human soul

has to go down into the darkness alone, however close may be the

clasping love which accompanies us to the portal; but the loneliness of

death was realised by Jesus Christ in a very unique and solemn manner.

For round Him there gathered the clouds of a mysterious agony, only

faintly typified by the darkness of eclipse which hid the material sun

in the universe, what time He died.

And all this solitude, the solitude of unappreciated aims, and unshared

purposes, and misunderstood sorrow during life, and the solitude of

death with its elements ineffable of atonement;--all this solitude was

borne that no human soul, living or dying, might ever be lonely any

more. Lo! I,' whom you all left alone, am with you,' who left Me alone,

even till the end of the world.'

So, dear brethren, ponder that picture that I have been trying very

feebly to set before you, of the heroic, self-sacrificing, shrinking,

solitary Saviour. Take Him as your Saviour, your Sacrifice, your

Pattern; and hear Him saying, If any man serve Me, let him follow Me,

and where I am there shall also My servant be.'

An old ecclesiastical legend conies into my mind at the moment, which

tells how an emperor won the true Cross in battle from a pagan king,

and brought it back, with great pomp, to Jerusalem; but found the gate

walled up, and an angel standing before it, who said, Thou bringest

back the Cross with pomp and splendour. He that died upon it had shame

for His companion; and carried it on His back, barefooted, to Calvary.'

Then, says the chronicler, the emperor dismounted from his steed, cast

off his robes, lifted the sacred Rood on his shoulders, and with bare

feet advanced to the gate, which opened of itself, and he entered in.

We have to go up the steep rocky road that leads from the plain where

the Dead Sea is, to Jerusalem. Let us follow the Master, as He strides

before us, the Forerunner and the Captain of our salvation.

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DIGNITY AND SERVICE

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto Him, saying, Master,

we would that Thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. 36.

And He said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? 37. They

said unto Him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on Thy right hand,

and the other on Thy left hand, in Thy glory. 38. But Jesus said unto

them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of!

and he baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with! 39. And they

said unto Him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink

of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized

withal shall ye be baptized: 40. But to sit on My right hand and on My

left hand is not Mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom

it its prepared. 41. And when the Ten heard it, they began to be much

displeased with James and John. 42. But Jesus called them to Him, and

saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the

Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise

authority upon them. 43. But so shall it not be among you: but

whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: 44. And

whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. 45. For

even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister,

and to give His life a ransom for many.'--Mark x. 35-45.

How lonely Jesus was! While He strode before the Twelve, absorbed in

thoughts of the Cross to which He was pressing, they, as they followed,

amazed' and afraid,' were thinking not of what He would suffer, but of

what they might gain. He saw the Cross. They understood little of it,

but supposed that somehow it would bring in the kingdom, and they dimly

saw thrones for themselves. Hence James and John try to secure the

foremost places, and hence the others' anger at what they thought an

unfair attempt to push in front of them. What a contrast between Jesus,

striding on ahead with set' face, and the Twelve unsympathetic and

self-seeking, lagging behind to squabble about pre-eminence! We have in

this incident two parts: the request and its answer, the indignation of

the Ten and its rebuke. The one sets forth the qualifications for the

highest place in the kingdom; the other, the paradox that pre-eminence

there is service.

James and John were members of the group of original disciples who

stood nearest to Jesus, and of the group of three whom He kept

specially at His side. Their present place might well lead them to

expect pre-eminence in the kingdom, but their trick was mean, as being

an underhand attempt to forestall Peter, the remaining one of the

three, as putting forward their mother as spokeswoman, and as

endeavouring to entrap Jesus into promising before the disclosure of

what was desired. Matthew tells that the mother was brought in order to

make the request, and that Jesus brushed her aside by directing His

answer to her sons (Ye know not what ye ask'). The attempt to get

Jesus' promise without telling what was desired betrayed the

consciousness that the wish was wrong. His guarded counter-question

would chill them and make their disclosure somewhat hesitating.

Note the strangely blended good and evil of the request. The gold was

mingled with clay; selfishness and love delighting in being near Him

had both place in it. We may well recognise our own likenesses in these

two with their love spotted with self-regard, and be grateful for the

gentle answer which did not blame the desire for pre-eminence, but

sought to test the love. It was not only to teach them, that He brought

them back to think of the Cross which must precede the glory, but

because His own mind was so filled with it that He saw that glory only

as through the darkness which had to be traversed to reach it. But for

us all the question is solemn and heart-searching.

Was not the answer, We are able,' too bold? They knew neither what they

asked nor what they promised; but just as their ignorant question was

partly redeemed by its love, their ignorant vow was ennobled by its

very rashness, as well as by the unfaltering love in it. They did not

know what they were promising, but they knew that they loved Him so

well that to share anything with Him would be blessed. So it was not in

their own strength that the swift answer rushed to their lips, but in

the strength of a love that makes heroes out of cowards. And they nobly

redeemed their pledge. We, too, if we are Christ's, have the same

question put to us, and, weak and timid as we are, may venture to give

the same answer, trusting to His strength.

The full declaration of what had been only implied in the previous

question follows. Jesus tells the two, and us all, that there are

degrees in nearness to Him and in dignity in that future, but that the

highest places are not given by favouritism, but attained by fitness.

He does not deny that He gives, but only that He gives without regard

to qualification. Paul expected the crown from the righteous Judge,'

and one of these two brethren was chosen to record His promise of

giving a seat on His throne to all that overcome. Those for whom it is

prepared' are those who are prepared for it, and the preparation lies

in being made conformable to His death,' and being so joined to Him

that in spirit and mind we are partakers of His sufferings, whether we

are called to partake of them in outward form or not.

The two had had their lesson, and next the Ten were to have theirs. The

conversation with the former had been private, for it was hearing of it

that made the others so angry. We can imagine the hot words among them

as they marched behind Jesus, and how they felt ashamed already when He

called them.' What they were to be now taught was not so much the

qualifications for pre-eminence in the kingdom, whether here or

hereafter, as the meaning of preeminence and the service to which it

binds. In the world, the higher men are, the more they are served; in

Christ's kingdom, both in its imperfect earthly and in its perfect

heavenly form, the higher men are, the more they serve. So-called

Christian' nations are organised on the former un-Christian basis

still. But wherever pre-eminence is not used for the general good,

there authority rests on slippery foundations, and there will never be

social wellbeing or national tranquillity until Christ's law of dignity

for service and dignity by service shapes and sweetens society. But it

is not so among you' laid down the constitution for earth, and not only

for some remote heaven; and every infraction of it, sooner or later,

brings a Nemesis.

The highest is to be the lowest; for He who is higher than the highest'

has shown that such is the law which He obeys. The point in the heaven

that is highest above our heads is in twelve hours deepest beneath our

feet. Fellowship in Christ's sufferings was declared to be the

qualification for our sharing in His dignity. His lowly service and

sacrificial death are now declared to be the pattern for our use of

dignity. Still the thought of the Cross looms large before Jesus, and

He is not content with presenting Himself as the pattern of service

only, but calls on His disciples to take Him as the pattern of utter

self-surrender also. We cannot enter on the great teaching of these

words, but can only beseech all who hear them to note how Jesus sets

forth His death as the climax of His work, without which even that life

of ministering were incomplete; how He ascribes to it the power of

ransoming men from bondage and buying them back to God; and of how He

presents even these unparalleled sufferings, which bear or need no

repetition as long as the world lasts, as yet being the example to

which our lives must be conformed. So His lesson to the angry Ten

merges into that to the self-seeking two, and declares to each of us

that, if we are ever to win a place at His right hand in His glory, we

must here take a place with Him in imitating His life of service and

His death of self-surrender for men's good. If we endure, we shall also

reign with Him.'

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BARTIMAEUS

Blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side

begging.'--Mark x. 46.

The narrative of this miracle is contained in all the Synoptical

Gospels, but the accounts differ in two respects--as to the number of

men restored to sight, and as to the scene of the miracle. Matthew

tells us that there were two men healed, and agrees with Mark in

placing the miracle as Jesus was leaving Jericho. Mark says that there

was one, and that the place was outside the gate in departing. Luke, on

the other hand, agrees with Matthew as to the number, and differs from

him and Mark as to the place, which he sets at the entrance into the

city. The first of these two discrepancies may very easily be put

aside. The greater includes the less; silence is not contradiction. To

say that there was one does not deny that there were two. And if

Bartimaeus was a Christian, and known to Mark's readers, as is probable

from the mention of his name, it is easily intelligible how he, being

also the chief actor and spokesman, should have had Mark's attention

concentrated on him. As to the other discrepancy, many attempts have

been made to remove it. None of them are altogether satisfactory. But

what does it matter? The apparent contradiction may affect theories as

to the characteristics of inspired books, but it has nothing to do with

the credibility of the narratives, or with their value for us.

Mark's account is evidently that of an eye-witness. It is full of

little particulars which testify thereto. Whether Bartimaeus had a

companion or not, he was obviously the chief actor and spokesman. And

the whole story seems to me to lend itself to the enforcement of some

very important lessons, which I will try to draw from it.

I. Notice the beggar's petition and the attempts to silence it.

Remember that Jesus was now on His last journey to Jerusalem. That

night He would sleep at Bethany; Calvary was but a week off. He had

paused to win Zacchaeus, and now He has resumed His march to His Cross.

Popular enthusiasm is surging round Him, and for the first time He does

not try to repress it. A shouting multitude are escorting Him out of

the city. They have just passed the gates, and are in the act of

turning towards the mountain gorge through which runs the Jerusalem

road. A long file of beggars is sitting, as beggars do still in Eastern

cities, outside the gate, well accustomed to lift their monotonous wail

at the sound of passing footsteps. Bartimaeus is amongst them. He asks,

according to Luke, what is the cause of the bustle, and is told that

Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.' The name wakes strange hopes in him,

which can only be accounted for by his knowledge of Christ's miracles

done elsewhere. It is a witness to their notoriety that they had

filtered down to be the talk of beggars at city gates. And so, true to

his trade, he cries, Jesus . . . have mercy upon me!'

Now, note two or three things about that cry. The first is the clear

insight into Christ's place and dignity. The multitude said to him,

Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.' That was all they cared for or knew. He

cried, Jesus, thou Son of David,' distinctly recognising our Lord's

Messianic character, His power and authority, and on that power and

authority he built a confidence; for he says not as some other

suppliants had done, either If Thou wilt Thou canst,' or If Thou canst

do anything, have compassion on us.' He is sure of both the power and

the will.

Now, it is interesting to notice that this same clear insight other

blind men in the Evangelist's story are also represented as having had.

Blindness has its compensations. It leads to a certain steadfast

brooding upon thoughts, free from disturbing influences. Seeing Jesus

did not produce faith; not seeing Him seems to have helped it. It left

imagination to work undisturbed, and He was all the loftier to these

blind men, because the conceptions of their minds were not limited by

the vision of their eyes. At all events, here is a distinct piece of

insight into Christ's dignity, power, and will, to which the seeing

multitudes were blind.

Note, further, how in the cry there throbs the sense of need, deep and

urgent. And note how in it there is also the realisation of the

possibility that the widely-flowing blessings of which Bartimaeus had

heard might be concentrated and poured, in their full flood, upon

himself. He individualises himself, his need, Christ's power and

willingness to help him. And because he has heard of so many who have,

in like manner, received His healing touch, he comes with the cry, Have

mercy upon me.'

All this is upon the low level of physical blessings needed and

desired. But let us lift it higher. It is a mirror in which we may see

ourselves, our necessities, and the example of what our desire ought to

be. Ah! brethren, the deep consciousness of impotence, need, emptiness,

blindness, lies at the bottom of all true crying to Jesus Christ. If

you have never gone to Him, knowing yourself to be a sinful man, in

peril, present and future, from your sin, and stained and marred by

reason of it, you never have gone to Him in any deep and adequate sense

at all. Only when I thus know myself am I driven to cry, Jesus! have

mercy on me.' And I ask you not to answer to me, but to press the

question on your own consciences--Have I any experience of such a sense

of need; or am I groping in the darkness and saying, I see? am I weak

as water, and saying I am strong?' Thou knowest not that thou art poor,

and naked, and blind'; and so that Jesus of Nazareth should be passing

by has never moved thy tongue to call, Son of David, have mercy upon

me!'

Again, this man's cry expressed a clear insight into something at least

of our Lord's unique character and power. Brethren, unless we know Him

to be all that is involved in that august title, the Son of David,' I

do not think our cries to Him will ever be very earnest. It seems to me

that they will only be so when, on the one hand, we recognise our need

of a Saviour, and, on the other hand, behold in Him the Saviour whom we

need. I can quite understand--and we may see plenty of illustrations of

it all round us--a kind of Christianity real as far as it goes, but in

my judgment very superficial, which has no adequate conception of what

sin means, in its depth, in its power upon the victim of it, or in its

consequences here and hereafter; and, that sense being lacking, the

whole scale of Christianity, as it were, is lowered, and Christ comes

to be, not, as I think the New Testament tells us that He is, the

Incarnate Word of God, who for us men and for our salvation bare our

sins in His own body on the tree,' and was made sin for us, that we

might be made the righteousness of God in Him,' but an Example, a

Teacher, or a pure Model, or a social Reformer, or the like. If men

think of Him only as such, they will never cry to Him, Have mercy upon

me!'

Dear friends, I pray you, whether you begin with looking into your own

hearts and recognising the crawling evils that have made their home

there, and thence pass to the thought of the sort of Redeemer that you

need and find in Christ--or whether you begin at the other side, and,

looking upon the revealed Christ in all the fulness in which He is

represented to us in the Gospels, from thence go back to ask yourselves

the question, What sort of man must I be, if that is the kind of

Saviour that I need?'--I pray you ever to blend these two things

together, the consciousness of your own need of redemption in His blood

and the assurance that by His death we are redeemed, and then to cry,

Lord! have mercy upon me,' and claim your individual share in the

wide-flowing blessing. Turn all the generalities of His grace into the

particularity of your own possession of it. We have to go one by one to

His cross, and one by one to pass through the wicket gate. We have not

cried to Him as we ought, if our cry is only Christ, have mercy upon

us. Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon us.' We must be

alone with Him, that into our own hearts we may receive all the fulness

of His blessing; and our petition must be Thou Son of David! have mercy

upon me.' Have you cried that? Notice, further, the attempts to stifle

the cry. No doubt it was in defence of the Master's dignity, as they

construed it, that the people sought to silence the persistent,

strident voice piercing through their hosannas. Ah! they did not know

that the cry of wretchedness was far sweeter to Him than their shallow

hallelujahs. Christian people of all churches, and of some stiffened

churches very especially, have been a great deal more careful of

Christ's dignity than He is, and have felt that their formal worship

was indecorously disturbed when by chance some earnest voice forced its

way through it with the cry of need and desire. But this man had been

accustomed for many a day, sitting outside the gate, to reiterate his

petition when it was unattended to, and to make it heard amidst the

noise of passers-by. So he was persistently bold and importunate and

shameless, as the shallow critics thought, in his crying. The more they

silenced him, the more a great deal he cried. Would God that we had

more crying like that; and that Christ's servants did not so often seek

to suppress it, as some of them do! If there are any of you who, by

reason of companions, or cares, or habits, or sorrows, or a feeble

conception of your own need or a doubtful recognition of Christ's power

and mercy, have been tempted to stop your supplications, do like

Bartimaeus, and the more these, your enemies, seek to silence the

deepest voice that is in you, the more let it speak.

II. So, notice Christ's call and the suppliant's response.

He stood still, and commanded him to be called.' Remember that He was

on His road to His Cross, and that the tension of spirit which the

Evangelists notice as attaching to Him then, and which filled the

disciples with awe as they followed Him, absorbed Him, no doubt, at

that hour, so that He heard but little of the people's shouts. But He

did hear the blind beggar's cry, and He arrested His march in order to

attend to it.

Now, dear friends, I am not merely twisting a Biblical incident round

to an interpretation which it does not bear, but am stating a plain

un-rhetorical truth when I say that it is so still. Jesus Christ is no

dead Christ who is to be remembered only. He is a living Christ who, at

this moment, is all that He ever was, and is doing in loftier fashion

all the gracious things that He did upon earth. That pause of the King

is repeated now, and the quick ear which discerned the difference

between the unreal shouts of the crowd, and the agony of sincerity in

the cry of the beggar, is still open. He is in the heavens, surrounded

by its glories, and, as I think Scripture teaches us, wielding

providence and administering the affairs of the universe. He does not

need to pause in order to hear you and me. If He did, He would--if I

may venture upon such an impossible supposition--bid the hallelujahs of

heaven hush themselves, and suspend the operations of His providence if

need were, rather than that you or I, or any poor man who cries to Him,

should be unheard and unhelped. The living Christ is as tender a

friend, has as quick an ear, is as ready to help at once, to-day, as He

was when outside the gate of Jericho; and every one of us may lift his

or her poor, thin voice, and it will go straight up to the throne, and

not be lost in the clamour of the hallelujahs that echo round His seat.

Christ still hears and answers the cry of need. Send you it up, and you

will find that true.

Notice the suppliant's response. That is a very characteristic

right-about-face of the crowd, who one moment were saying, Hold your

tongue and do not disturb Him,' and the next moment were all eager to

encumber him with help, and to say, Rise up, be of good cheer; He

calleth thee.' No thanks to them that He did. And what did the man do?

Sprang to his feet--as the word rightly rendered would be--and flung

away the frowsy rags that he had wrapped round him for warmth and

softness of seat, as he waited at the gate; and he came to Jesus.'

Brethren, casting aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily

beset us, let us run' to the same Refuge. You have to abandon something

if you are to go to Christ to be healed. I dare say you know well

enough what it is. I do not; but certainly there is something that

entangles your legs and keeps you from finding your way to Him. If

there is nothing else, there is yourself and your trust in self, and

that is to be put away. Cast away the garment spotted with the flesh'

and go to Christ, and you will receive succour.

III. Notice the question of all-granting love, and the answer of

conscious need.

What wilt Thou that I should do unto thee?' A very few hours before He

had put the same question with an entirely different significance, when

the sons of Zebedee came to Him, and tried to get Him to walk blindfold

into a promise. He upset their scheme with the simple question, What is

it that you want?' which meant, I must know and judge before I commit

Myself,' But when He said the same thing to Bartimaeus He meant exactly

the opposite. It was putting the key of the treasure-house into the

beggar's hand. It was the implicit pledge that whatever he desired he

should receive. He knew that the thing this man wanted was the thing

that He delighted to give.

But the tenderness of these words, and the gracious promise that is

hived in them, must not make us forget the singular authority that

speaks in them. Think of a man doing as Jesus Christ did--standing

before another and saying, I will give you anything that you want.' He

must be either a madman or a blasphemer, or God manifest in the flesh';

Almighty power guided by infinite love.

And what said the man? He had no doubt what he wanted most--the opening

of these blind eyes of his. And, dear brother, if we knew ourselves as

well as Bartimaeus knew his blindness, we should have as little doubt

what it is that we need most. Suppose you had this wishing-cap that

Christ put on Bartimaeus's head put on yours: what would you ask? It is

a penetrating question if men will answer it honestly. Think what you

consider to be your chief need. Suppose Jesus Christ stood where I

stand, and spoke to you: What wilt thou that I should do for you?' If

you are a wise man, if you know yourself and Him, your answer will come

as swiftly as the beggar's--Lord! heal me of my blindness, and take

away my sin, and give me Thy salvation.' There is no doubt about what

it is that every one of us needs most. And there should be no doubt as

to what each of us would ask first.

The supposition that I have been making is realised. That gracious Lord

is here, and is ready to give you the satisfaction of your deepest

need, if you know what it is, and will go to Him for it. Ask! and ye

shall receive.'

IV. Lastly, notice, sight given, and the Giver followed.

Bartimaeus had scarcely ended speaking when Christ began. He was blind

at the beginning of Christ's little sentence; he saw at the end of it.

Go thy way; thy faith hath saved thee.' The answer came instantly, and

the cure was as immediate as the movement of Christ's heart in answer.

I am here to proclaim the possibility of an immediate passage from

darkness to light. Some folk look askance at us when we talk about

sudden conversions, but these are perfectly reasonable; and the

experience of thousands asserts that they are actual. As soon as we

desire, we have, and as soon as we have, we see. Whenever the lungs are

opened the air rushes in; sometimes the air opens the lungs that it

may. The desire is all but contemporaneous with the fulfilment, in

Christ's dealing with men. The message is flashed along the wire from

earth to heaven, in an incalculably brief space of time, and the answer

comes, swift as thought and swifter than light. So, dear friends, there

is no reason whatever why a similar instantaneous change should not

pass over any man who hears the Good News. He may be unsaved when his

hearing of it begins, and saved when his hearing of it ends. It is for

himself to settle whether it shall be so or not.

Here we have a clear statement of the path by which Christ's mercy

rushes into a man's soul. Thy faith hath saved thee.' But it was

Christ's power that saved him. Yes, it was; but it was faith that made

it possible for Christ's power to make him whole. Physical miracles

indeed did not always require trust in Christ, as a preceding

condition, but the possession of Christ's salvation does, and cannot

but do so. There must be trust in Him, in order that we may partake of

the salvation which is owing solely to His power, His love, His work

upon the Cross. The condition is for us; the power comes from Him. My

faith is the hand that grasps His; it is His hand, not mine, that holds

me up. My faith lays hold of the rope; it is the rope and the Person

above who holds it, that lift me out of the horrible pit and the miry

clay.' My faith flees for refuge to the city; it is the city that keeps

me safe from the avenger of blood. Brother! exercise that faith, and

you will receive a better sight than was poured into Bartimaeus's eyes.

Now, all this story should be the story of each one of us. One

modification we have to make upon it, for we do not need to cry

persistently for mercy, but to trust in, and to take, the mercy that is

offered. One other difference there is between Bartimaeus and many of

my hearers. He knew what he needed, and some of you do not. But Christ

is calling us all, and my business now is to say to each of you what

the crowd said to the beggar, Rise! be of good cheer; He calleth thee.'

If you will fling away your hindrances, and grope your path to His

feet, and fall down before Him, knowing your deep necessity, and

trusting to Him to supply it, He will save you. Your new sight will

gaze upon your Redeemer, and you will follow Him in the way of loving

trust and glad obedience.

Jesus Christ was passing by. He was never to be in Jericho any more. If

Bartimaeus did not get His sight then, he would be blind all his days.

Christ and His salvation are offered to thee, my brother, now. Perhaps

if you let Him pass, you will never hear Him call again, and may abide

in the darkness for ever. Do not run the risk of such a fate.

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AN EAGER COMING

And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.'--Mark x.

50.

Mark's vivid picture--long wail of the man, crowd silencing him, but

wheeling round when Christ calls him--and the quick energy of the

beggar, flinging away his cloak, springing to his feet--and blind as he

was, groping his way.

I. What we mean by coming to Jesus:--faith, communion, occupation of

mind, heart, and will.

II. How eagerly we shall come when we are conscious of need. This man

wanted his eyesight: do we not want too?

III. We must throw off our hindrances if we would come to Him.

Impediments of various kinds. Lay aside every weight'--not only sins,

but even right things that hinder. Occupations, pursuits, affections,

possessions, sometimes have to be put away altogether; sometimes but to

be minimised and kept in restraint. There is no virtue in self-denial

except as it helps us to come nearer Him.

IV. We must do it with quick, glad energy. Bartimaeus springs to his

feet at once with a bound. So we should leap to meet Jesus, our

sight-giver. How slothful and languid we often are. We do not put half

as much heart into our Christian life as people do into common things.

Far more pains are taken by a ballet-dancer to learn her posturing than

by most Christians to keep near Christ.

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LOVE'S QUESTION

What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?'--Mark x. 51.

What wilt Thou have me to do!'--Acts ix. 6.

Christ asks the first question of a petitioner, and the answer is a

prayer for sight. Saul asks the second question of Jesus, and the

answer is a command. Different as they are, we may bring them together.

The one is the voice of love, desiring to be besought in order that it

may bestow; the other is the voice of love, desiring to be commanded in

order that it may obey.

Love delights in knowing, expressing, and fulfilling the beloved's

wishes.

I. The communion of Love delights on both sides in knowing the

beloved's wishes. Christ delights in knowing ours. He encourages us to

speak though He knows, because it is pleasant to Him to hear, and good

for us to tell. His children delight in knowing His will.

II. It delights in expressing wishes--His commandments are the

utterance of His Love: His Providences are His loving ways of telling

us what He desires of us, and if we love Him as we ought, both

commandments and providences will be received by us as lovers do gifts

that have with my love' written on them.

On the other hand, our love will delight in telling Him what we wish,

and to speak all our hearts to Jesus will be our instinct in the

measure of our love to Him.

III. It delights in fulfilling wishes--puts key of treasure-house into

our hands. He refused John and James. Be sure that He does still

delight to give us our desires, and so be sure that when any of these

are not granted there must be some loving reason for refusal.

Our delight should be in obedience, and only when our wills are

submitted to His does He say to us, What wilt thou?' If ye abide in Me

and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be

done unto you.'

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A ROYAL PROGRESS

. . . Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye

be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat;

loose him, and bring him.'--Mark xi. 2.

Two considerations help us to appreciate this remarkable incident of

our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The first of these is its

date. It apparently occurred on the Sunday of the Passion Week. The

Friday saw the crosses on Calvary. The night before, Jesus had sat at

the modest feast that was prepared in Bethany, where Lazarus was one of

the guests, Martha was the busy servant, and Mary poured out the lavish

treasures of her love upon His feet. The resurrection of Lazarus had

created great popular excitement; and that excitement is the second

consideration which throws light upon this incident. The people had

rallied round Christ, and, consequently, the hatred of the official and

ecclesiastical class had been raised to boiling-point. It was at that

time that our Lord deliberately presented Himself before the nation as

the Messiah, and stirred up still more this popular enthusiasm. Now, if

we keep these two things in view, I think we shall be at the right

point from which to consider the whole incident. To it, and not merely

to the words which I have chosen as our starting-point, I wish to draw

attention now. I am mistaken if there are not in it very important and

practical lessons for ourselves.

I. First, note that deliberate assumption by Christ of royal authority.

I shall have a good deal to say presently about the main fact which

bears upon that, but in the meantime I would note, in passing, a

subsidiary illustration of it, in the errand on which He sent these

messengers to the little village over against' them; and in the words

which He put into their mouths. They were to go, and, without a word,

to loose and bring away the colt fastened at a door, where it was

evidently waiting the convenience of its owner to mount it. If, as was

natural, any objection or question was raised, they were to answer

exactly as servants of a king would do, if he sent them to make

requisition on the property of his subjects, The Lord hath need of

him.'

I do not dwell on our Lord's supernatural knowledge as coming out here;

nor on the fact that the owner of the colt was probably a partial

disciple, perhaps a secret one--ready to recognise the claim that was

made. But I ask you to notice here the assertion, in act and word, of

absolute authority, to which all private convenience and rights of

possession are to give way unconditionally. The Sovereign's need is a

sovereign reason. What He requires He has a right to take. Well for us,

brethren, if we yield as glad, as swift, and as unquestioning obedience

to His claims upon us, and upon our possessions, as that poor peasant

of Bethphage gave in the incident before us! But there is not only the

assertion, here, of absolute authority, but note how, side by side with

this royal style, there goes the acknowledgment of poverty. Here is a

pauper King, who having nothing yet possesses all things. The

Lord'--that is a great title--hath need of him'--that is a strange verb

to go with such a nominative. But this little sentence, in its two

halves of authority and of dependence, puts into four words the whole

blessed paradox of the life of Jesus Christ upon earth. Though He was

rich, yet for our sakes He became poor'; and being Lord and Owner of

all things, yet owed His daily bread to ministering women, borrowed a

boat to preach from, a house wherein to lay His head, a shroud and a

winding-sheet to enfold His corpse, a grave in which to lie, and from

which to rise, the Lord of the dead and of the living.'

Not only so, but there is another thought suggested by these words. The

accurate, or, at least, the probable reading, of one part of the third

verse is given in the Revised Version, Say ye that the Lord hath need

of him, and straightway he will send him back hither.' That is to say,

these last words are not Christ's assurance to His two messengers that

their embassy would succeed, but part of the message which He sends by

them to the owner of the colt, telling him that it was only a loan

which was to be returned. Jesus Christ is debtor to no man. Anything

given to Him comes back again. Possessions yielded to that Lord are

recompensed a hundredfold in this life, if in nothing else in that

there is a far greater sweetness in that which still remains. What I

gave I have,' said the wise old epitaph. It is always true. Do you not

think that the owner of the patient beast, on which Christ placidly

paced into Jerusalem on His peaceful triumph, would be proud all his

days of the use to which his animal had been put, and would count it as

a treasure for the rest of its life? If you and I will yield our gifts

to Him, and lay them upon His altar, be sure of this, that the altar

will ennoble and will sanctify all that is laid upon it. All that we

have rendered to Him gains fragrance from His touch, and comes back to

us tenfold more precious because He has condescended to use it.

So, brethren, He still moves amongst us, asking for our surrender of

ourselves and of our possessions to Him, and pledging Himself that we

shall lose nothing by what we give to Him, but shall be infinitely

gainers by our surrender. He still needs us. Ah! if He is ever to march

in triumph through the world, and be hailed by the hosannas of all the

tribes of the earth, it is requisite for that triumph that His children

should surrender first themselves, and then all that they are, and all

that they have, to Him. To us there comes the message, The Lord hath

need of you.' Let us see that we answer as becomes us.

But then, more important is the other instance here of this assertion

of royal authority. I have already said that we shall not rightly

understand it unless we take into full account the state of popular

feeling at the time. We find in John's Gospel great stress laid on the

movement of curiosity and half-belief which followed on the

resurrection of Lazarus. He tells us that crowds came out from

Jerusalem the night before to gaze upon the Lifebringer and the

quickened man. He also tells us that another enthusiastic crowd flocked

out of Jerusalem before Jesus sent for the colt to the neighbouring

village. We are to keep in mind, therefore, that what He did here was

done in the midst of a great outburst of popular enthusiasm. We are to

keep in mind, too, the season of Passover, when religion and

patriotism, which were so closely intertwined in the life of the Jews,

were in full vigorous exercise. It was always a time of anxiety to the

Roman authorities, lest this fiery people should break out into

insurrection. Jerusalem at the Passover was like a great magazine of

combustibles, and into it Jesus flung a lighted brand amongst the

inflammable substances that were gathered there. We have to remember,

too, that all His life long He had gone exactly on the opposite tack.

Remember how He betook Himself to the mountain solitudes when they

wanted to make Him a king. Remember how He was always damping down

Messianic enthusiasm. But here, all at once, He reverses His whole

conduct, and deliberately sets Himself to make the most public and the

most exciting possible demonstration that He was King of Israel.'

For what was it that He did? Our Evangelist here does not quote the

prophecy from Zechariah, but two other Evangelists do. Our Lord then

deliberately dressed Himself by the mirror of prophecy, and assumed the

very characteristics which the prophet had given long ago as the mark

of the coming King of Zion. If He had wanted to excite a popular

commotion, that is what He would have done.

Why did He act thus? He was under no illusion as to what would follow.

For the night before He had said: She hath come beforehand to anoint My

body for the burial.' He knew what was close before Him in the future.

And, because He knew that the end was at hand, He felt that, once at

least, it was needful that He should present Himself solemnly,

publicly, I may almost say ostentatiously, before the gathered nation,

as being of a truth the Fulfiller and the fulfilment of all the

prophecies and the hopes built upon them that had burned in Israel,

with a smoky flame indeed, but for so many ages. He also wanted to

bring the rulers to a point. I dare not say that He precipitated His

death, or provoked a conflict, but I do say that deliberately, and with

a clear understanding of what He was doing, He took a step which forced

them to show their hand. For after such a public avowal of who He was,

and such public hosannas surging round His meek feet as He rode into

the city, there were but two courses open for the official class:

either to acknowledge Him, or to murder Him. Therefore He reversed His

usual action, and deliberately posed, by His own act, as claiming to be

the Messiah long prophesied and long expected.

Now, what do you think of the man that did that? If He did it, then

either He is what the rulers called Him, a deceiver,' swollen with

inordinate vanity and unfit to be a teacher, or else we must fall at

His feet and say Rabbi! Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of

Israel.' I venture to believe that to extol Him and to deny the

validity of His claims is in flagrant contradiction to the facts of His

life, and is an unreasonable and untenable position.

II. Notice the revelation of a new kind of King and Kingdom.

Our Evangelist, from whom my text is taken, has nothing to say about

Zechariah's prophecy which our Lord set Himself to fulfil. He only

dwells on the pathetic poverty of the pomp of the procession. But other

Evangelists bring into view the deeper meaning of the incident. The

centre-point of the prophecy, and of Christ's intentional fulfilment of

it, lies in the symbol of the meek and patient animal which He

bestrode. The ass was, indeed, used sometimes in old days by rulers and

judges in Israel, but the symbol was chosen by the prophet simply to

bring out the peacefulness and the gentleness inherent in the Kingdom,

and the King who thus advanced into His city. If you want to understand

the meaning of the prophet's emblem, you have only to remember the

sculptured slabs of Assyria and Babylon, or the paintings on the walls

of Egyptian temples and tombs, where Sennacherib or Rameses ride

hurtling in triumph in their chariots, over the bodies of prostrate

foes; and then to set by the side of these, Rejoice! O daughter of

Zion; thy King cometh unto thee riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the

foal of an ass.' If we want to understand the significance of this

sweet emblem, we need only, further, remember the psalm that, with

poetic fervour, invokes the King: Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O Most

Mighty, and in Thy majesty ride prosperously . . . and Thy right hand

shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart

of the King's enemies; the people fall under Thee.' That is all that

that ancient singer could conceive of the triumphant King of the world,

the Messiah; a conqueror, enthroned in His chariot, and the twanging

bowstring, drawn by His strong hand, impelling the arrow that lodged in

the heart of His foes. And here is the fulfilment. Go ye into the

village over against you, and ye shall find a colt tied . . . And they

set Him thereon.' Christ's kingdom, like its King, has no power but

gentleness and the omnipotence of patient love.

If Christian' nations, as they are called, and Churches had kept the

significance of that emblem in mind, do you think that their hosannas

would have gone up so often for conquerors on the battlefields; or that

Christian communities would have been in complicity with war and the

glorifying thereof, as they have been? And, if Christian churches had

remembered and laid to heart the meaning of this triumphal entry, and

its demonstration of where the power of the Master lay, would they have

struck up such alliances with worldly powers and forms of force as,

alas! have weakened and corrupted the Church for hundreds of years?

Surely, surely, there is no more manifest condemnation of war and the

warlike spirit, and of the spirit which finds the strength of Christ's

Church in anything material and violent, than is that solitary instance

of His assumption of royal state when thus He entered into His city. I

need not say a word, brethren, about the nature of Christ's kingdom as

embodied in His subjects, as represented in that shouting multitude

that marched around Him. How Caesar in his golden house in Rome would

have sneered and smiled at the Jewish peasant, on the colt, and

surrounded by poor men, who had no banners but the leafy branches from

the trees, and no pomp to strew in his way but their own worn garments!

And yet these were stronger in their devotion, in their enthusiastic

conviction that He was the King of Israel and of the whole earth, than

Caesar, with all his treasures and with all his legions and their sharp

swords. Christ accepts poor homage because He looks for hearts; and

whatever the heart renders is sweet to Him. He passes on through the

world, hailed by the acclamations of grateful hearts, needing no

bodyguard but those that love Him; and they need to bear no weapons in

their hands, but their mission is to proclaim with glad hearts hosannas

to the King that cometh in the name of the Lord.'

There is one more point that I may note. Another of the Evangelists

tells us that it was when the humble cort�ge swept round the shoulder

of Olivet, and caught sight of the city gleaming in the sunshine,

across the Kedron valley, that they broke into the most rapturous of

their hosannas, as if they would call to the city that came in view to

rejoice and welcome its King. And what was the King doing when that

sight burst upon Him, and while the acclamations eddied round Him? His

thoughts were far away. His eyes with divine prescience looked on to

the impending end, and then they dimmed, and filled with tears; and He

wept over the city.

That is our King; a pauper King, a meek and patient King, a King that

delights in the reverent love of hearts, a King whose armies have no

swords, a King whose eyes fill with tears as He thinks of men's woes

and cries. Blessed be such a King!

III. Lastly, we have the Royal visitation of the Temple.

Our Evangelist has no word to speak about the march of the procession

down into the valley, and up on the other side, and through the gate,

and into the narrow streets of the city that was moved' as they passed

through it. His language sounds as if he considered that our Lord's

object in entering Jerusalem at all was principally to enter the

Temple. He looked round on all things' that were there. Can we fancy

the keen observance, the recognition of the hidden bad and good, the

blazing indignation, and yet dewy pity, in those eyes? His visitation

of the Temple was its inspection by its Lord. And it was an inspection

in order to cleanse. To-day He looked; to-morrow He wielded the whip of

small cords. His chastisement is never precipitate. Perfect knowledge

wields His scourge, and pronounces condemnation.

Brethren, Jesus Christ comes to us as a congregation, to the church to

which we belong, and to us individually, with the same inspection. He

whose eyes are a flame of fire, says to His churches to-day, I know thy

works.' What would He think if He came to us and tested us?

In the incident of my text He was fulfilling another ancient prophecy,

which says, The Lord shall suddenly come to His Temple, and . . . sit

as a refiner of silver . . . like a refiner's fire and as fuller's soap

. . . and He shall purify the sons of Levi. . .. Then shall the

offering of Jerusalem be pleasant, as in the days of old.'

We need nothing more, we should desire nothing more earnestly, than

that He would come to us: Search me, O Christ, and know me. And see if

there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.'

Jesus Christ is the King of England as truly as of Zion; and He is your

King and mine. He comes to each of us, patient, meek, loving; ready to

bless and to cleanse. Dear brother, do you open your heart to Him? Do

you acknowledge Him as your King? Do you count it your highest honour

if He will use you and your possessions, and condescend to say that He

has need of such poor creatures as we are? Do you cast your garments in

the way, and say: Ride on, great Prince'? Do you submit yourself to His

inspection, to His cleansing? Remember, He came once on a colt, the

foal of an ass, meek, and having salvation.' He will come on the white

horse, in righteousness to judge and to make war' and with power to

destroy.

