Expositions of Holy Scripture Matthew IX to XVIII

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EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

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

ST. MATTHEW

Chaps. IX to XXVIII

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CHRIST'S ENCOURAGEMENTS

'Son, be of good cheer.'--MATT. ix. 2.

This word of encouragement, which exhorts to both cheerfulness and

courage, is often upon Christ's lips. It is only once employed in the

Gospels by any other than He. If we throw together the various

instances in which He thus speaks, we may get a somewhat striking view

of the hindrances to such a temper of bold, buoyant cheerfulness which

the world presents, and of the means for securing it which Christ

provides.

But before I consider these individually, let me point you to this

thought, that such a disposition, facing the inevitable sorrows, evils,

and toilsome tasks of life with glad and courageous buoyancy, is a

Christian duty, and is a temper not merely to be longed for, but

consciously and definitely to be striven after.

We have a great deal more in our power, in the regulation of moods and

tempers and dispositions, than we often are willing to acknowledge to

ourselves. Our low' times--when we fret and are dull, and all things

seem wrapped in gloom, and we are ready to sit down and bewail

ourselves, like Job on his dunghill--are often quite as much the

results of our own imperfect Christianity as the response of our

feelings to external circumstances. It is by no means an unnecessary

reminder for us, who have heavy tasks set us, which often seem too

heavy, and are surrounded, as we all are, with crowding temptations to

be bitter and melancholy and sad, that Christ commands us to be, and

therefore we ought to be, of good cheer.'

Another observation may be made as preliminary, and that is that Jesus

Christ never tells people to cheer up without giving them reason to do

so. We shall see presently that in all cases where the words occur they

are immediately followed by words or deeds of His which hold forth

something on which, if the hearer's faith lay hold, darkness and gloom

will fly like morning mists before the rising sun. The world comes to

us and says, in the midst of our sorrows and our difficulties, Be of

good cheer,' and says it in vain, and generally only rubs salt into the

sore by saying it. Jesus Christ never thus vainly preaches the duty of

encouraging ourselves without giving us ample reasons for the

cheerfulness which He enjoins.

With these two remarks to begin with--that we ought to make it a part

of our Christian discipline of ourselves to seek to cultivate a

continuous and equable temperament of calm, courageous good cheer; and

that Jesus Christ never commands such a temper without showing cause

for our obedience--let us turn for a few moments to the various

instances in which this expression falls from His lips.

I. Now the first of them is this of my text, and from it we learn this

truth, that Christ's first contribution to our temper of equable,

courageous cheerfulness is the assurance that all our sins are

forgiven.

Son, be of good cheer,' said He to that poor palsied sufferer lying

there upon the little light bed in front of Him. He had been brought to

Christ to be cured of his palsy. Our Lord seems to offer him a very

irrelevant blessing when, instead of the healing of his limbs, He

offers him the forgiveness of his sins. That was possibly not what he

wanted most, certainly it was not what the friends who had brought him

wanted for him, but Jesus knew better than they what the man suffered

most from and most needed to have cured. They would have said Palsy.'

He said, Yes! but palsy that comes from sin.' For, no doubt, the sick

man's disease was a sin of flesh avenged in kind,' and so Christ went

to the fountain-head when He said, Thy sins be forgiven thee.' He

therein implied, not only that the man was longing for something more

than his four kindly but ignorant bearers there knew, but also that the

root of his disease was extirpated when his sins were forgiven.

And so, in like manner, thus conscience doth make cowards of us all.'

There is nothing that so drapes a soul with darkness as either the

consciousness of unforgiven sin or the want of consciousness of

forgiven sin. There may be plenty of superficial cheerfulness. I know

that; and I know what the bitter wise man called it, the crackling of

thorns under the pot,' which, the more they crackle, the faster they

turn into powdery ash and lose all their warmth. For stable, deep,

lifelong, reliable courage and cheerfulness, there must be thorough

work made with the black spot in the heart, and the black lines in the

history. And unless our comforters can come to us and say, Thy sins be

forgiven thee,' they are only chattering nonsense, and singing songs to

a heavy heart which will make an effervescence like vinegar on nitre,'

when they say to us, Be of good cheer.' How can I be glad if there lie

coiled in my heart that consciousness of alienation and disorder in my

relations to God, which all men carry with them, though they overlay it

and try to forget it? There is no basis for a peaceful gladness worthy

of a man except that which digs deep down into the very secrets of the

heart, and lays the first course of the building in the consciousness

of pardoned sin. Son, be of good cheer!' Lift up thy head. Face smaller

evils without discomposure, and with quietly throbbing pulses, for the

fountain of possible terrors and calamities is stanched and stayed

with, Thy sins are forgiven thee.'

Side by side with this first instance, illustrating the same general

thought, though from a somewhat different point of view, I may put

another of the instances in which the same phrase was soothingly on our

Lord's lips. Daughter,' said He to the poor woman with the issue of

blood, be of good cheer. Thy faith hath saved thee.' The consciousness

of a living union with God through Christ by faith, which results in

the present possession of a real, though it may be a partial,

salvation, is indispensable to the temper of equable cheerfulness of

which I have been speaking. Apart from that consciousness, you may have

plenty of excitement, but no lasting calm. The contrast between the

drugged and effervescent potion which the world gives as a cup of

gladness, and the pure tonic which Jesus Christ administers for the

same purpose, is infinite. He says to us, I forgive thy sins; by thy

faith I save thee; go in peace.' Then the burdened heart is freed from

its oppression, and the downcast face is lifted up, and all things

around change, as when the sunshine comes out on the wintry landscape,

and the very snow sparkles into diamonds. So much, then, for the first

of the instances of the use of this phrase.

II. We now take a second. Jesus Christ ministers to us cheerful courage

because He manifests Himself to us as a Companion in the storm (Matt.

xiv. 27).

The narrative is very familiar to us, so that I need not enlarge upon

it. You remember the scene--our Lord alone on the mountain in prayer,

the darkness coming down upon the little boat, the storm rising as the

darkness fell, the wind howling down the gorges of the mountains round

the landlocked lake, the crew toiling in rowing, for the wind was

contrary.' And then, all at once, out of the mysterious obscurity

beneath the shadow of the hills, Something is seen moving, and it comes

nearer; and the waves become solid beneath that light and noiseless

foot, as steadily nearer He comes. Jesus Christ uses the billows as the

pavement over which He approaches His servants, and the storms which

beat on us are His occasion for drawing very near. Then they think Him

a spirit, and cry out with voices that were heard amidst the howling of

the tempest, and struck upon the ear of whomsoever told the Evangelist

the story. They cry out with a shriek of terror--because Jesus Christ

is coming to them in so strange a fashion! Have we never shrieked and

groaned, and passionately wept aloud for the same reason; and mistaken

the Lord of love and consolation for some grisly spectre? When He comes

it is with the old word on His lips, Be of good cheer.'

Tell us not to be frightened when we see something stalking across the

waves in the darkness!' It is I'; surely that is enough. The Companion

in the storm is the Calmer of the terror. He who recognises Jesus

Christ as drawing near to his heart over wild billows may well be of

good cheer,' since the storm but brings his truest treasure to him.

Well roars the storm to those who hear

A deeper Voice across the storm.'

And He who, with unwetted foot, can tread on the wave, and with quiet

voice heard above the shriek of the blast can say, It is I,' has the

right to say, Be of good cheer,' and never says it in vain to such as

take Him into their lives however tempest-tossed, and into their hearts

however tremulous.

III. A third instance of the occurrence of this word of cheer presents

Jesus as ministering cheerful courage to us by reason of His being

victor in the strife with the world (John xvi. 33).

In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have

overcome the world.'

Of course the world' which He overcame is the whole aggregate of things

and persons considered as separated from God, and as being the great

Antagonist and counter power to a holy life of obedience and filial

devotion. At that last moment when, according to all outward seeming

and the estimate of things which sense would make, He was utterly and

hopelessly and all but ignominiously beaten, He says, I have overcome

the world.' What! Thou! within four-and-twenty hours of Thy Cross? Is

that victory? Yes! For he conquers the world who uses all its

opposition as well as its real good to help him, absolutely and

utterly, to do the will of God. And he is conquered by the world who

lets it, by its glozing sweetnesses and flatteries, or by its knitted

brows and frowning eyes and threatening hand, hinder him from the path

of perfect consecration and entire conformity to the Father's will.

Christ has conquered. What does that matter to us? Why, it matters

this, that we may have the Spirit of Jesus Christ in our hearts to make

us also victorious in the same fight. And whosoever will lay his

weakness on that strong arm, and open his emptiness to receive the

fulness of that victorious Spirit for the very spirit of his life, will

be more than conqueror through Him that loved us,' and can front all

the evils, dangers, threatenings, temptations of the world, its heaped

sweets and its frowning antagonisms, with the calm confidence that none

of them are able to daunt him; and that the Victor Lord will cover his

head in the day of battle and deliver him from every evil work. Be of

good cheer, for I have overcome the world, and play your parts like men

in the good fight of faith; for I am at your back, and will help you

with Mine own strength.'

IV. The last instance that I point to of the use of this phrase is one

in which it was spoken by Christ's voice from heaven (Acts xxiii. 11).

It was the voice which was heard by the Apostle Paul after he had been

almost torn in pieces by the crowd in the Temple, and had been bestowed

for security, by the half-contemptuous protection of the Roman

governor, in the castle, and was looking onward into a very doubtful

future, not knowing how many hours' purchase his life might be worth.

That same night the Lord appeared to him and said, Be of good cheer,

Paul, for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear

witness also at Rome.' That is to say, No man can touch you until I let

him, and nobody shall touch you until you have done your work and

spoken out your testimony. Jerusalem is a little sphere; Rome is a

great one. The tools to the hand that can use them. The reward for work

is more work, and work in a larger sphere. So cheer up! for I have much

for you to do yet.'

And the spirit of that encouragement may go with us all, breeding in us

the quiet confidence that no matter who may thwart or hinder, no matter

what dangers or evils may seem to ring us round, the Master who bids us

Be of good cheer' will give us a charmed life, and nothing shall by any

means hurt us until He says to us, Be of good courage; for you have

done your work; and now come and rest.' Wait on the Lord. Be of good

courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the

Lord.'

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SOUL-HEALING FIRST: BODY-HEALING SECOND

That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive

sins (then saith He to the sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed,

and go unto thine house.'--MATT. ix. 6.

The great example of our Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is

followed, in this and the preceding chapter, by a similar collection of

His works of healing. These are divided into three groups, each

consisting of three members. This miracle is the last of the second

triad, of which the other two members are the miraculous stilling of

the tempest and the casting out of the demons from the men in the

country of the Gergesenes.

One may discern a certain analogy in these three members of this

central group. In all of them our Lord appears as the peace-bringer.

But the spheres are different. The calm which was breathed over the

stormy lake is peace of a lower kind than that which filled the soul of

the demoniacs when the power that made discord within had been cast

out. Even that peace was lower in kind than that which brought sweet

repose in the assurance of pardon to this poor paralytic. Forgiveness

speaks of a loftier blessing than even the casting out of demons. The

manifestation of power and love steadily rises to a climax.

The most important part of this story, then, is not the mere healing of

the disease, but the forgiveness of sins which accompanies it. And the

large teaching which our Lord gives as to the relation between His

miracles and His standing work, His ordinary work which He has been

doing all through the ages, which He is doing to-day, which He is ready

to do for you and me if we will let Him, towers high above the mere

miracle, which is honoured by being the signal attestation of that

work.

Therefore I would turn to this story now, not for the sake of dealing

with the mere miraculous event, but in order to draw the important

lessons from it which lie upon its very surface.

I. The first thought that is suggested here is that our deepest need is

forgiveness.

How strangely irrelevant and beside the mark, at first sight, seems the

answer which Christ gives to the eager zeal and earnestness of the man

and his bearers. Christ's word is Son,' or as the original might more

literally and even more tenderly be rendered, Child--be of good cheer;

thy sins be forgiven thee.' That seemed far away from their want. It

was far from their wish, but yet it was the shortest road to its

accomplishment. Christ here goes straight to the heart of the

necessity, when, passing by the disease for the moment, He speaks the

great word of pardon. The palsy was probably the result of the

sufferer's vice, and probably, too, he felt, whatever may have been his

friends' wishes for him, that he needed forgiveness most. Such a

conclusion as to his state of mind seems a fair inference from our

Lord's words to him, for Christ would never have offered forgiveness to

an impenitent or indifferent heart.

So we may learn that our chief and prime need is forgiveness. Amid all

our clamours and hungry needs, that is our deepest. Is not a man's

chief relation in this world his relation to God? Is not that the most

important thing about all of us? If that be wrong, will not everything

be wrong? If that be right, will not everything come right? And is it

not true that for you and me, and for all our fellows, whatever be the

surface diversities of character, civilisation, culture, taste and the

like, there is one deep experience common to every human spirit, and

that is the fact, and in some sense more or less acutely the

consciousness of the fact, that we have sinned, and come short of the

glory of God'?

There is the fontal source of all sorrow, for even to the most

superficial observation ninety per cent., at any rate, of man's misery

comes either from his own or from others' wrongdoing, and for the rest,

it is regarded in the eye of faith as being sorrow that is needful

because of sin, in order to discipline and to purify. But here stands

the fact, that king and clown, philosopher and fool, men of culture and

men of ignorance, all of us, through all the ages, manifest the unity

of our nature in this--I was going to say most chiefly--that lapses

from the path of rectitude, and indulgence in habits, thoughts,

feelings, and actions, which even our consciences tell us are wrong,

characterise us all.

Hence the profound wisdom of Christ and of His Gospel in that, when it

begins the task of healing, it does not peddle and potter on the

surface, but goes straight to the heart, with true instinct flies at

the head, like a wise physician pays little heed to secondary and

unimportant symptoms, but grapples with the disease, makes the tree

good, and leaves the good tree to make, as it will, the fruit good.

The first thing to do to heal men's misery, is to make them pure; and

the first step in the great method by which a man can be made pure, is

to assure him of a divine forgiveness for the past. So the sneers that

we often hear about Christian philanthropists taking tracts to people

when they want soup,' and the like, are excessively shallow sneers, and

indicate nothing more than this, that the critic has superficially

diagnosed the disease, and is wofully wrong about the remedy. God

forbid that I should say one word that would seem to depreciate the

value of other forms of beneficence, or to cast doubt upon the purity

of motives, or even to be lacking in admiration for the enthusiasm that

fills and guides many an earnest man and woman, working amongst the

squalid vice of our great cities and of our complex and barbarous

civilisation to-day. I would recognise all their work as good and

blessed; but, oh! dear brethren, it deals with the surface, and you

will have to go a great deal deeper down than 泴hetic, or

intellectual, or economical, or political reformation and changes

reach, before you touch the real reason why men and women are miserable

in this world. And you will only effectually cure the misery, but you

certainly then will do it, when you begin where the misery begins, and

deal first with sin. The true saviour of society' is the man that can

go to his brother, and as a minister declaratory of the divine heart

can say--Brother, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.' And

then, after that, the palsy will go out of his limbs, and a new nervous

energy will come into them, and he will rise, take up his bed, and

walk.

II. Now, in the next place, notice, as coming out of this incident

before us, the thought that forgiveness is an exclusively divine act.

There was, sitting by, with their jealous and therefore blind eyes, a

whole crowd of wise men and religious formalists of the first water,

collected together as a kind of ecclesiastical inquisition and board of

triers, as one of the other evangelists tells us, out of every corner

of the land. They had no care for the dewy pity that was in Christ's

looks, or for the nascent hope that began to swim up into the poor, dim

eye of the paralytic. But they had keen scent for heresy, and so they

fastened with true feline instinct upon the one thing, This man

speaketh blasphemies. Who can forgive sins but God alone?' Ah! if you

want to get people blind as bats to the radiant beauty of some lofty

character, and insensible as rocks to the wants of a sad humanity,

commend me to your religious formalists, whose religion is mainly a

bundle of red tape tied round men's limbs to keep them from getting at

things that they would like. These are the people who will be as hard

as the nether millstones, and utterly blind to all enthusiasm and to

all goodness.

But yet these Pharisees are right; perfectly right. Forgiveness is an

exclusively divine act. Of course. For sin has to do with God only;

vice has to do with the laws of morality; crime has to do with the laws

of the land. The same act may be vice, crime, and sin. In the one

aspect it has to do with myself, in the other with my fellows, in the

last with God. And so evil considered as sin comes under God's control

only, and only He against whom it has been committed can forgive.

What is forgiveness? The sweeping aside of penalties? the shutting up

of some more or less material hell? By no means: penalties are often

left; when sins are crimes they are generally left; when sins are vices

they are always left, thank God! But in so far as sin is sin,

considered as being the perversion and setting wrong of my relation to

Him, its consequences, which are its penalties, are swept away by

forgiveness; for forgiveness, in its essence and deepest meaning, is

neither more nor less than that the love of the person against whom the

wrong has been done shall flow out, notwithstanding the wrong. Pardon

is love rising above the ice-dam which we have piled in its course, and

pouring into our hearts.

When you fathers and mothers forgive your children, what does it mean?

Does it not mean that your love is neither deflected nor embittered any

more, by reason of their wrongdoing, but pours upon them as of old? So

God's forgiveness is at bottom--Child! there is nothing in my heart to

thee, but pure and perfect love.' We fill the sky with mists, through

which the sun itself has to look like a red ball of lurid fire. But it

shines on the upper side of the mists all the same, and all the time,

and thins them away and scatters them utterly, and shines forth in its

own brightness on the rejoicing heart. Pardon is God's love, unchecked

and unembittered, granted to the wrongdoer. And that is a divine act,

and a divine act alone. Pharisees and Scribes were perfectly right. No

man can forgive sins but God only.

And I might add, though it is somewhat aside from my direct purpose,

God can forgive sin; which some people nowadays say is impossible. The

apparent impossibility arises only from shallow and erroneous notions

of what forgiveness is. God does not--it might be too bold to say God

cannot, if we believe in miracles--but as a matter of fact, God does

not, usually interfere to hinder men from reaping, as regards this

life, what they have sown. But as I say, that is not forgiveness; and

is there any reason conceivable why it should be impossible for the

divine love to pour down upon a sinful man who has forsaken his sin,

and is trusting in God's mercy in Christ, just as if his sin was

non-existent, in so far as it could condition or interfere with the

flow of the divine mercy?

And I may say, further, we need a definite divine assurance of pardon.

Ah! if you have ever been down into the cellars of your own hearts, and

seen the ugly things that coil there, you will know that a vague trust

in a vague God and a vague mercy is not enough to still the conscience

that has once been stung into action. My brothers, you want neither

priests nor ceremonies on the one hand, nor a mere peradventure of Oh!

God is merciful!' on the other, in order to deal with that deepest need

of your heart. Nothing but the King's own sign-manual on the pardon

makes it valid; and unless you and I can, somehow or other, come to

close grips with God, and get into actual contact with Him, and hear,

somehow, with infallible certitude, as from His own lips, the assurance

of forgiveness, there is not enough for our needs.

III. So I come to say, in the next place, that the incident before us

teaches us that Jesus Christ claims and exercises this divine

prerogative of forgiveness.

Mark His answer to these cavillers. He admits their promises

absolutely. They said, No man can forgive sins but God only.' If Christ

was only a man, like us, standing in the same relation to the divine

pardon that other teachers, saints, and prophets have stood, and had

nothing more to do with it than simply, as I might do, to say to a

troubled heart, My brother, be quite sure that God has forgiven you';

if Christ's relation to the divine forgiveness was nothing more than

ministerial and declaratory, why, in the name, not of common sense

only, but of veracity, did He not turn round to these men and say so?

He was bound, by all the obligations of a religious teacher, to

disclaim, as you or I would have done under similar circumstances, the

misapprehension of His words: I use blasphemies? No! I am not speaking

blasphemies. I know that God only can forgive sins, and I am doing no

more than telling my poor brother here that his sins are forgiven by

God.' But that is not His answer at all. What He says in effect

is--Yes; you are quite right. No man can forgive sins, but God only. I

forgive sins. Whom think ye, then, that I, the Son of Man am? It is

easy to say "Thy sins be forgiven thee"--far easier to say that than to

say "Take up thy bed and walk," because one can verify and check the

accomplishment of the saying in the one case, and one cannot in the

other. The sentences are equally easy to pronounce, the things are

equally difficult for a man to do, but the difference is that one of

them can be verified and the other of them cannot. I will do the

visible impossibility, and then I leave you to judge whether I can do

the invisible one or not.'

Now, dear brethren, I have only one word to say about that, and it is

this. We are here brought sharp up to a fork in the road. I know that

it is not always a satisfactory way of arguing to compel a man to take

one horn or other of an alternative, but it is quite fair to do go in

the present case; and I would press it upon some of you who, I think,

urgently need to consider the dilemma. Either the Pharisees were quite

right, and Jesus Christ, the meek, the humble, the Pattern of all lowly

gentleness, the Teacher whom nineteen centuries confess that they have

not exhausted, was an audacious blasphemer, or He was God manifest in

the flesh. The whole context forbids us to take these words, Thy sins

be forgiven thee,' as anything less than the voice of divine love

wiping out the man's transgressions; and if Jesus Christ pretended or

presumed to do that, there is no hypothesis that I know of which can

save His character for the reverence of man, but that which sees in Him

God revealed in manhood; the world's Judge, from whom the world may

receive divine forgiveness.

IV. Jesus Christ here brings visible facts into the witness-box as the

attesters of His invisible powers.

Of course the miracle was such a witness in a special way, inasmuch as

it and forgiveness were equally divine prerogatives and acts. I need

not dwell now upon what I have already observed in my introductory

remarks, that our Lord here teaches us the relative importance of the

attesting miracle and the thing attested, and regards the miracle as

subordinate to the higher and spiritual work of bringing pardon.

But we may widen out this into the thought that the subsidiary effects

of Christian faith in individuals, and of the less complete Christian

faith which is diffused over society, do stand as very strong evidences

of the reality of Christ's professions and claims to exercise this

invisible power of pardon. Or, to put it into a concrete form, and to

take an illustration which may need large deductions.--Go into a

Salvation Army meeting. Admit the extravagance, the coarseness, and all

the rest which we educated and superfine Christians cannot stand. But

when you have blown away the froth, is there not something left in the

cup which looks uncommonly like the wine of the Kingdom? Are there not

visible results of that, as of every earnest effort to carry the

message of forgiveness to men, which create an immense presumption in

favour of its reality and divine origin? Men reclaimed, passions tamed,

homes that were pandemoniums made Bethels, houses of God. Wherever

Christ's forgiving power really comes into a heart, life is beautified,

is purified, is ennobled; and secondary and material benefits follow in

the train.

I claim all the difference between Christendom and Heathendom as

attestation of the reality of Christ's divine and atoning work. I say,

and I believe it to be a valid and a good argument as against much of

the doubt of this day, If you seek His monument, look around.' His own

answer to the question, Art thou He that should come?' is valid still:

Go and tell John the things that ye see and hear'; the dead are raised,

the deaf ears are opened; faculties that lie dormant are quickened, and

in a thousand ways the swift spirit of life flows from Him and

vitalises the dead masses of humanity.

Let any system of belief or of no belief do the like if it can. This

rod has budded at any rate, let the magicians do the same with their

enchantments.

Now, Christian men and women, ye are My witnesses,' saith the Lord. The

world takes its notions of Christianity, and its belief in the power of

Christianity, a great deal more from you than it does from preachers

and apologists. You are the Bibles that most men read. See to it that

your lives represent worthily the redeeming and the ennobling power of

your Master.

And as for the rest of you, do not waste your time trying to purify the

stream twenty miles down from the fountainhead, but go to the source.

Do not believe, brother, that your palsy, or your fever, your paralysis

of will towards good, or the unwholesome ardour with which you are

impelled to wrong, and the consequent misery and restlessness, can ever

be healed until you go to Christ--the forgiving Christ--and let Him lay

His hand upon you; and from His own sweet and infallible lips hear the

word that shall come as a charm through all your nature: Son, thy sins

be forgiven thee.' Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened; then

shall the lame man leap as an hart';--then limitations, sorrows,

miseries, will pass away, and forgiveness will bear fruit in joy and

power, in holiness, health and peace.

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THE CALL OF MATTHEW

And as Jesus passed forth from thence, He saw a man, named Matthew,

sitting at the receipt of custom: and He saith unto him, Follow Me. And

he arose, and followed Him. 10. And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at

meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down

with Him and His disciples. 11. And when the Pharisees saw it, they

said unto His disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and

sinners? 12. But when Jesus heard that, He said unto them, They that be

whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. 13. But go ye and

learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am

not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. 14. Then

came to Him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees

fast oft, but Thy disciples fast not? 15. And Jesus said unto them, Can

the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is

with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken

from them, and then shall they fast. 16. No man putteth a piece of new

cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up

taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. 17. Neither do men

put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine

runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new

bottles, and both are preserved.'--MATT. ix. 9-17.

All three evangelists connect the call of Matthew immediately with the

cure of the paralytic, and follow it with an account of Christ's

answers to sundry cavils from Pharisees and John's disciples. No doubt,

the spectacle of this new Teacher taking a publican into His circle of

disciples, and, not content with such an outrage on all proper

patriotic feeling, following it up with scandalous companionship with

the sort of people that a publican could get to accept his hospitality,

sharpened hatred and made suspicion prick its ears. Mark and Luke call

the publican Levi, he calls himself Matthew, the former being probably

his name before his discipleship, the latter, that by which he was

known thereafter. Possibly Jesus gave it him, as in the cases of Simon,

and perhaps Bartholomew. But, however acquired, it superseded the old

one, as the fact that it appears in the lists of the apostles in both

the other evangelists and in Acts, shows. Its use here may be a trace

of a touching desire to make sure that readers, who only knew him as

Matthew, should understand who this publican was. It is like the little

likenesses of themselves, in some corner of a background, that early

painters used to slip into a picture of Madonna and angels. There was

no vanity in the wish, for he says nothing about his sacrifices,

leaving it to Luke to tell that he left all,' but he does crave that

his brethren, who read, should know that it was he whom Jesus honoured

by His call.

The condensed narrative emphasises three things, (1) his occupation

with his ordinary business when that wonderful summons thrilled his

soul; (2) the curt authoritative command, and (3) the swift obedience.