Oh! I beseech you, welcome Him as He comes in gentle love, that when He

comes in judicial majesty you may be among the armies of heaven that

follow after,' and from immortal tongues utter rapturous and undying

hosannas.

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CHRIST'S NEED OF US AND OURS

. . . Say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will

send him hither.'--Mark xi. 3.

You will remember that Jesus Christ sent two of His disciples into the

village that looked down on the road from Bethany to Jerusalem, with

minute instructions and information as to what they were to do and find

there. The instructions may have one of two explanations--they suggest

either superhuman knowledge or a previous arrangement. Perhaps,

although it is less familiar to our thoughts, the latter is the

explanation. There is a remarkable resemblance, in that respect, to

another incident which lies close beside this one in time, when our

Lord again sent two disciples to make preparation for the Passover,

and, with similar minuteness, told them that they would find, at a

certain point, a man bearing a pitcher of water. Him they were to

accost, and he would take them to the room that had been prepared. Now

the old explanation of both these incidents is that Jesus Christ knew

what was going to happen. Another possible explanation, and in my view

more probable and quite as instructive, is, that Jesus Christ had

settled with the two owners what was to happen. Clearly, the owner of

the colt was a disciple, because at once he gave up his property when

the message was repeated, the Lord hath need of him.' Probably he had

been one of the guests at the modest festival that had been held the

night before, in the village close by, in Simon's house, and had seen

how Mary had expended her most precious possession on the Lord, and,

under the influence of the resurrection of Lazarus, he, too, perhaps,

was touched, and was glad to arrange with Jesus Christ to have his colt

waiting there at the cross-road for his Master's convenience. But, be

that as it may, it seems to me that this incident, and especially these

words that I have read for a text, carry very striking and important

lessons for us, whether we look at them in connection with the incident

itself, or whether we venture to give them a somewhat wider

application. Let me take these two points in turn.

I. Now, what strikes one about our Lord's requisitioning the colt is

this, that here is a piece of conduct on His part singularly unlike all

the rest of His life. All through it, up to this last moment, His one

care was to damp down popular enthusiasm, to put on the drag whenever

there came to be the least symptom of it, to discourage any reference

to Him as the Messiah-King of Israel, to shrink back from the coarse

adulation of the crowd, and to glide quietly through the world,

blessing and doing good. But now, at the end, He flings off all

disguise. He deliberately sets Himself, at a time when popular

enthusiasm ran highest and was most turbid and difficult to manage, at

the gathering of the nation for the Passover in Jerusalem, to cast an

effervescing element into the caldron. If He had planned to create a

popular rising, He could not have done anything more certain to bring

it about than what He did that morning when He made arrangements for a

triumphal procession into the city, amidst the excited crowds gathered

from every quarter of the land. Why did He do that? What was the

meaning of it? Then there is another point in this requisitioning of

the colt. He not only deliberately set Himself to stir up popular

excitement, but He consciously did what would be an outward fulfilment

of a great Messianic prophecy. I hope you are wiser than to fancy that

Zechariah's prophecy of the peaceful monarch who was to come to Zion,

meek and victorious, and riding upon a colt the foal of an ass,' was

fulfilled by the outward fact of Christ being mounted on this colt

whereon never man sat.' That is only the shell, and if there had been

no such triumphal entry, our Lord would as completely have fulfilled

Zechariah's prophecy. The fulfilment of it did not depend on the petty

detail of the animal upon which He sat when He entered the city, nor

even on that entrance. The meaning of the prophecy was that to Zion,

wherever and whatever it is, there should come that Messianic King,

whose reign owed nothing to chariots and horses and weapons of war for

its establishment, but who, meek and patient, pacing upon the humble

animal used only for peaceful services, and not mounted on the prancing

steed of the warrior, should inaugurate the reign of majesty and of

meekness. Our Lord uses the external fact just as the prophet had used

it, as of no value in itself, but as a picturesque emblem of the very

spirit of His kingdom. The literal fulfilment was a kind of finger-post

for inattentive onlookers, which might induce them to look more

closely, and so see that He was indeed the King Messiah, because of

more important correspondences with prophecy than His once riding on an

ass. Do not so degrade these Old Testament prophecies as to fancy that

their literal fulfilment is of chief importance. That is the shell: the

kernel is the all-important thing, and Jesus Christ would have

fulfilled the r? that was sketched for Him by the prophets of old, just

as completely if there never had been this entrance into Jerusalem.

But, further, the fact that He had to borrow the colt was as

significant as the choice of it. For so we see blended two things, the

blending of which makes the unique peculiarity and sublimity of

Christ's life: absolute authority, and meekness of poverty and

lowliness. A King, and yet a pauper-King! A King claiming His dominion,

and yet obliged to borrow another man's colt in order that He might do

it! A strange kind of monarch!--and yet that remarkable combination

runs through all His life. He had to be obliged to a couple of

fishermen for a boat, but He sat in it, to speak words of divine

wisdom. He had to be obliged to a lad in the crowd for barley loaves

and fishes, but when He took them into His hands they were multiplied.

He had to be obliged for a grave, and yet He rose from the borrowed

grave the Lord of life and death. And so when He would pose as a King,

He has to borrow the regalia, and to be obliged to this anonymous

friend for the colt which made the emphasis of His claim. Who, though

He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty

might be rich.'

II. And now turn for a moment to the wider application of these words.

The Lord hath need of him.' That opens the door to thoughts, that I

cannot crowd into the few minutes that I have at my disposal, as to

that great and wonderful truth that Christ cannot assume His kingdom in

this world without your help, and that of the other people whose hearts

are touched by His love. The Lord hath need' of them. Though upon that

Cross of Calvary He did all that was necessary for the redemption of

the world and the salvation of humanity as a whole, yet for the bearing

of that blessing into individual hearts, and for the application of the

full powers that are stored in the Gospel and in Jesus, to their work

in the world, the missing link is man. We are fellow-labourers with

God.' We are Christ's tools. The instruments by which He builds His

kingdom are the souls that have already accepted His authority. The

Lord hath need of him,' though, as the psalmist sings, If I were hungry

I would not tell thee, for all the beasts of the forest are Mine.' Yes,

and when the Word was made flesh, He had need of one of the humblest of

the beasts. The Christ that redeemed the world needs us, to carry out

and to bring into effect His redemption. God mend all,' said one, and

the answer was, We must help Him to mend it.'

Notice again the authoritative demand, which does not contemplate the

possibility of reluctance or refusal. The Lord hath need of him.' That

is all. There is no explanation or motive alleged to induce surrender

to the demand. This is a royal style of speech. It is the way in which,

in despotic countries, kings lay their demands upon a poor man's whole

plenishing and possession, and sweep away all.

Jesus Christ comes to us in like fashion, and brushes aside all our

convenience and everything else, and says, I want you, and that is

enough.' Is it not enough? Should it not be enough? If He demands, He

has the right to demand. For we are His, bought with a price.' All the

slave's possessions are his owner's property. The slave is given a

little patch of garden ground, and perhaps allowed to keep a fowl or

two, but the master can come and say, Now I want them,' and the slave

has nothing for it but to give them up.

The Lord hath need of him' is in the autocratic tone of One who has

absolute power over us and ours. And that power, where does it come

from? It comes from His absolute surrender of Himself to us, and

because He has wholly given Himself for us. He does not expect us to

say one contrary word when He sends and says, I have need of you, or of

yours.'

Here, again, we have an instance of glad surrender. The last words of

my text are susceptible of a double meaning. Straightway he will send

him hither'--who is he'? It is usually understood to be the owner of

the colt, and the clause is supposed to be Christ's assurance to the

two messengers of the success of their errand. So understood, the words

suggest the great truth that Love loosens the hand that grasps

possessions, and unlocks our treasure-houses. There is nothing more

blessed than to give in response to the requirement of love. And so, to

Christ's authoritative demand, the only proper answer is obedience

swift and glad, because it is loving. Many possibilities of joy and

blessing are lost by us through not yielding on the instant to Christ's

demands. Hesitation and delay are dangerous. In straightway' complying

are security and joy. If the owner had begun to say to himself that he

very much needed the colt, or that he saw no reason why some one else's

beast should not have been taken, or that he would send the animal very

soon, but must have the use of him for an hour or two first, he would

probably never have sent him at all, and so would have missed the

greatest honour of his life. As soon as I know what Christ wants from

me, without delay let me do it; for if I begin with delaying I shall

probably end with declining. The Psalmist was wise when he laid

emphasis on the swiftness of his obedience, and said, I made haste and

delayed not, but made haste to keep Thy commandments.'

But another view of the words makes them part of the message to the

owner of the colt, and not of the assurance to the disciples. Say ye

that the Lord hath need of him, and that straightway (when He has done

with him) He will send him back again.' That is a possible rendering,

and I am disposed to think it is the proper one. By it the owner is

told that he is not parting with his property for good and all, that

Jesus only wishes to borrow the animal for the morning, and that it

will be returned in the afternoon. What does that view of the words

suggest to us? Do you not think that that colt, when it did come

back--for of course it came back some time or other,--was a great deal

more precious to its owner than it ever had been before, or ever could

have been if it had not been lent to Christ, and Christ had not made

His royal entry upon it? Can you not fancy that the man, if he was, as

he evidently was, a disciple and lover of the Lord, would look at it,

especially after the Crucifixion and the Ascension, and think, What an

honour to me, that I provided the mount for that triumphal entry!'? It

is always so. If you wish anything to become precious, lend it to Jesus

Christ, and when it comes back again, as it will come back, there will

be a fragrance about it, a touch of His fingers will be left upon it, a

memory that He has used it. If you desire to own yourselves, and to

make yourselves worth owning, give yourselves to Christ. If you wish to

get the greatest possible blessing and good out of possessions, lay

them at His feet. If you wish love to be hallowed, joy to be calmed,

perpetuated, and deepened, carry it to Him. If the house be worthy,

your peace shall rest upon it; if not,' like the dove to the ark when

it could find no footing in the turbid and drowned world, it shall come

back to you again. Straightway He will send him back again,' and that

which I give to Jesus He will return enhanced, and it will be more

truly and more blessedly mine, because I have laid it in His hands.

This altar' sanctifies the giver and the gift.

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NOTHING BUT LEAVES

And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, He came, if haply He

might find any thing thereon: and when He came to it, He found nothing

but leaves; . . . 14. And Jesus . . . said unto it, No man eat fruit of

thee hereafter for ever.'--Mark xi. 13, 14.

The date of this miracle has an important bearing on its meaning and

purpose. It occurred on the Monday morning of the last week of Christ's

ministry. That week saw His last coming to Israel, if haply He might

find any thing thereon.' And if you remember the foot-to-foot duel with

the rulers and representatives of the nation, and the words, weighty

with coming doom, which He spoke in the Temple on the subsequent days,

you will not doubt that the explanation of this strange and anomalous

miracle is that it is an acted parable, a symbol of Israel in its

fruitlessness and in its consequent barrenness to all coming time.

This is the only point of view, as it seems to me, from which the

peculiarities of the miracle can either be warranted or explained. It

is our Lord's only destructive act. The fig-tree grew by the wayside;

probably, therefore, it belonged to nobody, and there was no right of

property affected by its loss. He saw it from afar, having leaves,' and

that was why, three months before the time, He went to look if there

were figs on it. For experts tell us that in the fig-tree the leaves

accompany, and do not precede, the fruit. And so this one tree, brave

in its show of foliage amidst leafless companions, was a hypocrite

unless there were figs below the leaves. Therefore Jesus came, if haply

He might find anything thereon, and finding nothing, perpetuated the

condition which He found, and made the sin its own punishment.

Now all that is plain symbol, and so I ask you to look with me, for a

few moments, at these three things--(1) What Christ sought and seeks;

(2) What He found and often finds; (3) What He did when He found it.

I. What Christ sought and seeks.

He came seeking fruit.' Now I may just notice, in passing, how

pathetically and beautifully this incident suggests to us the true,

dependent, weak manhood of that great Lord. In all probability He had

just come from the home of Mary and Martha, and it is strange that

having left their hospitable abode He should be an hungered.' But so it

was. And even with all the weight of the coming crisis pressing upon

His soul, He was conscious of physical necessities, as one of us might

have been, and perhaps felt the more need for sustenance because so

terrible a conflict was waiting Him. Nor, I think, need we shrink from

recognising another of the characteristics of humanity here, in the

limitations of His knowledge and in the real expectation, which was

disappointed, that He might find fruit where there were leaves. I do

not want to plunge into depths far too deep for any man to find sure

footing in, nor seek to define the undefinable, nor to explain how the

divine inosculates with the human, but sure I am that Jesus Christ was

not getting up a scene in order to make a parable out of His miracle;

and that the hunger and the expectancy and the disappointment were all

real, however they afterwards may have been turned by Him to a

symbolical purpose. And so here we may see the weak Christ, the limited

Christ, the true human Christ. But side by side, as is ever the case,

with this manifestation of weakness, there comes an apocalypse of

power. Wherever you have, in the history of our Lord, some signal

exemplification of human infirmity, you have flashed out through the

veil, that is, His flesh,' some beam of His glory. Thus this hungry Man

could say, No fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever'; and His bare

word, the mere forth-putting and manifestation of His will, had power

on material things. That is the sign and impress of divinity.

But I pass from that, which is not my special point now. What did

Christ seek? Fruit.' And what is fruit in contradistinction to leaves?

Character and conduct like His. That is our fruit. All else is leafage.

As the Apostle says, Love, joy, hope, peace, righteousness in the Holy

Ghost'; or, to put it into one word, Christ-likeness in our inmost

heart and nature, and Christ-likeness, so far as it may be possible for

us, in our daily life, that is the one thing that our Lord seeks from

us.

O brethren! we do not realise enough for ourselves, day by day, that it

was for this end that Jesus Christ came. The cradle in Bethlehem, the

weary life, the gracious words, the mighty deeds, the Cross on Calvary,

the open grave, Olivet with His last footprints; His place on the

throne, Pentecost, they were all meant for this, to make you and me

good men, righteous people, bearing the fruits of holy living and

conduct corresponding to His own pattern. Emotions of the selectest

kind, religious experience of the profoundest and truest nature, these

are blessed and good. They are the blossom which sets into fruit. And

they come for this end, that by the help of them we may be made like

Jesus Christ. He has yet to learn what is the purpose and the meaning

of the Gospel who fixes upon anything else as its ultimate design than

the production in us, as the results of the life of Christ dwelling in

our hearts, of character and conduct like to His.

I suppose I ought to apologise for talking such commonplace platitudes

as these, but, brethren, the most commonplace truths are usually the

most important and the most impotent. And no platitude' is a platitude

until you have brought it so completely into your lives that there is

no room for a fuller working of it out. So I come to you, Christian men

and women, real and nominal, now with this for my message, that Jesus

Christ seeks from you this first and foremost, that you shall be good

men and women according to the pattern that has been showed us in the

Mount,' according to the likeness of His own stainless perfection.

And do not forget that Jesus Christ hungers for that goodness. That is

a strange, and infinitely touching, and absolutely true thing. He is

only satisfied,' and the hunger of His heart appeased, when He sees of

the travail of His soul' in the righteousness of His servants. I passed

a day or two ago, in a country place, a great field on which there was

stuck up a board that said, ----'s trial ground for seeds.' This world

is Christ's trial ground for seeds, where He is testing you and me to

see whether it is worth while cultivating us any more, and whether we

can bring forth any fruit to perfection' fit for the lips and the

refreshment of the Owner and Lord of the vineyard Christ longs for

fruit from us. And--strange and wonderful, and yet true--the bread'

that He eats is the service of His servants. That, amongst other

things, is what is meant by the ancient institution of sacrifice, the

food of the gods.' Christ's food is the holiness and obedience of His

children. He comes to us, as He came to that fig-tree, seeking from us

this fruit which He delights in receiving. Brethren, we cannot think

too much of Christ's unspeakable gift in itself and in its

consequences; but we may easily think too little, and I am sure that a

great many of us do think too little, of Christ's demands. He is not an

austere man, reaping where He did not sow'; but having sowed so much,

He does look for the harvest. He comes to us with the heart-moving

appeal, I have given all to thee; what givest thou to Me?' My

well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill; and he fenced it

and planted it, and built a tower and a wine-press in it'--and what

then?--and he looked that it should bring forth grapes.' Christ comes

to each of you professing Christians, and asks, What fruit hast thou

borne after all My sedulous husbandry?'

II. Now note, in the next place, what Christ found.

Nothing but leaves.' I have already said that we are told that the

habit of growth of these trees is that the fruit accompanies, and

sometimes precedes, the leaves. Whether it is so or no, let me remind

you that leaves are an outcome of the life as well as fruit, and that

they benefit the tree, and assist in the production of the fruit which

it ought to bear. And so the symbol suggests things that are good in

themselves, ancillary and subsidiary to the production of fruit, but

which sometimes tend to such disproportionate exuberance of growth as

that all the life of the tree runs to leaf, and there is riot a berry

to be found on it.

And if you want to know what such things are, remember the condition of

the rulers of Israel at that time. They prided themselves upon their

nominal, external, hereditary connection with a system of revelation,

they trusted in mere ritualisms, they had ossified religion into

theology, and degraded morality into casuistry. They thought that

because they had been born Jews, and circumcised, and because there was

a daily sacrifice going on in the Temple, and because they had Rabbis

who could split hairs ad infinitum, therefore they were the temple of

the Lord,' and God's chosen.

And that is exactly what hosts of pagans, masquerading as Christians,

are doing in all our so-called Christian lands, and in all our

so-called Christian congregations. In any community of so-called

Christian people there is a little nucleus of real, earnest,

God-fearing folk, and a great fringe of people whose Christianity is

mostly from the teeth outward, who have a nominal and external

connection with religion, who have been baptized' and are

communicants,' who think that religion lies mainly in coming on a

Sunday, and with more or less toleration and interest listening to a

preacher's words and joining in external worship, and all the while the

weightier matters of the law'--righteousness, justice, and the love of

God--they leave untouched. What describes such a type of religion with

more piercing accuracy than nothing but leaves'? External connection

with God's Church is a good thing. It is meant to make us better men

and women. If it does not, it is a bad thing. Acts of worship, more or

less elaborate--for it is not the elaboration of ceremonial, but the

mistaken view of it, that does the harm--acts of worship may be

helpful, or may be absolute barriers to real religious life. They are

becoming so largely to-day. The drift and trend of opinion in some

parts of so-called Christendom is in the direction of outward

ceremonial. And I, for one, believe that there are few things doing

more harm to the Christian character of England to-day than the

preposterous recurrence to a reliance on the mere externals of worship.

Of course we Dissenters pride ourselves on having no complicity with

the sacramentarian errors which underlie these. But there may be quite

as much of a barrier between the soul and Christ, reared by the bare

worship of Nonconformists, or by the no-worship of the Society of

Friends. If the absence of form be converted into a form, as it often

is, there may be as lofty and wide a barrier raised by these as by the

most elaborate ritual of the highest ceremonial that exists in

Christendom. And so I say to you, dear brethren, seeing that we are all

in danger of cleaving to externals and substituting these which are

intended to be helps to the production of godly life and character, it

becomes us all to listen to the solemn word of exhortation that comes

out of my text, and to beware lest our religion runs to leaf instead of

setting into fruit.

It does so with many of us; that is a certainty. I am thinking about no

individual, about no individuals, but I am only speaking common sense

when I say that amongst as many people as I am now addressing there

will be an appreciable proportion who have no notion of religion as

anything beyond a more or less imperative and more or less unwelcome

set of external observances.

III. And so, lastly, let me ask you to notice what Christ did.

I do not need to trouble myself nor you with vindicating the morality

of this miracle against the fantastic objections that often have been

made against it; nor need I say a word more than I have already said

about its symbolical meaning. Israel was in that week being asked for

the last time to bring forth fruit' to the Lord of the vineyard. The

refusal bound barrenness on the synagogue and on the nation, if not

absolutely for ever, at all events until it shall turn to the Lord,'

and partake again of the root and fatness' from which it has been

broken off. What thirsty lips since that week have ever got any good

out of Rabbinism and Judaism? No figs' have grown on that thistle.' The

world has passed it by, and left all its subtle casuistries and

painfully microscopic studies of the letter of Scripture--with utter

oblivion of its spirit--left them all severely and wisely alone.

Judaism is a dead tree.

And is there nothing else in this incident? No man eat fruit of thee

hereafter for ever'; the punishment of that fruitlessness was confirmed

and eternal barrenness. There is the lesson that the punishment of any

Bin is to bind the sin upon the doer of it.

But, further, the church or the individual whose religion runs to leaf

is useless to the world. What does the world care about the ceremonials

and the externals of worship, and a painful orthodoxy, and the study of

the letter of Scripture? Nothing. A useless church or a Christian, from

whom no man gets any fruit to cool a thirsty, parched lip, is only fit

for what comes after the barrenness, and that is, that every tree that

bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.' The

churches of England, and we, as integral parts of these, have solemn

duties lying upon us to-day; and if we cannot help our brethren, and

feed and nourish the hungry and thirsty hearts and souls of mankind,

then--then! the sooner we are plucked up and pitched over the vineyard

wall, which is the fate of the barren vine, the better for the world

and the better for the vineyard.

The fate of Judaism teaches, to all of us professing Christians, very

solemn lessons. If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest

He also spare not thee.' What has become of the seven churches of Asia

Minor? They hardened into chattering theological orthodoxy,' and all

the blood of them went to the surface, so to speak. And so down came

the Mohammedan power--which was strong then because it did believe in a

God, and not in its own belief about a God--and wiped them off the face

of the earth. And so, brethren, we have, in this miracle, a warning and

a prophecy which it becomes all the Christian communities of this day,

and the individual members of such, to lay very earnestly to heart.

But do not let us forget that the Evangelist who does not tell us the

story of the blasted fig-tree does tell us its analogue, the parable of

the barren fig-tree, and that in it we read that when the fiat of

destruction had gone forth, there was one who said, Let it alone this

year also that I may dig about it, . . . and if it bear fruit, well! If

not, after that thou shalt cut it down.' So the barren tree may become

a fruitful tree, though it has hitherto borne nothing but leaves. Your

religion may have been all on the surface and in form, but you can come

into touch with Him in whom is our life and from whom comes our

fruitfulness. He has said to each of us, As the branch cannot bear

fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye

abide in Me.'

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DISHONEST TENANTS

And He began to speak unto them by parables. A certain man planted a

vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the

winefat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into

a far country. 2. And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a

servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the

vineyard. 3. And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away

empty. 4. And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they

cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully

handled. 5. And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many

others; beating some, and killing some 6. Having yet therefore one son,

his well beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will

reverence my son. 7. But those husbandmen said among themselves, This

is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours.

8. And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard.

9. What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? He will come and

destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others. 10. And

have ye not read this scripture: The stone which the builders rejected

is become the head of the corner: 11. This was the Lord's doing, and it

is marvellous in our eyes? 12. And they sought to lay hold on Him, but

feared the people: for they knew that He had spoken the parable against

them; and they left Him, and went their way.'--Mark xii. 1-12.

The ecclesiastical rulers had just been questioning Jesus as to the

authority by which He acted. His answer, a counter-question as to

John's authority, was not an evasion. If they decided whence John came,

they would not be at any loss as to whence Jesus came. If they steeled

themselves against acknowledging the Forerunner, they would not be

receptive of Christ's message. That keen-edged retort plainly indicates

Christ's conviction of the rulers' insincerity, and in this parable He

charges home on these solemn hypocrites their share in the hereditary

rejection of messengers whose authority was unquestionable. Much they

cared for even divine authority, as they and their predecessors had

shown through centuries! The veil of parable is transparent here. Jesus

increased in severity and bold attack as the end drew near.

I. The parable begins with a tender description of the preparation and

allotment of the vineyard. The picture is based upon Isaiah's lovely

apologue (Isaiah v. 1), which was, no doubt, familiar to the learned

officials. But there is a slight difference in the application of the

metaphor which in Isaiah means the nation, and in the parable is rather

the theocracy as an institution, or, as we may put it roughly, the

aggregate of divine revelations and appointments which constituted the

religious prerogatives of Israel.

Our Lord follows the original passage in the description of the

preparation of the vineyard, but it would probably be going too far to

press special meanings on the wall, the wine-press, and the watchman's

tower. The fence was to keep off marauders, whether passers-by or the

boar out of the wood' (Psalm lxxx. 12, 13); the wine-press, for which

Mark uses the word which means rather the vat into which the juice from

the press proper flowed, was to extract and collect the precious

liquid; the tower was for the watchman.

A vineyard with all these fittings was ready for profitable occupation.

Thus abundantly had God furnished Israel with all that was needed for

fruitful, happy service. What was true of the ancient Church is still

more true of us who have received every requisite for holy living.

Isaiah's solemn appeal has a still sharper edge for Christians: Judge,

I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more

to my vineyard that I have not done in it?'

The letting of the vineyard to husbandmen' means the committal to

Israel and its rulers of these divine institutions, and the holding

them responsible for their fruitfulness. It may be a question whether

the tenants are to be understood as only the official persons, or

whether, while these are primarily addressed, they represent the whole

people. The usual interpretation limits the meaning to the rulers, but,

if so, it is difficult to carry out the application, as the vineyard

would then have to be regarded as being the nation, which confuses all.

The language of Matthew (which threatens the taking of the vineyard and

giving it to another nation) obliges us to regard the nation as

included in the husbandmen, though primarily the expression is

addressed to the rulers.

But more important is it to note the strong expressions for man's

quasi-independence and responsibility. The Jew was invested with full

possession of the vineyard. We all, in like manner, have intrusted to

us, to do as we will with, the various gifts and powers of Christ's

gospel. God, as it were, draws somewhat apart from man, that he may

have free play for his choice, and bear the burden of responsibility.

The divine action was conspicuous at the time of founding the polity of

Judaism, and then came long years in which there were no miracles, but

all things continued as they were. God was as near as before, but He

seemed far off. Thus Jesus has, in like manner, gone into a far country

to receive a kingdom and to return'; and we, the tenants of a richer

vineyard than Israel's, have to administer what He has intrusted to us,

and to bring near by faith Him who is to sense far off.

II. The next scenes paint the conduct of the dishonest vine-dressers.

We mark the stern, dark picture drawn of the continued and brutal

violence, as well as the flagrant unfaithfulness, of the tenants.

Matthew's version gives emphasis to the increasing harshness of

treatment of the owner's messengers, as does Mark's. First comes

beating, then wounding, then murder. The interpretation is

self-evident. The servants' are the prophets, mostly men inferior in

rank to the hierarchy, shepherds, fig-gatherers, and the like. They

came to rouse Israel to a sense of the purpose for which they had

received their distinguishing prerogatives, and their reward had been

contempt and maltreatment. They had trial of mockings and scourgings,

of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder,

they were slain with the sword.'

The indictment is the same as that by which Stephen wrought the

Sanhedrim into a paroxysm of fury. To make such a charge as Jesus did,

in the very Temple courts, and with the already hostile priests glaring

at Him while He spoke, was a deliberate assault on them and their

predecessors, whose true successors they showed themselves to be. They

had just been solemnly questioning Him as to His authority. He answers

by thus passing in review the uniform treatment meted by them and their

like to those who came with God's manifest authority.

If a mere man had spoken this parable, we might admire the magnificent

audacity of such an accusation. But the Speaker is more than man, and

we have to recognise the judicial calmness and severity of His tone.

Israel's history, as it shaped itself before His pure eyes and perfect

judgment,' was one long series of divine favours and of human

ingratitude, of ample preparations for righteous living and of no

result, of messengers sent and their contumelious rejection. We wonder

at the sad monotony of such requital. Are we doing otherwise?

III. Then comes the last effort of the Owner, the last arrow in the

quiver of Almighty Love. Two things are to be pondered in this part of

the parable. First, that wonderful glimpse into the depths of God's

heart, in the hope expressed by the Owner of the vineyard, brings out

very clearly Christ's claim, made there before all these hostile, keen

critics, to stand in an altogether singular relation to God. He asserts

His Sonship as separating Him from the class of prophets who are

servants only, and as constituting a relationship with the Father prior

to His coming to earth. His Sonship is no mere synonym for His

Messiahship, but was a fact long before Bethlehem; and its assertion

lifts for us a corner of the veil of cloud and darkness round the

throne of God. Not less striking is the expression of a frustrated hope

in they will reverence My Son.' Men can thwart God's purpose. His

divine charity hopeth all things.' The mystery thus sharply put here is

but that which is presented everywhere in the co-existence of God's

purposes and man's freedom.

The other noteworthy point is the corresponding casting of the

vine-dressers' thoughts into words. Both representations are due to the

graphic character of parable; both crystallise into speech motives

which were not actually spoken. It is unnecessary to suppose that even

the rulers of Israel had gone the awful length of clear recognition of

Christ's Messiahship, and of looking each other in the face and

whispering such a fiendish resolve. Jesus is here dragging to light

unconscious motives. The masses did wish to have their national

privileges and to avoid their national duties. The rulers did wish to

have their sway over minds and consciences undisturbed. They did resent

Jesus' interference, chiefly because they instinctively felt that it

threatened their position. They wanted to get Him out of the way, that

they might lord it at will. They could have known that He was the Son,

and they suppressed dawning suspicions that He was. Alas! they have

descendants still in many of us who put away His claims, even while we

secretly recognise them, in order that we may do as we like without His

meddling with us! The rulers' calculation was a blunder. As Augustine

says, They slew Him that they might possess, and, because they slew,

they lost.' So is it always. Whoever tries to secure any desired end by

putting away his responsibility to render to God the fruit of his

thankful service, loses the good which he would fain clutch at for his

own. All sin is a mistake.

The parable passes from thinly veiled history to equally transparent

prediction. How sadly and how unshrinkingly does the meek yet mighty

Victim disclose to the conspirators His perfect knowledge of the murder

which they were even now hatching in their minds! He foresees all, and

will not lift a finger to prevent it. Mark puts the killing' before the

casting out of the vineyard,' while Matthew and Luke invert the order

of the two things. The slaughtered corpse was, as a further indignity,

thrown over the wall, by which is symbolically expressed His exclusion

from Israel, and the vine-dressers' delusion that they now had secured

undisturbed possession.

IV. The last point is the authoritative sentence on the evil-doers.

Mark's condensed account makes Christ Himself answer His own question.

Probably we are to suppose that, with hypocritical readiness, some of

the rulers replied, as the other Evangelists represent, and that Jesus

then solemnly took up their words. If anything could have enraged the

rulers more than the parable itself, the distinct declaration of the

transference of Israel's prerogatives to more worthy tenants would do

so. The words are heavy with doom. They carry a lesson for us.

Stewardship implies responsibility, and faithlessness, sooner or later,

involves deprivation. The only way to keep God's gifts is to use them

for His glory. The grace of God,' says Luther somewhere, is like a

flying summer shower.' Where are Ephesus and the other apocalyptic

churches? Let us take heed lest, if God spared not the natural

branches, He also spare not us.'

Jesus leaves the hearers with the old psalm ringing in their ears,

which proclaimed that the stone which the builders rejected becomes the

head stone of the corner.' Other words of the same psalm had been

chanted by the crowd in the procession on entering the city. Their

fervour was cooling, but the prophecy would still be fulfilled. The

builders are the same as the vine-dressers; their rejection of the

stone is parallel with slaying the Son.

But though Jesus foretells His death, He also foretells His triumph

after death. How could He have spoken, almost in one breath, the

prophecy of His being slain and cast out of the vineyard,' and that of

His being exalted to be the very apex and shining summit of the true

Temple, unless He had been conscious that His death was indeed not the

end, but the centre, of His work, and His elevation to universal and

unchanging dominion?

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GOD'S LAST ARROW

Having yet therefore one son, his well-beloved, he sent him also last

unto them.'--Mark xii. 6.

Reference to Isaiah v. There are differences in detail here which need

not trouble us.

Isaiah's parable is a review of the theocratic history of Israel, and

clearly the messengers are the prophets; here Christ speaks of Himself

and His own mission to Israel, and goes on to tell of His death as

already accomplished.

I. The Son who follows and surpasses the servants.

(a) Our Lord here places Himself in the line of the prophets as coming

for a similar purpose. The mission to Israel was the same. The mission

of His life was the same.

The last words of the lawgiver certainly point to a person (Deut.

xviii. 18): A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you like

unto me. Him shall ye hear.' How ridiculous the cool superciliousness

with which modern historical criticism pooh-poohs' that interpretation!

But the contrast is quite as prominent as the resemblance. This saying

is one which occurs in all the Synoptics, and is as full a declaration

of Sonship as any in John's Gospel. It reposes on the scene at the

baptism (Matt. iii.): This is My beloved Son!' Such a saying was well

enough understood by the Jews to mean more than the Messiah.' It

clearly involves kindred to the divine in a far other and higher sense

than any prophet ever had it. It involves pre-existence. It asserts

that He was the special object of the divine love, the heir.'

You cannot relieve the New Testament Christ of the responsibility of

having made such assertions. There they are! He did deliberately

declare that He was, in a unique sense, the Son' on whom the love and

complacency of the Father rested continually.

II. The aggravation of men's sins as tending to the enhancement of the

divine efforts.

The terrible Nemesis of evil is that it ever tends to reproduce itself

in aggravated forms. Think of the influence of habit; the searing of

conscience, so that we become able to do things that we would have

shrunk from at an earlier stage. Remember how impunity leads to greater

sin. So here the first servant is merely sent away empty, the second is

wounded and disgraced, the third is killed. All evil is an inclined

plane, a steady, downward progress. How beautifully the opposite

principle of the divine love and patience is represented as striving

with the increasing hate and resistance! According to Matthew, the

householder sent other servants more than the first,' and the climax

was that he sent his son. Mightier forces are brought to bear. This

attraction increases as the square of the distance. The blacker the

cloud, the brighter the sun; the thicker the ice, the hotter the flame;

the harder the soil, the stronger the ploughshare. Note, too, the

undertone of sacrifice and of yearning for the son which may be

discerned in the householder's' words. The son is his dearest

treasure,' his mightiest gift, than which is nothing higher.

The mission of Christ is the ultimate appeal of God to men.

In the primary sense of the parable Jesus does close the history of the

divine strivings with Israel. After Christ, the last of the prophets,

the divine voice ceases; after the blaze of that light all is dark.

There is nothing more remarkable in the whole history of the world than

that cessation in an instant, as it were, of the long, august series of

divine efforts for Israel. Henceforward there is an awful silence.

Forsaken Israel wanders lone.'

And the principle involved for us is the same.

Christ crucified' is more than Christ miracle-working. That more' we

have, as the Jews had. But if that avails not, then nothing else will.

He is last' because highest, strongest, and all-sufficient.

He is last' inasmuch as all since are but echoes of His voice and

proclaimers of His grace.

He is last' as the eternal and the permanent, the same for ever' (Heb.

xiii. 8). There are to be no new powers for the world; no new forces to

draw men to God. God's quiver is empty, His last bolt shot, His most

tender appeal made.

III. The unwearied divine charity.

They will reverence My Son.' May we not say this is a divine hope? It

is not worth while to make a difficulty of the bold representation. It

is but parallel to all the dealings of God with men; and it sets forth

the possibility that He might have won Israel back to God and to

obedience. It suggests the good faith and the earnestness with which

God sent Him, and He came, to bring Israel back to God. But we are not

to suppose that this divine hope excluded the divine purpose of His

death or was inconsistent with that, for He goes on to speak of His

death as if it were past (verse 8). This shows how distinctly He

foreknew it.

Its highest aspect is not here, for it was not needed for the parable.

With wicked hands ye have crucified,' etc., is true, as well as I lay

it down of Myself.'

Let us lay to heart the solemn love which warns by prophesying, tells

what men are going to do in order that they may not do it (and what He

will do in order that He may not have to do it). And let us yield

ourselves to the power of Christ's death as God's magnet for drawing us

all back to Him; and as certain to bring about at last the satisfaction

of the Father's long-frustrated hope: They will reverence my Son,' and

the fulfilment of the Son's long-unaccomplished prediction: I, if I be

lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.'

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NOT FAR AND NOT IN

Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.'--Mark xii. 34.

A bruised reed He will not break, and the smoking flax He will not

quench.'

Here is Christ's recognition of the low beginnings of goodness and

faith.

This is a special case of a man who appears to have fully discerned the

spirituality and inwardness of law, and to have felt that the one bond

between God and man was love. He needed only to have followed out the

former thought to have been smitten by the conviction of his own

sinfulness, and to have reflected on the latter to have discovered that

he needed some one who could certify and commend God's love to him, and

thereby to kindle his to God. Christ recognises such beginnings and

encourages him to persevere: but warns him against the danger of

supposing himself in the kingdom, and against the prolongation of what

is only good as a transition state.

This Scribe is an interesting study as being one who recognised the Law

in its spiritual meaning, in opposition to forms and ceremonies. His

intellectual convictions needed to be led on from recognition of the

spirituality of the Law to recognition of his own failures. By law is

the knowledge of sin.' His intellectual convictions needed to pass over

into and influence his heart and life. He recognised true piety, and

was earnestly striving after it, but entrance into the kingdom is by

faith in the Saviour, who is the Way.' So Jesus' praise of him is but

measured. For in him there was separation between knowing and doing.

I. Who are near? Christ's kingdom is near us all, whether we are

heathen, infidel, profligate or not.

Here is a distinct recognition of two things--(a) Degrees of

approximation; (b) decisive separation between those who are, and those

who are not, within the kingdom.