As to the first, Capernaum was on a great trade route, and the

custom-house officers there would have their hands full. This one was

busy at his work, hateful and shameful as it was in Jewish eyes, and

into that sordid atmosphere, like a flash of light into a mephitic

cavern full of unclean creatures, came the transcendent mercy of Jesus'

summons. There is no region of life so foul, so mean, so despicable in

men's eyes, but that the quickening Voice will enter there. We do not

need to be in temples or about sacred tasks in order to hear it. It

summons us in, and sometimes from, our daily work. Well for those who

know whose Voice it is, and do not mistake it for some Eli's!

No doubt this was not the first of Matthew's knowledge of Jesus. Living

in Capernaum, he would have had many opportunities of hearing Him or of

Him, and his heart and conscience may have been stirred. As he sat in

his tolbooth,' feeling contempt and hatred poured on him, he, no doubt,

had had longings to get nearer to the One whose voice was gentle, and

His looks, love. So the call would come to him as the fulfilment of a

dim hope, and it would be a joyful surprise to know that Jesus wished

to have him for a disciple as much as he wished to have Jesus for a

Teacher. The ring of fire and hate within which he had been imprisoned

was broken, and there was One who cared to have him, and who would not

shrink from his touch. In the light of that assurance, the call became,

not a summons to give anything up, but an invitation to receive a

better possession than all with which he was called to part. And if we

saw things as they are, would it not always be so to us? Follow Me'

does mean, Forsake earth and self, but it means still more: Take what

is more than all. It parts from these because it unites to Jesus.

Therefore it means gain, not deprivation. And it condenses all rules

for life into one, for to follow Him is the sum of all duty, and yields

the perfect pattern of conduct and character, while it is also the

secret of all blessedness, and the talisman that assures a man of

continual progress. They who follow are near, and will reach, Him. Of

course, if His servants follow Him, it stands to reason that one day,

where I am there shall also My servants be.' So in that command lie a

sufficient guide for earth, and a sure guarantee for heaven.

And he arose and followed Him.' That is the only thing that we are told

of Matthew. We hear no more of him, except that he made a feast in his

house on the occasion. No doubt he did his work as an apostle, but

oblivion has swallowed up all that. A happy fate to be known to all the

world for all time, only by this one thing, that he unconditionally,

immediately and joyfully obeyed Christ's call! He might have said: How

can I leave my work? I must make up my accounts, hand over my papers,

do a hundred things in order to wind up matters, and I must postpone

following till then.' But he sprang up at once. He would have abundant

opportunities to settle all details afterwards, but if he let this

opportunity of taking his place as a disciple pass, he might never have

another. There are some things that are best done gradually and slowly,

but obedience to Christ's call is not one of them. Prompt obedience is

the only safety. The psalmist knew the danger of delay when he said: I

made haste and delayed not, but made haste to keep Thy commandments.'

Matthew does not tell us that he made the feast, but Luke does. It was

the natural expression of his thankfulness and joy for the new bond.

His knowledge was small, but his love was great. How could he honour

Jesus enough? But he was a pariah in Capernaum, and the only guests he

could assemble were, like himself, outcasts from respectable society.'

In popular estimation all publicans were regarded without any more ado

as sinners,' but probably that designation is here applied to

disreputable folks of various kinds and degrees of shadiness, who

gravitated to Matthew and his class, because, like him, they were

repulsed by every one else. Even outcasts hunger for society, and

manage to get a community of their own, in which they find some glow of

comradeship, and some defence from hatred and contempt. Even lepers

herd together and have their own rules of intercourse.

But what a scandal in the eyes not only of Pharisees, but of all the

proper people in Capernaum, Jesus' going to such a gathering of

disreputables would be, we may estimate if we remember that they did

not know His reason, but thought that He went because He liked the

atmosphere and the company. Like draws to like' was the conclusion

suggested, in the absence of His own explanation. The Pharisee

conceived that his duty in regard to publicans and sinners was to keep

as far from them as he could, and his strait-laced self-righteousness

had never dreamed of going to them with an open heart, and trying to

win them to a better life. Many so-called followers of Jesus still take

that attitude. They gather up their skirts round them daintily, and

never think that it would be liker their Lord to sweep away the mud

than to pick their steps through it, caring mainly to keep their own

shoes clean.

The feast was probably spread in some courtyard or open space, to

which, as is the Eastern custom, uninvited spectators could have

access. It is quite in accordance with the usage of the times and land

that the Pharisees should have been onlookers, and should have been

able to talk to the disciples. No doubt their colloquy became animated,

and perhaps loud, so that it could easily attract Christ's attention.

He answered for Himself, and the tone of His reply is friendly and

explanatory, as if He recognised that the questioners genuinely wished

to know why' He was sitting in such company.

It discloses His motive, and thereby sweeps away all insinuations that

He consorted with sinners because their company was congenial. It was

precisely for the opposite reason, because He was so unlike them. He

came among these sinners as a physician; and who wonders at his being

beside the sick? He does not spend his days by their bedsides because

he likes the atmosphere, but because it is his business to make them

well. Now, in that comparison, Jesus pronounces no opinion on the

correctness of the Pharisees' estimate of themselves as righteous,' or

of publicans as sinners, but simply takes them on their own ground. But

He does make a great claim for Himself, and speaks out of His

consciousness of power to heal men's worst disease, sin. It is a

tremendous assertion to make of oneself, and its greatness is enhanced

by the quiet way in which it is stated as a thought familiar to

Himself. What right had He to pose as the physician for humanity, and

how can such a claim be reconciled with His being meek and lowly in

heart'? If He Himself was one of the sick and needed healing, how can

He be the healer of the rest? If being a sinful man, as we all are, He

made such a claim, what becomes of the reverence which is paid to Him

as a great religious Teacher, and where has His 'sweet reasonableness'

vanished?

Jesus passes from explanation of His personal relation to the publicans

to adduce the broad principle which should shape the Pharisees'

relation to them, as it had shaped His. Hosea had said long ago that

God delighted more in mercy' than in sacrifice.' Kindly helpfulness to

men is better worship than exact performance of any ritual. Sacrifice

propitiates God, but mercy imitates Him, and imitation is the

perfection of divine service. Jesus here speaks as all the prophets had

spoken, and smites with a deadly stroke the mechanical formalism which

in every age stiffens religion into ceremonies and neglects love

towards God, expressed in mercy to men. He lays bare the secret of His

own life, and He thereby lays on His followers the obligation of making

it the moving impulse of theirs.

The great general truth is followed, as it has been preceded, by a

plain statement of Jesus' own conception of His mission in the world. I

came,' says He, hinting at the fact that He was before He was born, and

that His Incarnation was His voluntary act. True, He was sent, and we

speak of His mission, but also He came,' and we speak of His advent. To

repentance' is omitted by the best editors as being brought over from

Luke, where it is genuine. But it is a correct gloss on the simple word

call,' though repentance' is but a small part of that to which He

summons. He calls us to repent; He calls us to Himself; He calls us to

self-surrender; He calls us to Eternal Life; He calls us to a better

feast than Matthew had spread. But we must recognise that we are

sinners, or we shall never realise that His invitation is for us, nor

ever feel that we need a physician, and have in Him, and in Him alone,

the Physician whom we need.

The Pharisees objected to Jesus' feasting, and could scarcely in the

same breath find fault with Him for not fasting, but they put forward

some of John's disciples to bring that fresh objection. Common hatred

is a strong cement, and often holds opposites together for a while. It

was bad for John's followers that they should be willing to say, We and

the Pharisees.' They had travelled far from the days when their master

had called the same class a generation of vipers'! Their keen desire to

uphold the honour of their teacher, whose light they saw paling before

the younger Jesus, made them hostile to Him, and, as is usually the

case, the followers were more partisan than the leader. Religious

antagonism sometimes stoops to very strange alliances. The two

questions brought together in this context are noticeably alike, and

noticeably different. Both ask for the reason of conduct which they do

not go the length of impugning. They seem to be desirous of

enlightenment, they are really eager to condemn. Both avoid seeming to

call in question the acts of the persons addressed, for the Pharisees

interrogate the disciples as to the reason for Jesus' conduct, while

John's disciples ask from Jesus the reason of His disciples' conduct.

In both, mock respectfulness covers lively hatred.

Our Lord's first answer is as profound as it is beautiful, and veils,

while it reveals, a lofty claim for Himself and a solemn foresight of

His death, and lays down a great and fruitful principle as to the

relations between spiritual moods and outward acts of religion. His

speaking of Himself as the Bridegroom' would recall to some of His

questioners, and that with a touch of shame, John's nobly humble

acceptance of the subordinate place of the bridegroom's friend and

elevation of Jesus to that of the bridegroom. But it was not merely a

rebuking quotation from John's witness, but the expression of His own

unclouded and continual consciousness of what He was to humanity, and

of what humanity could find in Him, as well as a sovereign

appropriating to Himself of many prophetic strains. What depth of love,

what mysterious blending of spirit, what adoring, lowly obedience, what

perfection of protecting care, what rapture of possession, what rest of

heart in trust, what dower of riches are dimly shadowed in that

wonderful emblem, will never be known till the hour of the

marriage-supper of the Lamb, when His bride hath made herself ready.'

But across the light there flits a shadow. It is but for a moment, and

it meant little to the hearers, but it meant much to Him. For He could

not look forward to winning His bride without seeing the grim Cross,

and even athwart the brightness of the days of companionship with His

humble friends, came the darkness on His soul, though not on theirs, of

the violent end when He shall be taken from them.' The hint fell

apparently on deaf ears, but it witnesses to the continual presence in

the mind of Jesus of His sufferings and death. The certainty that He

must die was not forced on Him by the failure of His efforts as His

career unfolded itself. It was no disappointment of bright earlier

hopes, as is the case with many a disillusionised reformer, who thought

at the outset that he had only to speak and all men would listen. It

was the clearly discerned goal from the first. The Son of Man came

. . . to give His life a ransom.'

But our Lord here lays down a broad principle, which, if applied as it

was meant to be, would lift a heavy burden of outward observance off

the Christian consciousness. Fast when you are sad; feast when you are

glad. Let the disposition, the mood, the moment's circumstance, mould

your action. There is no virtue or sanctity in observances which do not

correspond to the inner self. What a charter of liberty is proclaimed

in these quiet words! What mountains of ceremonial unreality,

oppressive to the spirit, are cast into the sea by them! How different

Christendom would have been and would be to-day, if Christians had

learned the lesson of these words!

The two condensed parables or extended metaphors, which follow the

vindication of the disciples, carry the matter further, and lay down a

principle which is intended to cover not only the question in hand,

their non-observance of Jewish regulations as to fasting, but the whole

subject of the relations of the new word, which Jesus felt that He

brought, to the old system. The same consciousness of His unique

mission which prompted His use of the term bridegroom,' shines through

the two metaphors of the new cloth and the new wine. He knows that He

is about to bring a new garb to men, and to give them new wine to

drink, and He knows that what He brings is no mere patch on a worn-out

system, but a new fermenting force, which demands fresh vehicles and

modes of expression. The two metaphors take up different aspects of one

thought. To try to mend an old coat with a bit of unshrunk cloth would

only make a worse dissolution of continuity, for as soon as a shower

fell on it the patch would shrink, and, in shrinking, pull the thin

pieces of the old garment adjoining it to itself. Judaism was already

rent' and worn too thin to be capable of repair. The only thing to be

done was as a vesture' to fold it up' and shape a new garment out of

new cloth. What was true as to the supremely new thing which He brought

into the world remains true, in less eminent degree, of the less acute

differences between the Old and the New, within Christianity itself.

There do come times when its externals become antiquated, worn thin and

torn, and when patching is useless. Christian men, like others,

constitutionally incline to conservatism or to progress, and the one

temperament needs to be warned against obstinately preserving old

clothes, and the other against eagerly insisting that they are past

mending.

But a patch and a worn garment do not wholly describe the relations of

the old and the new. Freshly made wine, still fermenting, and old,

stiff wine-skins which have lost their elasticity suggest further

thoughts. Now we have to do with containing vessel versus contents,

with a fermenting force versus stiffened forms. To put that into these

will destroy both. For example, if the struggle of the Judaisers in the

early Church had succeeded, and Christianity had become a Jewish sect,

it would have dwindled to nothing, as the Jewish-minded Christians did.

The wine must have bottles. Every great spiritual renovating force must

embody itself in institutions. Spiritual emotions must express

themselves in acts of worship, spiritual convictions must speak in a

creed. But the containing vessel must be congruous with, and still

more, it must be created by, the contained force, as there are

creatures who frame their shells to fit the convolutions of their

bodies, and build them up from their own substance. Forms are good, as

long as they can stretch if need be; when they are too stiff to expand,

they restrict rather than contain the wine, and if short-sighted

obstinacy insists on keeping it in them, there will be a great spill

and loss of much that is precious.