This Scribe was near, and yet not in, the kingdom, because, like so

many in all ages, he had an intellectual hold of principles which he

had never followed out to their intellectual issues, nor ever enthroned

as, in their practical issues, the guides of his life. How constantly

we find characters of similar incompleteness among ourselves! How many

of us have true thoughts concerning God's law and what it requires,

which ought, in all reason, to have brought us to the consciousness of

our own sin, and are yet untouched by one pang of penitence! How many

of us have lying in our heads, like disused furniture in a lumber-room,

what we suppose to be beliefs of ours, which only need to be followed

out to their necessary results to refurnish with a new equipment the

whole of our religious thinking! How few of us do really take pains to

bring our beliefs into clear sunlight, and to follow them wherever they

lead us! There is no commoner fault, and no greater foe, than the hazy,

lazy half-belief, of which its owner neither knows the grounds nor

perceives the intellectual or the practical issues.

There are multitudes who have, or have had, convictions of which the

only rational outcome is practical surrender to Jesus Christ by faith

and love. Such persons abound in Christian congregations and in

Christian homes. They are on the verge of the great surrender,' but

they do not go beyond the verge, and so they perpetrate the great

refusal.' And to all such the word of our text should sound as a

warning note, which has also hope in its bone. Not far from' is still

outside.'

II. Why they are only near.

The reason is not because of anything apart from themselves. The

Christian gospel offers immediate entrance into the Kingdom, and all

the gifts which its King can bestow, to all and every one who will. So

that the sole cause of any man's non-entrance lies with himself.

We have spoken of failure to follow out truths partially grasped, and

that constitutes a reason which affects the intellect mainly, and plays

its part in keeping men out of the Kingdom.

But there are other, perhaps more common, reasons, which intervene to

prevent convictions being followed out into their properly consequent

acts.

The two most familiar and fatal of these are:--

(a) Procrastination.

(b) Lingering love of the world.

III. Such men cannot continue near.

The state is necessarily transitional. It must pass over into--(a)

Either going on and into the Kingdom, or (b) going further away from

it.

Christ warns here, and would stimulate to action, for--(a) Convictions

not acted on die; (b) truths not followed out fade; (c) impressions

resisted are harder to be made again; (d) obstacles increase with time;

(e) the habit of lingering becomes strengthened.

IV. Unless you are in, you are finally shut out.

City of refuge.' It was of no avail to have been near. Strive to enter

in.'

Appeal to all such as are in this transition stage.

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THE CREDULITY OF UNBELIEF

Many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive

many.'--Mark xiii. 6.

When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?'--Luke

xviii. 8.

It was the same generation that is represented in these two texts as

void of faith in the Son of Man, and as credulously giving heed to

impostors. Unbelief and superstition are closely allied. Religion is so

vital a necessity, that if the true form of it be cast aside, some

false form will be eagerly seized in order to fill the aching void. Men

cannot permanently live without some sort of a faith in the Unseen, but

they can determine whether it shall be a worthy recognition of a worthy

conception of that Unseen, or a debasing superstition. An epoch of

materialism in philosophic thought has always been followed by violent

reaction, in which quacks and fanatics have reaped rich harvests. If

the dark is not peopled with one loved Face, our busy imagination will

fill it with a crowd of horrible ones.

Just as a sailor, looking out into the night over a solitary,

islandless sea, sees shapes; intolerant of the islandless expanse,

makes land out of fogbanks; and, sick of silence, hears airy tongues'

in the moanings of the wind and the slow roll of the waves, so men

shudderingly look into the dark unknown, and if they see not their

Father there, will either shut their eyes or strain them in gazing it

into shape. The sight of Him is religion, the closed eye is infidelity,

the strained gaze is superstition. The second and the third are each so

unsatisfying that they perpetually pass over into one another and

destroy one another, as when I shut my eyes, I see slowly shaping

itself a coloured image of my eye, which soon flickers and fluctuates

into black nothingness again, and then rises once more, once more to

fade. Men, if they believe not in God, then do service to them which by

nature are no gods.'

But let us come to more immediately Christian thoughts. Christ does

what men so urgently require to be done, that if they do not believe in

Him they will be forced to shape out for themselves some fancied ways

of doing it. The emotions which men cherish towards Him so

irrepressibly need an object to rest on, that if not He, then some far

less worthy one, will be chosen to receive them.

It is just to the illustration of these thoughts that I seek to turn

now, and in such alternatives as these--

I. Reception of Christ as the Revealer is the only escape from unmanly

submission to unworthy pretenders.

That function is one which the instincts of men teach them that they

need.

Christ comes to satisfy the need as the visible true embodiment of the

Father's love, of the Father's wisdom.

If He be rejected--what then? Why, not that the men who reject will

contentedly continue in darkness--that is never possible; but that some

manner or other of satisfying the clamant need will be had recourse to,

and then that to it will be transferred the submission and credence

that should have been His. If we have Him for our Teacher and Guide,

then all other teachers and guides will take their right places. We

shall not angrily repel their power, nor talk loudly about the right of

private judgment,' and our independence of all men's thoughts. We are

not so independent. We shall thankfully accept all help from all men

wiser, better, more manly than ourselves, whether they give us uttered

words of wisdom and beauty, having grace poured into their lips,' or

whether they give us lives ennobled by strenuous effort, or whether

they give us greater treasure than all these--the sight once more of a

loving heart. All is good, all is helpful, all we shall receive; but in

proportion to the felt obligations we are laid under to them will be

the felt authority of that saying, Call no man your master on earth,

for One is your Master, even Christ.' That command forbids our

slavishly accepting any human domination over our faith, but it no less

emphatically forbids our contemptuously rejecting any human helper of

our joy, for it closes with and all ye are brethren'--bound then to

mutual observance, mutual helpfulness, mutual respect for each other's

individuality, mutual avoidance of needless division. To have Him for

his Guide makes the human guide gentle and tender among his disciples

as a nurse among her children,' for he remembers the gentleness of

Christ,' and he dare not be other than an imitator of Him. A Christian

teacher's spirit will always be, not for that we have dominion over

your faith, but we are helpers of your joy'; his most earnest word, I

beseech you, therefore, brethren'; his constant desire, He must

increase. I must decrease.' And to have Christ for our Guide makes the

taught lovingly submissive to all who by largeness of gifts and graces

are set by Him above them, and yet lovingly recalcitrant at any attempt

to compel adhesion or force dogmas. The one freedom from undue

dependence on men and men's opinions lies in this submission to Jesus.

Then we can say, when need is, I have a Master. To Him I submit; if you

seek to be master, I demur: of them who seemed to be somewhat,

whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me.'

But the greatest danger is not that our guides shall insist on our

submission, but that we shall insist on giving it. It is for all of us

such a burden to have the management of our own fate, the forming of

our own opinions, the fearful responsibility of our own destiny, that

we are all only too ready to say to some man or other, from love or

from laziness, Where thou goest, I will go; thy people shall be my

people, and thy God my God.'

Few things are more strange and tragic than the eagerness with which

people who are a great deal too enlightened to render allegiance to

Jesus Christ will install some teacher of their own choosing as their

authoritative master, will swallow his dicta, swear by him, and glory

in being called by his name. What they think it derogatory to their

mental independence to give to the Teacher of Nazareth, they freely

give to their chosen oracle. It is not in the last times' only that men

who will not endure sound teaching heap to themselves teachers after

their own lusts,' and have the ears' which are fast closed to the

Truth' wide open to fables.'

On the small scale we see this melancholy perversity of conduct

exemplified in every little coterie and school of unbelievers.

On the great scale Mohammedanism and Buddhism, with their millions of

adherents, write the same tragic truth large in the history of the

world.

II. Faith in the reconciling Christ is the only sure deliverance from

debasing reliance on false means of reconciliation.

In a very profound sense ignorance and sin are the same fact regarded

under two different aspects. And in the depths of their natures men

have the longing for some Power who shall put away sin, as they have

the longing for one that will dispel ignorance. The consciousness of

alienation from God lies in the human heart, dormant indeed for the

most part, but like a coiled, hibernating snake, ready to wake and

strike its poison into the veins. Christ by His great work, and

specially by His sacrificial death, meets that universal need.

But closely as His work fits men's needs, it sharply opposes some of

their wishes, and of their interpretations of their needs. The Jew

demands a sign,' the Greek craves a reasoned system of wisdom,' and

both concur in finding the Cross an offence.'

But the rejection of Jesus as the Reconciler does not quiet the

cravings, which make themselves heard at some time or other in most

consciences, for deliverance from the dominion and from the guilt of

sin. And men are driven to adopt other expedients to fill up the void

which their turning away from Jesus has left. Sometimes they fall back

on a vague reliance on a vague assertion that God is merciful';

sometimes they reason themselves into a belief--or, at any rate, an

assertion--that the conception of sin is an error, and that men are not

guilty. Sometimes they manage to silence the inward voice that accuses

and condemns, by dint of not listening to it or drowning it by other

noises.

But these expedients fail them some time or other, and then, if they

have not cast the burden of their sin and their sins on the great

Reconciler, they either have to weary themselves with painful and vain

efforts to be their own redeemers, or they fall under the domination of

a priest.

Hence the hideous penances of heathenism; and hence, too, the power of

sacramentarian and sacerdotal perversions of evangelical truth.

III. Faith in Christ as the Regenerator is the only deliverance from

baseless hopes for the world.

The world is today full of moaning voices crying, Art thou He that

should come, or do we look for another?' and it is full of confident

voices proclaiming other means of its regeneration than letting Christ

make all things new.'

The conviction that society needs to be reconstituted on other

principles is spread everywhere, and is often associated with intense

disbelief in Christ the Regenerator.

Has not the past proved that all schemes for the regeneration of

society which do not grapple with the fact of sin, and which do not

provide a means of infusing into human nature a new impulse and

direction, will end in failure, and are only too likely to end in

blood? These two requirements are met by Jesus, and by Him only, and

whoever rejects Him and His gift of pardon and cleansing, and His

inbreathing of a new life into the individual, will fail in his effort,

however earnest and noble in many aspects, to redeem society and bring

about a fair new world.

It is pitiable to see the waste of high aspiration and eager effort in

so many quarters today. But that waste is sure to attend every scheme

which does not start from the recognition of Christ's work as the basis

of the world's transformation, and does not crown Him as the King,

because He is the Saviour, of mankind.

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AUTHORITY AND WORK

For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his

house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work,

and commanded the porter to watch.'--Mark xiii. 34.

Church order is not directly touched on in the Gospels, but the

principles which underlie all Church order are distinctly laid down.

The whole community of Christian people is a family or household, being

brethren because possessors of a new life through Christ. In that

household there is one Master,' and all its members are servants.' That

name suggests the purpose for which they exist; the meaning of all

their offices, dignities, etc.

I. The authority with which the servants are invested.

We hear a great deal about the authority of the Church in these days,

as a determiner of truth and as a prescriber of Christian action. It

means generally official authority, the power of guidance and

definition of the Church's action, etc., which some people think is

lodged in the hands of preachers, pastors, priests, either individually

or collectively. There is nothing of that sort meant here. Whatever

this authority is, it belongs to the whole body of the servants, not to

individuals among them. It is the prerogative of the whole ecclesia,

not of some handful of them. This honour,' whatever it be, have all the

saints.'

Explain by reference to the kings of the earth exercise lordship over

them'; the greatest shall be your servant.' It is then but another name

for capacity for service, power to bless, etc.

And this idea is still further borne out if we go back to the parable

of our text. A man leaves his house in charge of his servants. To them

is committed the responsibility for his goods. His honour and interests

are in their hands. They have control over his possessions. This is the

analogy which our Lord suggests as presenting a vivid likeness to our

position in the world.

Christ has committed the care of His kingdom, the glory of His name,

the growth of His cause in the world to His Church, and has endowed it

with all talents,' i.e. gifts needful for that work. Or, to put it in

other words, they are His representatives in the world. They have to

defend His honour. His name is scandalised or glorified by their

actions. They have to see to His interests. They are charged with the

carrying out of His mind and purposes.

The foundation of all is laid. Henceforth building on it is all, and

that is to be done by men. Human lips and Christian effort--not without

the divine Spirit in the word--are to be the means.

It is as when some commander plans his battle, and from an eminence

overlooks the current of the fight, and marks the plunging legions as

they struggle through the smoke. He holds all the tremendous machinery

in his hands. The plan and the glory are his, but the execution of the

plan lies with the troops.

In a still more true sense all the glory of the Christian conquest of

the world is His, but still the instruments are ourselves. The whole

counsel of God is on our side. We go not a warfare at our own charges.'

Note the perfect consistency of this with all that we hold of the

necessity of divine influence, etc.

His servants are intrusted with all His goods.' They have authority

over the gifts which He has given them, i.e. Christian men are stewards

of Christ's riches for others.

They have access to the free use of them all for themselves.

Thus the authority' is all derived. It is all given for the sake of

others. It is all capacity for service. Hence--

II. The authority with which the servants are invested binds every one

of them to hard work for Christ.

To every man his work'

(1) Gifts involve duties. That is the first great thought. To have

received binds us to impart. Freely ye have received, freely give.'

All selfish possession of the gifts which Christ bestows is grave sin.

The price at which they were procured, that miracle and mystery of

self-sacrifice, is the great pattern as well as the great motive for

our service.

The purpose for which we have received them is plainly set forth: in

the existence of the solidarity in which we are all bound; in the

definite utterances of Scripture.

The need for their exercise is only too palpable in the condition of

things around us.

(2) In this multitude of servants every one has his own task.

The universality of the great gift leads to a corresponding

universality of obligation. All Christians have their gifts. Each of us

has his special work marked out for him by character, relationships,

circumstances, natural tastes, etc.

How solemn a divine call there is in these individual peculiarities

which we so often think of as unimportant accidents, or regard mainly

in their bearing on our own ease and comfort! How reverently we should

regard the diversities which are thus revelations of God's will

concerning our tasks! How earnestly we should seek to know what it is

that we are fitted for! The importance of all protests against priestly

assumption lies here, that they strengthen the force with which we

proclaim that every man has his work.'

Ponder the variety of characters and gifts which Christ gives and

desires His servants to use, and the indispensable need for them all.

The ideal Church is the body' of Christ, in which each member has its

place and function.

Our fault in this matter.

(3) The duties are to be done in the spirit of hard toil.

The servant has his work' allotted him, and the word implies that the

work calls for effort. The race is not to be run without dust and

sweat. Our Christian service is not to be regarded as a bye-product' or

parergon. It is, so to speak, a vocation, not an avocation. It deserves

and demands all the energy that we can put forth, continuity and

constancy, plan and system. Nothing is to be done for God, any more

than for ourselves, without toil. In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou

eat bread and give it to others.'

III, To do this work, watchfulness is needed.

The division of tasks between servant' and porter' is only part of the

drapery of the parable. To show that watchfulness belongs to all, see

the two following verses.

What is this watchfulness? Not constant fidgety curiosity about the

coming of the Lord; not hunting after apocalyptic dates. The modern

impression seems to be that such study is watchfulness.' Christ says

that the time of His coming is hidden (see previous verses). Ignorance

of that is the very reason why we are to watch. Watchfulness, then, is

just a profound and constant feeling of the transiency of this present.

The mind is to be kept detached from it; the eye and heart are to be

going out to things unseen and eternal'; we are to be familiarising

ourselves with the thought that the world is passing away.

This watchfulness is an indispensable part of our work.' The true

Christian thought of the transiency of the world sets us to work the

more vigorously in it, and increases, not diminishes, our sense of the

importance of time and of earthly things, and braces us to our tasks by

the thought of the brevity of opportunity, as well as by guarding us

against tastes and habits which eat all earnestness out of the soul.

Thus working and watching,' happy will be the servant whom his Lord

will find so doing,' i.e. at work, not idly looking for Him. Our common

duties are the best preparation for our Lord's coming.

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THE ALABASTER BOX

And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a

good work on Me. . .. 8. She hath done what she could: she is come

aforehand to anoint My body to the burying. 9. Verily I say unto you.

Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world,

this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of

her.'--Mark xiv. 6-9.

John's Gospel sets this incident in its due framework of time and

place, and tells us the names of the actors. The time was within a week

of Calvary, the place was Bethany, where, as John significantly reminds

us, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, thereby connecting the

feast with that incident; the woman who broke the box of ointment and

poured the perfume on the head and feet of Jesus was Mary; the first

critic of her action was Judas. Selfishness blames love for the

profusion and prodigality, which to it seem folly and waste. The

disciples chimed in with the objection, not because they were superior

to Mary in wisdom, but because they were inferior in consecration.

John tells us, too, that Martha was amongst them that served.' The

characteristics of the two sisters are preserved. The two types of

character which they respectively represent have great difficulty in

understanding and doing justice to one another. Christ understands and

does justice to them both. Martha, bustling, practical, utilitarian to

the finger-tips, does not much care about listening to Christ's words

of wisdom. She has not any very high-strung or finely-spun emotions,

but she can busy herself in getting a meal ready; she loves Him with

all her heart, and she takes her own way of showing it. But she gets

impatient with her sister, and thinks that her sitting at Christ's feet

is a dreamy waste of time, and not without a touch of selfishness,

taking no care for me, though I have got so much on my back.' And so,

in like manner, Mary is made out to be a monster of selfishness; Why

was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the

poor?' She could not serve, she would only have been in Martha's road

if she had tried. But she had one precious thing which was her very

own, and she caught it up, and in the irrepressible burst of her

thankful love, as she saw Lazarus sitting there at the table beside

Jesus, she poured the liquid perfume on His head and feet. He casts His

shield over the poor, unpractical woman, who did such an utterly

useless thing, for which a basin of water and a towel would have served

far better. There are a great many useless things which, in Heaven's

estimate, are more valuable than a great many apparently more practical

ones. Christ accepts the service, and in His deep words lays down three

or four principles which it would do us all good to carry with us into

our daily lives. So I shall now try to gather from these utterances of

our Lord's some great truths about Christian service.

I. The first of them is the motive which hallows everything.

She hath wrought a good work on Me.' Now that is pretty nearly a

definition of what a good work is, and you see it is very unlike our

conventional notions of what constitutes a good work.' Christ implies

that anything, no matter what are its other characteristics, that is

on' Him, that is to say, directed towards Him under the impulse of

simple love to Him, is a good work'; and the converse follows, that

nothing which has not that saving salt of reference to Him in it

deserves the title. Did you ever think of what an extraordinary

position that is for a man to take up? Think about Me in what you do,

and you will do good. Do anything, no matter what, because you love Me,

and it will be lifted up into high regions, and become transfigured; a

good work.' He took the best that any one could give Him, whether it

was of outward possessions or of inward reverence, abject submission,

and love and trust. He never said to any man, You are going over the

score. You are exaggerating about Me. Stand up, for I also am a Man.'

He did say once, Why callest thou Me good?' not because it was an

incorrect attribution, but because it was a mere piece of conventional

politeness. And in all other cases, not only does He accept as His

rightful possession the utmost of reverence that any man can do Him,

and bring Him, but He here implies, if He does not, as He almost does,

specifically declare, that to be done for His sake lifts a deed into

the region of good' works.

Have you reflected what such an attitude implies as to the

self-consciousness of the Man who took it, and whether it is

intelligible, not to say admirable, or rather whether it is not worthy

of reprobation, except upon one hypothesis--Thou art the everlasting

Son of the Father,' and all men honour God when they honour the

Incarnate Word? But that is aside from my present purpose.

Is not this conception, that the motive of reverence and love to Him

ennobles and sanctifies every deed, the very fundamental principle of

Christian morality? All things are sanctified when they are done for

His sake. You plunge a poor pebble into a brook, and as the sunlit

ripples pass over its surface, the hidden veins of delicate colour come

out and glow, and the poor stone looks a jewel, and is magnified as

well as glorified by being immersed in the stream. Plunge your work

into Christ, and do it for Him, and the giver and the gift will be

greatened and sanctified.

But, brethren, if we take this point of view, and look to the motive,

and not to the manner or the issues, or the immediate objects, of our

actions, as determining whether they are good or no, it will

revolutionise a great many of our thoughts, and bring new ideas into

much of our conventional language. A good work' is not a piece of

beneficence or benevolence, still less is it to be confined to those

actions which conventional Christianity has chosen to dignify by the

name. It is a designation that should not be clotted into certain

specified corners of a life, but be extended over them all. The things

which more specifically go under such a name, the kind of things that

Judas wanted to have substituted for the utterly useless, lavish

expenditure by this heart that was burdened with the weight of its own

blessedness, come, or do not come, under the designation, according as

there is present in them, not only natural charity to the poor whom ye

have always with you,' but the higher reference of them to Christ

Himself. All these lower forms of beneficence are imperfect without

that. And instead of, as we have been taught by authoritative voices of

late years, the service of man being the true service of God, the

relation of the two terms is precisely the opposite, and it is the

service of God that will effloresce into all service of man. Judas did

not do much for the poor, and a great many other people who are

sarcastic upon the folly,' the uncalculating impulses' of Christian

love, with its wasteful expenditure,' and criticise us because we are

spending time and energy and love upon objects which they think are

moonshine and mist, do little more than he did, and what beneficence

they do exercise has to be hallowed by this reference to Jesus before

it can aspire to be beneficence indeed.

I sometimes wish that this generation of Christian people, amid its

multifarious schemes of beneficence, with none of which would one

interfere for a moment, would sometimes let itself go into

manifestations of its love to Jesus Christ, which had no use at all

except to relieve its own burdened heart. I am afraid that the lower

motives, which are all right and legitimate when they are lower, are

largely hustling the higher ones into the background, and that the

river has got so many ponds to fill, and so many canals to trickle

through, and so many plantations to irrigate and make verdant, that

there is a danger of its falling low at its fountain, and running

shallow in its course. One sometimes would like to see more things done

for Him that the world would call utter folly,' and prodigal waste,'

and absolutely useless.' Jesus Christ has a great many strange things

in His treasure-house--widows' mites, cups of water, Mary's broken

vase--has He anything of yours? She hath wrought a good work on Me.'

II. Now, there is another lesson that I would gather from our Lord's

apologising for Mary, and that is the measure and the manner of

Christian service.

She hath done what she could'; that is generally read as if it were an

excuse. So it is, or at least it is a vindication of the manner and the

direction of Mary's expression of love and devotion. But whilst it is

an apologia for the form, it is a high demand in regard to the measure.

She hath done what she could.' Christ would not have said that if she

had taken a niggardly spoonful out of the box of ointment, and dribbled

that, in slow and half-grudging drops, on His head and feet. It was

because it all went that it was to Him thus admirable. I think it is

John Foster who says, Power to its last particle is duty.' The question

is not how much have I done, or given, but could I have done or given

more? We Protestants have indulgences of our own; the guinea or the

hundred guineas that we give in a certain direction, we some of us seem

to think, buy for us the right to do as we will with all the rest. But

she hath done what she could.' It all went. And that is the law for us

Christian people, because the Christian life is to be ruled by the

great law of self-sacrifice, as the only adequate expression of our

recognition of, and our being affected by, the great Sacrifice that

gave Himself for us.

Give all thou canst! High Heaven rejects the lore

Of nicely calculated less or more.'

But whilst thus there is here a definite demand for the entire

surrender of ourselves and our activities to Jesus Christ, there is

also the wonderful vindication of the idiosyncrasy of the worker, and

the special manner of her gift. It was not Mary's m鴩er to serve at

the table, nor to do any practical thing. She did not know what there

was for her to do; but something she must do. So she caught up her

alabaster box, and without questioning herself about the act, let her

heart have its way, and poured it out on Christ. It was the only thing

she could do, and she did it. It was a very useless thing. It was an

entirely unnecessary expenditure of the perfume. There might have been

a great many practical purposes found for it, but it was her way.

Christ says to each of us, Be yourselves, take circumstances,

capacities, opportunities, individual character, as laying down the

lines along which yon have to travel. Do not imitate other people. Do

not envy other people; be yourselves, and let your love take its

natural expression, whatever folk round you may snarl and sneer and

carp and criticise. She hath done what she could,' and so He accepts

the gift.

Engineers tell us that the steam-engine is a very wasteful machine,

because so little of the energy is brought into actual operation. I am

afraid that there are a great many of us Christian people like that,

getting so much capacity, and turning out so little work. And there are

a great many more of us who simply pick up the kind of work that is

popular round us, and never consult our own bent, nor follow this

humbly and bravely, wherever it will take us. She hath done what she

could.'

III. And now the last thought that I would gather from these words is

as to the significance and the perpetuity of the work which Christ

accepts.

She hath come beforehand to anoint My body to the burying.' I do not

suppose that such a thought was in Mary's mind when she snatched up her

box of ointment, and poured it out on Christ's head. But it was a

meaning that He, in His tender pity and wise love and foresight, put

into it, pathetically indicating, too, how the near Cross was filling

His thought, even whilst He sat at the humble rustic feast in Bethany

village.

He puts meaning into the service of love which He accepts. Yes, He

always does. For all the little bits of service that we can bring get

worked up into the great whole, the issues of which lie far beyond

anything that we conceive, Thou sowest not that body that shall be, but

bare grain . . . and God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him.' We

cast the seed into the furrows. Who can tell what the harvest is going

to be? We know nothing about the great issues that may suddenly, or

gradually, burst from, or be evolved out of, the small deeds that we

do. So, then, let us take care of the end, so to speak, which is under

our control, and that is the motive. And Jesus Christ will take care of

the other end that is beyond our control, and that is the issue. He

will bring forth what seemeth to Him good, and we shall be as much

astonished when we get yonder' at what has come out of what we did

here, as poor Mary, standing there behind Him, was when He translated

her act into so much higher a meaning than she had seen in it.

Lord! when saw we Thee hungry and fed Thee?' We do not know what we are

doing. We are like the Hindoo weavers that are said to weave their

finest webs in dark rooms; and when the shutters come down, and not

till then, shall we find out the meanings of our service of love.

Christ makes the work perpetual as well as significant by declaring

that in the whole world this shall be preached for a memorial of her.'

Have not the poor' got far more good out of Mary's box of ointment than

the three hundred pence that a few of them lost by it? Has it not been

an inspiration to the Church ever since? The house was filled with the

odour of the ointment.' The fragrance was soon dissipated in the

scentless air, but the deed smells sweet and blossoms for ever. It is

perpetual in its record, perpetual in God's remembrance, perpetual in

its results to the doer, and in its results in the world, though these

may be indistinguishable, just as the brook is lost in the river and

the river in the sea.

But did you ever notice that the Evangelist who records the promise of

perpetual remembrance of the act does not tell us who did it, and that

the Evangelists who tell us who did it do not record the promise of

perpetual remembrance? Never mind whether your deed is labelled with

your address or not, God knows to whom it belongs, and that is enough.

As Paul says in one of his letters, other my fellow-labourers also,

whose names are in the Book of Life.' Apparently he had forgotten the

names, or perhaps did not think it needful to occupy space in his

letter with detailing them, and so makes that graceful, half-apologetic

suggestion that they are inscribed on a more august page. The work and

the worker are associated in that Book, and that is enough.

Brethren, the question of Judas is far more fitting when asked of other

people than of Christians. To what purpose is this waste?' may well be

said to those of you who are taking mind, and heart, and will,

capacity, and energy, and all life, and using it for lower purposes

than the service of God, and the manifestation of loving obedience to

Jesus Christ. Why do ye spend money for that which is not bread?' Is it

not waste to buy disappointments at the price of a soul and of a life?

Why do ye spend that money thus? Whose image and superscription hath

it?' Whose name is stamped upon our spirits? To whom should they be

rendered? Better for us to ask ourselves the question to-day about all

the godless parts of our lives, To what purpose is this waste?' than to

have to ask it yonder! Everything but giving our whole selves to Jesus

Christ is waste. It is not waste to lay ourselves and our possessions

at His feet. He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth

his life for My sake, the same shall find it.'

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A SECRET RENDEZVOUS

And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the pastorer,

His disciples said unto Him, Where wilt Thou that we go and prepare

that Thou mayest eat the passover? 13. And He sendeth forth two of His

disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall

meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him. 14. And

wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The

Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover

with My disciples? 15. And he will show you a large upper room

furnished and prepared: there make ready for us. 16. And His disciples

went forth, and came into the city, and found as He had said unto them:

and they made ready the passover.'--Mark xiv. 12-16.

This is one of the obscurer and less noticed incidents, but perhaps it

contains more valuable teaching than appears at first sight.

The first question is--Miracle or Plan? Does the incident mean

supernatural knowledge or a preconcerted token, like the provision of

the ass at the entry into Jerusalem? I think that there is nothing

decisive either way in the narrative. Perhaps the balance of

probability lies in favour of the latter theory. A difficulty in its

way is that no communication seems to pass between the two disciples

and the man by which he could know them to be the persons whom he was

to precede to the house. There are advantages in either theory which

the other loses; but, on the whole, I incline to believe in a

preconcerted signal. If we lose the supernatural, we gain a suggestion

of prudence and human adaptation of means to ends which makes the story

even more startlingly real to us.

But whichever theory we adopt, the main points and lessons of the

narrative remain the same.

I. The remarkable thing in the story is the picture it gives us of

Christ as elaborately adopting precautions to conceal the place.

They are at Bethany. The disciples ask where the passover is to be

eaten. The easy answer would have been to tell the name of the man and

his house. That is not given. The deliberate round-aboutness of the

answer remains the same whether miracle or plan. The two go away, and

the others know nothing of the place. Probably the messengers did not

come back, but in the evening Jesus and the ten go straight to the

house which only He knew.

All this secrecy is in strong contrast with His usual frank and open

appearances.

What is the reason? To baffle the traitor by preventing him from

acquiring previous knowledge of the place. He was watching for some

quiet hour in Jerusalem to take Jesus. So Christ does not eat the

passover at the house of any well-known disciple who had a house in

Jerusalem, but goes to some man unknown to the Apostolic circle, and

takes steps to prevent the place being known beforehand.

All this looks like the ordinary precautions which a man who knew of

the plots against him would take, and might mean simply a wish to save

his life. But is that the whole explanation? Why did He wish to baffle

the traitor? (a) Because of His desire to eat the passover with the

disciples. His loving sympathy.

(b) Because of His desire to found the new rite of His kingdom.

(c) Because of His desire to bring His death into immediate connection

with the Paschal sacrifice. There was no reason of a selfish kind, no

shrinking from death itself.

The fact that such precautions only meet us here, and that they stand

in strongest contrast with the rest of His conduct, emphasises the

purely voluntary nature of His death: how He chose to be betrayed,

taken, and to die. They suggest the same thought as do the staggering

back of His would-be captors in Gethsemane, at His majestic word, I am

He. . . . Let these go their way.' The narrative sets Him forth as the

Lord of all circumstances, as free, and arranging all events.

Judas, the priests, Pilate, the soldiers, were swept by a power which

they did not know to deeds which they did not understand. The Lord of

all gives Himself up in royal freedom to the death to which nothing

dragged Him but His own love.

Such seem to be the lessons of this narrative in so far as it bears on

our Lord's own thoughts and feelings.

II. We note also the authoritative claim which He makes.

One reading is my guest-chamber,' and that makes His claim even more

emphatic; but apart from that, the language is strong in its expression

of a right to this unknown man's upper room.' Mark the singular

blending here, as in all His earthly life, of poverty and dignity--the

lowliness of being obliged to a man for a room; the royal style, The

Master saith.'

So even now there is the blending of the wonderful fact that He puts

Himself in the position of needing anything from us, with the absolute

authority which He claims over us and ours.

III. The answer and blessedness of the unknown disciple.

(a) Jesus knows disciples whom the other disciples know not.

This man was one of the of secret' disciples. There is no excuse for

shrinking from confession of His name; but it is blessed to believe

that His eye sees many a hidden one.' He recognises their faith, and

gives them work to do. Add the striking thought that though this man's

name is unrecorded by the Evangelist, it is known to Christ, was

written in His heart, and, to use the prophetic image, was graven on

the palms of His hands.'

(b) The true blessedness is to be ready for whatever calls He may make

on us. These may sometimes be sudden and unlooked for. But the

preparation for obeying the most sudden or exacting summons of His is

to have our hearts in fellowship with Him.

(c) The blessedness of His coming into our hearts, and accepting our

service.

How honoured that man felt then! how much more so as years went on! how

most of all now!

Our greatest blessedness that He does come into the narrow room of our

hearts: If any man open the door, I will sup with him.'

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THE NEW PASSOVER

And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the Passover,

the disciples said unto Him, Where wilt Thou that we go and prepare

that Thou mayest eat the Passover? 13. And He sendeth forth two of His

disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall

meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him. 14. And

wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The

Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the Passover

with My disciples? 15. And he will shew you a large upper room

furnished and prepared: there make ready for us. 16. And His disciples

went forth, and came into the city, and found as He had said unto them:

and they made ready the Passover. 17. And in the evening He cometh with

the twelve. 18. And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say

unto you, One of you which eateth with Me shall betray Me. 19. And they

began to be sorrowful, and to say unto Him one by one, Is it I? and

another said, Is it I? 20. And He answered and said unto them, It is

one of the twelve, that dippeth with Me in the dish. 21. The Son of Man

indeed goeth, as it is written of Him: but woe to that man by whom the

Son of Man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had never been

born. 22. And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake

it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is My body. 23. And He

took the cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them: and

they all drank of it. 24. And He said unto them, This is My blood of

the new testament, which is shed for many. 25. Verily I say unto you, I

will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I

drink it new in the kingdom of God. 26. And when they had sung an hymn,

they went out into the mount of Olives.'--Mark xiv. 12-26.

This passage falls into three sections--the secret preparation for the

Passover (verses 12-17), the sad announcement of the betrayer (verses

18-21), and the institution of the Lord's Supper (verses 22-26). It may

be interesting to notice that in the two former of these Mark's account

approximates to Luke's, while in the third he is nearer Matthew's. A

comparison of the three accounts, noting the slight, but often

significant, variations, should be made. Nothing in the Gospels is

trivial. The dust of that land is gold.'

I. The secret preparation for the Passover. The three Evangelists all

give the disciples' question, but only Luke tells us that it was in

answer to our Lord's command to Peter and John to go and prepare the

Passover. They very naturally said Where?' as they were all strangers

in Jerusalem. Matthew may not have known of our Lord's initiative; but

if Mark were, as he is, with apparent correctness, said to have been,

Peter's mouthpiece in his Gospel, the reticence as to the prominence of

that Apostle is natural, and explains the omission of all but the bare

fact of the despatch of the two. The curiously roundabout way in which

they are directed to the upper room' is only explicable on the

supposition that it was intended to keep them in the dark till the last

moment, so that no hint might leak from them to Judas. Whether the

token of the man with the waterpot was a preconcerted signal or an

instance of our Lord's supernatural knowledge and sovereign sway, his

employment as a silent and probably unconscious guide testifies to

Christ's wish for that last hour to be undisturbed. A man carrying a

water-pot, which was woman's special task, would be a conspicuous

figure even in the festival crowds. The message to the householder

implies that he recognised the Master' as his Master, and was ready to

give up at His requisition even the chamber which he had prepared for

his own family celebration of the feast.

Thus instructed, the two trusted Apostles left Bethany, early in the

day, without a clue of their destination reaching Judas's hungry

watchfulness. Evidently they did not return, and in the evening Jesus

led the others straight to the place. Mark says that He came with the

twelve'; but he does not mean thereby to specify the number, but to

define the class, of His attendants.

Each figure in this preparatory scene yields important lessons. Our

Lord's earnest desire to secure that still hour before pushing out into

the storm speaks pathetically of His felt need of companionship and

strengthening, as well as of His self-forgetting purpose to help His

handful of bewildered followers and His human longing to live in

faithful memories. His careful arrangements bring vividly into sight

the limitations of His manhood, in that He, by whom all things

consist,' had to contrive and plan in order to baffle for a moment His

pursuers. And, side by side with the lowliness, as ever, is the

majesty; for while He stoops to arrange, He sees with superhuman

certitude what will happen, moves unconscious feet with secret and

sovereign sway, and in royal tones claims possession of His servant's

possessions.

The two messengers, sent out with instructions which would only guide

them half-way to their destination, and obliged, if they were to move

at all, to trust absolutely to His knowledge, present specimens of the

obedience still required. He sends us out still on a road full of sharp

turnings round which we cannot see. We get light enough for the first

stage; and when it is traversed, the second will be plainer.

The man with the water-pot reminds us how little we may be aware of the

Hand which guides us, or of our uses in His plans. I girded thee,

though thou hast not known Me,'--how little the poor water-bearer knew

who were following, or dreamed that he and his load would be remembered

for ever! The householder responded at once, and gladly, to the

authoritative message, which does not ask a favour, but demands a

right. Probably he had intended to celebrate the Passover with his own

family, in the large chamber on the roof, with the cool evening air

about it, and the moonlight sleeping around. But he gladly gives it up.

Are we as ready to surrender our cherished possessions for His use?

II. The sad announcement of the traitor (verses 18-21). As the Revised

Version indicates more clearly than the Authorised, the purport of the

announcement was not merely that the betrayer was an Apostle, but that

he was to be known by his dipping his hand into the common dish at the

same moment as our Lord. The prophetic psalm would have been abundantly

fulfilled though Judas's fingers had never touched Christ's; but the

minute accomplishment should teach us that Jewish prophecy was the

voice of divine foreknowledge, and embraced small details as well as

large tendencies. Many hands dipped with Christ's, and so the sign was

not unmistakably indicative, and hence was privately supplemented, as

John tells us, by the giving of the sop.' The uncertainty as to the

indication given by the token is reflected by the reiterated questions

of the Apostles, which, in the Greek, are cast in a form that

anticipates a negative answer: Surely not I?' Mark omits the audacious

hypocrisy of Judas's question in the same form, and Christ's curt, sad

answer which Matthew gives. His brief and vivid sketch is meant to fix

attention on the unanimous shuddering horror of these faithful hearts

at the thought that they could be thus guilty--a horror which was not

the child of presumptuous self-confidence, but of hearty, honest love.

They thought it impossible, as they felt the throbbing of their own

hearts--and yet--and yet--might it not be? As they probed their hearts

deeper, they became dimly aware of dark gulfs of possible

unfaithfulness half visible there, and so betook themselves to their

Master, and strengthened their loyalty by the question, which breathed

at once detestation of the treason and humble distrust of themselves.

It is well to feel and speak the strong recoil from sin of a heart

loyal to Jesus. It is better to recognise the sleeping snakes, the

possibilities of evil in ourselves, and to take to Christ our ignorance

and self-distrust. It is wiser to cry Is it I?' than to boast, Although

all shall be offended, yet will not I.' Hold Thou me up, and I shall be

safe.'

Our Lord answers the questions by a still more emphatic repetition of

the distinctive mark, and then, in verse 21, speaks deep words of

mingled pathos, dignity, and submission. The voluntariness of His

death, and its uniqueness as His own act of return to His eternal home,

are contained in that majestic goeth,' which asserts the impotence of

the betrayer and his employers, without the Lord's own consent. On the

other hand, the necessity to which He willingly bowed is set forth in

that as it is written of Him.' And what sadness and lofty consciousness

of His own sacred personality and judicial authority are blended in the

awful sentence on the traitor! What was He that treachery to Him should

be a crime so transcendent? What right had He thus calmly to pronounce

condemnation? Did He see into the future? Is it the voice of a Divine

Judge, or of a man judging in his own cause, which speaks this

passionless sentence? Surely none of His sayings are more fully charged

with His claims to pre-existence, divinity, and judicial authority,

than this which He spoke at the very moment when the traitor's plot was

on the verge of success.

III. The institution of the Lord's Supper (verses 22-26). Mark's

account is the briefest of the three, and his version of Christ's words

the most compressed. It omits the affecting Do this for remembering

Me,' which is pre-supposed by the very act of instituting the

ordinance, since it is nothing if not memorial; and it makes prominent

two things--the significance of the elements, and the command to

partake of them. To these must be added Christ's attitude in blessing'

the bread and cup, and His distribution of them among the disciples.

The Passover was to Israel the commemoration of their redemption from

captivity and their birth as a nation. Jesus puts aside this divinely

appointed and venerable festival to set in its stead the remembrance of

Himself. That night, to be much remembered of the children of Israel,'

is to be forgotten, and come no more into the number of the months; and

its empty place is to be filled by the memory of the hours then

passing. Surely His act was either arrogance or the calm consciousness

of the unique significance and power of His death. Think of any mere

teacher or prophet doing the like! The world would meet the

preposterous claim implied with deserved and inextinguishable laughter.

Why does it not do so with Christ's act? Christ's view of His death is

written unmistakably on the Lord's Supper. It is not merely that He

wishes it rather than His life, His miracles, or words, to be kept in

thankful remembrance, but that He desires one aspect of it to be held

high and clear above all others. He is the true Passover Lamb,' whose

shed and sprinkled blood establishes new bonds of amity and new

relations, with tender and wonderful reciprocal obligations, between

God and the many' who truly partake of that sacrifice. The key-words of

Judaism--'sacrifice,' covenant,' sprinkling with blood'--are taken over

into Christianity, and the ideas they represent are set in its centre,

to be cherished as its life. The Lord's Supper is the conclusive answer

to the allegation that Christ did not teach the sacrificial character

and atoning power of His death. What, then, did He teach when He said,

This is My blood of the covenant, which is shed for many'? The Passover

was a family festival, and that characteristic passes over to the

Lord's Supper. Christ is not only the food on which we feed, but the

Head of the family and distributor of the banquet. He is the feast and

the Governor of the feast, and all who sit at that table are brethren.'

One life is in them all, and they are one as partakers of One.

The Lord's Supper is a visible symbol of the Christian life, which

should not only be all lived in remembrance of Him, but consists in

partaking by faith of His life, and incorporating it in ours, until we

come to the measure of perfect men, which, in one aspect, we reach when

we can say, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.'

There is a prophetic element, as well as a commemorative and symbolic,

in the Lord's Supper, which is prominent in Christ's closing words. He

does not partake of the symbols which He gives; but there comes a time,

in that perfected form of the kingdom, when perfect love shall make all

the citizens perfectly conformed to the perfect will of God. Then,

whatsoever associations of joy, of invigoration, of festal fellowship,

clustered round the wine-cup here, shall be heightened, purified, and

perpetuated in the calm raptures of the heavenly feast, in which He

will be Partaker, as well as Giver and Food. Thou shalt make them drink

of the river of Thy pleasures.' The King's lips will touch the golden

cup filled with un-foaming wine, ere He commends it to His guests. And

from that feast they will go no more out,' neither shall the triumphant

music of its great hymn' be followed by any Olivet or Gethsemane, or

any denial, or any Calvary; but there shall be no more sorrow, nor sin,

nor death'; for the former things are passed away,' and He has made all

things new.'

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IS IT I?'

Is it I?'--Mark xiv. 19.

The scene shows that Judas had not as yet drawn any suspicion on

himself.

Here the Apostles seem to be higher than their ordinary stature; for

they do not take to questioning one another, or even to protest, No!'

but to questioning Christ.

I. The solemn prophecy.

It seems strange at first sight that our Lord should have introduced

such thoughts then, disturbing the sweet repose of that hallowed hour.

But the terrible fact of the betrayal was naturally suggested by the

emblems of His death, and still more by the very confiding familiarity

of that hour. His household were gathered around Him, and the more

close and confidential the intercourse, the bitterer that thought to

Him, that one of the little band was soon to play the traitor. It is

the cry of His wounded love, the wail of His unrequited affection, and,

so regarded, is infinitely touching. It is an instance of that sad

insight into man's heart which in His divinity He possessed. What a

fountain of sorrow for His manhood was that knowledge! how it increases

the pathos of His tenderness! Not only did He read hearts as they

thought and felt in the present, but He read their future with more

than a prophet's insight. He saw how many buds of promise would

shrivel, how many would go away and walk no more with Him.'

That solemn prophecy may well be pondered by all Christian assemblies,

and specially when gathered for the observance of the Lord's Supper.

Perhaps never since that first institution has a community met to

celebrate it without Him who walks amid the candlesticks,' with eyes as

a flame of fire marking a Judas among the disciples. There is, I think,

no doubt that Judas partook of the Lord's Supper. But be that as it

may, he was among the number, and our Lord knew him to be the traitor.'

In its essence Judas's sin can be repeated still, and the thought of

that possibility may well mingle with the grateful and adoring

contemplations suitable to the act of partaking of the Lord's Supper.

In the hour of holiest Christian emotion the thought that I may betray

the Lord who has died for me will be especially hateful, and to

remember the possibility then will do much to prevent its ever becoming

a reality.

II. The self-distrustful question, Is it I?'

It suggests that the possibilities of the darkest sin are in each of

us, and especially, that the sin of treason towards Christ is in each

of us.

Think generally of the awful possibilities of sin in every soul.

All sin has one root, so it is capable of passing from one form to

another as light, heat, and motion do, or like certain diseases that

are Protean in their forms. One sin is apt to draw others after it.

None shall want her mate.' Wild beasts of the desert' meet with wild

beasts of the islands.' Sins are gregarious, as it were; they hunt in

couples.' Then goeth he, and taketh with him seven other spirits more

wicked than himself.'

The roots of all sin are in each. Men may think that they are protected

from certain forms of sin by temperament, but identity of nature is

deeper than varieties of temperament. The greatest sins are committed

by yielding to very common motives. Love of money is not a rare

feeling, but it led Judas to betray Jesus. Anger is thought to be

scarcely a sin at all, but it often moves an arm to murder.

Temptations to each sin are round us all. We walk in a tainted

atmosphere.

There is progress in evil. No man reaches the extreme of depravity at a

bound. Judas's treachery was of slow growth.

So still there is the constant operation and pressure of forces and

tendencies drawing us away from Jesus Christ. We, every one of us, know

that, if we allowed our nature to have its way, we should leave Him and

make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience.' The forms in which

we might do it might vary, but do it we should. We are like a man

desperately clutching some rocky projection on the face of a precipice,

who knows that if once he lets go, he will be dashed to pieces. There

goes John Bradford, but for the grace of God!' But for this same

restraining grace, to what depths might we not sink? So, in all

Christian hearts there should be profound consciousness of their own

weakness. The man who fears no fall' is sure to have one. It is

perilous to march through an enemy's country in loose order, without

scouts and rearguard. Rigorous control is ever necessary. Brotherly

judgment, too, of others should result from our consciousness of

weakness. Examples of others falling are not to make us say cynically,

We are all alike,' but to set us to think humbly of ourselves, and to

supplicate divine keeping,' Lord, save me, or I perish!'

III. The safety of the self-distrustful.

When the consciousness of possible falling is brought home to us, we

shall carry, if we are wise, all our doubts as to ourselves to Jesus.

There is safety in asking Him, Is it I?' To bare our inmost selves

before Him, and not to shrink, even if that piercing gaze lights on

hidden meannesses and incipient treachery, may be painful, but is

healing. He will keep us from yielding to the temptation of which we

are aware, and which we tell frankly to Him. The lowly sense of our own

liability to fall, if it drives us closer to Him, will make it certain

that we shall not fall.

While the other disciples asked Is it I?' John asked Who is it?' The

disciple who leaned on Christ's bosom was bathed in such a

consciousness of Christ's love that treason against it was impossible.

He, alone of the Evangelists, records his question, and he tells us

that he put it, leaning back as he was, on Jesus's breast.' For the

purpose of whispering his interrogation, he changed his attitude for a

moment so as to press still closer to Jesus. How could one who was thus

nestling nearer to that heart be the betrayer? The consciousness of

Christ's love, accompanied with the effort to draw closer to Him, is

our surest defence against every temptation to faithlessness or

betrayal of Him.

Any other fancied ground of security is deceptive, and will sooner or

later crumble beneath our deceived feet. On this very occasion, Peter

built a towering fabric of profession of unalterable fidelity on such

shifting ground, and saw it collapse into ruin in a few hours. Let us

profit by the lesson! That wholesome consciousness of our weakness need

not shade with sadness the hours of communion, but it may well help us

to turn them to their highest use in making them occasions for lowlier

self-distrust and closer cleaving to Him. If we thus use our sense of

weakness, the sweet security will enter our souls that belongs to those

who have trusted in the great promise: He shall not fall, for God Is

able to make him stand.' The blessed ones who are kept from falling and

presented faultless before the presence of His glory,' will hear with

wonder the voice of the Judge ascribing to them deeds of service to Him

of which they had not been conscious, and will have to ask once more

the old question, but with a new meaning: Lord, is it I? when saw we

Thee an hungered, and fed Thee?'

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STRONG CRYING AND TEARS'

And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and He saith to

His disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray. 33. And He taketh with

Him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be

very heavy; 34. And saith onto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful

unto death: tarry ye here, and watch. 35. And He went forward a little,

and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour

might pass from Him. 36. And He said, Abba, Father, all things are

possible unto Thee; take away this cup from Me: nevertheless not what I

will, but what Thou wilt. 37. And He cometh, and findeth them sleeping,

and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou! couldest not thou watch one

hour? 38. Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit

truly is ready, but the flesh is weak. 39. And again He went away, and

prayed, and spake the same words. 40. And when He returned, He found

them asleep again, (for their eyes were heavy,) neither wist they what

to answer Him. 41. And He cometh the third time, and saith unto them,

Sleep on now, and take your rest, it is enough, the hour is come;

behold, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42. Rise

up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth Me is at hand.--Mark xiv. 32-42.

The three who saw Christ's agony in Gethsemane were so little affected

that they slept. We have to beware of being so little affected that we

speculate and seek to analyse rather than to bow adoringly before that

mysterious and heart-subduing sight. Let us remember that the place is

holy ground.' It was meant that we should look on the Christ who prayed

with strong crying and tears,' else the three sleepers would not have

accompanied Him so far; but it was meant that our gaze should be

reverent and from a distance, else they would have gone with Him into

the shadow of the olives.

Gethsemane' means an oil-press.' It was an enclosed piece of ground,

according to Matthew and Mark; a garden, according to John. Jesus, by

some means, had access to it, and had oft-times resorted thither with

His disciples.' To this familiar spot, with its many happy

associations, Jesus led the disciples, who would simply expect to pass

the night there, as many Passover visitors were accustomed to bivouac

in the open air.

The triumphant tone of spirit which animated His assuring words to His

disciples, I have overcome the world,' changed as they passed through

the moonlight down to the valley, and when they reached the garden deep

gloom lay upon Him. His agitation is pathetically and most naturally

indicated by the conflict of feeling as to companionship. He leaves the

other disciples at the entrance, for He would fain be alone in His

prayer. Then, a moment after, He bids the three, who had been on the

Mount of Transfiguration and with Him at many other special times,

accompany Him into the recesses of the garden. But again need of

solitude overcomes longing for companionship, and He bids them stay

where they were, while He plunges still further into the shadow. How

human it is! How well all of us, who have been down into the depths of

sorrow, know the drawing of these two opposite longings! Scripture

seldom undertakes to tell Christ's emotions. Still seldomer does He

speak of them. But at this tremendous hour the veil is lifted by one

corner, and He Himself is fain to relieve His bursting heart by

pathetic self-revelation, which is in fact an appeal to the three for

sympathy, as well as an evidence of His sharing the common need of

lightening the burdened spirit by speech. Mark's description of

Christ's feelings lays stress first on their beginning, and then on

their nature as being astonishment and anguish. A wave of emotion swept

over Him, and was in marked contrast with His previous demeanour.

The three had never seen their calm Master so moved. We feel that such

agitation is profoundly unlike the serenity of the rest of His life,

and especially remarkable if contrasted with the tone of John's account

of His discourse in the upper room; and, if we are wise, we shall gaze

on that picture drawn for us by Mark with reverent gratitude, and feel

that we look at something more sacred than human trembling at the

thought of death.

Our Lord's own infinitely touching words heighten the impression of the

Evangelist's My soul is exceeding sorrowful,' or, as the word literally

means, ringed round with sorrow.' A dark orb of distress encompassed

Him, and there was nowhere a break in the gloom which shut Him in. And

this is He who, but an hour before, had bequeathed His joy' to His

servants, and had bidden them be of good cheer,' since He had conquered

the world.'

Dare we ask what were the elements of that all-enveloping horror of

great darkness? Reverently we may. That astonishment and distress no

doubt were partly due to the recoil of flesh from death. But if that

was their sole cause, Jesus has been surpassed in heroism, not only by

many a martyr who drew his strength from Him, but by many a rude

soldier and by many a criminal. No! The waters of the baptism with

which He was baptized had other sources than that, though it poured a

tributary stream into them.

We shall not understand Gethsemane at all, nor will it touch our hearts

and wills as it is meant to do, unless, as we look, we say in adoring

wonder, The Lord hath made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all.' It

was the weight of the world's sin which He took on Him by willing

identification of Himself with men, that pressed Him to the ground.

Nothing else than the atoning character of Christ's sufferings explains

so far as it can be explained, the agony which we are permitted to

behold afar off.

How nearly that agony was fatal is taught us by His own word unto

death,' A little more, and He would have died. Can we retain reverence

for Jesus as a perfect and pattern man, in view of His paroxysm of

anguish in Gethsemane, if we refuse to accept that explanation? Truly

was the place named The Olive-press,' for in it His whole being was as

if in the press, and another turn of the screw would have crushed Him.

Darkness ringed Him round, but there was a rift in it right overhead.

Prayer was His refuge, as it must be ours. The soul that can cry, Abba,

Father!' does not walk in unbroken night. His example teaches us what

our own sorrows should also teach us--to betake ourselves to prayer

when the spirit is desolate. In that wonderful prayer we reverently

note three things: there is unbroken consciousness of the Father's

love; there is the instinctive recoil of flesh and the sensitive nature

from the suffering imposed; and there is the absolute submission of the

will, which silences the remonstrance of flesh. Whatever the weight

laid on Jesus by His bearing of the sins of the world, it did not take

from Him the sense of sonship. But, on the other hand, that sense did

not take from Him the consciousness that the world's sin lay upon Him.

In like manner His cry on the Cross mysteriously blended the sense of

communion with God and of abandonment by God. Into these depths we see

but a little way, and adoration is better than speculation.

Jesus shrank from this cup,' in which so many bitter ingredients

besides death were mingled, such as treachery, desertion, mocking,

rejection, exposure to the contradiction of sinners.' There was no

failure of purpose in that recoil, for the cry for exemption was

immediately followed by complete submission to the Father's will. No

perturbation in the lower nature ever caused His fixed resolve to

waver. The needle always pointed to the pole, however the ship might

pitch and roll. A prayer in which remove this from me' is followed by

that yielding nevertheless' is always heard. Christ's was heard, for

calmness came back, and His flesh was stilled and made ready for the

sacrifice.

So He could rejoin the three, in whose sympathy and watchfulness He had

trusted--and they all were asleep! Surely that was one ingredient of

bitterness in His cup. We wonder at their insensibility; and how they

must have wondered at it too, when after years taught them what they

had lost, and how faithless they had been! Think of men who could have

seen and heard that scene, which has drawn the worshipping regard of

the world ever since, missing it all because they fell asleep! They had

kept awake long enough to see Him fall on the ground and to hear His

prayer, but, worn out by a long day of emotion and sorrow, they slept.

Jesus was probably rapt in prayer for a considerable time, perhaps for

a literal hour.' He was specially touched by Peter's failure, so sadly

contrasted with his confident professions in the upper room; but no

word of blame escaped Him. Rather He warned them of swift-coming

temptation, which they could only overcome by watchfulness and prayer.

It was indeed near, for the soldiers would burst in, before many

minutes had passed, polluting the moonlight with their torches and

disturbing the quiet night with their shouts. What gracious allowance

for their weakness and loving recognition of the disciples' imperfect

good lie in His words, which are at once an excuse for their fault and

an enforcement of His command to watch and pray! The flesh is weak,'

and hinders the willing spirit from doing what it wills. It was an

apology for the slumber of the three; it is a merciful statement of the

condition under which all discipleship has to be carried on. He knoweth

our frame.' Therefore we all need to watch and pray, since only by such

means can weak flesh be strengthened and strong flesh weakened, or the

spirit preserved in willingness.

The words were not spoken in reference to Himself, but in a measure

were true of Him. His second withdrawal for prayer seems to witness

that the victory won by the first supplication was not permanent. Again

the anguish swept over His spirit in another foaming breaker, and again

He sought solitude, and again He found tranquillity--and again returned

to find the disciples asleep. They knew not what to answer Him' in

extenuation of their renewed dereliction.

Yet a third time the struggle was renewed. And after that, He had no

need to return to the seclusion, where He had fought, and now had

conclusively conquered by prayer and submission. We too may, by the

same means, win partial victories over self, which may be interrupted

by uprisings of flesh; but let us persevere. Twice Jesus' calm was

broken by recrudescence of horror and shrinking; the third time it came

back, to abide through all the trying scenes of the passion, but for

that one cry on the Cross, Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' So it may be

with us.

The last words to the three have given commentators much trouble. Sleep

on now, and take your rest,' is not so much irony as spoken with a kind

of permissive force, and in tones in which merciful reproach was

blended with calm resignation.' So far as He was concerned, there was

no reason for their waking. But they had lost an opportunity, never to

return, of helping Him in His hour of deepest agony. He needed them no

more. And do not we in like manner often lose the brightest

opportunities of service by untimely slumber of soul, and is not the

irrevocable past' saying to many of us, Sleep on now since you can no

more do what you have let slip from your drowsy hands'? It is enough'

is obscure, but probably refers to the disciples' sleep, and prepares

for the transition to the next words, which summon them to arise, not

to help Him by watching, but to meet the traitor. They had slept long

enough, He sadly says. That which will effectually end their sleepiness

is at hand. How completely our Lord had regained His calm superiority

to the horror which had shaken Him is witnessed by that majestic Let us

be going.' He will go out to meet the traitor, and, after one flash of

power, which smote the soldiers to the ground, will yield Himself to

the hands of sinners.

The Man who lay prone in anguish beneath the olive-trees comes forth in

serene tranquillity, and gives Himself up to the death for us all. His

agony was endured for us, and needs for its explanation the fact that

it was so. His victory through prayer was for us, that we too might

conquer by the same weapons. His voluntary surrender was for us, that

by His stripes we might be healed.' Surely we shall not sleep, as did

these others, but, moved by His sorrows and animated by His victory,

watch and pray that we may share in the virtue of His sufferings and

imitate the example of His submission.

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THE SLEEPING APOSTLE

Simon, sleepest thou!'--Mark xiv. 37.

It is a very old Christian tradition that this Gospel is in some sense

the Apostle Peter's. There are not many features in the Gospel itself

which can be relied on as confirming this idea. Perhaps one such may be

found in this plaintive remonstrance, which is only preserved for us

here. Matthew's Gospel, indeed, tells us that the rebuke was addressed

to Peter, but blunts the sharp point of it as directed to him, by

throwing it into the plural, as if spoken to all the three slumberers:

What, could ye not watch with Me one hour?' To Matthew, the special

direction of the words was unimportant, but Peter could never forget

how the Master had come out from the shadow of the olives to him lying

there in the moonlight, and stood before him worn with His solitary

agony, and in a voice yet tremulous from His awful conflict, had said

to him, so lately loud in his professions of fidelity, Sleepest thou?

It was but an hour or two since he had been saying, and meaning, I will

lay down my life for Thy sake,' and this was what all that fervour had

come to. No wonder if there is almost a tone of surprise discernible in

our Lord's word, as if He who marvelled at the unbelief' of those who

were not His followers, marvelled still more at the imperfect sympathy

of those who were, and marvelled most of all at such a sudden ebb of

such a flood of devotion. Surprise and sorrow, the pain of a loving

heart thrown back upon itself, the sharp pang of feeling how much less

one is loved than one loves, the pleading with His forgetful servant,

rebuke without anger, all breathe through the question, so pathetic in

its simplicity, so powerful to bow in contrition by reason of its very

gentleness and self-restraint.

The record of this Evangelist proves how deep it sank into the

impulsive, loving heart of the apostle, and yet the denials in the high

priest's palace, which followed so soon, show how much less power it

had on him on the day when it was spoken, than it gained as he looked

back on it through the long vista of years that had passed, when he

told the story to Mark.

The first lesson to be gathered from these words is drawn from the name

by which our Lord here addresses the apostle: Simon, sleepest thou?'

Now the usage of Mark's Gospel in reference to this apostle's name is

remarkably uniform and precise. Both his names occur in Mark's

catalogue of the Apostles: Simon he surnamed Peter.' He is never called

by both again, but before that point he is always Simon, and after it

he is always Peter, except in this verse. The other Evangelists show

similar purpose, for the most part, in their interchange of the names.

Luke, for instance, always calls him Simon up to the same point as

Mark, except once where he uses the form Simon Peter,' and thereafter

always Peter, except in Christ's solemn warning, Simon, Simon, Satan

hath desired to have you,' and in the report of the tidings that met

the disciples on their return from Emmaus, The Lord hath appeared to

Simon.' So Matthew calls him Simon in the story of the first miraculous

draught of fishes, and in the catalogue of Apostles, and afterwards

uniformly Peter, except in Christ's answer to the apostle's great

confession, where He names him Simon Bar Jona,' in order, as would

appear, to bring into more solemn relief the significance of the

immediately following words, Thou art Peter.' In John's Gospel, again,

we find the two forms Simon Peter' and the simple Peter' used

throughout with almost equal frequency, while Simon' is only employed

at the very beginning, and in the heart-piercing triple question at the

end, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?'

The conclusion seems a fair one from these details that, on the whole,

the name Simon brings into prominence the natural unrenewed humanity,

and the name Peter suggests the Apostolic office, the bold confessor,

the impulsive, warm-hearted lover and follower of the Lord. And it is

worth noticing that, with one exception, the instances in which he is

called by his former name, after his designation to the apostolate,

occur in words addressed to him by our Lord.

He had given the name, and surely His withdrawal of it was meant to be

significant, and must have struck with boding, rebuking emphasis on the

ear and conscience of the apostle. Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to

have you': Remember thy human weakness, and in the sore conflict that

is before thee, trust not to thine own power.' Simon, sleepest thou?'

Can I call thee Peter now, when thou hast not cared for My sorrow

enough to wake while I wrestled? Is this thy fervid love?' Simon, son

of Jonas, lovest thou Me?' Thou wast Peter because thou didst confess

Me; thou hast fallen back to thine old level by denying Me. It is not

enough that in secret I should have restored thee to My love. Here

before thy brethren, thou must win back thy forfeited name and place by

a confession as open as the denial, and thrice repeated like it. Once

thou hast answered, but still thou art "Simon." Twice thou hast

answered, but not yet can I call thee "Peter." Thrice thou hast

answered, by each reply effacing a former denial, and now I ask no

more. Take back thine office; henceforth thou shalt be called "Cephas"

as before.'

And so it was. In the Acts of the Apostles, and in Paul's letters,

Peter' or Cephas' entirely obliterates Simon.' Only for ease in finding

him, the messengers of Cornelius are to ask for him in Joppa by the

name by which he would be known outside the Church, and his old

companion James begins his speech to the council at Jerusalem by

referring with approbation to what Simeon' had said, as if he liked to

use the old name, that brought back memories of the far-off days in

Galilee, before they had known the Master.

Very touching, too, is it to notice how the apostle himself, while

using the name by which he was best known in the Church, in the

introduction to his first Epistle, calls himself Simon Peter' in his

second, as if to the end he felt that the old nature clung to him, and

was not yet, so long as he was in this tabernacle,' wholly subdued

under the dominion of the better self, which his Master had breathed

into him.

So we see that a bit of biography and an illustration of a large truth

are wrapped up for us in so small a matter as the apparently fortuitous

use of one or other of these names. I do not suppose that in every

instance where either of them occur, we can explain their occurrence by

a reference to such thoughts. But still there is an unmistakable

propriety in several instances in the employment of one rather than the

other, and we may fairly suggest the lesson as put hero in a

picturesque form, which Paul gives us in definite words, The flesh

lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh.' The

better and the worse nature contend in all Christian souls, or, as our

Lord says with such merciful leniency in this very context, The spirit

is willing, but the flesh is weak.' However real and deep the change

which passes over us when Christ is formed in us,' it is only by

degrees that the transformation spreads through our being. The renewing

process follows upon the bestowment of the new life, and works from its

deep inward centre outwards and upwards to the circumference and

surface of our being, on condition of our own constant diligence and

conflict.

True, If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature'; but also, and

precisely because he is, therefore the daily and hourly exhortation is,

Put on the new man.' The leaven is buried in the dough, and must be

well kneaded up with it if the whole is to be leavened. Peter is still

Simon, and sometimes seems to be so completely Simon that he has ceased

to be Peter. He continues Simon Peter to his own consciousness to the

very end, however his brethren call him. The struggle between the two

elements in his nature makes the undying interest of his story, and

brings him nearer to us than any of the other disciples are. We, too,

have to wage the conflict between the old nature and the new; for us,

too, the worse part seems too often to be the stronger, if not the only

part. The Master has often to speak to us, as if His merciful

all-seeing eye could discern in us nothing of our better selves which

are in truth Himself, and has to question our love. We, too, have often

to feel how little those who think best of us know what we are. But let

us take heart and remember that from every fall it is possible to rise

by penitence and secret converse with Him, and that if only we remember

to the end our lingering weakness, and giving all diligence,' cleave to

Him, an entrance shall be ministered unto us abundantly into His

everlasting kingdom.'

We may briefly notice, too, some other lessons from this slumbering

apostle.

Let us learn, for instance, to distrust our own resolutions. An hour or

two at the most had passed since the eager protestation, Though all

should deny Thee, yet will not I. I will lay down my life for Thy

sake.' It had been most honestly said, at the dictate of a very loving

heart, which in its enthusiasm was over-estimating its own power of

resistance, and taking no due account of obstacles. The very utterance

of the rash vow made him weaker, for some of his force was expended in

making it. The uncalculating, impulsive nature of the man makes him a

favourite with all readers, and we sympathise with him, as a true

brother, when we hear him blurting out his big words, followed so soon

by such a contradiction in deeds. He is the same man all through his

story, always ready to push himself into dangers, always full of rash

confidence, which passes at once into abject fear when the dangers

which he had not thought about appear.

His sleep in the garden, following close on his bold words in the upper

chamber, is just like his eager wish to come to Christ on the water,

followed by his terror. He desires to be singled out from the others;

he desires to be beside his Master, and then as soon as he feels a dash

of spray on his cheek, and the heaving of that uneasy floor beneath

him, all his confidence collapses and he shrieks to Christ to save him.

It is just like his thrusting himself into the high priest's palace--no

safe place, and bad company for him by the coal fire--and then his

courage oozing out at his fingers' ends as soon as a maidservant's

sharp tongue questioned him. It is just like his hearty welcome of the

heathen converts at Antioch, and his ready breaking through Jewish

restrictions, and then his shrinking back into his old shell again, as

soon as certain came down from Jerusalem.'

And in it all, he is one of ourselves. We have to learn to distrust all

our own resolutions, and to be chary of our vows. Better is it that

thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.' So,

aware of our own weakness, and the flutterings of our own hearts, let

us not mortgage the future, nor lightly say I will'--but rather let us

turn our vows into prayers,

Nor confidently say,

"I never will deny Thee, Lord"

But, "Grant I never may.''

Let us note, too, the slight value of even genuine emotion. The very

exhaustion following on the strained emotions which these disciples had

been experiencing had sent them to sleep. Luke, in his physician-like

way, tells us this, when he says that they slept for sorrow.' We all

know how some great emotion which we might have expected would have

held our eyes waking, lulls to slumber. Men sleep soundly on the night

before their execution. A widow leaves her husband's deathbed as soon

as he has passed away, and sleeps a dreamless sleep for hours. The

strong current of emotion sweeps through us, and leaves us dry. Sheer

exhaustion and collapse follow its intenser forms. And even in its

milder, nothing takes so much out of a man as emotion. Reaction always

follows, and people are in some degree unfitted for sober work by it.

Peter, for example, was all the less ready for keeping awake, and for

bold confession, because of the vehement emotions which had agitated

him in the upper chamber. We have, therefore, to be chary, in our

religious life, of feeding the flames of mere feeling. An unemotional

Christianity is a very poor thing, and most probably a spurious and

unreal thing. But a merely emotional Christianity is closely related to

practical unholiness, and leads by a very short straight road to windy

wordy insincerity and conscious hypocrisy. Emotion which is firmly

based upon an intelligent grasp of God's truth, and which is at once

translated into action, is good. But unless these two conditions be

rigidly observed, it darkens the understanding and enfeebles the soul.

Lastly, notice how much easier it is to purpose and to do great things

than small ones.

I have little doubt that if the Roman soldiers had called on Peter to

have made good his boast, and to give up his life to rescue his Master,

he would have been ready to do it. We know that he was ready to fight

for Him, and in fact did draw a sword and offer resistance. He could

die for Him, but he could not keep awake for Him. The great thing he

could have done, the little thing he could not do.

Brethren, it is far easier once in a way, by a dead lift, to screw

ourselves up to some great crisis which seems worthy of a supreme

effort of enthusiasm and sacrifice, than it is to keep on persistently

doing the small monotonies of daily duty. Many a soldier will bravely

rush to the assault in a storming-party, who would tremble in the

trenches. Many a martyr has gone unblenching to the stake for Christ,

who had found it far harder to serve Him in common duties. It is easier

to die for Him than to watch with Him. So let us listen to His gentle

voice, as He speaks to us, not as of old in the pauses of His agony,

and His locks wet with the dews of the night, but bending from His

throne, and crowned with many crowns: Sleepest them? Watch and pray,

lest ye enter into temptation.'

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THE CAPTIVE CHRIST AND THE CIRCLE ROUND HIM

And immediately, while He yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve,

and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief

priests and the scribes and the elders. 44. And he that betrayed Him

had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is

He; take Him, and lead Him away safely. 45. And as soon as he was come,

he goeth straightway to Him, and saith, Master, Master; and kissed Him.

46. And they laid their hands on Him, and took Him. 47. And one of them

that stood by drew a sword, and smote a servant of the high priest, and

cut off his ear. 48. And Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come

out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take Me? 49. I

was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took Me not: but the

scriptures must be fulfilled. 50. And they all forsook Him, and fled.

51. And there followed Him a certain young man, having a linen cloth

cast about his naked body; and the young man laid hold on Him: 52. And

he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked. 53. And they led

Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the

chief priests and the elders and the scribes. 54. And Peter followed

Him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with

the servants, and warmed himself at the fire.'--Mark xiv. 43-54.

A comparison of the three first Gospels in this section shows a degree

of similarity, often verbal, which is best accounted for by supposing

that a common (oral?) Gospel,' which had become traditionally fixed by

frequent and long repetition, underlies them all. Mark's account is

briefest, and grasps with sure instinct the essential points; but, even

in his brevity, he pauses to tell of the young man who so nearly shared

the Lord's apprehension. The canvas is narrow and crowded; but we may

see unity in the picture, if we regard as the central fact the

sacrilegious seizure of Jesus, and the other incidents and persons as

grouped round it and Him, and reflecting various moods of men's

feelings towards Him.

I. The avowed and hypocritical enemies of incarnate love. Again we have

Mark's favourite straightway,' so frequent in the beginning of the

Gospel, and occurring twice here, vividly painting both the sudden

inburst of the crowd which Interrupted Christ's words and broke the

holy silence of the garden, and Judas's swift kiss. He is named--the

only name but our Lord's in the section; and the depth of his sin is

emphasised by adding one of the twelve.' He is not named in the next

verse, but gibbeted for immortal infamy by the designation, he that

betrayed Him.' There is no dilating on his crime, nor any bespattering

him with epithets. The passionless narrative tells of the criminal and

his crime with unsparing, unmoved tones, which have caught some echo

beforehand of the Judge's voice. To name the sinner, and to state

without cloak or periphrasis what his deed really was, is condemnation

enough. Which of us could stand it? Judas was foremost of the crowd.

What did he feel as he passed swiftly into the shadow of the olives,

and caught the first sight of Jesus? That the black depths of his

spirit were agitated is plain from two things--the quick kiss, and the

nauseous repetition of it. Mark says, Straightway . . . he kissed Him

much.' Probably the swiftness and vehemence, so graphically expressed

by these two touches, were due, not only to fear lest Christ should

escape, and to hypocrisy overacting its part, but to a struggle with

conscience and ancient affection, and a fierce determination to do the

thing and have it over. Judas is not the only man who has tried to

drown conscience by hurrying into and reiterating the sin from which

conscience tries to keep him. The very extravagances of evil betray the

divided and stormy spirit of the doer. In the darkness and confusion,

the kiss was a surer token than a word or a pointing finger would have

been; and simple convenience appears to have led to its selection. But

what a long course of hypocrisy must have preceded and how complete the

alienation of heart must have become, before such a choice was

possible! That traitor's kiss has become a symbol for all treachery

cloaked in the garb of affection. Its lessons and warnings are obvious,

but this other may be added--that such audacity and nauseousness of

hypocrisy is not reached at a leap, but presupposes long underground

tunnels of insincere discipleship, through which a man has burrowed,

unseen by others, and perhaps unsuspected by himself. Much hypocrisy of

the unconscious sort precedes the deliberate and conscious.

How much less criminal and disgusting was the rude crowd at Judas's

heels! Most of them were mere passive tools. The Evangelist points

beyond them to the greater criminals by his careful enumeration of all

classes of the Jewish authorities, thus laying the responsibility

directly on their shoulders, and indirectly on the nation whom they

represented. The semi-tumultuous character of the crowd is shown by

calling them a multitude,' and by the medley of weapons which they

carried. Half-ignorant hatred, which had had ample opportunities of

becoming knowledge and love, offended formalism, blind obedience to

ecclesiastical superiors, the dislike of goodness--these impelled the

rabble who burst into the garden of Gethsemane.

II. Incarnate love, bound and patient. We may bring together verses 46,

48, and 49, the first of which tells in simplest, briefest words the

sacrilegious violence done to Jesus, while the others record His calm

remonstrance. They laid hands on Him.' That was the first stage in

outrage--the quick stretching of many hands to secure the unresisting

prisoner. They took Him,' or, as perhaps we might better render, They

held Him fast,' as would have been done with any prisoner. Surely, the

quietest way of telling that stupendous fact is the best! It is easy to

exclaim, and, after the fashion of some popular writers of lives of

Christ, to paint fancy pictures. It is better to be sparing of words,

like Mark, and silently to meditate on the patient long-suffering of

the love which submitted to these indignities, and on the blindness

which had no welcome but this for God manifest in the flesh.' Both are

in full operation to-day, and the germs of the latter are in us all.

Mark confines himself to that one of Christ's sayings which sets in the

clearest light His innocence and meek submissiveness. With all its

calmness and patience, it is majestic and authoritative, and sounds as

if spoken from a height far above the hubbub. Its question is not only

an assertion of His innocence, and therefore of his captor's guilt, but

also declares the impotence of force as against Him--Swords and staves

to take Me!' All that parade of arms was out of place, for He was no

evil-doer; needless, for He did not resist; and powerless, unless He

chose to let them prevail. He speaks as the stainless, incarnate Son of

God. He speaks also as Captain of the noble army of martyrs,' and His

question may be extended to include the truth that force is in its

place when used against crime, but ludicrously and tragically out of

place when employed against any teacher, and especially against

Christianity. Christ, in His persecuted confessors, puts the same

question to the persecutors which Christ in the flesh put to His

captors.

The second clause of Christ's remonstrance appeals to their knowledge

of Him and His words, and to their attitude towards Him. For several

days He had daily been publicly teaching in the Temple. They had laid

no hands on Him. Nay, some of them, no doubt, had helped to wave the

palm-branches and swell the hosannas. He does not put the contrast of

then and now in its strongest form, but spares them, even while He says

enough to bring an unseen blush to some cheeks. He would have them ask,

Why this change in us, since He is the same? Did He deserve to be

hailed as King a few short hours ago? How, then, before the

palm-branches are withered, can He deserve rude hands?' Men change in

their feelings to the unchanging Christ; and they who have most closely

marked the rise and fall of the tide in their own hearts will be the

last to wonder at Christ's captors, and will most appreciate the

gentleness of His rebuke and remonstrance.