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THE TOUCH OF FAITH AND THE TOUCH OF CHRIST

While He spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain

ruler, and worshipped Him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but

come and lay Thy hand upon her, and she shall live. 19. And Jesus

arose, and followed him, and so did His disciples. 20. And, behold, a

woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came

behind Him, and touched the hem of His garment: 21. For she said within

herself, If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole. 22. But

Jesus turned Him about, and when He saw her, He said, Daughter, be of

good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made

whole from that hour. 23. And when Jesus came into the ruler's house,

and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise. 24. He said unto

them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they

laughed Him to scorn. 25. But when the people were put forth, He went

in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose. 26. And the fame

hereof went abroad into all that land. 27. And when Jesus departed

thence, two blind men followed Him, crying, and saying, Thou Son of

David, have mercy on us. 28. And when He was come into the house, the

blind men came to Him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am

able to do this? They said unto Him, Yea, Lord. 29. Then touched He

their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. 30. And

their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See

that no man know it. 31. But they, when they were departed, spread

abroad His fame in all that country.'--MATT. ix. 18-31.

The three miracles included in the present section belong to the last

group of this series. Those of the second group were all effected by

Christ's word. Those now to be considered are all effected by touch.

The first two are intertwined. The narrative of the healing of the

woman is embedded in the account of the raising of Jairus's daughter.

Mark the impression of calm consciousness of power and leisurely

dignity produced by Christ's having time to pause, even on such an

errand, in order to heal, by the way, the other sufferer. The father

and the disciples would wonder at Him as He stayed His steps, and be

apt to feel that priceless moments were being lost; but He knows His

own resources, and can afford to let the child die while He heals the

woman. The one shall receive no harm by the delay, and the other will

be blessed. Our Lord is sitting at the feast which Matthew gave on the

occasion of his call, engaged in vindicating His sharing in innocent

festivity against the cavils of the Pharisees, when the summons to the

death-bed comes to Him from the lips of the father, who breaks in on

the banquet with his imploring cry. Matthew gives the story much more

summarily than the other evangelists, and does not distinguish, as they

do, between Jairus's first words, at the point of death, and the

message of her actual decease, which met them on the way. The call of

sorrow always reaches Christ's ear, and the cry for help is never

deemed by Him an interruption. So this man, gluttonous and a

wine-bibber,' as these Pharisees thought Him, willingly and at once

leaves the house of feasting for that of mourning. How near together,

in this awful life of ours, the two lie, and how thin the partition

walls! Well for those whose feasts do not bar them out from hearing the

weeping next door.

As the crowd accompanies Jesus, His hasting love is, for a moment,

diverted by another sufferer. We never go on an errand of mercy but we

pass a hundred other sorrowing hearts, so close packed lie the griefs

of men. This woman is a poor shrinking creature, broken down by long

illness (which had lasted for the same length of time as the joyous

life of Jairus's child), made more timid by disappointed hopes of cure,

and 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

church dignitary of the town to heal his daughter, but lets Him pass

before she can make up her mind to go near Him; and then she comes

creeping up behind the crowd, puts out her wasted, trembling hand to

the hem of His garment,--and she is whole.

The other evangelists give us a more extended account, but Matthew

throws into prominence, in his condensed narrative, the essential

points.

Notice her real but imperfect faith. There was unquestionable

confidence in Christ's power, and very genuine desire for healing. But

it was a very ignorant faith. She believes that her touch of the

garment will heal without Christ's will or knowledge, much more His

pitying love, having any part in it. She thinks that she may win her

desire furtively, and may carry it away, and He be none the wiser nor

the poorer for the stolen blessing. What utter, blank ignorance of His

character and way of working! What gross superstition! Yes, and withal

what a hunger of desire, what absolute assurance of confidence that one

finger-tip on His robe was enough! Therefore she had her desire, and

her Healer recognised her faith as true, though blended with much

ignorance of Him. Her error was very like that which many Christians

entertain with less excuse. To attach importance to external means of

grace, rites, ordinances, sacraments, outward connection with Christian

organisations, is the very same misconception in a slightly different

form. Such error is always near us; it is especially rife in countries

where there has long been a visible Church. It has received strange new

vigour to-day, partly by reaction from extreme rationalism, partly by

the growing cultivation of the aesthetic faculties. It is threatening

to corrupt the simplicity and spirituality of Christian worship, and

needs to be strenuously resisted. But the more we have to fight against

it, the more do we need to remember that, along with this clinging to

the hem of the garment instead of to the heart of its Wearer, there may

be a very real trust, which might shame some of those who profess to

hold a less sensuous form of faith. Many a poor soul clasping a

crucifix clings to the Cross. Many a devout heart kneeling at mass sees

through the incense-smoke the face of Christ.

This woman's faith was selfish. She wanted health; she did not care

much about the Healer. She would have been quite contented to have had

no more to do with Him, if she could only have stolen out of the crowd

cured. She would have had little gratitude to the unconscious Giver of

a stolen good. So, many a Christian life in its earlier stages is more

absorbed with its own deep misery and its desire for deliverance, than

with Him. Love comes after, born of the experience of His love. But

faith precedes love, and the predominant motive impelling to faith at

first is distinctly self-regard. That is all as it should be. The most

purely self-absorbed wish to escape from the most rudely pictured hell

is often the beginning of a true trust in Christ, which, in due time,

will be elevated into perfect consecration. Some of our modern

teachers, who are shocked at Christianity because it lays the

foundation of the most self-denying morality in such selfishness,'

would be none the worse for going to school to this story, and learning

from it how a desire for nothing more than to get rid of a painful

disease, started a process which turned a life into a peaceful,

thankful surrender of the cured self to the love and service of the

mighty Healer.

Observe, next, how Christ answers the imperfect faith, and, by

answering, corrects and confirms it. Matthew omits Christ's question as

to who touched Him, the disciples' reply, and His renewed asseveration

that He was conscious of power having gone forth from Him. All these

belong to the loving method by which our Lord sought to draw forth an

open acknowledgment. Womanly diffidence, enfeebled health, her special

disease, all made the woman wish to hide herself. She wanted to steal

away unnoticed, as she hoped that she had come. But Christ forces her

to stand out before all the crowd, and there, with all eyes upon

her,--cold, cruel eyes, some of them--to conquer her shame, and tell

all the truth. Strange kindness that; strangely contrasted with His

ordinary desire to avoid notoriety, and with His ordinary tender

consideration for shrinking weakness! He did it for her sake, not for

His own. She is changed from timidity to courage. At one moment she

stretches out her wasted finger, a tremulous invalid; at the next, she

flings herself at His feet, a confessor. He would have us testify for

Him, because faith unavowed, like a plant in the dark, is apt to become

pale and sickly; 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.

His words to her are full of tenderness. She receives the name of

daughter.' Gently He encourages her timidity by that Be of good cheer,'

and then He sets right her error: Thy faith'--not thy finger--hath made

thee whole.' There was no real connection between the touch of the robe

and healing; but the woman thought that there was, and so Christ

stooped to her childish thought, and allowed her to prescribe the road

which His mercy should take. But He would not leave her with her error.

The true means of contact between us and Him is not our outward contact

with external means of grace, but the touch of our spirits by faith.

Faith is nothing in itself, and heals only because it brings us into

union with His power, which is the sole cause of our healing. Faith is

the hand which receives the blessing. It may be a wasted and tremulous

hand, like that which this woman laid lightly on His robe. But He feels

its touch, though a universe presses on Him, and He answers. Not the

garment's hem, but Christ's love, is the cause of our salvation. Not an

outward contact with it or with Him, but faith, is the condition on

which His life, which knows no disease, pours into our souls. The hand

of my faith lifted to Him will receive into its empty palm and clasping

fingers the special blessing for my special wants.

The other evangelists tell us that, at the moment of His words to the

woman, the messengers came bearing tidings of the child's death. How

Jairus must have grudged the pause! A word from Christ, like the

pressure of His hand, heartened him. Like a river turned from its

course for a space, to fill some empty reservoir, His love comes back

to its original direction. How abundant the power and mercy, to which

such a work as that just done was but a parenthesis! The doleful music

and the shrill shrieks of Eastern mourning, which met them as they

entered Jairus's house, disturbed the sanctity of the hour, and were in

strong contrast with the majestic calmness of Jesus. Not amid venal

lamentations and excited cries will He do His work. He bids the noisy

crowd forth with curt, almost stern, command, and therein rebukes all

such hollow and tumultuous scenes, in the presence of the stillness of

death, still more where faith in Him has robbed it of its terror, in

robbing it of its perpetuity. It is strange that believing readers

should have thought that our Lord meant to say that the little girl was

not really dead, but only in a swoon. The scornful laughter of the

flute-players and hired mourners understood Him better. They knew that

it was real death, as men count death, and, as has often been the case,

the laughter of His foes has served to establish the truth. That was

not worthy to be called death from which the child was so soon and

easily to be awaked. But, besides this special application to the case

in hand, that great saying of our Lord's carries the blessed truth

that, since He has come, death is softened into sleep for all who love

Him. The euphemism is not peculiar to Christianity, but has a deeper

meaning on Christian lips than when Greeks or Romans spoke of the

eternal sleep. Others speak of death by any name rather than its own,

because they fear it so much. The Christian does so, because he fears

it so little,--and, as a matter of fact, the use of the word death as

meaning merely the separation of soul and body by the physical act is

exceptional in the New Testament. This name of sleep, sanctioned thus

by Christ, is the sweetest of all. It speaks of the cessation of

connection with the world of sense, and long disquiet merged in rest.'

It does not imply unconsciousness, for we are not unconscious when we

sleep, but only unaware of externals. It holds the promise of waking

when the sun comes. So it has driven out the ugly old name. Our tears

flow less bitterly when we think of our dear ones as sleeping in

Jesus.' Their bodies, like this little child's, are dead, but they are

not. They rest, conscious of their own blessedness and of Him in whom

they live, and have their being,' whether they move' or no.

Then comes the great deed. The crowd is shut out. For such a work

silence is befitting. The father and mother, with His foremost three

disciples, go with Him into the chamber. There is no effort, repeated

and gradually successful, as when Elisha raised the dead boy; no

praying, as when Peter raised Dorcas; only the touch of the hand in

which life throbbed in fulness, and, as the other narratives record,

two words, spoken strangely to, and yet more strangely heard by, the

dull, cold ear of death. Their echo lingered long with Peter, and Mark

gives us them in the original Aramaic. But Matthew passes them by, as

he seems here to have desired to emphasise the power of Christ's touch.

But touch or word, the real cause of the miracle was simply His will;

and whether He used media to help men's faith, or said only I will,'

mattered little. He varied His methods as the circumstances of the

recipients required, and in order that they and we might learn that He

was tied to none. These miracles of raising the dead are three in

number. Jairus's daughter is raised from her bed, just having passed

away; the widow's son at Nain from his bier, having been for a little

longer separated from his body; Lazarus from the grave, having been

dead four days. A few minutes, or days, or four thousand years, are one

to His power. These three are in some sense the first-fruits of the

great harvest; the stars that shone out singly before all the heaven is

in a blaze. For, though they died again, and so left to Him the

precedence in resurrection, as in all besides, they are still prophetic

of His power in the hour when they that sleep in the dust' shall awake

at His voice. Blessed they who, like this little maiden, are awakened,

not only by His voice, but by His touch, and to find, as she did, their

hand in His!

The third of these miracles, which Matthew seems to reckon as the

second in the group, because he treats the two former as so closely

connected as to be but one in numeration, need not detain us long. It

is found only in this Gospel. The first point to be observed in it is

the cry of these two blind men. There is something pathetic and

exquisitely natural in the two being together, as is also the case in

the similar miracle, at a later period, on the outskirts of Jericho.

Equal sorrows drive men together for such poor help and solace as they

can give each other. They have common experiences which isolate them

from others, and they creep close for warmth and companionship. All the

blind men in the Gospels have certain resemblances. One is that they

are all sturdily persevering, as perhaps was easier for them because

they could not see the impatience of the listeners, and possibly

because, in most cases, persistent begging was their trade, and they

were used to refusals. But a more important trait is their recognition

of Jesus as Son of David.' Blind as they are, they see more than do the

seeing. Thrown in upon themselves, they may have been led to ponder the

old words, and by their affliction been made more ready to welcome One

who, if He were Messiah, was coming with a special blessing for

them--to open the blind eyes.' Men who deeply desire a good are quick

to listen to the promise of its accomplishment. So these two followed

Him along the road, loudly and perseveringly calling out their

profession of faith, and their entreaty for sight.

The next point is our Lord's treatment. He let them cry on, apparently

unheeding. Had, then, the two miracles just done exhausted His stock of

power or of pity? Certainly His reason was, as it always was, their

good. We do not know why it was better for them to have to wait, and

continue their entreaty; but we may be quite sure that the reason for

all His delays is the same,--the larger blessing which comes with the

answer when it comes, and the large blessings which may be gathered

while we wait its coming. Christ's question to them, when at last they

have found their way even indoors, holds out more hope than they had

yet received. By it, Christ established a close relation with them, and

implied to them that He was willing to answer their cry. One can fancy

how the poor blind faces would light up with a flush of eager

expectation, and how swift would be the answer. The question is not

cold or inquisitorial. It is more than half a promise, and a powerful

aid to the faith which it requires.

There is something very beautiful and pathetic in the simple brevity of

the unhesitating answer, Yea, Lord.' Sincerity needs few words. Faith

can put an infinite deal of meaning into a monosyllable. Their

eagerness to reach the goal made their answer brief. But it was enough.