The third clause rises beyond all notice of the human agents, and soars

to the divine purpose which wrought itself out through them. That

divine purpose does not make them guiltless, but it makes Jesus

submissive. He bows utterly, and with no reluctance, to the Father's

will, which could be wrought out through unconscious instruments, and

had been declared of old by half-understanding prophets, but needed the

obedience of the Son to be clear-seeing, cheerful, and complete. We,

too, should train ourselves to see the hand that moves the pieces, and

to make God's will our will, as becomes sons. Then Christ's calm will

be ours, and, ceasing from self, and conscious of God everywhere, and

yielding our wills, which are the self of ourselves, to Him, we shall

enter into rest.

III. Rash love defending its Lord with wrong weapons (verse 47). Peter

may have felt that he must do something to vindicate his recent

boasting, and, with his usual headlong haste, stops neither to ask what

good his sword is likely to do, nor to pick his man and take deliberate

aim at him. If swords were to be used, they should do something more

effectual than hacking off a poor servant's ear. There was love In the

foolish deeds and a certain heroism in braving the chance of a return

thrust or capture, which should go to Peter's credit. If he alone

struck a blow for his Master, it was because the others were more

cowardly, not more enlightened. Peter has had rather hard measure about

this matter, and is condemned by some of us who would not venture a

tenth part of what he ventured for his Lord then. No doubt, this was

blind and blundering love, with an alloy of rashness and wish for

prominence; but that is better than unloving enlightenment and caution,

which is chiefly solicitous about keeping its own ears on. It is also

worse than love which sees and reflects the image of the meek Sufferer

whom it loves. Christ and His cause are to be defended by other

weapons. Christian heroism endures and does not smite. Not only swords,

but bitter words which wound worse than they, are forbidden to Christ's

soldier. We are ever being tempted to fight Christ's battles with the

world's weapons; and many a defender of the faith' in later days,

perhaps even in this very enlightened day, has repeated Peter's fault

with less excuse than he, and with very little of either his courage or

his love.

IV. Cowardly love forsaking its Lord (verse 50). They all forsook Him,

and fled.' And who will venture to say that he would not have done so

too? The tree that can stand such a blast must have deep roots. The

Christ whom they forsook was, to them, but a fragment of the Christ

whom we know; and the fear which scattered them was far better founded

and more powerful than anything which the easy-going Christians of

to-day have to resist. Their flight may teach us to place little

reliance on our emotions, however genuine and deep, and to look for the

security for our continual adherence to Christ, not to our fluctuating

feelings, but to His steadfast love. We keep close to Him, not because

our poor fingers grasp His hand--for that grasp is always feeble, and

often relaxed--but because His strong and gentle hand holds us with a

grasp which nothing can loosen. Whoso trusts in his own love to Christ

builds on sand, but whoso trusts in Christ's love to him builds on

rock.

V. Adventurous curiosity put to flight (verses 51, 52). Probably this

young man was Mark. Only he tells the incident, which has no bearing on

the course of events, and was of no importance but to the person

concerned. He has put himself unnamed in a corner of his picture, as

monkish painters used to do, content to associate himself even thus

with his Lord. His hastily cast-on covering seems to show that he had

been roused from sleep. Mingled love and curiosity and youthful

adventurousness made him bold to follow when Apostles had fled. No

effort appears to have been made to stop their flight; but he is laid

hold of, and, terrified at his own rashness, wriggles himself out of

his captors' hands. The whole incident singularly recalls Mark's

behaviour on Paul's first missionary journey. There are the same

adventurousness, the same inconsiderate entrance on perilous paths, the

same ignominious and hasty retreat at the first whistle of the bullets.

A man who pushes himself needlessly into difficulties and dangers

without estimating their force is pretty sure to take to his heels as

soon as he feels them, and to cut as undignified a figure as this naked

fugitive.

VI. Love frightened, but following (verse 54). Fear had driven Peter

but a little way. Love soon drew him and John back. Sudden and often

opposite impulses moved Ms conduct and ruffled the surface of his

character, but, deep down, the core was loyal love. He followed, but

afar off; though afar off,' he did follow. If his distance betrayed his

terror, his following witnessed his bravery. He is not a coward who is

afraid, but he who lets his fear hinder him from duty or drive him to

flight. What is all Christian living but following Christ afar off? And

do the best of us do more, though we have less apology for our distance

than Peter had? Leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps'

said he, long after, perhaps remembering both that morning and the

other by the lake when he was bidden to leave other servants' tasks to

the Master's disposal, and, for his own part, to follow Him.

His love pushed him into a dangerous place. He was in bad company among

the inferior sort of servants huddled around the fire that cold

morning, at the lower end of the hall; and as its light flickered on

his face, he was sure to be recognised. But we have not now to do with

his denial. Rather he is the type of a true disciple, coercing his

human weakness and cowardice to yield to the attraction which draws him

to his Lord, and restful in the humblest place where he can catch a

glimpse of His face, and so be, as he long after alleged it as his

chief title to authority to have been, a witness of the sufferings of

Christ.'

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THE CONDEMNATION WHICH CONDEMNS THE JUDGES

And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against

Jesus to put Him to death; and found none. 56. For many bare false

witness against Him, but their witness agreed not together. 57. And

there arose certain, and bare false witness against Him, saying, 58. We

heard Him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and

within three days I will build another made without hands. 59. But

neither so did their witness agree together. 60. And the high priest

stood up in their midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest Thou

nothing? what is it which these witness against Thee? 61. But He held

His peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, and

said unto Him, Art Thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? 62. And

Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of Man, sitting on the right

hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. 63. Then the high

priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses?

64. Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned

Him to be guilty of death. 65. And some began to spit on Him, and to

cover His face, and to buffet Him, and to say unto Him, Prophesy: and

the servants did strike Him with the palms of their hands.'--Mark xiv.

55-65.

Mark brings out three stages in our Lord's trial by the Jewish

authorities--their vain attempts to find evidence against Him, which

were met by His silence; His own majestic witness to Himself, which was

met by a unanimous shriek of condemnation; and the rude mockery of the

underlings. The other Evangelists, especially John, supply many

illuminative details; but the essentials are here. It is only in

criticising the Gospels that a summary and a fuller narrative are dealt

with as contradictory. These three stages naturally divide this

paragraph.

I. The judges with evil thoughts, the false witnesses, and the silent

Christ (verses 55-61). The criminal is condemned before He is tried.

The judges have made up their minds before they sit, and the Sanhedrim

is not a court of justice, but a slaughter-house, where murder is to be

done under sanction of law. Mark, like Matthew, notes the unanimity of

the council,' to which Joseph of Arimathea--the one swallow which does

not make a summer--appears to have been the only exception; and he

probably was absent, or, if present, was silent. He did not consent';

but we are not told that he opposed. That ill-omened unanimity measures

the nation's sin. Flagrant injustice and corruption in high places is

possible only when society as a whole is corrupt or indifferent to

corruption. This prejudging of a case from hatred of the accused as a

destroyer of sacred tradition, and this hunting for evidence to bolster

up a foregone conclusion, are preeminently the vices of ecclesiastical

tribunals and not of Jewish Sanhedrim or Papal Inquisition only. Where

judges look for witnesses for the prosecution, plenty will be found,

ready to curry favour by lies. The eagerness to find witnesses against

Jesus is witness for Him, as showing that nothing in His life or

teaching was sufficient to warrant their murderous purpose. His judges

condemn themselves in seeking grounds to condemn Him, for they thereby

show that their real motive was personal spite, or, as Caiaphas

suggested, political expediency.

The single specimen of the worthless evidence given may be either a

piece of misunderstanding or of malicious twisting of innocent words;

nor can we decide whether the witnesses contradicted one another or

each himself. The former is the more probable, as the fundamental

principle of the Jewish law of evidence ('two or three witnesses')

would, in that case, rule out the testimony. The saying which they

garble meant the very opposite of what they made it mean. It

represented Jesus as the restorer of that which Israel should destroy.

It referred to His body which is the true Temple; but the symbolic

temple made with hands' is so inseparably connected with the real, that

the fate of the one determines that of the other. Strangely

significant, therefore, is it, that the rulers heard again, though

distorted, at that moment when they were on their trial, the

far-reaching sentence, which might have taught them that in slaying

Jesus they were throwing down the Temple and all which centred in it,

and that by His resurrection, His own act, He would build up again a

new polity, which yet was but the old transfigured, even the Church,

which is His body.' His work destroys nothing but the works of the

devil.' He is the restorer of the divine ordinances and gifts which men

destroy, and His death and resurrection bring back in nobler form all

the good things lost by sin, the desolations of many generations.' The

history of all subsequent attacks on Christ is mirrored here. The

foregone conclusion, the evidence sought as an after-thought to give a

colourable pretext, the material found by twisting His teaching, the

blindness which accuses Him of destroying what He restores, and fancies

itself as preserving what it is destroying, have all reappeared over

and over again.

Our Lord's silence is not only that of meekness, as a sheep before her

shearers is dumb.' It is the silence of innocence, and, if we may use

the word concerning Him, of scorn. He will not defend Himself to such

judges, nor stoop to repel evidence which they knew to be worthless.

But there is also something very solemn and judicial in His locked

lips. They had ever been ready to open in words of loving wisdom; but

now they are fast closed, and this is the penalty for despising, that

He ceases to speak. Deaf ears make a dumb Christ, What will happen when

Jesus and His judges change places, as they will one day do? When He

says to each, Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these, thy sins,

witness against thee?' each will be silent with the consciousness of

guilt and of just condemnation by His all-knowing justice.

II. Christ's majestic witness to Himself received with a shriek of

condemnation. What a supreme moment that was when the head of the

hierarchy put this question and received the unambiguous answer! The

veriest impostor asserting Messiahship had a right to have his claims

examined; but a howl of hypocritical horror is all which Christ's

evoke. The high priest knew well enough what Christ's answer would be.

Why, then, did he not begin by questioning Jesus, and do without the

witnesses? Probably because the council wished to find some pretext for

His condemnation without bringing up the real reason; for it looked

ugly to condemn a man for claiming to be Messias, and to do it without

examining His credentials. The failure, however, of the false witnesses

compelled the council to show their hands,' and to hear and reject our

Lord solemnly and, so to speak, officially, laying His assertion of

dignity and office before them, as the tribunal charged with the duty

of examining His proofs. The question is so definite as to imply a

pretty full and accurate knowledge of our Lord's teaching about

Himself. It embraces two points--office and nature; for the Christ' and

the Son of the Blessed' are not equivalents. The latter title points to

our Lord's declarations that He was the Son of God, and is an instance

of the later Jewish superstition which avoided using the divine name.

Loving faith delights in the name of the Lord. Dead formalism changes

reverence into dread, and will not speak it.

Sham reverence, feigned ignorance, affected wish for information, the

false show of judicial impartiality, and other lies and vices not a

few, are condensed in the question; and the fact that the judge had to

ask it and hear the answer, is an instance of a divine purpose working

through evil men, and compelling reluctant lips to speak words the

meaning and bearing of which they little know. Jesus could not leave

such a challenge unanswered. Silence then would have been abandonment

of His claims. It was fitting that the representatives of the nation

should, at that decisive moment, hear Him declare Himself Messiah. It

was not fitting that He should be condemned on any other ground. In

that answer, and its reception by the council, the nation's rejection

of Jesus is, as it were, focused and compressed. This was the end of

centuries of training by miracle, prophet and psalmist--the saddest

instance in man's long, sad history of his awful power to frustrate

God's patient educating! Our Lord's majestic I am,' in one word answers

both parts of the question, and then passes on, with strange calm and

dignity, to point onwards to the time when the criminal will be the

judge, and the judges will stand at His bar. The Son of Man,' His

ordinary designation of Himself, implies His true manhood, and His

representative character, as perfect man, or, to use modern language,

the realised ideal' of humanity. In the present connection, its

employment in the same sentence as His assertion that He is the Son of

God goes deep into the mystery of His twofold nature, and declares that

His manhood had a supernatural origin and wielded divine prerogatives.

Accordingly there follows the explicit prediction of His assumption of

the highest of these after His death. The Cross was as plain to Him as

ever; but beyond it gleamed the crown and the throne. He anticipates

sitting on the right hand of power,' which implies repose,

enthronement, judicature, investiture with omnipotence, and

administration of the universe. He anticipates coming in the clouds of

heaven,' which distinctly claims to be the future Judge of the world.

His hearers could scarcely fail to discern the reference to Daniel's

prophecy.

Was ever the irony of history more pungently exemplified than in an

Annas and Caiaphas holding up hands of horror at the blasphemies' of

Jesus? They rightly took His words to mean more than the claim of

Messiahship as popularly understood. To say that He was the Christ was

not blasphemy,' but a claim demanding examination; but to say that He,

the Son of Man, was Son of God and supreme Judge was so, according to

their canons. How unconsciously the exclamation, What need we further

witnesses?' betrays the purpose for which the witnesses had been

sought, as being simply His condemnation! They were needed' to compass

His death, which the council now gleefully feels to be secured. So with

precipitate unanimity they vote. And this was Israel's welcome to their

King, and the outcome of all their history! And it was the destruction

of the national life. That howl of condemnation pronounced sentence on

themselves and on the whole order of which they were the heads. The

prisoner's eyes alone saw then what we and all men may see now--the

handwriting on the wall of the high priest's palace: Weighed in the

balance, and found wanting.'

III. The savage mockers and the patient Christ (verse 65). There is an

evident antithesis between the all' of verse 64 and the some' of verse

65, which shows that the inflictors of the indignities were certain

members of the council, whose fury carried them beyond all bounds of

decency. The subsequent mention of the servants' confirms this,

especially when we adopt the more accurate rendering of the Revised

Version, received Him with blows.' Mark's account, then, is this: that,

as soon as the unanimous howl of condemnation had beep uttered, some of

the judges'(!) fell upon Jesus with spitting and clumsy ridicule and

downright violence, and that afterwards He was handed over to the

underlings, who were not slow to copy the example set them at the upper

end of the hall.

It was not an ignorant mob who thus answered His claims, but the

leaders and teachers--the cr�me de la cr�me of the nation. A wild beast

lurks below the Pharisee's long robes and phylacteries; and the more

that men have changed a living belief in religion for a formal

profession, the more fiercely antagonistic are they to every attempt to

realise its precepts and hopes. The religious' men who mock Jesus in

the name of traditional religion are by no means an extinct species. It

is of little use to shudder at the blind cruelty of dead scribes and

priests. Let us rather remember that the seeds of their sins are in us

all, and take care to check their growth. What a volcano of hellish

passion bursts out here! Spitting expresses disgust; blinding and

asking for the names of the smiters is a clumsy attempt at wit and

ridicule; buffeting is the last unrestrained form of hate and malice.

The world has always paid its teachers and benefactors in such coin;

but all other examples pale before this saddest, transcendent instance.

Love is repaid by hate; a whole nation is blind to supreme and

unspotted goodness; teachers steeped in law and prophets' cannot see

Him of and for whom law and prophets witnessed and were, when He stands

before them. The sin of sins is the failure to recognise Jesus for what

He is. His person and claims are the touchstone which tries every

beholder of what sort He is.

How wonderful the silent patience of Jesus! He withholds not His face

from shame and spitting.' He gives His back to the smiters.' Meek

endurance and passive submission are not all which we have to behold

there. This is more than an uncomplaining martyr. This is the sacrifice

for the world's sin; and His bearing of all that men can inflict is

more than heroism. It is redeeming love. His sad, loving eyes, wide

open below their bandage, saw and pitied each rude smiter, even as He

sees us all. They were and are eyes of infinite tenderness, ready to

beam forgiveness; but they were and are the eyes of the Judge, who sees

and repays His foes, as those who smite Him will one day find out.

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CHRIST AND PILATE: THE TRUE KING AND HIS COUNTERFEIT

And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation

with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and

carried Him away, and delivered Him to Pilate. 2. And Pilate asked Him,

Art Thou the King of the Jews? And He answering said unto him, Thou

sayest it. 3. And the chief priests accused Him of many things: but He

answered nothing. 4. And Pilate asked Him again, saying, Answerest Thou

nothing? behold how many things they witness against Thee. 6. But Jesus

yet answered nothing; so that Pilate marvelled. 6. Now at that feast he

released unto them one prisoner, whomsoever they desired. 7. And there

was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made

insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection. 8.

And the multitude crying aloud began to desire him to do as he had ever

done unto them. 9. But Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I

release unto you the King of the Jews? 10. For he knew that the chief

priests had delivered Him for envy. 11. But the chief priests moved the

people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them. 12. And

Pilate answered and said again unto them, What will ye then that I

shall do unto Him whom ye call the King of the Jews? 13. And they cried

out again, Crucify Him. 14. Then Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil

hath He done? And they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify Him. 15.

And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto

them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged Him, to be crucified.

16. And the soldiers led Him away into the hall, called Praetorium; and

they call together the whole band. 17. And they clothed Him with

purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about His head, 18.

And began to salute Him, Hail, King of the Jews! 19. And they smote Him

on the head with a reed, and did spit upon Him, and bowing their knees

worshipped Him. 20. And when they had mocked Him they took off the

purple from Him, and put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to

crucify Him.'--Mark xv. 1-20.

The so-called trial of Jesus by the rulers turned entirely on his claim

to be Messias; His examination by Pilate turns entirely on His claim to

be king. The two claims are indeed one, but the political aspect is

distinguishable from the higher one; and it was the Jewish rulers'

trick to push it exclusively into prominence before Pilate, in the hope

that he might see in the claim an incipient insurrection, and might

mercilessly stamp it out. It was a new part for them to play to hand

over leaders of revolt to the Roman authorities, and a governor with

any common sense must have suspected that there was something hid below

such unusual loyalty. What a moment of degradation and of treason

against Israel's sacredest hopes that was when its rulers dragged Jesus

to Pilate on such a charge! Mark follows the same method of

condensation and discarding of all but the essentials, as in the other

parts of his narrative. He brings out three points--the hearing before

Pilate, the popular vote for Barabbas, and the soldiers' mockery.

I. The true King at the bar of the apparent ruler (verses 1-6). The

contrast between appearance and reality was never more strongly drawn

than when Jesus stood as a prisoner before Pilate. The One is helpless,

bound, alone; the other invested with all the externals of power. But

which is the stronger? and in which hand is the sceptre? On the lowest

view of the contrast, it is ideas versus swords. On the higher and

truer, it is the incarnate God, mighty because voluntarily weak, and

man dressed in a little brief authority,' and weak because insolently

making his power his god.' Impotence, fancying itself strong, assumes

sovereign authority over omnipotence clothed in weakness. The phantom

ruler sits in judgment on the true King. Pilate holding Christ's life

in his hand is the crowning paradox of history, and the mystery of

self-abasing love. One exercise of the Prisoner's will and His chains

would have snapped, and the governor lain dead on the marble pavement.'

The two hearings are parallel, and yet contrasted. In each there are

two stages--the self-attestation of Jesus and the accusations of

others; but the order is different. The rulers begin with the

witnesses, and, foiled there, fall back on Christ's own answer, Pilate,

with Roman directness and a touch of contempt for the accusers, goes

straight to the point, and first questions Jesus. His question was

simply as to our Lord's regal pretensions. He cared nothing about

Jewish superstitions' unless they threatened political disturbance. It

was nothing to him whether or no one crazy fanatic more fancied himself

the Messiah,' whatever that might be. Was He going to fight?--that was

all which Pilate had to look after. He is the very type of the hard,

practical Roman, with a practical' man's contempt for ideas and

sentiments, sceptical as to the possibility of getting hold of truth,'

and too careless to wait for an answer to his question about it;

loftily ignorant of and indifferent to the notions of the troublesome

people that he ruled, but alive to the necessity of keeping them in

good humour, and unscrupulous enough to strain justice and

unhesitatingly to sacrifice so small a thing as an innocent life to

content them.

What could such a man see in Jesus but a harmless visionary? He had

evidently made up his mind that there was no mischief in Him, or he

would not have questioned Him as to His kingship. It was a new thing

for the rulers to hand over dangerous patriots, and Pilate had

experience enough to suspect that such unusual loyalty concealed

something else, and that if Jesus had really been an insurrectionary

leader, He would never have fallen into Pilate's power. Accordingly, he

gives no serious attention to the case, and his question has a certain

half-amused, half-pitying ring about it. Thou a king? --poor helpless

peasant! A strange specimen of royalty this! How constantly the same

blindness is repeated, and the strong things of this world despise the

weak, and material power smiles pityingly at the helpless impotence of

the principles of Christ's gospel, which yet will one day shatter it to

fragments, like a potter's vessel! The phantom ruler judges the real

King to be a powerless shadow, while himself is the shadow and the

other the substance. There are plenty of Pilates to-day who judge and

misjudge the King of Israel.

The silence of Jesus in regard to the eager accusations corresponds to

His silence before the false witnesses. The same reason dictated both.

His silence is His most eloquent answer. It calmly passes by all these

charges by envenomed tongues as needing no reply, and as utterly

irrelevant. Answered, they would have lived in the Gospels; unanswered,

they are buried. Christ can afford to let many of His foes alone.

Contradictions and confutations keep slanders and heresies above water,

which the law of gravitation would dispose of if they were left alone.

Pilate's wonder might and should have led him further. It should have

prompted to further inquiry, and that might have issued in clearer

knowledge. It was the little glimmer of light at the far-off end of his

cavern, which, travelled towards, might have brought him into free air

and broad day. One great part of his crime was neglecting the faint

monitions of which he was conscious. His light may have been dim, but

it would have brightened; and he quenched it. He stands as a tremendous

example of possibilities missed, and of the tragedy of a soul that has

looked on Jesus, and has not yielded to the impressions made on him by

the sight.

II. The people's favourite (verses 7-15), Barabbas' means son of the

father,' His very name is a kind of caricature of the Son of the

Blessed,' and his character and actions present in gross form the sort

of Messias whom the nation really wanted. He had headed some one of the

many small riots against Rome which were perpetually sputtering up and

being trampled out by an armed heel. There had been bloodshed, in which

he had himself taken part (a murderer,' Acts iii. 14). And this coarse,

red-handed desperado is the people's favourite, because he embodied

their notions and aspirations, and had been bold enough to do what

every man of them would have done if he had dared. He thought and felt,

as they did, that freedom was to be won by the sword. The popular hero

is as a mirror which reflects the popular mind. He echoes the popular

voice, a little improved or exaggerated. Jesus had taught what the

people did not care to hear, and given blessings which even the

recipients soon forgot, and lived a life whose beauty of holiness'

oppressed and rebuked the common life of men. What chance had truth and

kindness and purity against the sort of bravery that slashes with a

sword, and is not elevated above the mob by inconvenient reach of

thought or beauty of character? Even now, after nineteen centuries of

Christ's influence have modified the popular ideals, what chance have

they? Are the popular heroes' of Christian nations saints, teachers,

lovers of men, in whom their Christ-likeness is the thing venerated?

The old saying that the voice of the people is the voice of God

receives an instructive commentary in the vote for Barabbas and against

Jesus. That was what a plebiscite for the discovery of the people's

favourite came to. What a reliable method of finding the best man

universal suffrage, manipulated by wirepullers like these priests, is!

and how wise the people are who let it guide their judgments, or still

wiser, who fret their lives out in angling for its approval! Better be

condemned with Jesus than adopted with Barabbas.

That fatal choice revealed the character of the choosers, both in their

hostility and admiration; for excellence hated shows what we ought to

be and are not, and grossness or vice admired shows what we would fain

be if we dared. It was the tragic sign that Israel had not learned the

rudiments of the lesson which at sundry times and in divers manners'

God had been teaching them. In it the nation renounced its Messianic

hopes, and with its own mouth pronounced its own sentence. It convicted

them of insensibility to the highest truth, of blindness to the most

effulgent light, of ingratitude for the richest gifts. It is the

supreme instance of short-lived, unintelligent emotion, inasmuch as

many who on Friday joined in the roar, Crucify Him!' had on Sunday

shouted Hosanna!' till they were hoarse.

Pilate plays a cowardly and unrighteous part in the affair, and tries

to make amends to himself for his politic surrender of a man whom he

knew to be innocent, by taunts and sarcasm. He seems to see a chance to

release Jesus, if he can persuade the mob to name Him as the prisoner

to be set free, according to custom. His first proposal to them was

apparently dictated by a genuine interest in Jesus, and a complete

conviction that Rome had nothing to fear from this King.' But there are

also in the question a sneer at such pauper royalty, as it looked to

him, and a kind of scornful condescension in acknowledging the mob's

right of choice. He consults their wishes for once, but there is

haughty consciousness of mastery in his way of doing it. His appeal is

to the people, as against the priests whose motives he had penetrated.

But in his very effort to save Jesus he condemns himself; for, if he

knew that they had delivered Christ for envy, his plain duty was to set

the prisoner free, as innocent of the only crime of which he ought to

take cognisance. So his attempt to shift the responsibility off his own

shoulders is a piece of cowardice and a dereliction of duty. His second

question plunges him deeper in the mire. The people had a right to

decide which was to be released, but none to settle the fate of Jesus.

To put that in their hands was an unconditional surrender by Pilate,

and the sneer in whom ye call the King of the Jews' is a poor attempt

to hide from them and himself that he is afraid of them. Mark puts his

finger on the damning blot in Pilate's conduct when he says that his

motive for condemning Jesus was his wish to content the people. The

life of one poor Jew was a small price to pay for popularity. So he let

policy outweigh righteousness, and, in spite of his own clear

conviction, did an innocent man to death. That would be his reading of

his act, and, doubtless, it did not trouble his conscience much or

long, but he would leave the judgment-seat tolerably satisfied with his

morning's work. How little he knew what he had done! In his ignorance

lies his palliation. His crime was great, but his guilt is to be

measured by his light, and that was small. He prostituted justice for

his own ends, and he did not follow out the dawnings of light that

would have led him to know Jesus. Therefore he did the most awful thing

in the world's history. Let us learn the lesson which he teaches!

III. The soldiers' mockery (verses 16-20). This is characteristically

different from that of the rulers, who jeered at His claim to

supernatural enlightenment, and bade Him show His Messiahship by naming

His smiters. The rough legionaries knew nothing about a Messiah, but it

seemed to them a good jest that this poor, scourged prisoner should

have called Himself a King, and so they proceed to make coarse and

clumsy merriment over it. It is like the wild beast playing with its

prey before killing it. The laughter is not only rough, but cruel.

There was no pity for the Victim bleeding from the Roman rods,' and

soon to die. And the absence of any personal hatred made this mockery

more hideous. Jesus was nothing to them but a prisoner whom they were

to crucify, and their mockery was sheer brutality and savage delight in

torturing. The sport is too good to be kept by a few, so the whole band

is gathered to enjoy it. How they would troop to the place! They get

hold of some robe or cloth of the imperial colour, and of some flexible

shoots of some thorny plant, and out of these they fashion a burlesque

of royal trappings. Then they shout, as they would have done to Caesar,

Hail, King of the Jews!' repeating again with clumsy iteration the

stale jest which seems to them so exquisite. Then their mood changes,

and naked ferocity takes the place of ironical reverence. Plucking the

mock sceptre, the reed, from His passive hand, they strike the

thorn-crowned Head with it, and spit on Him, while they bow in mock

reverence before Him, and at last, when tired of their sport, tear off

the purple, and lead him away to the Cross.

If we think of who He was who bore all this, and of why He bore it, we

may well bow not the knee but the heart, in endless love and

thankfulness. If we think of the mockers--rude Roman soldiers, who

probably could not understand a word of what they heard on the streets

of Jerusalem--we shall do rightly to remember our Lord's own plea for

them, they know not what they do,' and reflect that many of us with

more knowledge do really sin more against the King than they did. Their

insult was an unconscious prophecy. They foretold the basis of His

dominion by the crown of thorns, and its character by the sceptre of

reed, and its extent by their mocking salutations; for His Kingship is

founded in suffering, wielded with gentleness, and to Him every knee

shall one day bow, and every tongue confess that the King of the Jews

is monarch of mankind.

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THE DEATH WHICH GIVES LIFE

And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the

country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear His cross. 22. And

they bring Him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted,

The place of a skull. 23. And they gave Him to drink wine mingled with

myrrh: but He received it not. 24. And when they had crucified Him,

they parted His garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should

take. 25. And it was the third hour, and they crucified Him. 26. And

the superscription of His accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE

JEWS. 27. And with Him they crucify two thieves; the one on His right

hand, and the other on His left. 28. And the Scripture was fulfilled,

which saith, And He was numbered with the transgressors. 29. And they

that passed by railed on Him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, Thou

that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, 30. Save

Thyself, and come down from the cross. 31. Likewise also the chief

priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved

others; Himself He cannot save. 32. Let Christ the King of Israel

descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that

were crucified with Him reviled Him. 33. And when the sixth hour was

come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. 34.

And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi,

Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, My God,

why hast Thou forsaken Me? 35. And some of them that stood by, when

they heard it, said, Behold, He calleth Elias. 36. And one ran and

filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave Him to

drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take

Him down. 37. And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.

38. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the

bottom. 39. And when the centurion, which stood over against Him, saw

that He so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man

was the Son of God.'--Mark xv. 21-39.

The narrative of the crucifixion is, in Mark's hands, almost entirely a

record of what was done to Jesus, and scarcely touches what was done by

Him. We are shown the executioners, the jeering rabble, the triumphant

priests, the fellow-sufferers reviling; but the only glimpses we get of

Him are His refusal of the stupefying draught, His loud cries, and His

giving up the ghost. The narrative is perfectly calm, as well as

reverently reticent. It would have been well if our religious

literature had copied the example, and treated the solemn scene in the

same fashion. Mark's inartificial style of linking long paragraphs with

the simple and' is peculiarly observable here, where every verse but

vv. 30 and 32, which are both quotations, begins with it. The whole

section is one long sentence, each member of which adds a fresh touch

to the tragic picture. The monotonous repetition of and,' and,' and,'

gives the effect of an endless succession of the wares of sorrow, pain,

and contumely which broke over that sacred head. We shall do best

simply to note each billow as it breaks.

The first point is the impressing of Simon to bear the Cross. That was

not dictated by compassion so much as by impatience. Apparently the

weight was too heavy for Jesus, and the pace could be quickened by

making the first man who could be laid hold of help to carry the load.

Mark adds that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus,' whom he

supposes to need no introduction to his readers. There is a Rufus

mentioned in Romans xvi. 13 as being, with his mother, members of the

Roman Church. Mark's Gospel has many traces of being primarily intended

for Romans. Possibly these two Rufuses are the same; and the conjecture

may be allowable that the father's fortuitous association with the

crucifixion led to the conversion of himself and his family, and that

his sons were of more importance or fame in the Church than he was.

Perhaps, too, he is the Simeon called Niger' (bronzed by the hot

African sun) who was a prophet of Antioch, and stands by the side of a

Cyrenian (Acts xiii. 1). It is singular that he should be the only one

of all the actors in the crucifixion who is named; and the fact

suggests his subsequent connection with the Church. If so, the seeking

love of God found him by a strange way. On what apparently trivial

accidents a life may be pivoted, and how much may depend on turning to

right or left in a walk! In this bewildering network of interlaced

events, which each ramifies in so many directions, the only safety is

to keep fast hold of God's hand and to take good care of the purity of

our motives, and let results alone.

The next verse brings us to Golgotha, which is translated by the three

Evangelists, who give it as meaning the place of a skull.' The name may

have been given to the place of execution with grim suggestiveness; or,

more probably, Conder's suggested identification is plausible, which

points to a little, rounded, skull-shaped knoll, close outside the

northern wall, as the site of the crucifixion. In that case, the name

would originally describe the form of the height, and be retained as

specially significant in view of its use as the place of execution.

That was the place' to which Israel led its King! The place of death

becomes a place of life, and from the mournful soil where the bones of

evildoers lay bleaching in the sun springs the fountain of water of

life.

Arrived at that doleful place, a small touch of kindness breaks the

monotony of cruelty, if it be not merely apart of the ordinary routine

of executions. The stupefying potion would diminish, but would

therefore protract, the pain, and was possibly given for the latter

rather than the former effect. But Jesus received it not.' He will not,

by any act of His, lessen the bitterness. He will drink to the dregs

the cup which His Father hath given Him, and therefore He will not

drink of the numbing draught. It is a small matter comparatively, but

it is all of a piece with the greater things. The spirit of His whole

course of voluntary, cheerful endurance of all the sorrows needful to

redeem the world, is expressed in His silent turning away from the

draught which might have alleviated physical suffering, but at the cost

of dulling conscious surrender.

The act of crucifixion is but named in a subsidiary clause, as if the

writer turned away, with eyes veiled in reverence, from the sight of

man's utmost sin and Christ's utmost mystery of suffering love. He can

describe the attendant circumstances, but his pen refuses to dwell upon

the central fact. The highest art and the simplest natural feeling both

know that the fewest words are the most eloquent. He will not expressly

mention the indignity done to the sacred Body in which dwelt all the

fulness of the Godhead,' but leaves it to be inferred from the parting

of Christ's raiment, the executioner's perquisite. He had nothing else

belonging to Him, and of even that poor property He is spoiled.

According to John's more detailed account, the soldiers made an equal

parting of His garments except the seamless robe, for which they threw

lots. So the parting' applies to one portion, and the casting lots' to

another. The incident teaches two things: on the one hand, the stolid

indifference of the soldiers, who had crucified many a Jew, and went

about their awful work as a mere piece of routine duty; and, on the

other hand, the depth of the abasement and shame to which Jesus bowed

for our sakes. Naked shall I return thither' was true in the most

literal sense of Him whose earthly life began with His laying aside His

garments of divine glory, and ended with rude legionaries parting His

raiment' among them.

Mark alone tells the hour at which Jesus was nailed to the Cross (verse

25). Matthew and Luke specify the sixth and ninth hours as the times of

the darkness and of the death; but to Mark we owe our knowledge of the

fact that for six slow hours Jesus hung there, tasting death drop by

drop. At any moment of all these sorrow-laden moments He could have

come down from the Cross, if He would. At each, a fresh exercise of His

loving will to redeem kept Him there.

The writing on the Cross is given here in the most condensed fashion

(verse 26). The one important point is that His accusation' was--King

of the Jews.' It was the official statement of the reason for His

crucifixion, put there by Pilate as a double-barrelled sarcasm, hitting

both Jesus and the nation. The rulers winced under the taunt, and tried

to get it softened; but Pilate sought to make up for his unrighteous

facility in yielding Jesus to death, by obstinacy and jeers. So the

inscription hung there, a truth deeper than its author or its angry

readers knew, and a prophecy which has not received all its fulfilment

yet.

The narrative comes back, in verse 27, to the sad catalogue of the

insults heaped on Jesus. Verse 28 is probably spurious here, as the

Revised Version takes it to be; but it truly expresses the intention of

the crucifixion of the thieves as being to put Him in the same class as

they, and to suggest that He was a ringleader, pre-eminent in evil.

Possibly the two robbers may have been part of Barabbas' band, who had

been brigands disguised as patriots; and, if so, the insult was all the

greater. But, in any case, the meaning of it was to bring Him down, in

the eyes of beholders, to the level of vulgar criminals. If a Cranmer

or a Latimer had been bound to the stake with a housebreaker or a

cut-throat, that would have been a feeble image of the malicious

contumely thus flung at Jesus; but His love had identified Him with the

worst sinners in a far deeper and more real way, and not a crime had

stained these men's hands, but its weight pressed on Him. He numbered

Himself with transgressors, that they may be numbered with His saints.

Then follows (verses 29-32) the threefold mockery by people, priests,

and fellow-sufferers. That is spread over three hours, and is all which

Mark has to tell of them. Other Evangelists give us words spoken by

Jesus; but this narrative has only one of the seven words from the

Cross, and gives us the picture rather of the silent Sufferer, bearing

in meek resolution all that men can lay on Him. Both pictures are true,

for the words are too few to make notable breaches in the silence. The

mockery harps on the old themes, and witnesses at once the malicious

cruelty of the mockers and the innocence of the Victim, at whom even

such malice could find nothing to fling except these stale taunts. The

chance passengers, of whom there would be a stream to and from the

adjacent city gate, wag their heads' in gratified and fierce hate. The

calumny of the discredited witnesses, although even the biased judges

had not dared to treat it as true, has lodged in the popular mind, and

been accepted as proved. Lies are not killed when they are shown to be

lies. They travel faster than truth. Ears were greedily open for the

false witnesses' evidence which had been closed to Christ's gracious

teaching. The charge that He was a would-be destroyer of the Temple

obliterated all remembrance of miracles and benefits, and fanned the

fire of hatred in men whose zeal for the Temple was a substitute for

religion. Are there any of them left nowadays--people who have no real

heart-hold of Christianity, but are fiercely antagonistic to supposed

destroyers of its externals, and not over-particular to the evidence

against them? These mockers thought that Christ's being fastened to the

Cross was a reductio ad absurdum of His claim to build the Temple. How

little they knew that it led straight to that rebuilding, or that they,

and not He, were indeed the destroyers of the holy house which they

thought that they were honouring, and were really making desolate'! The

priests do not take up the people's mockery, for they know that it is

based upon a falsehood; but they scoff at His miracles, which they

assume to be disproved by His crucifixion. Their venomous gibe is

profoundly true, and goes to the very heart of the gospel. Precisely

because He saved others,' therefore Himself He cannot save'--not, as

they thought, for want of power, but because His will was fixed to obey

the Father and to redeem His brethren, and therefore He must die and

cannot deliver Himself. But the necessity and inability both depend on

His will. The priests, however, take up the other part of the people's

scoff. They unite the two grounds of condemnation in the names the

Christ, the King of Israel,' and think that both are disproved by His

hanging there. But the Cross is the throne of the King. A sacrificial

death is the true work of the Messiah of law, prophecy, and psalm; and

because He did not come down from the Cross, therefore is He crowned

with glory and honour' in heaven, and rules over grateful and redeemed

hearts on earth.