Again the hand which had clasped the maiden's palm is put out and laid

gently on the useless eyes, and the great word spoken, According to

your faith be it unto you.' Their blindness made the touch peculiarly

fitting in their case, as bringing evidence of sense to those who could

not see the gracious pity of His looks. The word spoken was, like that

to the centurion, a declaration of the power of faith, which determines

the measure, and often the manner, of His gifts to us. The containing

vessel not only settles the quantity of, but the shape assumed by, the

water which is taken up in it from the sea. Faith, which keeps inside

of Christ's promises (and what goes outside of them is not faith),

decides how much of Christ we shall have for our very own. He

condescends to run the molten gold of His mercies into the moulds which

our faith prepares.

These two men, who had used their tongues so well in their persistent

cry for healing, went away to make a worse use of them in telling

everywhere of their cure. Jesus desired silence. Possibly He did not

wish His reputation as a mere worker of miracles to be spread abroad.

In all His earlier ministry He avoided publicity, singularly

contrasting therein with the evident desire to make Himself the centre

of observation which marks its close. He dreaded the smoky flame of

popular excitement. His message was to individuals, not to crowds. It

was a natural impulse to tell the benefits these two had received; but

truer gratitude and deeper faith would have made them obey His lightest

word, and have shut their mouths. We honour Christ most, not by taking

our way of honouring Him, but by absolute obedience.

The final miracle of the nine (or ten) marshalled in long procession in

chapters viii. and ix. is told with singular brevity. There is nothing

individual in our Lord's treatment of the sufferer, as there was in the

previous healing of the two blind men, and no details are given of

either the appeal to His pity or the method of His cure. The dumb

demoniac could lift no cry, nor exercise any faith, and all the

petitions and hopes of his bearers were expressed in the act of

bringing the sufferer thither, and silently setting him there before

these eyes of universal pity. It was enough. With Jesus, to see was to

compassionate, and to compassionate was to help. In the other instances

of casting out demons, the method is an authoritative command,

addressed not to the possessed, but to the alien personality that has

seized on him, and we conclude that such was the method here. Jesus

undoubtedly believed in demoniacal possession, if we can at all rely on

the Gospel narratives; and it may be humbly suggested that there are

dark depths in humanity, which had need to be fathomed more completely,

before any one is warranted in dogmatically pronouncing that He was

wrong in His diagnosis. There are ugly facts which should give pause to

those who are inclined to say--There are no demons, and if there were,

they could not dominate a human consciousness.'

But the effects of the miracle are emphasised more than itself. They

are two, neither of them what might or should have been. The dumb man

is not said to have used his recovered speech to thank his deliverer,

nor is there any sign that he clung to Him, either for fear of being

captured again or in passionate gratitude. It looks as if he selfishly

bore away his blessing and cared nothing for its giver. That is very

human, and we all are too often guilty of the same sin. Nor was the

effect on the multitudes much better, for they were only struck with

vulgar wonder, which had no moral quality in it and led to nothing.

They saw the miracle,' that is, the wonderfulness of the act made some

dint even on their minds, but these were either too fluid to retain the

impression, or too hard to let it be deep, and so it soon filled up

again. We have to think of Christ's deeds as signs,' not only as

wonders,' or they will do little to draw us to Him. Wonder is a

necessarily evanescent emotion, which may indeed set something better

stirring in us, but is quite as likely to die barren.

The Pharisees did not wonder, and did look into the phenomenon with

sharp eyes; and in so far, they were in advance of the gaping

multitudes. They were much too superior persons to be astonished at

anything, and they had already settled on a formula which was

delightfully easy of application, and had the further advantage of

turning the miracles into evidences that the doer of them was a child

of the Devil. It appears to have been a well-worked formula too, for it

is found again in chap. xii. 24, and in Luke xi. 15, in the account of

another cure of a dumb demoniac. It is possible that the incident now

before us may be the same as this, but there is nothing improbable in

the occurrence of such a case twice, nor in the repetition of what had

become the commonplace of the Pharisaic polemic. But what a piercing

example that explanation is of the blinding power of prejudice,

determined to hold on to a foregone conclusion, and not to see the sun

at noon! Jesus in league with the prince of the devils'! And that was

gravely said by religious authorities! They saw the loveliness of His

perfect life, His gentle goodness, His self-forgetting love, His

swift-springing pity, and they set it all down to His commerce with the

Evil One. He was so good that He must be more than humanly bad.

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A CHRISTLIKE JUDGMENT OF MEN

But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them,

because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no

shepherd.' --MATT. ix. 36.

In the course of our Lord's wandering life of teaching and healing,

there had naturally gathered around Him a large number of persons who

followed Him from place to place, and we have here cast into a symbol

the impression produced upon Him by their outward condition. That is to

say, He sees them lying there weary, and footsore, and travel-stained.

They have flung themselves down by the wayside. There is no leader or

guide, no Joshua or director to order their march; they are a worn-out,

tired, unregulated mob, and the sight smites upon His eye, and it

smites upon His heart. He says to Himself, if I may venture to put

words into His lips, There are a worse weariness, and a worse

wandering, and a worse anarchy, and a worse disorder afflicting men

than that poor mob of tired pedestrians shows.' Matthew, who was always

fond of showing the links and connections between the Old Testament and

the New, casts our Lord's impression of what He then saw into language

borrowed from the prophecy of Ezekiel (ch. xxxiv.), which tells of a

flock that is scattered in a dark and cloudy day, that is broken, and

torn, and driven away. I venture to see in the text three points: (1)

Christ teaching us how to look at men; (2) Christ teaching us how to

feel at such a sight; and (3) Christ teaching us what to do with the

feeling. When He saw the multitude, He was moved with compassion,

because they fainted and were scattered abroad.' Then He said unto His

disciples, the harvest is plenteous, the labourers are few, pray ye the

Lord of the harvest to send forth labourers unto the harvest.' And then

there follows, And when He had called unto Him His twelve disciples, He

gave them power against unclean spirits to cast them out.' There are,

then, these three points;--just a word or two about each of them.

I. Here we have our Lord teaching us how to look at men.

The picture of my text is, of course, in its broad outlines, very clear

and intelligible, but there may be a little difficulty as to the

precise force of the language. The obscurity of it is in some degree

reflected in the margin of our Bibles; so, perhaps, you will permit one

word of an expository nature. The description of the flock, Because

they fainted and were scattered abroad,' is couched in the original in

a couple of words, one of which means properly torn' or fainting,'

according as one or other of two readings of the text is adopted, and

the other means lying down.' Now, the former of these gives a very

pathetic picture if we apply it to the individuals that made up the

flock. We have then the image of the poor sheep that has lost its way,

struggling through briars and thorns, getting out of them with its

fleece all torn and hanging in strips dangling at its heels, or of it

as lacerated by the beasts of the field to whom it is a prey. If we

take the metaphor, as seems more probably to be intended, as applying

not so much to the individuals as to the flock, then it comes to mean

torn asunder,' thrown apart,' and gives us the notion of anarchic

confusion into which the flock comes if there be no shepherd to lead

it. Then the other word, which our Bible translates were scattered

abroad,' seems to mean more properly lying down,' and it gives the idea

of the poor, wearied creature, after all its struggles and wanderings,

utterly beaten and dejected, having lost its way, at its wits' end and

resourceless, flinging itself down there in despair, and panting its

timid life out anywhere where it finds itself. So it comes to be a

picture of the utter weariness and hopelessness of all men's efforts

apart from that Guide and Shepherd, who alone can lead them in the way.

And then both of these miserable states, the laceration if you take the

one explanation, the disintegration and casting apart if you take the

other, the weariness and exhaustion, are traced to their source, they

are as sheep having no shepherd.' He has gone, and so all this comes.

With this explanation we may take the points of view that are thus

suggested simply as they lie before us.

First of all, notice how here, as always to Jesus Christ, the outward

was nothing, except as a symbol and manifestation of the inward; how

the thing that He saw in a man was not the external accidents of

circumstance or position, for His true, clear gaze and His loving, wise

heart went straight to the essence of the matter, and dealt with the

man not according to what he might happen to be in the categories of

earth, but to what he was in the categories of heaven. All the same to

Him whether it was some poor harlot, or a rabbi; all the same to Him

whether it was Pilate on the judgment-seat, or the penitent thief

hanging at His side. These gauds and shows were nothing; sheer away He

cut them all, and went down to the hidden heart of the man, and He

allocated and ranged them according to that. Christian men and women,

do you try to do the same thing, and to get rid of all these

superficial veils and curtains with which we drape ourselves and

attitudinise in the world, and to see men as Christ saw them, both in

regard to your judgment of them, and in regard to your judgment of

yourselves? I am a scholar and a wise man; a great thinker; a rich

merchant; a man of rising importance and influence.' Very well; what

does that matter? I am ignorant or a pauper'; be it so. Let us get

below all that. The one question worth asking and worth answering is,

How am I affected towards Him?' There are many temporary and local

principles of arrangement and order among men; but they will all vanish

some day, and there will be one regulating and arranging principle, and

it is this: Do I love God in Jesus Christ, or do I not?' Oh! for

myself, for yourself, and for all our outlook towards others, let us

not forget that the inmost, deepest, hidden man of the heart is the

man, and that all else is naught, and that its whole character is

absolutely determined by its relation to Jesus Christ.

But this is somewhat aside from my main purpose, which is rather

briefly to expand the various phases which, as I have already

suggested, are included in such an emblem. The first of them is this:

Try to think for yourselves of the condition of humanity as apart from

Christ--shepherdless. That old metaphor of a shepherd which comes out

of the Old Testament is there sometimes used to indicate a prophet, and

sometimes to indicate a king. I suppose we may put both of these uses

together, as far as our present purposes are concerned; and this is

what I want to insist upon. I dare say some people here will think it

is very old-fashioned, very narrow in these broad and liberal days; but

what I would say is this, that unless Jesus Christ is both Guide and

Teacher, we have neither guide nor teacher but are shepherdless without

Him. There are plenty of rulers. There was no lack of other authority

in the days of His flesh. There were crowds of rabbis, guides, and

directors. The life of the nation was throttled by the authorities that

had planted themselves upon its back, and yet Christ saw that there

were none of those who were fit for the work, or afforded the adequate

guidance. And so it is, now and always. There have been hosts of men

who have sought to impose their authority upon an era. Where is there

one that has swayed passion, that has ruled hearts, that has impressed

his own image on the will, that has made obedience an honour, and

absolute, abject devotion to his command a very patent of nobility?

Here, and nowhere beside. Besides that Christ there is no ruler amongst

men who can come to them and say to his servant, Go,' and he goeth, and

to this man, Do this,' and he doeth it. Obedience to any besides is

treason against the dignity of our own nature; disobedience to Him is

both treason against our nature and blasphemy against God. Thou art the

King of Glory, O Christ, Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.'

There is the deepest reason for His rule.

And as for teacher,' whom are we to put up beside Him? Is it to be

these dim figures of religious reformers that are gliding, ghostlike,

to their doom, being wrapped round and round about by ever thicker and

thicker folds of the inevitable oblivion that swallows all that is

human? Brethren, by common consent it is Christ or nobody. Aaron dies

upon Hor; Moses dies upon Pisgah; the teachers, the leaders, the

guides, the under-shepherds, pass away one by one; and if this Christ

be but a Man and a Teacher, He too will pass away. Shall I be thought

very blind to the signs of the times if I say that I see no sign of His

dominion being exhausted, of His influence being diminished, of His

guidance being capable of being dispensed with? You may say, Oh, we do

not want any teacher or guide; we do not want a shepherd.' I am not

going to enter upon that question now at all, except just to say this,

that the instincts of humanity rise up in contradiction, as it seems to

me, of that cold and cheerless creed, and that we have this fact

staring us in the face, that men are made capable of a devotion and

submission the most passionate, the most absolute, the most mighty

force in their lives, to human guides and ensamples, and that it is all

wasted unless there be somewhere a Man, our Brother, who shall come to

us and say, All that ever went before Me are thieves and robbers; I am

the Good Shepherd; follow Me, and ye shall not walk in darkness,' He

saw the multitudes as sheep having no shepherd.'

Still further, take that other phase of the metaphor which, as I

suggested, the text includes, namely, the idea of disintegration, the

rending apart of social ties and union, unless there be the centre of

unity in the shepherd of the flock. I will smite the shepherd, and the

sheep shall be scattered,' says the old prophecy. Of course, for what

is there to hold them together unless it be their guide and their

director? So we are brought face to face with this plain prosaic

rendering of the metaphor--that but for the centre of unity provided

for mankind in the person and work of Jesus Christ, there is no

satisfaction of the deep hunger for unity and society with which in

that case God would have cursed mankind. For whilst there are many

other bonds most true, most blessed, God-given, and mighty, such as

that of the sacred unity of the family, and that of the nation and many

others of which we need not speak, yet all these are constantly being

disintegrated by the unresting waves of that gnawing sea of

selfishness, if I may so say, which, like the waters upon our eastern

coasts, eats and eats for ever at the base of the cliffs, so that

society in all its forms, whether it be built upon identity of opinion,

which is perhaps the shabbiest bond of all, or whether it be built upon

purposes of mutual action, which is a great deal better, or whether it

be built upon hatred of other people, which is the modern form of

patriotism, or whether it be built upon the domestic affections, which

are the purest and highest of all--all the other bonds of society, such

as creeds, schools, nations, associations, leagues, families,

denominations, all go sooner or later. The base is eaten out of them,

because every man that belongs to them has in him that tyrannous,

dominant self, which is ever seeking to assert its own supremacy. Here

is Babel, with its half-finished tower, built on slime; and there is

Pentecost, with its great Spirit; here is the confusion, there is the

unifying; here the disintegration, there the power that draws them all

together. They were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd,' and

one looks out over the world and sees great tracts of country and long

dismal generations of time, in which the very thought of unity and

charity and human bonds knitting men together has faded from the

consciousness of the race, and then one turns to blessed, sweet, simple

words that say, there shall be one flock and one shepherd,' and I, if I

be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.' Drawing thus,

He will draw them into the eternal, mighty bond of union that shall

never be broken, and is all the more precious and all the more true

because it is not a unity like the vulgar unities that express

themselves in external associations. You know, of course or if you do

not know it will be a good thing that you should know, that that verse

in John's Gospel which I have quoted has been terribly mangled by a

little slip of our translators. Christ said, Other sheep I must bring

which are not of this fold,' the fold being the external unity of the

Jewish church--an enclosure made of hurdles that you can stick in the

ground. I shall bring them,' says He, and there shall be one'--(not, as

our Bible says, fold,'--but something far better)--there shall be one

flock'; which becomes a unity not by wattling round about it on the

outside, but by a shepherd standing in the middle. There shall be one

flock and one shepherd'--a unity which is neither the destruction of

the variety of the churches, nor the crushing of men, nationalities,

and types of character all down into one dead level beneath the heel of

a conqueror, but the unity which subsists in the many operations of the

one Spirit, and is expressed by all the forms of the one inspired

grace.

Then passing by altogether the other idea which I said was only

doubtfully suggested by the words--namely, that of laceration and

wounding--let me say a word about the last of the aspects of humanity

when Christless, which is set forth in this text, and that is, the

dejected weariness arising from the fruitless wanderings wherewith men

are cursed. As a verse in the Book of Proverbs puts it, The labour of

the foolish wearieth every one of them, because they know not how to go

to the city.' Putting aside the metaphor, the plain truth which it

embodies is just this, that there is in all men's souls a deep longing

after peace and rest, after goodness and beauty and truth, and that all

the strenuous efforts to satisfy these longings, either by social

reforms or by individual culture and discipline, are pathetically vain

and profitless, because there is none to guide them. The sheep go

wandering in any direction, and with no goal; and wherever one has

jumped, a dozen others will go after him, and so they are wearied out

long before the day's journey is ended, and they never reach the goal.

Put that into less vivid, and, therefore, as people generally suppose,

more accurate, language, and it is a statement of the universal law of

human history that, after any epoch of great aspirations and strong

excitement of the noblest parts of human nature, there has always come

a reaction of corruption and a collapse from weariness. What did

Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' end in? A guillotine. What do all

similar epochs end in, when they do not take the Christ to march ahead

of them? An utter disgust and disillusion, and a despair of all

progress. That is why wild revolutionists in their youth are always

obstinate Conservatives in their old age. The wandering sheep are

footsore, and they fling themselves down by the wayside. That is why

heathenism presents to us the aspect that it does. There is nothing

about it that seems to me more tragical than the weary languor that

besets it. Do you ever think of the depth of pathetic, tragic meaning

that there is in that verse in one of the Psalms, Such as sit in

darkness and in the shadow of death'? There they sit, because there is

no hope in rising and moving. They would have to grope if they arose,

and so with folded hands they sit like the Buddha, which one great

section of heathenism has taken as being the true emblem and ideal of

the noblest life. Absolute passivity lays hold upon them all--torpor,

stagnation, no dream of advance or progress. The sheep are dejected,

despairing, anarchic, disintegrated, lacerated, guideless, and

shepherdless--away from Christ. So He thought them. God give you and me

grace, dear brethren, to see, as Christ saw, the condition of humanity

and our own apart from Him.

II. And now let me say a word in the next place as to the second

movement of His mind and heart here. He teaches us not only how to

think of men, but how that sight should touch us.

He was moved with compassion on them when He saw the multitude'--with

the eye of a god, I was going to say, and the heart of a man. Pity

belongs to the idea of divinity; compassion belongs to the idea of

divinity incarnate; and the motion that passed across His heart is the

motion that I would seek may pass, with its sweet and healing breath,

across yours and mine. The right emotion for a Christian looking on the

Christless crowds is pity, not aversion; pity, not anger; pity, not

curiosity; pity, not indifference. How many of us walk the streets of

the towns in which our lot is cast, and never know one touch of that

emotion, when we look at these people here in England torn, and

anarchic, and wearied, and shepherdless, within sound of our

psalm-singing in our chapels? Why, on any Sunday there are thousands of

men and women standing about the streets who, we may be sure, have not

seen the inside of a church or a chapel since they were married, and

that not one in five hundred of all the good people that are going with

their prayer-books and hymn-books to church and chapel ever think

anything about them as they pass them by; and some of them, perhaps, if

they come to any especially disreputable one, will gather up their

skirts and keep on the safe side of the pavement, and there an end of

it. But Jesus Christ had no aversions. His white purity was a great

deal nearer to the blackness of the woman that was a sinner, than was

the leprous whiteness of the whited sepulchre of the self-righteous

Pharisee. He had neither aversion, nor anger, nor indifference.

And, if I might venture to touch upon another matter, compassion and

not curiosity is an especial lesson for the day to the more thoughtful

and cultivated amongst our congregations. I have just said that the

appropriate Christian feeling in contemplating the state of the sheep

without the Shepherd is compassion, not curiosity. That reminder is

particularly needful in view of the prominence to-day of investigations

into the new science of Comparative Religion. I speak with most

unfeigned respect of it and of its teachers, and gratefully hail the

wonderful light that it is casting upon ideas underlying the strange

and often savage and obscene rites of heathenism; but it has a side of

danger in it against which I would warn you all, especially young,

reading men and women. The time has not yet come when we can afford to

let such investigations be our principal occupation in the face of

heathenism. If idolatry was dead we could afford to do that, but it is

alive--the more's the pity; and it is not only a curious instance of

the workings of man's intelligence, and a great apocalypse of earlier

stages of society, but, besides that, it is a lie that is deceiving and

damning our brethren, and we have got to kill it first and dissect it

afterwards. So I say, do not only think of heathenism in its various

forms as a subject for speculation and analysis; as much as you like of

that, only do not let it drive out the other thing, and after you have

tried to understand it, then come back to my text, He was moved with

compassion.' And so pity, and neither anger, nor aversion, nor

curiosity, nor indifference is what I urge as the Christian emotion.

III. Let us take this text as teaching us how Christ would have us act,

after such emotion built and based upon such a look.

It is perfectly legitimate, although it is by no means the highest

motive, to appeal to feeling as a stimulus to action. We have a right

to base our urging of Christian men and women to missionary work either

at home or abroad, upon the ground of the condition of the men to whom

the Gospel has to be carried. I know that if taken alone it is a very

inadequate motive. I believe that any failure that may be manifest in

the interest of Christian people in missionary work is largely

traceable to the blunder we have made in dwelling on superficial

motives more than we ought to have done, in proportion to the degree in

which we have dwelt on the deepest. We have been gathering the

surface-water instead of going right down to the green sand, to which

the artesian well must be sunk if the stream is to come up without

pumping or wasting. So I say that a deeper reason than the sorrow and

darkness of the heathen is--the love of Christ constraineth me'; but

yet the first is a legitimate one. Only remember this, that Bishop

Butler taught us long ago, that if you excite emotions which are

intended to lead to action, and the action does not follow, the

excitation of the emotion without its appropriate action makes the

heart a great deal harder than it was before. That is why it is playing

with edged tools to speak so much to our Christian audiences, as we

sometimes hear done, about the condition of the heathen as a stimulus

to missionary work. If a man does not respond and do something, some

crust of callousness and coldness comes over his own heart. You cannot

indulge in the luxury of emotion which you do not use to drive your

spindles, without doing yourselves harm. It is never intended to be

blown off as waste steam and allowed to vanish into the air. It is

meant to be conserved and guided, and to have something done with it.

Therefore beware of sentimental contemplation of the sad condition of

the shepherdless sheep which does not move you to do anything to help

them.

One word more. Take my text as a guide to the form of action into which

we are to cast the emotions that should spring from this gaze upon the

world. I will only name three points. Christ opened His mouth and spake

to them, and taught them many things; Christ said to His disciples,

Pray ye the Lord of the harvest'; and Christ sent out His apostles to

preach the Kingdom. These three things in their bearing upon us

are--personal work, prayer, help to send forth Christ's messengers.

There is nothing like personal work for making a man understand and

feel the miseries of his fellows. Christian men and women, it is your

first business everywhere to proclaim the name of Jesus Christ, and no

prayers and no subscriptions absolve you from that. In this army a man

cannot buy himself off and send in a substitute at the cost of an

annual guinea. If Christ sent the apostles, do you hold up the hands of

the apostles' successors, and so by God's grace you and I may help on

the coming of that blessed day when there shall be one flock and one

Shepherd, and when the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne'--for

the Shepherd is Himself a lamb--'shall feed them and lead them, and God

shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.'

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THE OBSCURE APOSTLES

These twelve Jesus sent forth.'--MATT. x. 5.

And half of these twelve' are never heard of as doing any work for

Christ. Peter and James and John we know; the other James and Judas

have possibly left us short letters; Matthew gives us a Gospel; and of

all the rest no trace is left. Some of them are never so much as named

again, except in the list at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles;

and none of them except the three who seemed to be pillars' appear to

have been of much importance in the early diffusion of the Gospel.

There are many instructive and interesting points in reference to the

Apostolate. The number of twelve, in obvious allusion to the tribes of

Israel, proclaims the eternal certainty of the divine promises to His

people, and the dignity of the New Testament Church as their true heir.

The ties of relationship which knit so many of the apostles together,

the order of the names varying, but within certain limits, in the

different catalogues, the uncultivated provincial rudeness of most of

them, would all afford material for important reflections. But,

perhaps, not the least important fact about the Apostolate is that one

to which we have referred, which like the names of countries on the

map, escapes notice because it is writ' so large'--namely, the small

place which the apostles as a body fill in the subsequent narrative,

and the entire oblivion into which so many of them pass from the moment

of their appointment.

It is to that fact that we wish to turn attention now. It may suggest

some considerations worth pondering, and among other things, may help

to show the exaggeration of the functions of the office by the opposite

extremes of priests and rationalists. The one school makes it the

depository of exclusive supernatural powers; the other regards it as a

master-stroke of organisation, to which the early rapid growth of

Christianity was largely due. The facts seem to show that it was

neither.

I. The first thought which this peculiar and unexpected silence

suggests is of the True Worker in the Church's progress.

The way in which the New Testament drops these apostles is of a piece

with the whole tone of the Bible. Throughout, men are introduced into

its narratives and allowed to slip out with well-marked indifference.

Nowhere do we get more vivid, penetrating portraiture, but nowhere do

we see such carelessness about following the fortunes or completing the

biographies even of those who have filled the largest space in its

pages.

Recall, for example, the way in which the New Testament deals with the

very chiefest' apostles, the illustrious triad of Peter, James, and

John. The first escapes from prison; we see him hammering at Mary's

door in the grey of the morning, and after brief, eager talk with his

friends he vanishes to hide in another place,' and is no more heard of,

except for a moment in the great council, held in Jerusalem, about the

admission of Gentiles to the Church. The second of the three is killed

off in a parenthesis. The third is only seen twice in the Book of the

Acts, as a silent companion of Peter at a miracle and before the

Sanhedrim. Remember how Paul is left in his own hired house, within

sight of trial and sentence, and neither the original writer of the

book nor any later hand thought it worth while to add three lines to

tell the world what became of him. A strange way to write history, and

a most imperfect narrative, surely! Yes, unless there be some

peculiarity in the purpose of the book, which explains this

cold-blooded, inartistic, and tantalising habit of letting men leap

upon the stage as if they had dropped from the clouds, and vanish from

it as abruptly as if they had fallen through a trap-door.

Such a peculiarity there is. One of the three to whom we have referred

has explained it in the words with which he closes his gospel, words

which might stand for the motto of the whole book, These are written

that ye might believe that Jesus is the Son of God.' The true purpose

is not to speak of men except in so far as they bore witness to that

light' and were illuminated for a moment by contact with Him. From the

beginning the true Hero' of the Bible is God; its theme is His

self-revelation culminating for evermore in the Man Jesus. All other

men interest the writers only as they are subsidiary or antagonistic to

that revelation. As long as that breath blows through them they are

music; else they are but common reeds. Men are nothing except as

instruments and organs of God. He is all, and His whole fulness is in

Jesus Christ. Christ is the sole worker in the progress of His Church.

That is the teaching of all the New Testament. The thought is expressed

in the deepest, simplest form in His own unapproachable words,

unfathomable as they are in their depth of meaning, and inexhaustible

in their power to strengthen and to cheer: I am the vine, ye are the

branches, without Me ye can do nothing.' It shapes the whole treatment

of the history of the so-called Acts of the Apostles,' which by its

very first sentence proclaims itself to be the Acts of the ascended

Jesus, the former treatise' being declared to have had for its subject

all that Jesus began to do and teach while on earth, and this treatise

being manifestly the continuance of the same theme, and the record of

the heavenly activity of the Lord. So the thought runs through all the

book: The help that is done on earth, He does it all Himself.'