The midday darkness lasted three hours, during which no word or

incident is recorded. It was nature divinely draped in mourning over

the sin of sins, the most tragic of deaths. It was a symbol of the

eclipse of the Light of the world; but ere He died it passed, and the

sun shone on His expiring head, in token that His death scattered our

darkness and poured day on our sad night. The solemn silence was broken

at last by that loud cry, the utterance of strangely blended

consciousness of possession of God and of abandonment by Him, the

depths of which we can never fathom. But this we know: that our sins,

not His, wove the veil which separated Him from His God. Such

separation is the real death. Where cold analysis is out of place,

reverent gratitude may draw near. Let us adore, for what we can

understand speaks of a love which has taken on itself the iniquity of

us all. Let us silently adore, for all words are weaker than that

mystery of love.

The first hearers of that cry misunderstood it, or cruelly pretended to

do so, in order to find fresh food for mockery. Eloi' sounded like

enough to Elijah' to suggest to some of the flinty hearts around a

travesty of the piteous appeal. They must have been Jews, for the

soldiers knew nothing about the prophet; and if they were Scribes, they

could scarcely fail to recognise the reference to the Twenty-second

Psalm, and to understand the cry. But the opportunity for one more

cruelty was too tempting to be resisted, and savage laughter was man's

response to the most pitiful prayer ever uttered. One man in all that

crowd had a small touch of human pity, and, dipping a sponge in the

sour drink provided for the soldiers, reached it up to the parched

lips. That was no stupefying draught, and was accepted. Matthew's

account is more detailed, and represents the words spoken as intended

to hinder even that solitary bit of kindness.

The end was near. The lips, moistened by the vinegar,' opened once more

in that loud cry which both showed undiminished vitality and conscious

victory; and then He gave up the ghost,' sending away His spirit, and

dying, not because the prolonged agony had exhausted His energy, but

because He chose to die, He entered through the gate of death as a

conqueror, and burst its bars when He went in, and not only when He

came out.

His death rent the Temple veil. The innermost chamber of the Divine

Presence is open now, and sinful men have access with confidence by the

faith of Him,' to every place whither He has gone before. Right into

the secret of God's pavilion we can go, now and here, knowledge and

faith and love treading the path which Jesus has opened, and coming to

the Father by Him. Bight into the blaze of the glory we shall go

hereafter; for He has gone to prepare a place for us, and when He

overcame the sharpness of death He opened the gate of heaven to all

believers.

Jews looked on, unconcerned and unconvinced by the pathos and triumph

of such a death. But the rough soldier who commanded the executioners

had no prejudices or hatred to blind his eyes and ossify his heart. The

sight made its natural impression on him; and his exclamation, though

not to be taken as a Christian confession or as using the phrase Son of

God' in its deepest meaning, is yet the beginning of light. Perhaps, as

he went thoughtfully to his barrack that afternoon, the process began

which led him at last to repeat his first exclamation with deepened

meaning and true faith. May we all gaze on that Cross, with fuller

knowledge, with firm trust, and endless love!

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SIMON THE CYRENIAN

And they compel one Simon, a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the

country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear His Cross.'--Mark

xv. 21.

How little these soldiers knew that they were making this man immortal!

What a strange fate that is which has befallen chose persons in the

Gospel narrative, who for an instant came into contact with Jesus

Christ. Like ships passing athwart the white ghostlike splendour of

moonlight on the sea, they gleam silvery pure for a moment as they

cross its broad belt, and then are swallowed up again in the darkness.

This man Simon, fortuitously, as men say, meeting the little procession

at the gate of the city, for an instant is caught in the radiance of

the light, and stands out visible for evermore to all the world; and

then sinks into the blackness, and we know no more about him. This

brief glimpse tells us very little, and yet the man and his act and its

consequences may be worth thinking about.

He was a Cyrenian; that is, he was a Jew by descent, probably born, and

certainly resident, for purposes of commerce, in Cyrene, on the North

African coast of the Mediterranean. No doubt he had come up to

Jerusalem for the Passover; and like very many of the strangers who

flocked to the Holy City for the feast, met some difficulty in finding

accommodation in the city, and so was obliged to go to lodge in one of

the outlying villages. From this lodging he is coming in, in the

morning, knowing nothing about Christ nor His trial, knowing nothing of

what he is about to meet, and happens to see the procession as it is

passing out of the gate. He is by the centurion impressed to help the

fainting Christ to carry the heavy Cross. He probably thought Jesus a

common criminal, and would resent the task laid upon him by the rough

authority of the officer in command. But he was gradually touched into

some kind of sympathy; drawn closer and closer, as we suppose, as he

looked upon this dying meekness; and at last, yielded to the

soul-conquering power of Christ.

Tradition says so, and the reasons for supposing that it was right may

be very simply stated. The description of him in our text as the father

of Alexander and Rufus' shows that, by the time when Mark wrote, his

two sons were members of the Christian community, and had attained some

eminence in it. A Rufus is mentioned in the salutations in Paul's

Epistle to the Romans, as being elect in the Lord,' that is to say,

eminent,' and his mother is associated in the greeting, and commended

as having been motherly to Paul as well as to Rufus. Now, if we

remember that Mark's Gospel was probably written in Rome, and for Roman

Christians, the conjecture seems a very reasonable one that the Rufus

here was the Rufus of the Epistle to the Romans. If so, it would seem

that the family had been gathered into the fold of the Church, and in

all probability, therefore, the father with them.

Then there is another little morsel of possible evidence which may just

be noticed. We find in the Acts of the Apostles, in the list of the

prophets and teachers in the Church at Antioch, a Simon, who is called

Niger' (that is, black, the hot African sun having tanned his

countenance, perhaps), and side by side with him one Lucius of Cyrene,'

from which place we know that several of the original brave preachers

to the Gentiles in Antioch came. It is possible that this may be our

Simon, and that he who was the last to join the band of disciples

during the Master's life and learned courage at the Cross was among the

first to apprehend the world-wide destination of the Gospel, and to

bear it beyond the narrow bounds of his nation.

At all events, I think we may, with something like confidence, believe

that his glimpse of Christ on that morning and his contact with the

suffering Saviour ended in his acceptance of Him as his Christ, and in

his bearing in a truer sense the Cross after Him.

And so I seek now to gather some of the lessons that seem to me to

arise from this incident.

I. First, the greatness of trifles. If Simon had started from the

little village where he lodged five minutes earlier or later, if he had

walked a little faster or slower, if he had happened to be lodging on

the other side of Jerusalem, or if the whim had taken him to go in at

another gate, or if the centurion's eye had not chanced to alight on

him in the crowd, or if the centurion's fancy had picked out somebody

else to carry the Cross, then all his life would have been different.

And so it is always. You go down one turning rather than another, and

your whole career is coloured thereby. You miss a train, and you escape

death. Our lives are like the Cornish rocking stones, pivoted on little

points. The most apparently insignificant things have a strange knack

of suddenly developing unexpected consequences, and turning out to be,

not small things at all, but great and decisive and fruitful.

Let us then look with ever fresh wonder on this marvellous contexture

of human life, and on Him that moulds it all to His own perfect

purposes. Let us bring the highest and largest principles to bear on

the smallest events and circumstances, for you can never tell which of

these is going to turn out a revolutionary and formative influence in

your life. And if the highest Christian principle is not brought to

bear upon the trifles, depend upon it, it will never be brought to bear

upon the mighty things. The most part of every life is made up of

trifles, and unless these are ruled by the highest motives, life, which

is divided into grains like the sand, will have gone by, while we are

waiting for the great events which we think worthy of being regulated

by lofty principles. Take care of the pence and the pounds will take

care of themselves.'

Look after the trifles, for the law of life is like that which is laid

down by the Psalmist about the Kingdom of Jesus Christ: There shall be

a handful of corn in the earth,' a little seed sown in an apparently

ungenial place on the top of the mountains.' Ay! but this will come of

it, The fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon,' and the great harvest

of benediction or of curse, of joy or of sorrow, will come from the

minute seeds that are sown in the great trifles of our daily life.

Let us learn the lesson, too, of quiet confidence in Him in whose hands

the whole puzzling, overwhelming mystery lies. If a man once begins to

think of how utterly incalculable the consequences of the smallest and

most commonplace of his deeds may be, how they may run out into all

eternity, and like divergent lines may enclose a space that becomes

larger and wider the further they travel; if, I say, a man once begins

to indulge in thoughts like these, it is difficult for him to keep

himself calm and sane at all, unless he believes in the great loving

Providence that lies above all, and shapes the vicissitude and mystery

of life. We can leave all in His hands--and if we are wise we shall do

so--to whom great and small are terms that have no meaning; and who

looks upon men's lives, not according to the apparent magnitude of the

deeds with which they are filled, but simply according to the motive

from which, and the purpose towards which, these deeds were done.

II. Then, still further, take this other lesson, which lies very

plainly here--the blessedness and honour of helping Jesus Christ. If we

turn to the story of the Crucifixion, in John's Gospel, we find that

the narratives of the three other Gospels are, in some points,

supplemented by it. In reference to our Lord's bearing of the Cross, we

are informed by John that when He left the judgment hall He was

carrying it Himself, as was the custom with criminals under the Roman

law. The heavy cross was laid on the shoulder, at the intersection of

its arms and stem, one of the arms hanging down in front of the

bearer's body, and the long upright trailing behind.

Apparently our Lord's physical strength, sorely tried by a night of

excitement and the hearings in the High priest's palace and before

Pilate, as well as by the scourging, was unequal to the task of

carrying, albeit for that short passage, the heavy weight. And there is

a little hint of that sort in the context. In the verse before my text

we read, They led Jesus out to crucify Him,' and in the verse after,

they bring,' or bear Him to the place Golgotha,' as if, when the

procession began, they led Him, and before it ended they had to carry

Him, His weakness having become such that He Himself could not sustain

the weight of His cross or of His own enfeebled limbs. So, with some

touch of pity in their rude hearts, or more likely with professional

impatience of delay, and eager to get their task over, the soldiers lay

hold of this stranger, press him into the service and make him carry

the heavy upright, which trailed on the ground behind Jesus. And so

they pass on to the place of execution.

Very reverently, and with few words, one would touch upon the physical

weakness of the Master. Still, it does not do us any harm to try to

realise how very marked was the collapse of His physical nature, and to

remember that that collapse was not entirely owing to the pressure upon

Him of the mere fact of physical death; and that it was still less a

failure of His will, or like the abject cowardice of some criminals who

have had to be dragged to the scaffold, and helped up its steps; but

that the reason why His flesh failed was very largely because there was

laid upon Him the mysterious burden of the world's sin. Christ's

demeanour in the act of death, in such singular contrast to the calm

heroism and strength of hundreds who have drawn all their heroism and

strength from Him, suggests to us that, looking upon His sufferings, we

look upon something the significance of which does not lie on the

surface; and the extreme pressure of which is to be accounted for by

that blessed and yet solemn truth of prophecy and Gospel alike--The

Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.'

But, apart from that, which does not enter properly into my present

contemplations, let us remember that though changed in form, very truly

and really in substance, this blessedness and honour of helping Jesus

Christ is given to us; and is demanded from us, too, if we are His

disciples. He is despised and set at nought still. He is crucified

afresh still. There are many men in this day who scoff at Him, mock

Him, deny His claims, seek to cast Him down from His throne, rebel

against His dominion. It is an easy thing to be a disciple, when all

the crowd is crying Hosanna!' It is a much harder thing to be a

disciple when the crowd, or even when the influential cultivated

opinion of a generation, is crying Crucify Him! crucify Him!' And some

of you Christian men and women have to learn the lesson that if you are

to be Christians you must be Christ's companions when His back is at

the wall as well as when men are exalting and honouring Him, that it is

your business to confess Him when men deny Him, to stand by Him when

men forsake Him, to avow Him when the avowal is likely to bring

contempt upon you from some people, and thus, in a very real sense, to

bear His Cross after Him. Let us go forth unto Him without the camp,

bearing His reproach';--the tail end of His Cross, which is the

lightest! He has borne the heaviest end on His own shoulders; but we

have to ally ourselves with that suffering and despised Christ if we

are to be His disciples.

I do not dwell upon the lesson often drawn from this story, as if it

taught us to take up our cross daily and follow Him.' That is another

matter, and yet is closely connected with that about which I speak; but

what I say is, Christ's Cross has to be carried to-day; and if we have

not found out that it has, let us ask ourselves if we are Christians at

all. There will be hostility, alienation, a comparative coolness, and

absence of a full sense of sympathy with you, in many people, if you

are a true Christian. You will come in for a share of contempt from the

wise and the cultivated of this generation, as in all generations. The

mud that is thrown after the Master will spatter your faces too, to

some extent; and if you are walking with Him you will be, to the extent

of your communion with Him, objects of the aversion with which many men

regard Him. Stand to your colours. Do not be ashamed of Him in the

midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

And there is yet another way in which this honour of helping the Lord

is given to us. As in His weakness He needed some one to aid Him to

bear His Cross, so in His glory He needs our help to carry out the

purposes for which the Cross was borne. The paradox of a man's carrying

the Cross of Him who carried the world's burden is repeated in another

form. He needs nothing, and yet He needs us. He needs nothing, and yet

He needed that ass which was tethered at the place where two ways met,'

in order to ride into Jerusalem upon it. He does not need man's help,

and yet He does need it, and He asks for it. And though He bore Simon

the Cyrenian's sins in His own body on the tree,' He needed Simon the

Cyrenian to help Him to bear the tree, and He needs us to help Him to

spread throughout the world the blessed consequences of that Cross and

bitter Passion. So to us all is granted the honour, and from us all are

required the sacrifice and the service, of helping the suffering

Saviour.

III. Another of the lessons which may very briefly be drawn from this

story is that of the perpetual recompense and record of the humblest

Christian work. There were different degrees of criminality, and

different degrees of sympathy with Him, if I may use the word, in that

crowd that stood round the Master. The criminality varied from the

highest degree of violent malignity in the Scribes and Pharisees, down

to the lowest point of ignorance, and therefore all but entire

innocence, on the part of the Roman legionaries, who were merely the

mechanical instruments of the order given, and stolidly watched Him

there,' with eyes which saw nothing.

On the other hand, there were all grades of service and help and

sympathy, from the vague emotions of the crowd who beat their breasts,

and the pity of the daughters of Jerusalem, or the kindly-meant help of

the soldiers, who would have moistened the parched lips, to the heroic

love of the women at the Cross, whose ministry was not ended even with

His life. But surely the most blessed share in that day's tragedy was

reserved for Simon, whose bearing of the Cross may have been compulsory

at first, but became, ere it was ended, willing service. But whatever

were the degrees of recognition of Christ's character, and of sympathy

with the meaning of His sufferings, yet the smallest and most transient

impulse of loving gratitude that went out towards Him was rewarded

then, and is rewarded for ever, by blessed results in the heart that

feels it.

Besides these results, service for Christ is recompensed, as in the

instance before us, by a perpetual memorial. How little Simon knew that

wherever in the whole world this gospel was preached, there also, this

that he had done should be told for a memorial of him! How little he

understood when he went back to his rural lodging that night, that he

had written his name high up on the tablet of the world's memory, to be

legible for ever. Why, men have fretted their whole lives away to win

what this man won, and knew nothing of--one line in the chronicle of

fame.

So we may say, it shall be always, I will never forget any of their

works.' We may not leave our deeds inscribed in any records that men

can read. What of that, If they are written in letters of light in the

Lamb's Book of Life,' to be read out by Him before His Father and the

holy angels, in that last great day? We may not leave any separable

traces of our services, any more than the little brook that comes down

some gulley on the hillside flows separate from its sisters, with whom

it has coalesced, in the bed of the great river, or in the rolling,

boundless ocean, What of that so long as the work, in its consequences,

shall last? Men that sow some great prairie broadcast cannot go into

the harvest-field and say, I sowed the seed from which that ear came,

and you the seed from which this one sprang.' But the waving abundance

belongs to them all, and each may be sure that his work survives and is

glorified there,--that he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice

together.' So a perpetual remembrance is sure for the smallest

Christian service.

IV. The last lesson that I would draw is, let us learn from this

incident the blessed results of contact with the suffering Christ.

Simon the Cyrenian apparently knew nothing about Jesus Christ when the

Cross was laid on his shoulders. He would be reluctant to undertake the

humiliating task, and would plod along behind Him for a while, sullen

and discontented, but by degrees be touched by more of sympathy, and

get closer and closer to the Sufferer. And if he stood by the Cross

when it was fixed, and saw all that transpired there, no wonder if, at

last, after more or less protracted thought and search, he came to

understand who He was that he had helped, and to yield himself to Him

wholly.

Yes! dear brethren, Christ's great saying, I, if I be lifted up, will

draw all men unto Me,' began to be fulfilled when He began to be lifted

up. The centurion, the thief, this man Simon, by looking on the Cross,

learned the Crucified.

And it is the only way by which any of us will ever learn the true

mystery and miracle of Christ's great and loving Being and work. I

beseech you, take your places there behind Him, near His Cross; gazing

upon Him till your hearts melt, and you, too, learn that He is your

Lord, and your Saviour, and your God. The Cross of Jesus Christ divides

men into classes as the Last Day will. It, too, parts men--'sheep' to

the right hand, goats' to the left. If there was a penitent, there was

an impenitent thief; if there was a convinced centurion, there were

gambling soldiers; if there were hearts touched with compassion, there

were mockers who took His very agonies and flung them in His face as a

refutation of His claims. On the day when that Cross was reared on

Calvary it began to be what it has been ever since, and is at this

moment to every soul who hears the Gospel, a savour of life unto life,

or of death unto death.' Contact with the suffering Christ will either

bind you to His service, and fill you with His Spirit, or it will

harden your hearts, and make you tenfold more selfish--that is to say,

tenfold more a child of hell'--than you were before you saw and heard

of that divine meekness of the suffering Christ. Look to Him, I beseech

you, who bears what none can help Him to carry, the burden of the

world's sin. Let Him bear yours, and yield to Him your grateful

obedience, and then take up your cross daily, and bear the light burden

of self-denying service to Him who has borne the heavy load of sin for

you and all mankind.

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THE INCREDULOUS DISCIPLES

And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of

James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and

anoint Him. 2. And very early in the morning, the first day of the

week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. 3. And

they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the

door of the sepulchre? 4. And when they looked, they saw that the stone

was rolled away: for it was very great. 6. And entering into the

sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a

long white garment; and they were affrighted. 6. And he saith unto

them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was

crucified: He is risen; He is not here: behold the place where they

laid Him. 7. But go your way, tell His disciples and Peter that He

goeth before yon into Galilee: there shall ye see Him, as He said unto

you. 8. And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for

they trembled and were amazed: neither said they anything to any man;

for they were afraid. 9. Now, when Jesus was risen early the first day

of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had

cast seven devils. 10. And she went and told them that had been with

Him, as they mourned and wept. 11. And they, when they had heard that

He was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not. 12. After that He

appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went

into the country. 13. And they went and told it unto the residue:

neither believed they them.'--Mark xvi. 1-13.

It is not my business here to discuss questions of harmonising or of

criticism. I have only to deal with the narrative as it stands. Its

peculiar character is very plain. The manner in which the first

disciples learned the fact of the Resurrection, and the disbelief with

which they received it, much rather than the Resurrection itself, come

into view in this section. The disciples, and not the risen Lord, are

shown us. There is nothing here of the earthquake, or of the descending

angel, or of the terrified guard, or of our Lord's appearance to the

women. The two appearances to Mary Magdalene and to the travellers to

Emmaus, which, in the hands of John and Luke, are so pathetic and rich,

are here mentioned with the utmost brevity, for the sake chiefly of

insisting on the disbelief of the disciples who heard of them. Mark's

theme is mainly what they thought of the testimony to the Resurrection.

I. He shows us, first, bewildered love and sorrow. We leave the

question whether this group of women is the same as that of which Luke

records that Joanna was one, as well as the other puzzle as to

harmonising the notes of time in the Evangelists. May not the

difference between the time of starting and that of arrival solve some

of the difficulty? When all the notes are more or less vague, and refer

to the time of transition from dark to day, when every moment partakes

of both and may be differently described as belonging to either, is

precision to be expected? In the whirl of agitation of that morning,

would any one be at leisure to take much note of the exact minute? Are

not these discrepancies' much more valuable as confirmation of the

story than precise accord would have been? It is better to try to

understand the feelings of that little band than to carp at such

trifles.

Sorrow wakes early, and love is impatient to bring its tribute. So we

can see these three women, leaving their abode as soon as the doleful

grey of morning permitted, stealing through the silent streets, and

reaching the rock-cut tomb while the sun was rising over Olivet. Where

were Salome's ambitious hopes for her two sons now? Dead, and buried in

the Master's grave. The completeness of the women's despair, as well as

the faithfulness of their love, is witnessed by their purpose. They had

come to anoint the body of Him to whom in life they had ministered.

They had no thought of a resurrection, plainly as they had been told of

it. The waves of sorrow had washed the remembrance of His assurances on

that subject clean out of their minds. Truth that is only half

understood, however plainly spoken, is always forgotten when the time

to apply it comes. We are told that the disbelief of the disciples in

the Resurrection, after Christ's plain predictions of it, is

psychologically impossible.' Such big words are imposing, but the

objection is shallow. These disciples are not the only people who

forgot in the hour of need the thing which it most concerned them to

remember, and let the clouds of sorrow hide starry promises which would

have turned mourning into dancing, and night into day. Christ's sayings

about His resurrection were not understood in their, as it appears to

us, obvious meaning when spoken. No wonder, then, that they were not

expected to be fulfilled in their obvious meaning when He was dead. We

shall have a word to say presently about the value of the fact that

there was no anticipation of resurrection on the part of the disciples.

For the present it is enough to note how these three loving souls

confess their hopelessness by their errand. Did they not know, too,

that Joseph and Nicodemus had been beforehand with them in their labour

of love? Apparently not. It might easily happen, in the confusion and

dispersion, that no knowledge of this had reached them; or perhaps

sorrow and agitation had driven it out of their memories; or perhaps

they felt that, whether others had done the same before or no, they

must do it too, not because the loved form needed it, but because their

hearts needed to do it. It was the love which must serve, not

calculation of necessity, which loaded their hands with costly spices.

The living Christ was pleased with the odour of a sweet smell,' from

the needless spices, meant to re-anoint the dead Christ, and accepted

the purpose, though it came from ignorance and was never carried out,

since its deepest root was love, genuine, though bewildered.

The same absence of calm practical common sense' is seen in the too

late consideration, which never occurred to the three women till they

were getting near the tomb, as to how to get into it. They do not seem

to have heard of the guard; but they know that the stone is too heavy

for them to move, and none of the men among the disciples had been

taken into their confidence. Why did they not think of that before?

what a want of foresight!' says the cool observer. How beautifully true

to nature!' says a wiser judgment. To obey the impulse of love and

sorrow without thinking, and then to be arrested on their road by a

difficulty, which they might have thought of at first, but did not till

they were close to it, is surely just what might have been expected of

such mourners. Mark gives a graphic picture in that one word looking

up,' and follows it with picturesque present tenses. They had been

looking down or at each other in perplexity, when they lifted their

eyes to the tomb, which was possibly on an eminence. What a flash of

wonder would pass through their minds when they saw it open! What that

might signify they would be eager to hurry to find out; but, at all

events, their difficulty was at an end. When love to Christ is brought

to a stand in its venturous enterprises by difficulties occurring for

the first time to the mind, it is well to go close up to them; and it

often happens that when we do, and look steadily at them, we see that

they are rolled away, and the passage cleared which we feared was

hopelessly barred.

II. The calm herald of the Resurrection and the amazed hearers.

Apparently Mary Magdalene had turned back as soon as she saw the opened

tomb, and hurried to tell that the body had been carried off, as she

supposed. The guard had also probably fled before this; and so the

other two women enter the vestibule, and there find the angel.

Sometimes one angel, sometimes two, sometimes none, were visible there.

The variation in their numbers in the various narratives is not to be

regarded as an instance of discrepancy.' Many angels hovered round the

spot where the greatest wonder of the universe was to be seen, eagerly

desiring to look into' that grave. The beholder's eye may have

determined their visibility. Their number may have fluctuated. Mark

does not use the word angel' at all, but leaves us to infer what manner

of being he was who first proclaimed the Resurrection.

He tells of his youth, his attitude, and his attire. The angelic life

is vigorous, progressive, buoyant, and alien from decay. Immortal youth

belongs to them who excel in strength' because they do his

commandments.' That waiting minister shows us what the children of the

Resurrection shall be, and so his presence as well as his speech

expounds the blessed mystery of our life in the risen Lord. His serene

attitude of sitting on the right side' is not only a vivid touch of

description, but is significant of restfulness and fixed contemplation,

as well as of the calmness of a higher life. That still watcher knows

too much to be agitated; but the less he is moved, the more he adores.

His quiet contrasts with and heightens the impression of the storm of

conflicting feelings in the women's tremulous natures. His garments

symbolise purity and repose. How sharply the difference between heaven

and earth is given in the last words of verse 5! They were amazed,'

swept out of themselves in an ecstasy of bewilderment in which hope had

no place. Terror, surprise, curiosity, wonder, blank incapacity to know

what all this meant, made chaos in them.

The angel's words are a succession of short sentences, which have a

certain dignity, and break up the astounding revelation he has to make

into small pieces, which the women's bewildered minds can grasp. He

calms their tumult of spirit. He shows them that he knows their errand.

He adoringly names his Lord and theirs by the names recalling His

manhood, His lowly home, and His ignominious death. He lingers on the

thought, to him covering so profound a mystery of divine love, that his

Lord had been born, had lived in the obscure village, and died on the

Cross. Then, in one word, he proclaims the stupendous fact of His

resurrection as His own act--He is risen.' This crown of all miracles,

which brings life and immortality to light, and changes the whole

outlook of humanity, which changes the Cross into victory, and without

which Christianity is a dream and a ruin, is announced in a single

word--the mightiest ever spoken save by Christ's own lips. It was

fitting that angel lips should proclaim the Resurrection, as they did

the Nativity, though in either He taketh not hold of angels,' and they

had but a secondary share in the blessings. Yet that empty grave opened

to principalities and powers in heavenly places' a new unfolding of the

manifold wisdom and love of God.

The angel--a true evangelist--does not linger on the wondrous

intimation, but points to the vacant place, which would have been so

drear but for his previous words, and bids them approach to verify his

assurance, and with reverent wonder to gaze on the hallowed and now

happy spot. A moment is granted for feeling to overflow, and certainty

to be attained, and then the women are sent on their errand. Even the

joy of that gaze is not to be selfishly prolonged, while others are

sitting in sorrow for want of what they know. That is the law for all

the Christian life. First make sure work of one's own possession of the

truth, and then hasten to tell it to those who need it.

And Peter'--Mark alone gives us this. The other Evangelists might pass

it by; but how could Peter ever forget the balm which that message of

pardon and restoration brought to him, and how could Peter's mouthpiece

leave it out? Is there anything in the Gospels more beautiful, or

fuller of long-suffering and thoughtful love, than that message from

the risen Saviour to the denier? And how delicate the love which, by

calling him Peter, not Simon, reinstates him in his official position

by anticipation, even though in the subsequent full restoration scene

by the lake he is thrice called Simon, before the complete effacement

of the triple denial by the triple confession! Galilee is named as the

rendezvous, and the word employed, goeth before you,' is appropriate to

the Shepherd in front of His flock. They had been scattered,' but are

to be drawn together again. He is to precede' them there, thus lightly

indicating the new form of their relations to Him, marked during the

forty days by a distance which prepared for his final withdrawal.

Galilee was the home of most of them, and had been the field of His

most continuous labours. There would be many disciples there, who would

gather to see their risen Lord (five hundred at once'); and there,

rather than in Jerusalem which had slain Him, was it fitting that He

should show Himself to His friends. The appearances in Jerusalem were

all within a week (if we except the Ascension), and the connection in

which Mark introduces them (if verse 14 be his) seems to treat them as

forced on Christ by the disciples' unbelief, rather than as His

original intention. It looks as if He meant to show Himself in the city

only to one or two, such as Mary, Peter, and some others, but to

reserve His more public appearance for Galilee.

How did the women receive the message? Mark represents them as

trembling in body and in an ecstasy in mind, and as hurrying away

silent with terror. Matthew says that they were full of fear and great

joy,' and went in haste to tell the disciples. In the whirl of feeling,

there were opposites blended or succeeding one another; and the one

Evangelist lays hold of one set, and the other of the other. It is as

impossible to catalogue the swift emotions of such a moment as to

separate and tabulate the hues of sunrise. The silence which Mark tells

of can only refer to their demeanour as they fled.' His object is to

bring out the very imperfect credence which, at the best, was given to

the testimony that Christ was risen, and to paint the tumult of feeling

in the breasts of its first recipients. His picture is taken from a

different angle from Matthew's; but Matthew's contains the same

elements, for he speaks of fear,' though he completes it by joy.'

III. The incredulity of the disciples. The two appearances to Mary

Magdalene and the travellers to Emmaus are introduced mainly to record

the unbelief of the disciples. A strange choice that was, of the woman

who had been rescued from so low a debasement, to be first to see Him!

But her former degradation was the measure of her love. Longing eyes,

that have been washed clean by many a tear of penitent gratitude, are

purged to see Jesus; and a yearning heart ever brings Him near. The

unbelief of the story of the two from Emmaus seems to conflict with

Luke's account, which tells that they were met by the news of Christ's

appearance to Simon. But the two statements are not contradictory. If

we remember the excitement and confusion of mind in which they were, we

shall not wonder if belief and unbelief followed each other, like the

flow and recoil of the waves. One moment they were on the crest of the

billows, and saw land ahead; the next they were down in the trough, and

saw only the melancholy surge. The very fact that Peter was believed,

might make them disbelieve the travellers; for how could Jesus have

been in Jerusalem and Emmaus at so nearly the same time? However the

two narratives be reconciled, it remains obvious that the first

disciples did not believe the first witnesses of the Resurrection, and

that their unbelief is an important fact. It bears very distinctly on

the worth of their subsequent conviction. It has special bearing on the

most modern form of disbelief in the Resurrection, which accounts for

the belief of the first disciples on the ground that they expected

Christ to rise, and that they then persuaded themselves, in all good

faith, that He had risen. That monstrous theory is vulnerable at all

points, but one sufficient answer is--the disciples did not expect

Christ to rise again, and were so far from it that they did not believe

that He had risen when they were told it. Their original unbelief is a

strong argument for the reliableness of their final faith. What raised

them from the stupor of despair and incredulity? Only one answer is

psychologically' reasonable: they at last believed because they saw. It

is incredible that they were conscious deceivers; for such lives as

they lived, and such a gospel as they preached, never came from liars.

It is as incredible that they were unconsciously mistaken; for they

were wholly unprepared for the Resurrection, and sturdily disbelieved

all witnesses for it, till they saw with their own eyes, and had many

infallible proofs.' Let us be thankful for their unbelief and its

record, and let us seek to possess the blessing of those that have not

seen, and yet have believed!'

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PERPETUAL YOUTH

And entering Into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the

right side, clothed in a long white garment.'--Mark xvi. 5.

Many great truths concerning Christ's death, and its worth to higher

orders of being, are taught by the presence of that angel form, clad in

the whiteness of his own God-given purity, sitting in restful

contemplation in the dark house where the body of Jesus had lain. Which

things the angels desire to look into.' Many precious lessons of

consolation and hope, too, lie in the wonderful words which he spake

from his Lord and theirs to the weeping waiting women. But to touch

upon these ever so slightly would lead us too far from our more

immediate purpose.

It strikes one as very remarkable that this superhuman being should be

described as a young man.' Immortal youth, with all of buoyant energy

and fresh power which that attribute suggests, belongs to those beings

whom Scripture faintly shows as our elder brethren. No waste decays

their strength, no change robs them of forces which have ceased to

increase. For them there never comes a period when memory is more than

hope. Age cannot wither them. As one of our modern mystics has said,

hiding imaginative spiritualism under a crust of hard, dry

matter-of-fact, In heaven the oldest angels are the youngest.'

What is true of them is true of God's children, who are accounted

worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead,' for

they are equal unto the angels.' For believing and loving souls, death

too is a birth. All who pass through it to God, shall, in deeper

meaning than lay in the words at first, return unto the days of their

youth'; and when the end comes, and they are clothed with their house

from heaven,' they shall stand by the throne, like him who sat in the

sepulchre, clothed with lustrous light and radiant with unchanging

youth.

Such a conception of the condition of the dead in Christ may be

followed out in detail into many very elevating and strengthening

thoughts. Let me attempt to set forth some of these now.

I. The life of the faithful dead is eternal progress towards infinite

perfection.

For body and for spirit the life of earth is a definite whole, with

distinct stages, which succeed each other in a well-marked order. There

are youth, and maturity, and decay--the slow climbing to the narrow

summit, a brief moment there in the streaming sunshine, and then a sure

and gradual descent into the shadows beneath. The same equable and

constant motion urges the orb of our lives from morning to noon, and

from noon to evening. The glory of the dawning day, with its golden

clouds and its dewy freshness, its new awakened hopes and its unworn

vigour, climbs by silent, inevitable stages to the hot noon. But its

ardours flame but for a moment; but for a moment does the sun poise

itself on the meridian line, and the short shadow point to the pole.

The inexorable revolution goes on, and in due time come the mists and

dying purples of evening and the blackness of night. The same progress

which brings April's perfumes burns them in the censer of the hot

summer, and buries summer beneath the falling leaves, and covers its

grave with winter's snow.

Everything that grows

Holds in perfection but a little moment.'

So the life of man, being under the law of growth, is, in all its

parts, subject to the consequent necessity of decline. And very swiftly

does the direction change from ascending to descending. At first, and

for a little while, the motion of the dancing stream, which broadens as

it runs, and bears us past fields each brighter and more enamelled with

flowers than the one before it, is joyous; but the slow current becomes

awful as we are swept along when we would fain moor and land--and to

some of us it comes to be tragic and dreadful at last, as we sit

helpless, and see the shore rush past and hear the roar of the falls in

our ears, like some poor wretch caught in the glassy smoothness above

Niagara, who has flung down the oars, and, clutching the gunwale with

idle hands, sits effortless and breathless till the plunge comes. Many

a despairing voice has prayed as the sands ran out, and joys fled, Sun,

stand thou still on Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon,'

but in vain. Once the wish was answered; but, for all other fighters,

the twelve hours of the day must suffice for victory and for joy. Time

devours his own children. The morning hours come to us with full hands

and give, the evening hours come with empty hands and take; so that at

the last naked shall he return to go as he came.' Our earthly life runs

through its successive stages, and for it, in body and mind, old age is

the child of youth.

But the perfect life of the dead in Christ has but one phase, youth. It

is growth without a limit and without decline. To say that they are

ever young is the same thing as to say that their being never reaches

its climax, that it is ever but entering on its glory; that is, as we

have said, that the true conception of their life is that of eternal

progress towards infinite perfection.

For what is the goal to which they tend? The likeness of God in

Christ--all His wisdom, His love, His holiness. He is all theirs, and

His whole perfection is to be transfused into their growing greatness.

He is made unto them of God. wisdom, and righteousness, and salvation

and redemption,' nor can they cease to grow till they have outgrown

Jesus and exhausted God. On the one hand is infinite perfection,

destined to be imparted to the redeemed spirit. On the other hand is a

capability of indefinite assimilation to, by reception of, that

infinite perfection. We have no reason to set bounds to the possible

expansion of the human spirit. If only there be fitting circumstances

and an adequate impulse, it may have an endless growth. Such

circumstances and such impulse are given in the loving presence of

Christ in glory. Therefore we look for an eternal life which shall

never reach a point beyond which no advance is possible. The path of

the just' in that higher state shineth more and more,' and never

touches the zenith. Here we float upon a landlocked lake, and on every

side soon reach the bounding land; but there we are on a shoreless

ocean, and never hear any voice that says, Hitherto shalt thou come,

and no farther.' Christ will be ever before us, the yet unattained end

of our desires; Christ will be ever above us, fairer, wiser, holier,

than we; after unsummed eternities of advance there will yet stretch

before us a shining way that leads to Him. The language, which was

often breathed by us on earth in tones of plaintive confession, will be

spoken in heaven in gladness, Not as though I had attained, either were

perfect, but I follow after,' The promise that was spoken by Him in

regard to our mortality will be repeated by Him in respect to our

celestial being, I am come that they might have life, and that they

might have it more abundantly.' And as this advance has no natural

limit, either in regard to our Pattern or to ourselves, there will be

no reverse direction to ensue. Here the one process has its two

opposite parts; the same impulse carries up to the summit and forces

down from it. But it is not so then. There growth will never merge into

decay, nor exacting hours come to recall the gifts, which their

free-handed sisters gave.

They who live in Christ, beyond the grave, begin with a relative

perfection. They are thereby rendered capable of more complete

Christ-likeness. The eye, by gazing into the day, becomes more

recipient of more light; the spirit cleaves closer to a Christ more

fully apprehended and more deeply loved; the whole being, like a plant

reaching up to the sunlight, grows by its yearning towards the light,

and by the light towards which it yearns--lifts a stronger stem and

spreads a broader leaf, and opens into immortal flowers tinted by the

sunlight with its own colours. This blessed and eternal growth towards

Him whom we possess, to begin with, and never can exhaust, is the

perpetual youth of God's redeemed.

We ought not to think of those whom we have loved and lost as if they

had gone, carrying with them declining powers, and still bearing the

marks of this inevitable law of stagnation, and then of decay, under

which they groaned here. Think of them rather as having, if they sleep

in Jesus, reversed all this, as having carried with them, indeed, all

the gifts of matured experience and ripened wisdom which the slow years

bring, but likewise as having left behind all the weariness of

accomplished aims, the monotony of a formed character, the rigidity of

limbs that have ceased to grow. Think of them as receiving again from

the hands of Christ much of which they were robbed by the lapse of

years. Think of them as then crowned with loving-kindness and satisfied

with good, so that their youth is renewed like the eagle's.' Think of

them as again joyous, with the joy of beginning a career, which has no

term but the sum of all perfection in the likeness of the infinite God.