So let us think of Him and of His relation to us as well as to that

early Church. His continuous energy is pouring down on us if we will

accept it. In us, for us, by us He works. My Father worketh hitherto,

said He when here, and I work'; and now, exalted on high, He has passed

into that divine repose, which is at the same time the most energetic

divine activity. He is all in all to His people. He is all their

strength, wisdom, and righteousness. They are but the clouds irradiated

by the sun and bathed in its brightness; He is the light which flames

in their grey mist and turns it to a glory. They are but the belts and

cranks and wheels; He is the power. They are but the channel, muddy and

dry; He is the flashing life that fills it and makes it a joy. They are

the body; He is the soul dwelling in every part to save it from

corruption and give movement and warmth.

Thou art the organ, whose full breath is thunder;

I am the keys, beneath thy fingers pressed.'

If this be true, how it should deliver us from all overestimate of men,

to which our human affections and our feeble faith tempt us so sorely!

There is One man, and One man only, whose biography is a Gospel, who

owes nothing to circumstances, and who originates the power which He

wields; One who is a new beginning, and has changed the whole current

of human history, One to whom we are right to bring offerings of the

gold, and incense, and myrrh of our hearts, and wills, and minds, which

it is blasphemy and degradation to lay at the feet of any others. We

may utterly love, trust, and obey Jesus Christ. We dare not do so to

any other. The inscription written over the whole book, that it may be

transcribed on our whole nature, is, No man any more save Jesus only.'

If this thought be true, what confidence it ought to give us as we

think of the tasks and fortunes of the Church! If we think only of the

difficulties and of the enormous work before us, so disproportioned to

our weak powers, we shall be disposed to agree with our enemies, who

talk as if Christianity was on the point of perishing, as they have

been doing ever since it began. But the outlook is wonderfully

different when we take Christ into the account. We are very apt to

leave Him out of the reckoning. But one man with Christ to back him is

always in the majority. He flings his sword clashing into one scale,

and it weighs down all that is in the other. The walls are very lofty

and strong, and the besiegers few and weak, badly armed, and quite

unfit for the assault; but if we lift our eyes high enough, we, too,

shall see a man with a drawn sword over against us, and our hearts may

leap up in assured confidence of victory as we recognise in Him the

Captain of the Lord's Host, who has already overcome, and will make us

valiant in fight and more than conquerors.

When conscious of our own weakness, and tempted to think of our task as

heavy, or when complacent in our own power, and tempted to regard our

task as easy, let us think of His ever-present work in and for His

people, till it braces us for all duty, and rebukes our easy-going

idleness. Surely from that thought of the active, ascended Christ may

come to many of His slothful followers the pleading question, as from

His own lips, Dost thou not care that thou hast left me to serve

alone?' Surely to us all it should bring inspiration and strength,

courage and confidence, deliverance from man, and elevation above the

reverence of blind impersonal forces. Surely we may all lay to heart

the grand lesson that union with Him is our only strength, and oblivion

of ourselves our highest wisdom. Surely he has best learned his true

place and the worth of Jesus Christ, who abides with unmoved humility

at His feet, and, like the lonely, lowly forerunner, puts away all

temptations to self-assertion while joyfully accepting it as the law of

his life to

Fade in the light of the planet he loves,

To fade in his light and to die.'

Blessed is he who is glad to say,' He must increase, I must decrease!'

II. This same silence of Scripture as to so many of the apostles may be

taken as suggesting what the real work of these delegated workers was.

It certainly seems very strange that, if they were the possessors of

such extraordinary powers as the theory of Apostolic Succession

implies, we should hear so little of these in the narratives. The

silence of Scripture about them goes a long way to discredit such

ideas, while it is entirely accordant with a more modest view of the

apostolic office.

What was an apostle's function during the life of Christ? One of the

evangelists divides it into three portions: to be with Jesus; to preach

the kingdom; to cast out devils and to heal. There is nothing in these

offices peculiar to them. The seventy had miraculous powers too, and

some at least were our Lord's companions and preachers of His kingdom

who were simple disciples. What was an apostle's function after the

resurrection? Peter's words, on proposing the election of a new

apostle, lay down the duty as simply to bear witness' of that

resurrection. They were not supernatural channels of mysterious grace,

not lords over God's heritage, not even leaders of the Church, but

bearers of a testimony to the great historical fact, on the acceptance

of which all belief in an historical Christ depended then and depends

now. Each of the greater of the apostles is penetrated with the same

thought. Paul disclaims anything beside in his Not I, but the grace of

God in me.' Peter thrusts the question at the staring crowd, Why look

ye on us as though by our power or holiness we had made this man to

walk?' John, in his calm way, tells his children at Ephesus, Ye need

not that any man teach you.'

Such an idea of the apostolic office is far more reasonable and

accordant with Scripture than a figment about unexampled powers and

authority in the Church. It accounts for the qualifications as stated

in the same address of Peter's, which merely secure the validity of

their testimony. The one thing that must be found in an apostle was

that he should have been in familiar intercourse with Christ during his

earthly life, both before and after His resurrection, in order that he

might be able to say, I knew Him well; I know that He died; I know that

He rose again; I saw Him go up to heaven.' For such a work there was no

need for men of commanding power. Plain, simple, honest men who had the

requisite eye-witness were sufficient. The guidance and the missionary

work of the Church need not necessarily be in their hands, and, in

fact, does not seem to have been. In harmony with this view of the

office and its requisites, we find that Paul rests the validity of his

apostolate on the fact that He was seen of me also,' and regards that

vision as his true appointment which left him not one whit behind the

very chiefest apostles.' Miraculous gifts indeed they had, and

miraculous gifts they imparted; but in both instances others shared

these powers with them. It was no apostle who laid his hands on the

blinded Saul in that house in Damascus and said, Receive the Holy

Ghost.' An apostle stood by passive and wondering when the Holy Ghost

fell on Cornelius and his comrades. In reality apostolic succession is

absurd, because there is nothing to succeed to, except what cannot be

transmitted, personal knowledge of the reality of the resurrection of

Jesus Christ. To establish that fact as indubitable history is to lay

the foundation of the Christian Church, and the eleven plain men, who

did that, need no superstitious mist around them to magnify their

greatness.

In so far as any succession to them or any devolution of their office

is possible, all Christian men inherit it, for to bear witness of the

living power of the risen Lord is still the office and honour of every

believing soul. It is still true that the sharpest weapon which any man

can wield for Christ is the simple adducing of his own personal

experience. That which we have seen and handled we declare' is still

the best form into which our preaching can be cast. And such a voice

every man and woman who has found the sweetness and the power of Christ

filling their own souls, is bound--rather let us say, is privileged--to

lift up. This honour have all the saints.' Christ is the true worker,

and all our work is but to proclaim Him, and what He has done and is

doing for ourselves and for all men.

III. We may gather, too, the lesson of how often faithful work is

unrecorded and forgotten.

No doubt those apostles who have no place in the history toiled

honestly and did their Lord's commands, and oblivion has swallowed it

all. Bartholomew and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus,' and the

rest of them, have no place in the record, and their obscure work is

faded, faithful and good as certainly it was.

So it will be sooner or later with us all. For most of us, our service

has to be unnoticed and unknown, and the memory of our poor work will

live perhaps for a year or two in the hearts of some few who loved us,

but will fade wholly when they follow us into the silent land. Well, be

it so; we shall sleep none the less sweetly, though none be talking

about us over our heads. The world has a short memory, and, as the

years go on, the list that it has to remember grows so crowded that it

is harder and harder to find room to write a new name on it, or to read

the old. The letters on the tombstones are soon erased by the feet that

tramp across the churchyard. All that matters very little. The

notoriety of our work is of no consequence. The earnestness and

accuracy with which we strike our blow is all-important; but it matters

nothing how far it echoes. It is not the heaven of heavens to be talked

about, nor does a man's life consist in the abundance of newspaper or

other paragraphs about him. The love of fame' is, no doubt, sometimes

found in minds' otherwise noble,' but in itself is very much the

reverse of noble. We shall do our work best, and be saved from much

festering anxiety which corrupts our purest service and fevers our

serenest thoughts, if we once fairly make up our minds to working

unnoticed and unknown, and determine that, whether our post be a

conspicuous or an obscure one, we shall fill it to the utmost of our

power--careless of praise or censure, because our judgment is with our

God; careless whether we are unknown or well known, because we are

known altogether to Him.

The magnitude of our work in men's eyes is as little important as the

noise of it. Christ gave all the apostles their tasks--to some of them

to found the Gentile churches, to some of them to leave to all

generations precious teaching, to some of them none of these things.

What then? Were the Peters and the Johns more highly favoured than the

others? Was their work greater in His sight? Not so. To Him all service

done from the same motive is the same, and His measure of excellence is

the quantity of love and spiritual force in our deeds, not the width of

the area over which they spread. An estuary that goes wandering over

miles of shallows may have less water in it, and may creep more

languidly, than the torrent that thunders through some narrow gorge.

The deeds that stand highest on the records in heaven are not those

which we vulgarly call great. Many a cup of cold water only' will be

found to have been rated higher there than jewelled golden chalices

brimming with rare wines. God's treasures, where He keeps His

children's gifts, will be like many a mother's secret store of relics

of her children, full of things of no value, what the world calls

trash,' but precious in His eyes for the love's sake that was in them.

All service which is done from the same motive and with the same spirit

is of the same worth in His eyes. It does not matter whether you have

the gospel in a penny Testament printed on thin paper with black ink

and done up in cloth, or in an illuminated missal glowing in gold and

colour, painted with loving care on fair parchment, and bound in

jewelled ivory. And so it matters little about the material or the

scale on which we express our devotion and our aspirations; all depends

on what we copy, not on the size of the canvas on which, or on the

material in which, we copy it. Small service is true service while it

lasts,' and the unnoticed insignificant servants may do work every whit

as good and noble as the most widely known, to whom have been intrusted

by Christ tasks that mould the ages.

IV. Finally, we may add that forgotten work is remembered, and

unrecorded names are recorded above.

The names of these almost anonymous apostles have no place in the

records of the advancement of the Church or of the development of

Christian doctrine. They drop out of the narrative after the list in

the first chapter of the Acts. But we do hear of them once more. In

that last vision of the great city which the seer beheld descending

from God, we read that in its foundations were the names of the twelve

apostles of the Lamb.' All were graven there--the inconspicuous names

carved on no record of earth, as well as the familiar ones cut deep in

the rock to be seen of all men for ever. At the least that grand image

may tell us that when the perfect state of the Church is realised, the

work which these men did when their testimony laid its foundation, will

be for ever associated with their names. Unrecorded on earth, they are

written in heaven.

The forgotten work and its workers are remembered by Christ. His

faithful heart and all-seeing eye keep them ever in view. The world,

and the Church whom these humble men helped, may forget, yet He will

not forget. From whatever muster-roll of benefactors and helpers their

names may be absent, they will be in His list. The Apostle Paul, in his

Epistle to the Philippians, has a saying in which his delicate courtesy

is beautifully conspicuous, where he half apologises for not sending

his greetings to others my fellow-workers' by name, and reminds them

that, however their names may be unwritten in his letter, they have

been inscribed by a mightier hand on a better page, and are in the

Lamb's book of life.' It matters very little from what record ours may

be absent so long as they are found there. Let us rejoice that, though

we may live obscure and die forgotten, we may have our names written on

the breastplate of our High Priest as He stands in the Holy Place, the

breastplate which lies close to His heart of love, and is girded to His

arm of power.

The forgotten and unrecorded work lives, too, in the great whole. The

fruit of our labour may perhaps not be separable from that of others,

any more than the sowers can go into the reaped harvest-field and

identify the gathered ears which have sprung from the seed that they

sowed, but it is there all the same; and whosoever may be unable to

pick out each man's share in the blessed total outcome, the Lord of the

harvest knows, and His accurate proportionment of individual reward to

individual service will not mar the companionship in the general

gladness, when he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice

together.'

The forgotten work will live, too, in blessed results to the doers.

Whatever of recognition and honour we may miss here, we cannot be

robbed of the blessing to ourselves, in the perpetual influence on our

own character, of every piece of faithful even if imperfect service.

Habits are formed, emotions deepened, principles confirmed, capacities

enlarged by every deed done for Christ, and these make an over-measure

of reward here, and in their perfect form hereafter are heaven. Nothing

done for Him is ever wasted. Thou shalt find it after many days.' We

are all writing our lives' histories here, as if with one of these

manifold writers'--a black blank page beneath the flimsy sheet on which

we write, but presently the black page will be taken away, and the

writing will stand out plain on the page behind that we did not see.

Life is the filmy, unsubstantial page on which our pen rests; the black

page is death; and the page beneath is that indelible transcript of our

earthly actions, which we shall find waiting for us to read, with shame

and confusion of face, or with humble joy, in another world.

Then let us do our work for Christ, not much careful whether it be

greater or smaller, obscure or conspicuous; assured that whoever

forgets us and it, He will remember, and however our names may be

unrecorded on earth, they will be written in heaven, and confessed by

Him before His Father and the holy angels.