They rise like the song-bird, aspiring to the heavens, circling round,

and ever higher, which singing still doth soar, and soaring ever

singeth'--up and up through the steadfast blue to the sun! Even the

youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall;

but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.' They

shall lose the marks of age as they grow in eternity, and they who have

stood before the throne the longest shall be likest him who sat in the

sepulchre young with immortal strength, radiant with unwithering

beauty.

II. The life of the faithful dead recovers and retains the best

characteristics of youth.

Each stage of our earthly course has its own peculiar characteristics,

as each zone of the world has its own vegetation and animal life. And,

for the most part, these characteristics cannot be anticipated in the

preceding stage, nor prolonged into the succeeding. To some small

extent they will bear transplanting, and he is nearest a perfect man

who carries into each period of his life some trace of the special

beauty of that which went before, making the child the father of the

man,' and carrying deep into old age the simple self-forgetfulness of

the child and the energy of the youth. But this can only be partially

done by any effort; and even those whose happily constituted

temperaments make it comparatively easy for them, do often carry the

weakness rather than the strength of the earlier into the later epochs.

It is easier to be always childish than to be always childlike. The

immaturity and heedlessness of youth bear carriage better than the more

precious vintages of that sunny land--its freshness of eye and heart,

its openness of mind, its energy of hand. Even when these are in any

measure retained--beautiful as they are in old age--they are but too

apt to be associated with an absence of the excellences more proper to

the later stages of life, and to involve a want of patient judgment, of

sagacious discrimination, of rooted affections, of prudent, persistent

action. Beautiful indeed it is when the grace of the child and the

strength of the young man live on in the fathers, and when the last of

life encloses all that was good in all that went before. But miserable

it is, and quite as frequent a case, when grey hairs cover a childish

brain, and an aged heart throbs with the feverish passion of youthful

blood. So for this life it is difficult, and often not well, that youth

should be prolonged into manhood and old age.

But the thought is none the less true, that the perfection of our being

requires the reappearance and the continuance of all that was good in

each successive stage of it in the past. The brightest aspects of youth

will return to all who live in Jesus, beyond the grave, and will be

theirs for ever. Such a consideration branches out into many happy

anticipations, which we can but very cursorily touch on here.

For instance--Youth is the time for hope. The world then lies all

before us, fair and untried. We have not learnt our own weakness by

many failures, nor the dread possibilities that lie in every future.

The past is too brief to occupy us long, and its furthest point too

near to be clothed in the airy purple, which draws the eye and stirs

the heart. We are conscious of increasing powers which crave for

occupation. It seems impossible but that success and joy shall be ours.

So we live for a little while in a golden haze; we look down from our

peak upon the virgin forests of a new world, that roll away to the

shining waters in the west, and then we plunge into their mazes to hew

out a path for ourselves, to slay the wild beasts, and to find and

conquer rich lands. But soon we discover what hard work the march is,

and what monsters lurk in the leafy coverts, and what diseases hover

among the marshes, and how short a distance ahead we can see, and how

far off it is to the treasure-cities that we dreamed of; and if at last

we gain some cleared spot whence we can look forward, our weary eyes

are searching at most for a place to rest, and all our hopes have

dwindled to hopes of safety and repose. The day brings too much toil to

leave us leisure for much anticipation. The journey has had too many

failures, too many wounds, too many of our comrades left to die in the

forest glades, to allow of our expecting much. We plod on, sometimes

ready to faint, sometimes with lighter hearts, but not any more winged

by hope as in the golden prime,--unless indeed for those of us who have

fixed our hopes on God, and so get through the march better, because,

be it rough or smooth, long or short, He moves before us to guide, and

all our ways lead to Him. But even for these there comes, before very

long, a time when they are weary of hoping for much more here, and when

the light of youth fades into common day. Be it so! They will get the

faculty and the use of it back again in far nobler fashion, when death

has taken them away from all that is transient, and faith has through

death given for their possession and their expectation, the certitudes

of eternity. It will be worth while to look forward again, when we are

again standing at the beginning of a life. It will be possible once

more to hope, when disappointments are all past. A boundless future

stretching before us, of which we know that it is all blessed, and that

we shall reach all its blessedness, will give back to hearts that have

long ceased to drink of the delusive cup which earthly hope offered to

their lips, the joy of living in a present, made bright by the certain

anticipation of a yet brighter future. Losing nothing by our constant

progress, and certain to gain all which we foresee, we shall remember

and be glad, we shall hope and be confident. With the past unsighed

for, and the future sure,' we shall have that magic gift, which earth's

disappointments dulled, quickened by the sure mercies of the heavens.

Again, youth has mostly a certain keenness of relish for life which

vanishes only too soon. There are plenty of our young men and women

too, of this day, no doubt, who are as blas� and wearied before they

are out of their teens as if they were fifty. So much the sadder for

them, so much the worse for the social state which breeds such

monsters. For monsters they are: there ought to be in youth a sense of

fresh wonder undimmed by familiarity, the absence of satiety, a joy in

joyful things because they are new as well as gladsome. The poignancy

of these early delights cannot long survive. Custom stales them all,

and wraps everything in its robe of ashen grey. We get used to what was

once so fresh and wonderful, and do not care very much about anything

any more. We smile pitying smiles--sadder than any tears--at boyish

enthusiasm,' and sometimes plume ourselves on having come to years

which bring the philosophic mind'; and all the while we know that we

have lost a great gift, which here can never come back any more.

But what if that eager freshness of delight may yet be ours once again?

What if the eternal youth of the heavens means, amongst other things,

that there are pleasures which always satisfy but never cloy? What if,

in perpetual advance, we find and keep for ever that ever new gladness,

which here we vainly seek in perpetual distraction? What if constant

new influxes of divine blessedness, and constant new visions of God,

keep in constant exercise that sense of wonder, which makes so great a

part of the power of youth? What if, after all that we have learned and

all that we have received, we still have to say, It doth not yet appear

what we shall be'? Then, I think, in very profound and blessed sense,

heaven would be perpetual youth.

I need not pause to speak of other characteristics of that period of

life--such as its enthusiasm, its life by impulse rather than by

reason, its buoyant energy and delight in action. All these gifts, so

little cared for when possessed, so often misused, so irrevocably gone

with a few brief years, so bitterly bewailed, will surely be found

again, where God keeps all the treasures that He gives and we let fall.

For transient enthusiasm, heaven will give us back a fervour of love

like that of the seraphs, that have burned before His throne unconsumed

and undecaying for unknown ages. For a life of instinctive impulse, we

shall titan receive a life in which impulse is ever parallel with the

highest law, and, doing only what we would, we shall do only what we

ought. For energy which wanes as the years wax, and delight in action

which is soon worn down into mechanical routine of toil, there will be

bestowed strength akin to His who fainteth not, neither is weary.' All

of which maturity and old age robbed us is given back in nobler form.

All the limitation and weakness which they brought, the coldness, the

monotony, the torpor, the weariness, will drop away. But we shall keep

all the precious things which they brought us. None of the calm wisdom,

the ripened knowledge, the full-summed experience, the powers of

service acquired in life's long apprenticeship, will be taken from us.

All will be changed indeed. All will be cleansed of the impurity which

attaches to all. All will be accepted and crowned, not by reason of its

goodness, but by reason of Christ's sacrifice, which is the channel of

God's mercy. Though in themselves unworthy, and having nothing fit for

the heavens, yet the souls that trust in Jesus, the Lord of Life, shall

bear into their glory the characters which by His grace they wrought

out here on earth, transfigured and perfected, but still the same. And

to make up that full-summed completeness, will be given to them at once

the perfection of all the various stages through which they passed on

earth. The perfect man in the heavens will include the graces of

childhood, the energies of youth, the steadfastness of manhood, the

calmness of old age; as on some tropical trees, blooming in more

fertile soil and quickened by a hotter sun than ours, you may see at

once bud, blossom, and fruit--the expectancy of spring, and the

maturing promise of summer, and the fulfilled fruition of

autumn--hanging together on the unexhausted bough.

III. The faithful dead shall live in a body that cannot grow old.

Scripture assures us, I believe, that the dead in Christ are now in

full, conscious enjoyment of His presence, and of all the blessedness

that to dwell in Christ can bring to a spirit. All, then, which we have

been saying applies to the present condition of those who sleep in

Jesus. As concerning toil and trouble they take rest in sleep, as

concerning contact with an outer world they slumber untroubled by its

noise; but as concerning their communion with their Lord they, like us,

whether we wake or sleep, live together with Him.' But we know too,

from Scripture, that the dead in Christ wait for the resurrection of

the body, without which they cannot be perfected, nor restored to full

activity of outward life in connection with an external creation.

The lesson which we venture to draw from this text enforces the

familiar teaching of Scripture as to that body of glory--that it cannot

decay, nor grow old. In this respect, too, eternal youth may be ours.

Here we have a bodily organisation which, like all other living bodies,

goes through its appointed series of changes, wastes in effort, and so

needs reparation by food and rest, dies in growing, and finally waxes

old and dissolves. In such a house, a man cannot be ever young. The dim

eye and shaking hand, the wrinkled face and thin grey hairs cannot but

age the spirit, since they weaken its instruments.

If the redeemed of the Lord are to be always young in spirit, they must

have a body which knows no weariness, which needs no repose, which has

no necessity of dying impressed upon it. And such a body Scripture

plainly tells us will belong to those who are Christ's, at His coming.

Our present acquaintance with the conditions of life makes that great

promise seem impossible to many learned men amongst us. And I know not

that anything but acquaintance with the sure word of God and with a

risen Lord will make that seeming impossibility again a great promise

for us. If we believe it at all, I think we must believe it because the

resurrection of Jesus Christ says so, and because the Scriptures put it

into articulate words as the promise of His resurrection. Ye do err,'

said Christ long ago, to those who denied a resurrection, not knowing

the Scriptures nor the power of God.' Then knowledge of the Scriptures

leads to belief in the resurrection of the dead, and the remembrance of

our ignorance of the power of God disposes of all the doubts which are

raised on the supposition that His present works are the pattern of His

future ones, or the limits of His unexhausted energy.

We are content then to fall back on Scripture words, and to believe in

the resurrection of the dead simply because it is, as we believe, told

us from God.

For all who accept the message, this hope shines clear, of a building

of God imperishable and solid, when contrasted with the tent in which

we dwell here--of a body raised in incorruption,' clothed with

immortality,' and so, as in many another phrase, declared to be exempt

from decay, and therefore vigorous with unchanging youth. How that

comes we cannot tell. Whether because that body of glory has no

proclivity to mutation and decay, or whether the perpetual volition and

power of God counteract such tendency and give, as the Book of

Revelation says,' to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of

the paradise of God'--matters not at all. The truth of the promise

remains, though we have no means of knowing more than the fact, that we

shall receive a body, fashioned like His who dieth no more. There shall

be no weariness nor consequent need for repose-- they rest not day nor

night.' There shall be no faintness nor consequent craving for

sustenance--they shall hunger no more neither thirst any more.' There

shall be no disease--the inhabitant thereof shall no more say, I am

sick,' neither can they die any more, for they are equal unto the

angels.'

And if all this is true, that glorious and undecaying body will then be

the equal and fit instrument of the perfected spirit, not, as it is

now, the adequate instrument only of the natural life. The deepest

emotions then will be capable of expression, nor as now, like some

rushing tide, choke the floodgates through whose narrow aperture they

try to press, and be all tossed into foam in the attempt. We shall then

seem what we are, as we shall also be what we ought. All outward things

will then be fully and clearly communicated to the spirit, for that

glorious body will be a perfect instrument of knowledge. All that we

desire to do we shall then do, nor be longer tortured with tremulous

hands which can never draw the perfect circle that we plan, and

stammering lips that will not obey the heart, and throbbing brain that

will ache when we would have it clear. The ever-young spirit will have

for true yokefellow a body that cannot tire, nor grow old, nor die.

The aged saints of God shall rise then in youthful beauty. More than

the long-vanished comeliness shall on that day rest on faces that were

here haggard with anxiety, and pinched with penury and years. There

will be no more palsied hands, no more scattered grey hairs, no more

dim and horny eyes, no more stiffened muscles and slow throbbing

hearts. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.' It is sown in

decaying old age, it is raised in immortal youth. His servants shall

stand in that day among the young-eyed cherubim,' and be like them for

ever. So we may think of the dead in Christ.

But do not forget that Christian faith may largely do for us here what

God's grace and power will do for us in heaven, and that even now we

may possess much of this great gift of perpetual youth. If we live for

Christ by faith in Him, then may we carry with us all our days the

energy, the hope, the joy of the morning tide, and be children in evil

while men in understanding. With unworn and fresh heart we may bring

forth fruit in old age,' and have the crocus in the autumnal fields as

well as in the spring-time of our lives. So blessed, we may pass to a

peaceful end, because we hold His hand who makes the path smooth and

the heart quiet. Trust yourselves, my brethren, to the immortal love

and perfect work of the Divine Saviour, and by His dear might your days

will advance by peaceful stages, whereof each gathers up and carries

forward the blessings of all that went before, to a death which shall

be a birth. Its chill waters will be as a fountain of youth from which

you will rise, beautiful and strong, to begin an immortality of growing

power. A Christian life on earth solves partly, a Christian life in

heaven solves completely, the problem of perpetual youth. For those who

die in His faith and fear, better is the end than the beginning, and

the day of one's death than the day of one's birth.' Christ keeps the

good wine until the close of the feast.

Such is Thy banquet, dearest Lord;

O give us grace, to cast

Our lot with Thine, to trust Thy word,

And keep our best till last.'

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THE ANGEL IN THE TOMB

They saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white

garment; and they were aifrighted. 6. And he saith unto them, Be not

affrighted. Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: He is

risen; He is not here; behold the place where they laid Him.'--Mark

xvi. 5,6.

Each of the four Evangelists tells the story of the Resurrection from

his own special point of view. None of them has any record of the

actual fact, because no eye saw it. Before the earthquake and the

angelic descent, before the stone was rolled away, while the guards

perhaps slept, and before Love and Sorrow had awakened, Christ rose.

And deep silence covers the event. But in treating of the subsequent

portion of the narrative, each Evangelist stands at his own point of

view. Mark has scarcely anything to say about our Lord's appearance

after the Resurrection. His object seems mainly to be to describe

rather the manner in which the report of the Resurrection affected the

disciples, and so he makes prominent the bewildered astonishment of the

women. If the latter part of this chapter be his, he passes by the

appearance of our Lord to Mary Magdalene and to the two travellers to

Emmaus with just a word for each--contrasting singularly with the

lovely narrative of the former in John's Gospel and with the detailed

account of the latter in Luke's. He emphasises the incredulity of the

Twelve after receiving the reports, and in like manner he lays stress

upon the unbelief and hardness of heart which the Lord rebuked.

So, then, this incident, the appearance of the angel, the portion of

his message to the women which we have read, and the way in which the

first testimony to the Resurrection affected its hearers, may suggest

to us some thoughts which, though subsidiary to the main teaching of

the Resurrection, may yet be important in their place.

I. Note the first witness to the Resurrection.

There are singular diversities in the four Gospels in their accounts of

the angelic appearances, the number, occupation, and attitude of these

superhuman persons, and contradictions may be spun, if one is so

disposed, out of these varieties. But it is wiser to take another view

of them, and to see in the varying reports, sometimes of one angel,

sometimes of two, sometimes of one sitting outside the sepulchre,

sometimes one within, sometimes none, either different moments of time

or differences produced by the different spiritual condition of the

beholders. Who can count the glancing wings of the white-winged flock

of sea-birds as they sail and turn in the sunshine? Who can count the

numbers of these bright-harnessed angels,' sometimes more, sometimes

less, flickering and fluttering into and out of sight, which shone upon

the vision of the weeping onlookers? We know too little about the laws

of angelic appearances; we know too little about the relation in that

high region between the seeing eye and the objects beheld to venture to

say that there is contradiction where the narratives present variety.

Enough for us to draw the lessons that are suggested by that quiet

figure sitting there in the inner vestibule of the grave, the stone

rolled away and the work done, gazing on the tomb where the Lord of men

and angels had lain.

He was a youth. The oldest angels are the youngest,' says a great

mystic. The angels excel in strength' because they delight to do His

commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word.' The lapse of ages

brings not age to them who wait on the Lord' in the higher ministries

of heaven, and run unwearied, and walk unfainting, and when they are

seen by men are radiant with immortal youth. He was clothed in a long

white garment,' the sign at once of purity and of repose; and he was

sitting in rapt contemplation and quiet adoration there, where the body

of Jesus had lain.

But what had he to do with the joy of Resurrection? It delivered him

from no fears, it brought to him no fresh assurance of a life which was

always his. Wherefore was he there? Because that Cross strikes its

power upwards as well as downwards; because He that had lain there is

the Head of all creation, and the Lord of angels as well as of men;

because that Resurrection following upon that Cross, unto the

principalities and powers in heavenly places,' opened a new and

wonderful door into the unsounded and unfathomed abyss of divine love;

because into these things angels desire to look,' and, looking, are

smitten with adoring wonder and flushed with the illumination of a new

knowledge of what God is, and of what man is to God. The Resurrection

of the Prince of Life was no mystery to the angel. To him the mystery

was in His death. To us the death is not a mystery, but the

Resurrection is. That gazing figure looks from the other side upon the

grave which we contemplate from this side of the gulf of death; but the

eyes of both orders of Being fix upon the same hallowed spot--they in

adoring wonder that there a God should have lain; we in lowly

thankfulness that thence a man should have risen.

Further, we see in that angel presence not only the indication that

Christ is his King as well as ours, but also the mark of his and all

his fellows' sympathetic participation in whatsoever is of so deep

interest to humanity. There is a certain tone of friendship and oneness

in his words. The trembling women were smitten into an ecstasy of

bewildered fear (as one of the words, affrighted' might more accurately

be rendered), and his consolation to them, Be not affrighted, ye seek

Jesus,' suggests that, in all the great sweep of the unseen universe,

whatsoever beings may people that to us apparently waste and solitary

space, howsoever many they may be, thick as the autumn leaves in

Vallambrosa' or as the motes that dance in the sunshine, they are all

friends and allies and elder brethren of those who seek for Jesus with

a loving heart. No creature that owns His sway can touch or injure or

need terrify the soul that follows after Christ. All the servants of

our King in heaven and earth are one,' and He sends forth His brightest

and loftiest to be brethren and ministers to them who shall be heirs of

salvation.' So we may pass through the darkest spaces of the universe

and the loneliest valleys of the shadow of death, sure that whosoever

may be there will be our friend if we are the friends of Christ.

II. So much, then, for the first point that I would suggest here. Note,

secondly, the triumphant light cast upon the cradle and the Cross.

There is something very remarkable, because for purposes of

identification plainly unnecessary, in the minute particularity of the

designation which the angel lips give to Jesus Christ. Jesus, the

Nazarene, who was crucified.' Do you not catch a tone of wonder and a

tone of triumph in this threefold particularising of the humanity, the

lowly residence, and the Ignominious death? All that lowliness,

suffering, and shame are brought into comparison with the rising from

the dead. That is to say, when we grasp the fact of a risen Christ, we

look back upon all the story of His birth, His lowly life, His death of

shame, and see a new meaning in it, and new reasons for triumph and for

wonder. The cradle is illuminated by the grave, the Cross by the empty

sepulchre. As at the beginning there is a supernatural entrance into

life, so at the end there is a supernatural resumption of it. The birth

corresponds with the resurrection, and both witness to the divinity.

The lowly life culminates in the conquest over death; the Nazarene

despised, rejected, dwelling in a place that was a byword, sharing all

the modest lowliness and self-respecting poverty of the Galilean

peasants, has conquered death. The Man that was crucified has conquered

death. And the fact that He has risen explains and illuminates the fact

that He died.

Brethren, let us lay this to heart, that unless we believe in the

Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the saying He was crucified' is the

saddest word that can be spoken about any of the great ones of the

past. If Jesus Christ be lying in some nameless grave, then all the

power of His death is gone, and He and it are nothing to me, or to you,

or to any of our fellow-men, more than a thousand deaths of the mighty

ones of old. But Easter day transfigures the gloom of the day of the

Crucifixion, and the rising sun of its morning gilds and explains the

Cross. Now it stands forth as the great redeeming power of the world,

where my sins and yours and the whole world's have been expiated and

done away. And now, instead of being ignominy, it is glory, and instead

of being defeat it is victory, and instead of looking upon that death

as the lowest point of the Master's humiliation, we may look upon it as

He Himself did, as the highest point of His glorifying. For the Cross

then becomes His great means of winning men to Himself, and the very

throne of His power. On the historical fact of a Resurrection depend

all the worth and meaning of the death of Christ. If He be not risen

our preaching is vain, and your faith is also vain.' If Christ be not

risen, ye are yet in your sins.' But if what this day commemorates be

true, then upon all His earthly life is thrown a new light; and we

first understand the Cross when we look upon the empty grave.

III. Again, notice here the majestic announcement of the great fact,

and its confirmation.

He is risen; He is not here.' The first preacher of the Resurrection

was an angel, a true ev-angel-ist. His message is conveyed in these

brief sentences, unconnected with each other, in token, not of

abruptness and haste, but of solemnity. He is risen' is one word in the

original--a sentence of one word, which announces the mightiest miracle

that ever was wrought upon earth, a miracle which opens the door wide

enough for all supernatural events recorded of Jesus Christ to find an

entrance to the understanding and the reason.

He is risen.' The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is declared by angel

lips to be His own act; not, indeed, as if He were acting separately

from the Father, but still less as if in it He were merely passive.

Think of that; a dead Christ raised Himself. That is the teaching of

the Scripture. I do not dwell here, at this stage of my sermon, on the

many issues that spring from such a conception, but this only I urge,

Jesus Christ was the Lord of life; held life and death, His own and

others', at His beck and will. His death was voluntary; He was not

passive in it, but He died because He chose. His resurrection was His

act; He rose because He willed. I have power to lay it down, I have

power to take it again.' No one said to Him, I say unto Thee, arise!'

The divine power of the Father's will did not work upon Him as from

without to raise Him from the dead; but He, the embodiment of divinity,

raised Himself, even though it is also true that He was raised from the

dead by the glory of the Father. These two statements are not

contradictory, but the former of them can only be predicated of Him;

and it sets Him on a pedestal immeasurably above, and infinitely apart

from, all those to whom life is communicated by a divine act. He

Himself is the Life,' and it was not possible that Life should be

holden of Death; therefore He burst its bonds, and, like the ancient

Jewish hero, though in far nobler fashion, our Samson enters into the

city which is a prison, and on His strong shoulders bears away the

gates, that none may ever there be prisoners without hope.

Now, then, note the confirmation of this stupendous fact. He is risen;

He is not here.' The grave was empty, and the trembling women were

called upon to look and see for themselves that the body was not there.

One remark is all that I wish to make about this matter--viz. this, all

theories, ancient or modern, which deny the Resurrection, are shattered

by this one question, What became of Jesus Christ's body? We take it as

a plain historical fact, which the extremest scepticism has never

ventured to deny, that the grave of Christ was empty. The trumped-up

story of the guards sufficiently shows that. When the belief of a

resurrection began to be spread abroad, what would have been easier for

Pharisees and rulers than to have gone to the sepulchre and rolled back

the stone, and said, Look there! there is your risen Man, lying

mouldering, like all the rest of us.' They did not do it. Why? Because

the grave was empty. Where was the body? They had it not, else they

would have been glad to produce it. The disciples had it not, for if

they had, you come back to the discredited and impossible theory that,

having it, and knowing that they were telling lies, they got up the

story of the Resurrection. Nobody believes that nowadays--nobody can

believe it who looks at the results of the preaching of this, by

hypothesis, falsehood. Men do not gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of

thistles.' And whether the disciples were right or wrong, there can be

no question in the mind of anybody who is not prepared to swallow

impossibilities compared to which miracles are easy, that the first

disciples heartily believed that Jesus Christ was risen from the dead.

As I say, one confirmation of the belief lies in the empty grave, and

this question may be put to anybody that says I do not believe in your

Resurrection':--What became of the sacred body of Jesus Christ?'

Now, note the way in which the announcement of this tremendous fact was

received. With blank bewilderment and terror on the part of these

women, followed by incredulity on the part of the Apostles and of the

other disciples. These things are on the surface of the narrative, and

very important they are. They plainly tell us that the first hearers

did not believe the testimony which they themselves call upon us to

believe. And, that being the state of mind of the early disciples on

the Resurrection day, what becomes of the modern theory, which seeks to

explain the fact of the early belief in the Resurrection by saying, Oh,

they had worked themselves into such a fever of expectation that Jesus

Christ would rise from the dead that the wish was father to the

thought, and they said that He did because they expected that He

would'? No! they did not expect that He would; it was the very last

thing that they expected. They had not in their minds the soil out of

which such imaginations would grow. They were perfectly unprepared to

believe it, and, as a matter of fact, they did not believe until they

had seen. So I think that that one fact disposes of a great deal of

pestilent and shallow talk in these days that tries to deny the

Resurrection and to save the character of the men that witnessed it.

IV. And now, lastly, note here the summons to grateful contemplation.

Behold the place where they laid Him.' To these women the call was

simply one to come and see what would confirm the witness. But we may,

perhaps, permissibly turn it to a wider purpose, and say that it

summons us all to thankful, lowly, believing, glad contemplation of

that empty grave as the basis of all our hopes. Look upon it and upon

the Resurrection which it confirms to us as an historical fact. It sets

the seal of the divine approval on Christ's work, and declares the

divinity of His person and the all-sufficiency of His mighty sacrifice.

Therefore let us, laden with our sins and seeking for reconciliation

with God, and knowing how impossible it is for us to bring an atonement

or a ransom for ourselves, look upon that grave and learn that Christ

has offered the sacrifice which God has accepted, and with which He is

well pleased.

Behold the place where they laid Him,' and, looking upon it, let us

think of that Resurrection as a prophecy, with a bearing upon us and

upon all the dear ones that have trod the common road into the great

darkness. Christ has died, therefore they live; Christ lives, therefore

we shall never die. His grave was in a garden--a garden indeed. The

yearly miracle of the returning life re-orient out of dust,' typifies

the mightier miracle which He works for all that trust in Him, when out

of death He leads them into life. The graveyard has become God's acre';

the garden in which the seed sown in weakness is to be raised in power,

and sown corruptible is to be raised in incorruption.

Behold the place where they laid Him,' and in the empty grave read the

mystery of the Resurrection as the pattern and the symbol of our higher

life; that, like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the

Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.' Oh to partake

more and more of that power of His Resurrection!

In Christ's empty grave is planted the true tree of life, which is in

the midst of the "true" Paradise of God.' And we, if we truly trust and

humbly love that Lord, shall partake of its fruits, and shall one day

share the glories of His risen life in the heavens, even as we share

the power of it here and now.

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LOVE'S TRIUMPH OVER SIN

Tell His disciples and Peter that He goeth before yon into

Galilee.--Mark xvi. 7.

This prevailing tradition of Christian antiquity ascribes this Gospel

to John Mark, sister's son to Barnabas, and affirms that in composing

it he was in some sense the interpreter' of the Apostle Peter. Some

confirmation of this alleged connection between the Evangelist and the

Apostle may be gathered from the fact that the former is mentioned by

the latter as with him when he wrote his First Epistle. And, in the

Gospel itself, there are some little peculiarities which seem to look

in the same direction. A certain speciality is traceable here and

there, both in omissions of incidents in the Apostle's life recorded by

some of the other Evangelists, and in the addition of slight facts

concerning him unnoticed by them.

Chief among these is the place which his name holds in this very

remarkable message, delivered by the angels to the women who came to

Christ's tomb on the Resurrection morning. Matthew, who also reports

the angels' words, has only tell His disciples.' Mark adds the words,

which must have come like wine and oil to the bruised heart of the

denier, tell His disciples and Peter.' To the others, it was of little

importance that his name should have been named then; to him it was

life from the dead, that he should have been singled out to receive a

word of forgiveness and a summons to meet his Lord; as if He had said

through His angel messengers--I would see them all; but whoever may

stay behind, let not him be absent from our glad meeting again.'

We find, too, that the same individualising of the Apostle, which led

to his being thus greeted in the first thoughts of his risen Lord, led

also to an interview with Him on that same day, about which not a

syllable of detail is found in any Gospel, though the fact was known to

the whole body of the disciples. For when the two friends who had met

Christ at Emmaus came back in the night with their strange tidings,

their eagerness to tell their joyful news is anticipated by the

eagerness of the brethren to tell their wonderful story: The Lord is

risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.' Paul, too, gives that

meeting, when the Lord was alone with the penitent, the foremost place

in his list of the evidences of Christ's resurrection, He was seen of

Cephas.' What passed then is hidden from all eyes. The secrets of that

hour of deep contrition and healing love Peter kept secretly curtained

from sight, in the innermost chamber of his memory. But we may be sure

that then forgiveness was sought and granted, and the bond that

fastened him to his Lord was welded together again, where it had

snapped, and was the stronger because it had been broken, and at the

point of fracture.

The man must be first re-united to his Saviour, before the Apostle can

be reinstated in his functions. In secrecy, not beheld by any, is the

personal act of restoration to love and friendship effected; and then

in public, before his brethren, who were concerned in his official

position, but not in his personal relation to his Lord, the

reappointment of the pardoned disciple to his apostleship takes place.

His sin had had a public aspect, and his threefold denial must, in so

far as it was an outward act, be effaced by his threefold confession.

Then he becomes again Peter'--not merely Simon Bar Jonas'; and, as the

Book of the Acts shows, never ceases to hear the divine commissions,

Feed My sheep,' Follow Me'; nor ever forgets the lessons he had learned

in these bitter hours of self-loathing, and in the rapturous moments

when again he saw his Lord.

Putting all these things together--this message from Christ, the

interview which followed it, and the subsequent history of the

Apostle--we have a connected series of facts which may illustrate for

us, better than many dry words of mine could do, the triumph over sin

of the forgiving love of Christ.

I. Notice, then, first, the loving message with which He beckons the

wanderer back.

If we try to throw ourselves back into the Apostle's black thoughts

during the interval between his denial and the Resurrection morning, we

shall better feel what this love-token from the grave must have been to

him. His natural character, as well as his real love for his Master,

ensured that his lies could not long content him. They were uttered so

vehemently because they were uttered in spite of inward resistance.

Overpowered by fear, beaten down from all his vain-glorious

self-confidence by a woman-servant's sharp tongue and mocking eye, he

lied--and then came the rebound. The same impulsive vehemence which had

hurried him into the fault, would swing him back again to quick

penitence when the cock crew, and that Divine Face, turning slowly from

before the judgment-seat with the sorrow of wounded love upon it,

silently said, Remember.' We can fancy how that bitter weeping, which

began so soon, grew more passionate and more bitter when the end came.

We are singularly happy if we do not know the pang of remembering some

fault to the loved dead--some hasty word, some momentary petulance,

some selfish disregard of their happiness, some sullen refusal of their

tenderness. How the thought that it is all irrevocable now embitters

the remorse! How passionately we long that we could have one of the

moments again, which seemed so trivial while we possessed them, that we

might confess and be forgiven, and atone! And this poor, warm-hearted,

penitent denier had to think that his very last act to the Lord whom he

loved so well had been such an act of cowardly shrinking from

acknowledging Him; and that henceforward his memory of that dear face

was to be for ever saddened by that last look! That they should have

parted so! that that sad gaze was to be the last he should ever have,

and that it was to haunt him for the rest of his life! We can

understand how heavily the hours passed on that dreary Saturday. If, as

seems probable, he was with John in his home, whither the latter had

led the mother of our Lord, what a group were gathered there, each with

a separate pang from the common sorrow!

Into this sorrow come the tidings that all was not over, that the

irrevocable was not irrevocable, that perhaps new days of loyal love

might still be granted, in which the doleful failure of the past might

be forgotten; and then, whether before or after his hurried rush to the

grave we need not here stay to inquire, follows the message of our

text, a word of forgiveness and reconciliation, sent by the Lord as the

herald and outrider of His own coming, to bring gladness and hope ere

He Himself draws near.

Think of this message as a revelation of love that is stronger than

death.

The news of Christ's resurrection must have struck awe, but not

necessarily joy, into the disciples' hearts. The dearest ones suffer so

solemn a change to our apprehensions when they pass into the grave,

that to many a man it would be maddening terror to meet those whom he

loved and still loves. So there must have been a spasm of fear even

among Christ's friends when they heard of Him as risen again, and much

confusing doubt as to what would be the amount of resemblance to His

old self. They probably dreaded to find Him far removed from their

familiar love, forgetful perhaps of much of the old life, with other

thoughts than before, with the atmosphere of the other world round

about Him, which glorified Him indeed, but separated Him too from those

whose grosser lungs could live only in this thick air. These words of

our text would go far to scatter all such fears. They link on the

future to the past, as if His first thought when He rose had been to

gather up again the dropped threads of their intercourse, and to carry

on their ancient concord and companionship as though no break had been

at all. For all the disciples, and especially for him who is especially

named, they confirm the identity of Christ's whole dispositions towards

them now, with those which He had before. Death has not changed Him at

all. Much has been done since He left them; the world's history has

been changed, but nothing which has happened has had any effect on the

reality of His love, and on the inmost reality of their companionship.

In these respects they are where they were, and even Calvary and the

tomb are but as a parenthesis. The old bonds are all re-knit, and the

junction is all but imperceptible.

This is how we have to think of our Lord now, in His attitude towards

us. We, too, may have our share in that message, which came like

morning twilight before He shone upon the apostles' darkness. To them

it proclaimed a love which was stronger than death. To us it may

declare a love which is stronger than all change of circumstances. He

is no more parted from us by the Throne than from them by the Cross. He

descended into the lower parts of the earth,' and His love lived on,

and so it does now, when He has ascended up far above all heavens.'

Love knows no difference of place, conditions, or functions. From out

of the blazing heart of the Glory the same tender face looks that bent

over sick men's pallets, and that turned on Peter in the judgment-hall.

The hand that holds the sceptre of the universe is the hand that was

nailed to the Cross, and that was stretched out to that same Peter when

he was ready to sink. The breast that is girt with the golden girdle of

priestly sovereignty is the same tender home on which John's happy head

rested in placid contentment. All the love that ever flowed from Christ

flows from Him still. To Him, whose nature and whose name are Love,' it

matters nothing whether He is in the house at Bethany, or in the upper

room, or hanging on the Cross, or lying in the grave, or risen from the

dead, or seated on the right hand of God. He is the same everywhere and

always. I have loved thee with an everlasting love.'

Again, this message is the revelation of a love that is not turned away

by our sinful changes.

Peter may have thought that he had, with his own words, broken the bond

between him and his Lord. He had renounced his allegiance; was the

renunciation to be accepted? He had said, I am not one of them'; did

Christ answer, Be it so; one of them thou shalt no more be'? The

message from the women's lips settled the question, and let him feel

that, though his grasp of Christ had relaxed, Christ's grasp of him had

not, He might change, he might cease for a time to prize his Lord's

love, he might cease either to be conscious of it or to wish for it;

but that love could not change. It was unaffected by his

unfaithfulness, even as it had not been originated by his fidelity.

Repelled, it still lingered beside him. Disowned, it still asserted its

property in him. Being reviled, it blessed; being persecuted, it

endured; being defamed, it entreated; and, patient through all wrongs

and changes, it loved on till it had won back the erring heart, and

could fill it with the old blessedness again.

And is not that same miracle of long-enduring love presented before

every one of us, as in Christ's heart for us? True, our sin interferes

with our sense of it, and modifies the form in which it must deal with

us; but, however real and disastrous may be the power of our evil in

troubling the communion of love between us and our Lord, and in

compelling Him to smite before He binds up, never forget that our sin

is utterly impotent to turn away the tide that sets to us from the

heart of Christ. Earthborn vapours may hang about the low levels, and

turn the gracious sun himself into a blood-red ball of lurid fire; but

they reach only a little way up, and high above their region is the

pure blue, and the blessed light pours down upon the upper surface of

the white mist, and thins away its opaqueness, and dries up its

clinging damp, and at last parts it into filmy fragments that float out

of sight, and the dwellers on the green earth see the sun, which was

always there even when they could not behold it, and which, by shining

on, has conquered all the obstructions that veiled its beams. Sin is

mighty, but one thing sin cannot do, and that is to make Christ cease

to love us. Sin is mighty, but one other thing sin cannot do, and that

is to prevent Christ from manifesting His love to us sinners, that we

may learn to love and so may cease to sin. Christ's love is not at the

beck and call of our fluctuating affections. It has its source deeper

than in the springs in our hearts, namely in the depths of His own

nature. It is not the echo or the answer to ours, but ours is the echo

to His; and that being so, our changes do not reach to it, any more

than earth's seasons affect the sun. For ever and ever He loves. Whilst

we forget Him, He remembers us. Whilst we repay Him with neglect or

with hate, He still loves. If we believe not, He still abides faithful

to His merciful purpose, and, in spite of all that we can do, will not

deny Himself, by ceasing to be the incarnate Patience, the perfect

Love. He is Himself the great ensample of that charity' which His

Apostle painted; He is not easily provoked; He is not soon angry; He

beareth all things; He hopeth all things. We cannot get away from the

sweep of His love, wander we ever so far. The child may struggle in the

mother's arms, and beat the breast that shelters it with its little

hand; but it neither hurts nor angers that gentle bosom, nor loosens

the firm but loving grasp that holds it fast. He carries, as a nurse

does, His wayward children, and, blessed be His name! His arm is too

strong for us to shake it off, His love too divine for us to dam it

back.

And still further, here we see a love which sends a special message

because of special sin.

If one was to be singled out from the little company to receive by name

the summons of the Lord to meet Him in Galilee, we might have expected

it to have been that faithful friend who stood beneath the Cross, till

his Lord's command sent him to his own home; or that weeping mother

whom he then led away with him; or one of the two who had been turned

from secret disciples into confessors by the might of their love, and

had laid His body with reverent care in the grave in the garden.

Strange reward for true love that they should be merged in the general

message, and strange recompense for treason and cowardice that Peter's

name should be thus distinguished! Is sin, then, a passport to His

deeper love? Is the murmur true after all, Thou never gavest me a kid,

but as soon as this thy son is come, which hath devoured thy living

with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf'? Yes, and no.

No, inasmuch as the unbroken fellowship hath in it calm and deep joys

which the returning prodigal does not know, and all sin lays waste and

impoverishes the soul. Yes, inasmuch as He, who knows all our needs,

knows that the denier needs a special treatment to bring him back to

peace, and that the further a poor heart has strayed from Him, the

mightier must be the forthputting of manifested love, if it is to be

strong enough to travel across all the dreary wastes, and draw back

again, to its orbit among its sister planets, the wandering star. The

depth of our need determines the strength of the restorative power put

forth. They who had not gone away would come at the call addressed to

them all, but he who had sundered himself from them and from the Lord

would remain in his sad isolation, unless some special means were used

to bring him back. The more we have sinned, the less can we believe in

Christ's love; and so the more we have sinned, the more marvellous and

convincing does He make the testimony and operations of His love to us.

It is ever to the poor bewildered sheep, lying panting in the

wilderness, that He comes. Among His creatures, the race which has

sinned is that which receives the most stupendous proof of the seeking

divine love. Among men, the publicans and the harlots, the denying

Peters and the persecuting Pauls, are they to whom the most persuasive

entreaties of His love are sent, and on whom the strongest powers of

His grace are brought to bear. Our sin cannot check the flow of His

love. More marvellous still, our sin occasions a mightier burst of the

manifestation of His love, for eyes blinded by selfishness and

carelessness, or by fear and despair, need to see a brightness beyond

the noonday sun, ere they can behold the amazing truth of His love to

them; and what they need, they get. Go, tell Peter.'

Here, too, is the revelation of a love which singles out a sinful man

by name.

Christ does not deal with us in the mass, but soul by soul. Our finite

minds have to lose the individual in order to grasp the class. Our eyes

see the wood far off on the mountain-side, but not the single trees,

nor each fluttering leaf. We think of the race'--the twelve hundred

millions that live to-day, and the uncounted crowds that have been, but

the units in that inconceivable sum are not separate in our view. But

He does not generalise so. He has a clear individualising knowledge of

each; each separately has a place in His mind or heart. To each He

says, I know thee by name.' He loves the world, because He loves every

single soul with a distinct love. And His messages of blessing are as

specific and individualising as the love from which they come. He

speaks to each of us as truly as He singled out Peter here, as truly as

when His voice from heaven said, Saul, Saul.' English names are on His

lips as really as Jewish ones. He calls to thee by thy name--thou hast

a share in His love. To thee the call to trust Him is addressed, and to

thee forgiveness, help, purity, life eternal are offered. Thou hast

sinned; that only infuses deeper tenderness into His beseeching tones.

Thou hast gone further front Him than some of thy fellows; that only

makes His recovering energy greater. Thou hast denied His name; that

only makes Him speak thine with more persuasive invitation.

Look, then, at this one instance of a love stronger than death,

mightier than sin, sending its special greeting to the denier, and

learn how deep the source, how powerful the flow, how universal the

sweep, of that river of the love of God, which streams to us through

the channel of Christ His Son.

II. Notice, secondly, the secret meeting between our Lord and the

Apostle.

That is the second stage in the victorious conflict of divine love with

man's sin. As I have said, that interview took place on the day of the

Resurrection, apparently before our Lord joined the two sorrowful

travellers to Emmaus, and certainly before He appeared to the company

gathered by night in the closed chamber. The fact was well known, for

it is referred to by Luke and by Paul, but nothing beyond the fact

seems to have been known, or at all events is made public by them. All

this is very significant and very beautiful.

What tender consideration there is in meeting Peter alone, before

seeing him in the companionship of the others! How painful would have

been the rush of the first emotions of shame awakened by Christ's

presence, if their course had been checked by any eye but His own

beholding them! How impossible it would have then been to have poured

out all the penitent confessions with which his heart must have been

full, and how hard it would have been to have met for the first time,

and not to have poured them out! With most loving insight, then, into

the painful embarrassment, and dread of unsympathising standers-by,

which must have troubled the contrite Apostle, the Lord is careful to

give him the opportunity of weeping his fill on His own bosom,

unrestrained by any thought of others, and will let him sob out his

contrition to His own ear alone. Then the meeting in the upper chamber

will be one of pure joy to Peter, as to all the rest. The emotions

which he has in common with them find full play, in that hour when all

are reunited to their Lord. The experience which belongs to himself

alone has its solitary hour of unrecorded communion. The first to whom

He, who is separate from sinners,' appeared was Mary Magdalene, out of

whom He had cast seven devils.' The next were the women who bore this

message of forgiveness; and probably the next was the one among all the

company who had sinned most grievously. So wondrous is the order of His

preferences, coming ever nearest to those who need Him most.

And may we not regard this secret interview as representing for us what

is needed on our part to make Christ's forgiving love our own? There

must be the personal contact of my soul with the loving heart of

Christ, the individual act of my own coming to Him, and, as the old

Puritans used to say,' my transacting' with Him. Like the ocean of the

atmosphere, His love encompasses me, and in it I live, and move, and

have my being.' But I must let it flow into my spirit, and stir the

dormant music of ray soul. I can shut it out, sealing my heart

love-tight against it. I do shut it out, unless by my own conscious,

personal act I yield myself to Him, unless by my own faith I come to

Him, and meet Him, secretly and really as did the penitent Apostle,

whom the message, that proclaimed the love of his Lord, emboldened to

meet the Lord who loved, and by His own lips to be assured of

forgiveness and friendship. It is possible to stumble at noontide, as

in the dark. A man may starve, outside of barns filled with plenty, and

his lips may be parched with thirst, though he is within sight of a

broad river flowing in the sunshine. So a soul may stiffen into the

death of self and sin, even though the voice that wakes the dead to a

life of love be calling to it. Christ and His grace are yours if you

will, but the invitations and beseechings of His mercy, the constant

drawings of His love, the all-embracing offers of His forgiveness, may

be all in vain, if you do not grasp them and hold them fast by the hand

of faith.

That personal act must be preceded by the message of His mighty love.

Ever He sends such messages as heralds of His coming, just as He

prepared the way for His own approach to the Apostle, by the words of

our text. Our faith must follow His word. Our love can only be called

forth by the manifestation of His. But His message must be followed by

that personal act, else His word is spoken in vain, and there is no

real union between our need and His fulness, nor any cleansing contact

of His grace with our foulness.

Mark, too, the intensely individual character of that act of faith by

which a man accepts Christ's grace. Friends and companions may bring

the tidings of the risen Lord's loving heart, but the actual closing

with the Lord's mercy must be done by myself, alone with Him.

As if there were not another soul on earth, I and He must meet, and in

solitude deep as that of death, each man for himself must yield to

Incarnate Love, and receive eternal life. The flocks and herds, the

wives and children, have all to be sent away, and Jacob must be left

alone, before the mysterious Wrestler comes whose touch of fire lames

the whole nature of sin and death, whose inbreathed power strengthens

to hold Him fast till He speaks a blessing, who desires to be overcome,

and makes our yielding to Him our prevailing with Him. As one of the

old mystics called prayer the flight of the lonely man to the only

God,' so we may call the act of faith the meeting of the soul alone

with Christ alone. Do you know anything of that personal communion?

Have you, your own very self, by your own penitence for your own sin,

and your own thankful faith in the Love which thereby becomes truly

yours, isolated yourself from all companionship, and joined yourself to

Christ? Then, through that narrow passage where we can only walk

singly, you will come into a large place. The act of faith, which

separates us from all men, unites us for the first time in real

brotherhood, and they who, one by one, come to Jesus and meet Him

alone, next find that they are come to the city of God, to an

innumerable company, to the festal choirs of angels, to the Church of

the First-born, to the spirits of just men made perfect.'

III. Notice, finally, the gradual cure of the pardoned Apostle.

He was restored to his office, as we read in the supplement to John's

Gospel. In that wonderful conversation, full as it is of allusions to

Peter's fall, Christ asks but one question, Lovest thou Me?' That

includes everything. Hast thou learned the lesson of My mercy? hast

thou responded to My love? then thou art fit for My work, and beginning

to be perfected.' So the third stage in the triumph of Christ's love

over man's sin is, when we, beholding that love flowing towards us, and

accepting it by faith, respond to it with our own, and are able to say,

Thou knowest that I love Thee.'

The all-embracing question is followed by an equally comprehensive

command, Follow thou Me,' a two-worded compendium of all morals, a

precept which naturally results from love, and certainly leads to

absolute perfectness. With love to Christ for motive, and Christ

Himself for pattern, and following Him for our one duty, all things are

possible, and the utter defeat of sin in us is but a question of time.

And the certainty, as well as the gradual slowness, of that victory,

are well set forth by the future history of the Apostle. We know how

his fickleness passed away, and how his vehement character was calmed

and consolidated into resolved persistency, and how his love of

distinction and self-confidence were turned in a new direction, obeyed

a divine impulse, and became powers. We read how he started to the

front; how he guided the Church in the first stage of its development;

how whenever there was danger he was in the van, and whenever there was

work his hand was first on the plough; how he bearded and braved rulers

and councils; how--more difficult still for him--he lay quietly in

prison sleeping like a child, between his guards, on the night before

his execution; how--most difficult of all--he acquiesced in Paul's

superiority; and, if he still needed to be withstood and blamed, could

recognise the wisdom of the rebuke, and in his calm old age could speak

well of the rebuker as his beloved brother Paul.' Nor was the cure a

change in the great lines of his character. These remain the same, the

characteristic excellences possible to them are brought out, the

defects are curbed and cast out. The new man' is the old man' with a

new direction, obeying a new impulse, but retaining its individuality.

Weaknesses become strengths; the sanctified character is the old

character sanctified; and it is still true that every man hath his

proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.'

It is very instructive to observe how deeply the experiences of his

fall, and of Christ's mercy then, had impressed themselves on Peter's

memory, and how constantly they were present with him all through his

after-life. His Epistles are full of allusions which show this. For

instance, to go a step further back in his life, he remembered that the

Lord had said to him, Thou art Peter,' a stone,' and that his pride in

that name had helped to his rash confidence, and so to his sin.

Therefore, when he is cured of these, he takes pleasure in sharing his

honour with his brethren, and writes, Ye also, as living stones, are

built up.' He remembered the contempt for others and the trust in

himself with which he had said, Though all should forsake Thee, yet

will not I'; and, taught what must come of that, he writes, Be clothed

with humility, for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the

humble.' He remembered how hastily he had drawn his sword and struck at

Malchus, and he writes, If when ye do well and suffer for it, ye take

it patiently, this is acceptable with God.' He remembered how he had

been surprised into denial by the questions of a sharp-tongued

servant-maid, and he writes, Be ready always to give an answer to every

man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with

meekness.' He remembered how the pardoning love of his Lord had

honoured him unworthy, with the charge, Feed My sheep,' and he writes,

ranking himself as one of the class to whom he speaks--The elders I

exhort, who am also an elder . . . feed the flock of God.' He

remembered that last command, which sounded ever in his spirit, Follow

thou Me,' and discerning now, through all the years that lay between,

the presumptuous folly and blind inversion of his own work and his

Master's which had lain in his earlier question, Why cannot I follow

Thee now? I will lay down my life for Thy sake'--he writes to all,

Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should

follow His steps,'

So well had he learned the lesson of his own sin, and of that immortal

love which had beckoned him back, to peace at its side and purity from

its hand. Let us learn how the love of Christ, received into the heart,

triumphs gradually but surely over all sin, transforms character,

turning even its weakness into strength, and so, from the depths of

transgression and very gates of hell, raises men to God.

To us all this divine message speaks. Christ's love is extended to us;

no sin can stay it; no fall of ours can make Him despair. He will not

give us up. He waits to be gracious. This same Peter once asked, How

oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?' And the answer,

which commanded unwearied brotherly forgiveness, revealed inexhaustible

divine pardon--I say not unto thee until seven times, but until seventy

times seven.' The measure of the divine mercy, which is the pattern of

ours, is completeness ten times multiplied by itself; we know not the

numbers thereof. Let the wicked forsake his way . . . and let him

return unto the Lord, for He will have mercy upon him; and to our God,

for He will multiply to pardon.'

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FIRST TO MARY'

. . . He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast

seven devils.'--Mark xvi. 9.

A great pile of legend has been built on the one or two notices of Mary

Magdalene in Scripture. Art, poetry, and philanthropy have accepted and

inculcated these, till we almost feel as if they were bits of the

Bible. But there is not the shadow of a foundation for them. She has

generally been identified with the woman in Luke's Gospel who was a

sinner.' There is no reason at all for that identification. On the

contrary, there is a reason against it, in the fact that immediately

after that narrative she is named as one of the little band of women

who ministered to Jesus.

Here is all that we know of her: that Christ cast out the seven devils;

that she became one of the Galilean women, including the mothers of

Jesus and of John, who ministered to Him of their substance'; that she

was one of the Marys at the Cross and saw the interment; that she came

to the sepulchre, heard the angel's message, went to John with it, came

back and stood without at the sepulchre, saw the Lord, and, having

heard His voice and clasped His feet, returned to the little company,

and then she drops out of the narrative and is no more named. That is

all. It is enough. There are large lessons in this fact which Mark (or

whoever wrote this chapter) gives with such emphasis, He appeared first

to Mary Magdalene.'

Think what the Resurrection is--how stupendous and wonderful! Who might

have been expected to be its witnesses? But see! the first eye that

beholds is this poor sin-stained woman's. What a distance between the

two extremes of her experience--devil-ridden and gazing on the Risen

Saviour!

I. An example of the depth to which the soul of man can descend.

This fact of possession is very obscure and strange. I doubt whether we

can understand it. But I cannot see how we can bring it down to the

level of mere disease without involving Jesus Christ in the charge of

consciously aiding in upholding what, if it be not an awful truth, is

one of the grimmest, ghastliest superstitions that ever terrified men.

In all ways He gives in His adhesion to the fact of demoniacal

possession. He speaks to the demons, and of them, rebukes them, holds

conversations with them, charges them to be silent. He distinguishes

between possession and diseases. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers,

raise the dead'--these commands bring together forms of sickness

running its course; why should He separate from them His next command

and endowment, cast out devils,' unless because He regarded demoniacal

possession as separate from sickness in any form? He sees in His

casting of them out the triumph over the personal power of evil. I

beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.' But while the fact seems

to be established, the thing is only known to us by its signs. These

were madness, melancholy, sometimes dumbness, sometimes fits and

convulsions; the man was dominated by an alien power; there was a

strange, awful double consciousness; We are many,' My name is Legion.'

There was absolute control by this alien power, which like some

parasitical worm had rooted itself within the poor wretch, and there

lived upon his blood and life juices--only that it lived in the spirit,

dominated the will, and controlled the nature.

Probably there had always been the yielding to the impulse to sin of

some sort, or at any rate the man had opened the door for the devil to

come in.

This woman had been in the deepest depths of this awful abyss. Seven'

is the numerical symbol of completeness, so she had been utterly

devil-ridden. And she had once been a little child in some Galilean

home, and parents had seen her budding beauty and early, gentle,

womanly ways. And now, think of the havoc! the distorted face, the foul

words, the blasphemous thoughts! And is this worse than our sinful

case? Are not the devils that possess us as real and powerful?

II. An example of the cleansing power of Christ.

We know nothing about how she had come under His merciful eye, nor any

of the circumstances of her healing, but only that this woman, with

whom the serpent was so closely intertwined, as in some pictures of

Eve's temptation, was not beyond His reach, and was set free. Note--

There is no condition of human misery which Christ cannot alleviate.

None is so sunk in sin that He cannot redeem them.

For all in the world there is hope.

Look on the extremest forms of sin. We can regard them all with the

assurance that Christ can cleanse them--prostitutes, thieves,

respectable worldlings.

None is so bad as to have lost His love.

None is so bad as to be excluded from the purpose of His death.

None is so bad as to be beyond the reach of His cleansing power.

None has wandered so far that he cannot come back.

Think of the earliest believers--a thief, a woman that was a sinner,'

this Mary, a Zacch�us, a persecuting Paul, a rude, rough jailer, etc.

Remember Paul's description of a class of the Corinthian saints--'such

were some of you.'

As long as man is man, so long is God ready to receive him back. There

is no place where sun does not shine. No heart is given over to

irremediable hardness. None ever comes to Christ in vain.

The Saviour is greater than all our sins.

The deliverance is more than sufficient for the worst.

God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham.'

Ezekiel's vision of dry bones.

III. An example of how the remembrance of past and pardoned sin may be

a blessing.

Mary evidently tried always to be beside Him. The cure had been

perfect, but perhaps there was a tremulous fear, as in the man that

prayed that he might be with Him.'

And so, look how all the notices give us one picture of a heart set on

Him. There were-- (a) Consciousness of weakness, that made her long for

His presence as a security.

(b) Deep love, that made her long for His presence as a joy.

(c) Thankful gratitude, that made her long for opportunities to serve

Him.

And this is what the remembrance of Jesus should be to us.

IV. An example of how the most degraded may rise highest in fellowship

with Christ.

First' to her, because she needed Him and longed for Him.

Now this is but an illustration of the great principle that by God's

mercy sin when it is hated and pardoned may be made to subserve our

highest joys.

It is not sin which separates us from God, but it is unpardoned sin.

Not that the more we sin the more we are fit for Him, for all sin is

loss. There are ways in which even forgiven and repented sin may injure

a man. But there is nothing in it to hinder our coming close to the

Saviour and enjoying all the fulness of His love, so that if we use it

rightly it may become a help.

If it leads us to that clinging of which we have just spoken, then we

shall come nearer to God for it.

The divine presence is always given to those who long for it.

Sin may help to kindle such longings.

He who has been almost dead in the wilderness will keep near the guide.

The man that has been starved with cold in Arctic night will prize the

glory and grace of sunshine in fairer lands.

Instances in Church history--Paul, Augustine, Bunyan.

Publicans and harlots go into the kingdom before you.'

The noblest illustration is in heaven, where men lead the song of

Redemption.

God uses sin as a black background on which the brightest rainbow tints

of His mercy are displayed.

You can come to this Saviour whatever you have been. I say to no man,

Sin, for it does not matter.' But I do say, If you are conscious of

sin, deep, dark, damning, that makes no barrier between you and God.

You may come all the nearer for it if you will let your past teach you

to long for His love and to lean on Him.'

He appeared first to Mary Magdalene,' and those who stand nearest the

throne and lead the anthems of heaven, and look up with undazzled

angels' faces to the God of their joy, whose name blazes on their

foreheads, all these were guilty, sinful men. But they have washed

their robes and made them white.' There will be in heaven some of the

worst sinners that ever lived on earth. There will not be one out of

whom He has not cast seven devils.'

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THE WORLD-WIDE COMMISSION

Every creature.'--Mark xvi. 15.

The missionary enterprise has been put on many bases. People do not

like commandments, but yet it is a great relief and strength to come

back to one, and answer all questions with He bids me!'

Now, these words of our Lord open up the whole subject of the

Universality of Christianity.

I. The divine audacity of Christianity.

Take the scene. A mere handful of men, whether the twelve' or the five

hundred brethren' is immaterial.

How they must have recoiled when they heard the sweeping command, Go ye

into all the world'! It is like the apparent absurdity of Christ's

quiet word: They need not depart; give ye them to eat,' when the only

visible stock of food was five loaves and two small fishes.' As on that

occasion, so in this final commandment they had to take Christ's

presence into account. I am with you.'

So note the obviously world-wide extent of Christ's claim of dominion.

He had come into the world, to begin with, that the world through Him

might be saved.' If any man thirst, let him come.' The parables of the

kingdom of heaven are planned on the same grand scale. I will draw all

men unto Me.' It cannot be disputed that Jesus lived and moved and had

His being' in this vision of universal dominion.

Here emerges the great contrast of Christianity with Judaism. Judaism

was intolerant, as all merely monotheistic faiths must be, and sure of

future universality, but it was not proselytising--not a missionary

faith. Nor is it so to-day. It is exclusive and unprogressive still.

Mohammedanism in its fiery youth, because monotheistic was aggressive,

but it enforced outward profession only, and left the inner life

untouched. So it did not scruple to persecute as well as to

proselytise. Christianity is alone in calmly setting forth a universal

dominion, and in seeking it by the Word alone. Put up thy sword into

its sheath.'

II. The foundations of this bold claim.

Christ's sole and singular relation to the whole race. There are

profound truths embodied in this relation.

(a) There is implied the adequacy of Christ for all. He is for all,

because He is the only and all-sufficient Saviour. By His death He

offered satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. Look unto Me, and

be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none

else.' Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other

name,' etc.

(b) The divine purpose of mercy for all. God will have all men to be

saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth.'

(c) The adaptation of the Gospel message to all. It deals with all men

as on one level. It addresses universal humanity. Unto you, O men, I

call, and My voice is to the sons of men.' It speaks the same language

to all sorts of men, to all stages of society, and in all ages.

Christianity has no esoteric doctrine, no inner circle of the

initiated.' Consequently it introduces a new notion of privileged

classes.

Note the history of Christianity in its relation to slavery, and to

inferior and down-trodden races. Christianity has no belief in the

existence of irreclaimable outcasts,' but proclaims and glories in the

possibility of winning any and all to the love which makes godlike.

There is one Saviour, and so there is only one Gospel for all the

world.'

III. Its vindication in facts.

The history of the diffusion of the Gospel at first is significant.

Think of the varieties of civilisation it approached and absorbed. See

how it overcame the bonds of climate and language, etc. How unlike the

Europe of to-day is to the Europe of Paul's time!

In this twentieth century Christianity does not present the marks of an

expiring superstition.

Note, further, that the history of missions vindicates the world-wide

claim of the Gospel. Think of the wonderful number of converts in the

first fifty years of gospel preaching. The Roman empire was

Christianised in three centuries! Recall the innumerable testimonies

down to date; e.g. the absolute abandonment of idols in the South Sea

Islands, the weakening of caste in India, the romance of missions in

Central Africa, etc. etc.

The character, too, of modern converts is as good as was that of

Paul's. The gospel in this century produces everywhere fruits like

those which it brought forth in Asia and Europe in the first century.

The success has been in every field. None has been abandoned as

hopeless. The Moravians in Greenland. The Hottentots. The Patagonians

(Darwin's testimony). Christianity has constantly appealed to all

classes of society. Not many noble,' but some in every age and land.

IV. The practical duty.

Go ye and preach.' The matter is literally left in our hands. Jesus has

returned to the throne. Ere departing He announces the distinct

command. There it is, and it is age-long in its application,-- Preach!'

that is the one gospel weapon. Tell of the name and the work of God

manifest in the flesh.' First evangelise,' then disciple the nations.'

Bring to Christ, then build up in Christ. There are no other orders.

Let there be boundless trust in the divine gospel, and it will

vindicate itself in every mission-field. Let us think imperially of

Christ and the Church.' Our anticipations of success should be

world-wide in their sweep.

As when they kindle the festival lamps round the dome of St. Peter's,

there is a first twinkling spot here and another there, and gradually

they multiply till they outline the whole in an unbroken ring of light,

so one by one' men will enter the kingdom, till at last every knee

shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.'

He shall reign from shore to shore.

With illimitable sway.'

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THE ENTHRONED CHRIST

So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into

heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.'--Mark xvi. 19.

How strangely calm and brief is this record of so stupendous an event!

Do these sparing and reverent words sound to you like the product of

devout imagination, embellishing with legend the facts of history? To

me their very restrainedness, calmness, matter-of-factness, if I may so

call it, are a strong guarantee that they are the utterance of an

eyewitness, who verily saw what he tells so simply. There is something

sublime in the contrast between the magnificence and almost

inconceivable grandeur of the thing communicated, and the quiet words,

so few, so sober, so wanting in all detail, in which it is told.

That stupendous fact of Christ sitting at the right hand of God is the

one that should fill the present for us all, even as the Cross should

fill the past, and the coming for Judgment should fill the future. So

for us the one central thought about the present, in its loftiest

relations, should be the throned Christ at God's right hand. It is to

that thought of the session of Jesus by the side of the Majesty of the

Heavens that I wish to turn now, to try to bring out the profound

teaching that is in it, and the practical lessons which it suggests. I

desire to emphasise very briefly four points, and to see, in Christ's

sitting at the right hand, the revelation of these things:--The exalted

Man, the resting Saviour, the interceding Priest, and the ever-active

Helper.

I. First, then, in that solemn and wondrous fact of Christ's sitting at

the right hand of God, we have the exalted Man.

We are taught to believe, according to His own words, that in His

ascension Christ was but returning whence He came, and entering into

the glory which He had with the Father before the world was.' And that

impression of a return to His native and proper abode is strongly

conveyed to us by the narrative of His ascension. Contrast it, for

instance, with the narrative of Elijah's rapture, or with the brief

reference to Enoch's translation. The one was taken by God up into a

region and a state which he had not formerly traversed; the other was

borne by a fiery chariot to the heavens; but Christ slowly sailed

upwards, as it were, by His own inherent power, returning to His abode,

and ascending up where He was before.

But whilst this is one side of the profound fact, there is another

side. What was new in Christ's return to His Father's bosom? This, that

He took His Manhood with Him. It was the Everlasting Son of the

Father,' the Eternal Word, which from the beginning was with God and

was God,' that came down from heaven to earth, to declare the Father;

but it was the Incarnate Word, the Man Christ Jesus, that went back

again. This most blessed and wonderful truth is taught with emphasis in

His own words before the Council, Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting

on the right hand of power.' Christ, then, to-day, bears a human body,

not, indeed, the body of His humiliation,' but the body of His glory,

which is none the less a true corporeal frame, and necessarily requires

a locality. His ascension, whithersoever He may have gone, was the true

carrying of a real humanity, complete in all its parts, Body, Soul, and

Spirit, up to the very throne of God.

Where that locality is it is bootless to speculate. Scripture says that

He ascended up far above all heavens'; or, as the Epistle to the

Hebrews has it, in the proper translation, the High Priest is passed

through the heavens,' as if all this visible material creation was rent

asunder in order that He might soar yet higher beyond its limits

wherein reign mutation and decay. But wheresoever that place may be,

there is a place in which now, with a human body as well as a human

spirit, Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God.'

Let us thankfully think how, in the profound language of Scripture, the

Forerunner is for us entered'; how, in some mysterious manner, of which

we can but dimly conceive, that entrance of Jesus in His complete

humanity into the highest heavens is the preparation of a place for us.

It seems as if, without His presence there, there were no entrance for

human nature within that state, and no power in a human foot to tread

upon the crystal pavements of the celestial City, but where He is,

there the path is permeable, and the place native, to all who love and

trust Him.

We may stand, therefore, with these disciples, and looking upwards as

the cloud receives Him out of our sight, our faith follows Him, still

our Brother, still clothed with humanity, still wearing a bodily frame;

and we say, as we lose Him from our vision, What is man'? Capable of

being lifted to the most intimate participation in the glories of

divinity, and though he be poor and weak and sinful here, yet capable

of union and assimilation with the Majesty that is on high. For what

Christ's Body is, the bodies of them that love and serve Him shall

surely be, and He, the Forerunner, is entered there for us; that we

too, in our turn, may pass into the light, and walk in the full blaze

of the divine glory; as of old the children in the furnace were,

unconsumed, because companioned by One like unto the Son of Man.'

The exalted Christ, sitting at the right hand of God, is the Pattern of

what is possible for humanity, and the prophecy and pledge of what will

be actual for all that love Him and bear the image of Him upon earth,

that they may be conformed to the image of His glory, and be with Him

where He is. What firmness, what reality, what solidity this thought of

the exalted bodily Christ gives to the else dim and vague conceptions

of a Heaven beyond the stars and beyond our present experience! I

believe that no doctrine of a future life has strength and substance

enough to survive the agonies of our hearts when we part from our dear

ones, the fears of our spirits when we look into the unknown, inane

future for ourselves; except only this which says Heaven is Christ and

Christ is Heaven, and points to Him and says, Where He is, there and

that also shall His servants be.'

II. Now, secondly, look at Christ's sitting at the right hand of God as

presenting to our view the Resting Saviour.

That session expresses the idea of absolute repose after sore conflict.

It is the same thought which is expressed in those solemn Egyptian

colossal statues of deified conquerors, elevated to mysterious union

with their gods, and yet men still, sitting before their temples in

perfect stillness, with their mighty hands lying quiet on their restful

limbs; with calm faces out of which toil and passion and change seem to

have melted, gazing out with open eyes as over a silent, prostrate

world. So, with the Cross behind, with all the agony and weariness of

the arena, the dust and the blood of the struggle, left beneath, He

sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.'

The rest of the Christ after His Cross is parallel with and carries the

same meaning as the rest of God after the Creation. Why do we read He

rested on the seventh day from all His works'? Did the Creative Arm

grow weary? Was there toil for the divine nature in the making of a

universe? Doth He not speak and it is done? Is not the calm, effortless

forth-putting of His will the cause and the means of Creation? Does any

shadow of weariness steal over that life which lives and is not

exhausted? Does the bush consume in burning? Surely not. He rested from

His works, not because He needed to recuperate strength after action by

repose, but because the works were perfect, and in sign and token that

His ideal was accomplished, and that no more was needed to be done.

And, in like manner, the Christ rests after His Cross, not because He

needed repose even after that terrible effort, or was panting after His

race, and so had to sit there to recover, but in token that His work

was finished and perfected, that all which He had come to do was done;

and in token, likewise, that the Father, too, beheld and accepted the

finished work. Therefore, the session of Christ at the right hand of

God is the proclamation from Heaven of what He cried with His last

dying breath upon the Cross: It is finished!' It is the declaration

that the world has had all done for it that Heaven can do for it. It is

the declaration that all which is needed for the regeneration of

humanity has been lodged in the very heart of the race, and that

henceforward all that is required is the evolving and the development

of the consequences of that perfect work which Christ offered upon the

Cross. So the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews contrasts the

priests who stood daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same

sacrifices' which can never take away sin,' with this Man who, after He

had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down at the right hand

of God'; testifying thereby that His Cross is the complete, sufficient,

perpetual atonement and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

So we have to look back to that past as interpreted by this present, to

that Cross as commented upon by this Throne, and to see in it the

perfect work which any human soul may grasp, and which all human souls

need, for their acceptance and forgiveness. The Son of Man set at the

right hand of God is Christ's declaration, I have finished the work

which Thou gavest Me to do,' and is also God's declaration, This is My

beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'

III. Once more, we see here, in this great fact of Christ sitting at

the right hand of God, the interceding Priest.

So the Scripture declares. The Epistle to the Hebrews over and over

again reiterates that thought that we have a Priest who has passed into

the heavens,' there to appear in the presence of God for us.' And the

Apostle Paul, in that great linked climax in the eighth chapter of the

Epistle to the Romans, has it, Christ that died, yea rather, that is

risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh

intercession for us.' There are deep mysteries connected with that

thought of the intercession of Christ. It does not mean that the divine

heart needs to be won to love and pity. It does not mean that in any

mere outward and formal fashion Christ pleads with God, and softens and

placates the Infinite and Eternal love of the Father in the heavens.

It, at least, plainly means this, that He, our Saviour and Sacrifice,

is for ever in the presence of God; presenting His own blood as an

element in the divine dealing with us, modifying the incidence of the

divine law, and securing through His own merits and intercession the

outflow of blessings upon our heads and hearts. It is not a complete

statement of Christ's work for us that He died for us. He died that He

might have somewhat to offer. He lives that He may be our Advocate as

well as our propitiation with the Father. And just as the High Priest

once a year passed within the curtain, and there in the solemn silence

and solitude of the holy place sprinkled the blood that he bore

thither, not without trembling, and but for a moment permitted to stay

in the awful Presence, thus, but in reality and for ever, with the

joyful gladness of a Son in His own calm home, His habitation from

eternity,' Christ abides in the Holy Place; and, at the right hand of

the Majesty of the Heavens, lifts up that prayer, so strangely compact

of authority and submission; Father, I will that these whom Thou hast

given Me be with Me where I am.' The Son of Man at the right hand of

God is our Intercessor with the Father. Seeing, then, that we have a

great High Priest that is passed through the heavens, let us come

boldly to the Throne of Grace.'

IV. Lastly, this great fact sets before us the ever-active Helper.

The right hand of God' is the Omnipotent energy of God, and howsoever

certainly the language of Scripture requires for its full

interpretation that we should firmly hold that Christ's glorified body

dwells in a place, we are not to omit the other thought that to sit at

the right hand also means to wield the immortal energy of that divine

nature, over all the field of the Creation, and in every province of

His dominion. So that the ascended Christ is the ubiquitous Christ; and

He who is at the right hand of God' is wherever the power of God

reaches throughout His whole Universe.

Remember, too, that it was once given to a man to look through the

opened heavens (through which Christ had passed') and to see the Son of

Man standing'--not sitting--at the right hand of God.' Why to the dying

protomartyr was there granted that vision thus varied? Wherefore was

the attitude changed but to express the swiftness, the certainty of His

help, and the eager readiness of the Lord, who starts to His feet, as

it were, to succour and to sustain His dying servant? And so, dear

friends, we may take that great joyful truth that both as receiving

gifts for men' and bestowing gifts upon them, and as working by His

providence in the world, and on the wider scale for the well-being of

His children and of the Church, the Christ who sits at the right hand

of God wields, ever with eager cheerfulness, all the powers of

omnipotence for our well-being, if we love and trust Him. We may look

quietly upon all perplexities and complications, because the hands that

were pierced for us hold the helm and the reins, because the Christ who

is our Brother is the King, and sits supreme at the centre of the

Universe. Joseph's brethren, that came up in their hunger and their

rags to Egypt, and found their brother next the throne, were startled

with a great joy of surprise, and fears were calmed, and confidence

sprang in their hearts. Shall not we be restful and confident when our

Brother, the Son of Man, sits ruling all things? We see not yet all

things put under' us, but we see Jesus,' and that is enough.

So the ascended Man, the resting Saviour and His completed work, the

interceding Priest, and the ever-active Helper, are all brought before

us in this great and blessed thought, Christ sitteth at the right hand

of God.' Therefore, dear friends, set your affection on things above.

Our hearts travel where our dear ones are. Oh how strange and sad it is

that professing Christians whose lives, if they are Christians at all,

have their roots and are hid with Christ in God, should turn so few, so

cold thoughts and loves thither! Surely where your treasure is there

will your heart be also.' Surely if Christ is your Treasure you will

feel that with Him is home, and that this is a foreign land. Set your

affection,' then, on things above,' while life lasts, and when it is

ebbing away, perhaps to our eyes too Heaven may be opened, and the

vision of the Son of Man standing to receive and to welcome us may be

granted. And when it has ebbed away, His will be the first voice to

welcome us, and He will lift us to share in His glorious rest,

according to His own wondrous promise, To him that overcometh will I

grant to sit with Me in My Throne, even as I also overcame, and am set

down with My Father in His Throne.'

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207. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxi-p1.1

208. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p61.1

209. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxii-p1.1

210. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p62.1

211. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxiii-p1.1

212. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p63.1

213. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxiv-p1.1

214. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p64.1

215. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxv-p1.1

216. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxvi-p2.1

217. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p65.1

218. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxvi-p1.1

219. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxvi-p2.2

220. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxvi-p8.1

221. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p66.1

222. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxvii-p1.1

223. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxvi-p9.1

224. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxvi-p2.3

225. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxvi-p10.1

226. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p67.1

227. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxviii-p1.1

228. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p68.1

229. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxix-p1.1

230. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p69.1

231. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxx-p1.1

232. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxx-p5.1

233. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxx-p9.1

234. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxx-p5.1

235. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxx-p5.1

236. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxx-p10.1

237. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxx-p11.1

238. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxx-p11.1

239. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxx-p12.1

240. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxi-p3.1

241. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p70.1

242. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxi-p1.1

243. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxi-p9.2

244. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxi-p9.1

245. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxi-p9.3

246. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxii-p3.1

247. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p71.1

248. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxii-p1.1

249. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxii-p8.1

250. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxii-p11.1

251. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p73.1

252. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxiv-p1.1

253. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p72.1

254. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxiii-p1.1

255. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxiii-p7.1

256. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxiii-p8.1

257. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxiii-p9.1

258. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxiii-p9.2

259. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxiii-p10.1

260. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxiii-p2.1

261. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxiii-p2.2

262. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p74.1

263. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxv-p1.1

264. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p75.1

265. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p76.1

266. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxv-p7.1

267. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxvi-p1.1

268. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxvii-p1.1

269. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p76.1

270. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxvii-p1.1

271. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p77.1

272. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxviii-p1.1

273. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p78.1

274. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxix-p1.1

275. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxv-p10.1

276. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p79.1

277. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxx-p1.1

278. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p80.1

279. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxxi-p1.1

280. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.xxxix-p3.1

281. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p61.2

282. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxii-p2.1

283. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.iii-p11.1

284. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.xiii-p13.1

285. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.xiii-p13.2

286. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.xxviii-p8.1

287. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.iv-p1.1

288. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lii-p1.1

289. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.xiii-p9.1

290. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxii-p8.2

291. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.i-p54.2

292. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lv-p2.1

293. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxiii-p3.2

294. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.ii-p12.2

295. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxiii-p3.1

296. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.iii-p3.3

297. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.ii-p12.3

298. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.ii-p19.1

299. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.ii-p19.2

300. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.ii-p12.1

301. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.ii-p12.4

302. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lx-p16.1

303. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.xxiv-p1.1

304. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.ii-p12.5

305. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#i-p0.1

306. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.ii-p0.1

307. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.iii-p0.1

308. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.iv-p0.1

309. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.v-p0.1

310. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.v-p0.1

311. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.vi-p0.1

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321. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.xv-p0.1

322. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.xvi-p0.1

323. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.xvii-p0.1

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365. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.l-p0.1

366. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.li-p0.1

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369. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.liv-p0.1

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372. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lvii-p0.1

373. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lviii-p0.1

374. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lviii-p0.1

375. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lix-p0.1

376. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lx-p0.1

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396. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxix-p0.1

397. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxx-p0.1

398. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/mark/cache/mark.html3#ii.lxxxi-p0.1