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CHRIST'S CHARGE TO HIS HERALDS

These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, do not into

the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye

not: 6. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7. And

as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. 8. Heal the

sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye

have received, freely give. 9. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor

brass in your purses, 10. Nor scrip for your journey, neither two

coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his

meat. 11. And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who

in it is worthy: and there abide till ye go thence. 12. And when ye

come into an house, salute it. 13. And if the house be worthy, let your

peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to

you. 14. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when

ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.

15. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of

Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city. 16.

Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye

therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.' --Matt. x. 5-16.

The letter of these instructions to the apostles has been abrogated by

Christ, both in reference to the scope of, and the equipment for, their

mission (Matt. xxviii. 19; Luke xxii. 36). The spirit of them remains

as the perpetual obligation of all Christian workers, and every

Christian should belong to that class. Some direct evangelistic work

ought to be done by every believer, and in doing it he will find no

better directory than this charge to the apostles.

I. We have, first, the apostles' mission in its sphere and manner (vs.

5-8). They are told where to go and what to do there. Mark that the

negative prohibition precedes the positive injunction, as if the

apostles were already so imbued with the spirit of universalism that

they would probably have overpassed the bounds which for the present

were needful. The restriction was transient. It continued in the line

of divine limitation of the sphere of Revelation which confined itself

to the Jew, in order that through him it might reach the world. That

method could not be abandoned till the Jew himself had destroyed it by

rejecting Christ. Jesus still clung to it. Even when the commission was

widened to all the world,' Paul went to the Jew first,' till he too was

taught by uniform failure that Israel was fixed in unbelief.

How tenderly our Lord designates the nation as the lost sheep of the

house of Israel'! He is still influenced by that compassion which the

sight of the multitudes had moved in Him (chap. ix. 36). Lost indeed,

wandering with torn fleece, and lying panting, in ignorance of their

pasture and their Shepherd, they are yet sheep,' and they belong to

that chosen seed, sprung from so venerable ancestors, and heirs of so

glorious promises. Clear sight of, and infinite pity for, men's

miseries, must underlie all apostolic effort.

The work to be done is twofold--a glad truth is to be proclaimed,

gracious deeds of power are to be done. How blessed must be the

kingdom, the forerunners of which are miracles of healing and

life-giving! If the heralds can do these, what will not the King be

able to do? If such hues attend the dawn, how radiant will be the

noontide! Note as ye go,' indicating that they were travelling

evangelists, and were to speak as they went, and go when they had

spoken. The road was to be their pulpit, and each man they met their

audience. What a different world it would be if Christians carried

their message with them so!

Freely ye have received'; namely, in the first application of the

words, the message of the coming kingdom and the power to work

miracles. But the force of the injunction, as applied to us, is even

more soul-subduing, as our gift is greater, and the freedom of its

bestowal should evoke deeper gratitude. The deepest springs of the

heart's love are set flowing by the undeserved, unpurchased gift of

God, which contains in itself both the most tender and mighty motive

for self-forgetting labour, and the pattern for Christian service. How

can one who has received that gift keep it to himself? How can he sell

what he got for nothing? Freely give'--the precept forbids the seeking

of personal profit or advantage from preaching the gospel, and so makes

a sharp test of our motives; and it also forbids clogging the gift with

non-essential conditions, and so makes a sharp test of our methods.

II. The prohibition to make gain out of the message, serves as a

transition to the directions as to equipment. The apostles were to go

as they stood; for the command is, Get you no gold,' etc. It has been

already noted that these prohibitions were abrogated by Jesus in view

of His departure, and the world-wide mission of the Church. But the

spirit of them is not abrogated. Note that the descending value of the

metals named makes an ascending stringency in the prohibition. Not even

copper money is to be taken. The wallet' was a leather satchel or bag,

used by shepherds and others to carry a little food; sustenance, then,

was also to be left uncared for. Dress, too, was to be limited to that

in wear; no change of inner robe nor a spare pair of shoes was to

encumber them, nor even a spare staff. If any of them had one in his

hand, he was to take it (Mark vi. 8). The command was meant to lift the

apostles above suspicion, to make them manifestly disinterested, to

free them from anxiety about earthly things, that their message might

absorb their thoughts and efforts, and to give room for the display of

Christ's power to provide. It had a promise wrapped in it. He who

forbade them to provide for themselves thereby pledged Himself to take

care of them. The labourer is worthy of his food.' They may be sure of

subsistence, and are not to wish for more.

All this has a distinct bearing on modern church arrangements. On the

one hand, it vindicates the right of those who preach the gospel to

live of the gospel, and sets any payments to them on the right footing,

as not being charity or generosity, but the discharge of a debt. On the

other hand, it enjoins on preachers and others who are paid for service

not to serve for pay, not to be covetous of large remuneration, and to

take care that no taint of greed for money shall mar their work, but

that their conduct may confirm their words when they say with Paul, We

seek not yours, but you.'

III. The conduct required from, and the reception met with by, the

messengers come next. Christ first enjoins discretion and

discrimination of character, so far as possible. The messenger of the

kingdom is not to be mixed up with disreputable people, lest the

message should suffer. The principle of his choice of a home is to be,

not position, comfort, or the like, but worthiness'; that is,

predisposition to receive the message. However poor the chamber in the

house of such, there is the apostle to settle himself. If ye have

judged me to be faithful, come into my house,' said Lydia. The less

Christ's messengers are at home with Christ's neglecters, the calmer

their own hearts, and the more potent their message. They give the lie

to it, if they voluntarily choose as their associates those to whom

their dearest convictions are idle. Christian charity does not blind to

distinctions of character. A little common sense in reading these will

save many a scandal, and much weakening of influence.

Christian earnestness does not abolish courtesy. The message is not to

be blurted out in defiance of even conventional forms. Zeal for the

Lord is no excuse for rude abruptness. But the salutation of the true

apostle will deepen the meaning of such forms, and make the

conventional the real expression of real goodwill. No man should say

Peace be unto you' so heartily as Christ's servant. The servant's

benediction will bring the Master's ratification; for Jesus says, Let

your peace come upon it,' as if commanding the good which we can only

wish. That will be so, if the requisite condition is fulfilled. There

must be soil for the seed to root in.

But no true wish for others' good--still more, no effort for it--is

ever void of blessed issue. If the peace does not rest on a house into

which jarring and sin forbid its entrance, it will not be homeless, but

come back, like the dove to the ark, and fold its wings in the heart of

the sender. The reflex influence of Christian effort is precious,

whatever its direct results are. How the Church has been benefited by

its missionary enterprises!

Jesus encouraged no illusions in His servants as to their success. From

the beginning they were led to expect that some would receive and some

would reject their words. In this rapid preparatory mission, there was

no time for long delay anywhere; but for us, it is not wise to conclude

that patient effort will fail because first appeals have not succeeded.

Much close communion with Jesus, not a little self-suppression, and

abundant practical wisdom, are needed to determine the point at which

further efforts are vain. No doubt, there is often great waste of

strength in trying to impress unimpressible people, or to revive some

moribund enterprise; but it is a pardonable weakness to be reluctant to

abandon a field. Still it is a weakness, and there come times when the

only right thing to do is to shake off the dust' of the messenger's

feet in token that all connection is ended, and that he is clear from

the blood of the rejecters. The awful doom of such is solemnly

introduced by Verily, I say unto you.' It rests on the plain principle

that the measure of light is the measure of criminality, and hence the

measure of punishment. The rejecters of Christ among us are as much

more guilty than that city' as its inhabitants were than the men of

Sodom.

The first section of this charge properly ends with verse 15��, the

following verse being a transition to the second part. The Greek puts

strong emphasis on I.' It is He who sends among wolves, therefore He

will protect. A strange thing for a shepherd to do! A strange

encouragement for the apostles on the threshold of their work! But the

words would often come back to them when beset by the pack with their

white teeth gleaming, and their howls filling the night. They are not

promised that they will not be torn, but they are assured that, even if

they are, the Shepherd wills it, and will not lose one of His flock.

What is the Christian defence? Prudence like the serpent's, but not the

serpent's craft or malice; harmlessness like the dove's, but not

without the other safeguard of wisdom.' The combination is a rare one,

and the surest way to possess it is to live so close to Jesus that we

shall be progressively changed into His likeness. Then our prudence

will never degenerate into cunning, nor our simplicity become blindness

to dangers. The Christian armour and arms are meek, unconquerable

patience, and Christ-likeness, To resist is to be beaten; to endure

unretaliating is to be victorious. Be not overcome of evil, but

overcome evil with good.'

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THE WIDENED MISSION, ITS PERILS AND DEFENCES

Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye

therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. 17. But beware of

men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will

scourge you in their synagogues; 18. And ye shall be brought before

governors and kings for My sake, for a testimony against them and the

Gentiles. 19. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what

ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye

shall speak. 20. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your

Father which speaketh in you. 21. And the brother shall deliver up the

brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise

up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. 22. And ye

shall be hated of all men for My name's sake: but he that endureth to

the end shall be saved. 23. But when they persecute you in this city,

flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone

over the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come. 24. The

disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. 25.

It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant

as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how

much more shall they call them of his household? 26. Fear them not

therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed;

and hid, that shall not be known. 27. What I tell you in darkness, that

speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the

housetops. 28. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able

to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both

soul and body in hell. 29. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?

and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. 30.

But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31. Fear ye not

therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.' --MATT. x. 16-31.

We have already had two instances of Matthew's way of bringing together

sayings and incidents of a like kind without regard to their original

connection. The Sermon on the Mount and the series of miracles in

chapters viii. and ix. are groups, the elements of which are for the

most part found disconnected in Mark and Luke. This charge to the

twelve in chapter x. seems to present a third instance, and to pass

over in verse 16 to a wider mission than that of the twelve during our

Lord's lifetime, for it forebodes persecution, whereas the preceding

verses opened no darker prospect than that of indifference or

non-reception. The city' which, in that stage of the gospel message,

simply would not receive you nor hear your words,' in this stage has

worsened into one where they persecute you,' and the persecutors are

now kings' and Gentiles,' as well as Jewish councils and

synagogue-frequenters. The period covered in these verses, too, reaches

to the end,' the final revelation of all hidden things.

Obviously, then, our Lord is looking down a far future, and giving a

charge to the dim crowd of His later disciples, whom His prescient eye

saw pressing behind the twelve in days to come. He had no dreams of

swift success, but realised the long, hard fight to which He was

summoning His disciples. And His frankness in telling them the worst

that they had to expect was as suggestive as was His freedom from the

rosy, groundless visions of at once capturing a world which enthusiasts

are apt to cherish, till hard experience shatters the illusions. He

knew the future in store for Himself, for His Gospel, for His

disciples. And He knew that dangers and death itself will not appal a

soul that is touched into heroic self-forgetfulness by His love. Set

down my name,' says the man in Pilgrim's Progress, though he knew--may

we not say, because he knew?--that the enemies were outside waiting to

fall on him.

A further difference between this and the preceding section is, that

there the stress was laid on the contents of the disciples' message,

but that here it is laid on their sufferings. Not so much by what they

say, as by how they endure, are they to testify. The noble army of

martyrs praise Thee,' and the primitive Church preached Jesus most

effectually by dying for Him.

The keynote is struck in verse 16, in which are to be noted the

Behold,' which introduces something important and strange, and calls

for close attention; the majestic I send you,' which moves to obedience

whatever the issues, and pledges Him to defend the poor men who are

going on His errands and the pathetic picture of the little flock

huddled together, while the gleaming teeth of the wolves gnash all

round them. A strange theme to drape in a metaphor! but does not the

very metaphor help to lighten the darkness of the picture, as well as

speak of His calmness, while He contemplates it? If the Shepherd sends

His sheep into the midst of wolves, surely He will come to their help,

and surely any peril is more courageously faced when they can say to

themselves, He put us here.' The sheep has no claws to wound with nor

teeth to tear with, but the defenceless Christian has a defence, and in

his very weaponlessness wields the sharpest two-edged sword. Force from

force must ever flow.' Resistance is a mistake. The victorious

antagonist of savage enmity is patient meekness. Sufferance is the

badge of all' true servants of Jesus. Wherever they have been misguided

enough to depart from Christ's law of endurance and to give blow for

blow, they have lost their cause in the long run, and have hurt their

own Christian life more than their enemies' bodies. Guilelessness and

harmlessness are their weapons. But be ye wise as serpents' is equally

imperative with guileless as doves.' Mark the fine sanity of that

injunction, which not only permits but enjoins prudent

self-preservation, so long as it does not stoop to crooked policy, and

is saved from that by dove-like guilelessness. A difficult combination,

but a possible one, and when realised, a beautiful one!

The following verses (17-22) expand the preceding, and mingle in a very

remarkable way plain predictions of persecution to the death and

encouragements to front the worst. Jewish councils and synagogues,

Gentile governors and kings, will unite for once in common hatred, than

which there is no stronger bond. That is a grim prospect to set before

a handful of Galilean peasants, but two little words turn its terror

into joy; it is for My sake,' and that is enough. Jesus trusted His

humble friends, as He trusts all such always, and believed that for My

sake' was a talisman which would sweeten the bitterest cup and would

make cowards into heroes, and send men and women to their deaths

triumphant. And history has proved that He did not trust them too much.

For His sake'--is that a charm for us, which makes the crooked straight

and the rough places plain, which nerves for suffering and impels to

noble acts, which moulds life and takes the sting and the terror out of

death? Nor is that the only encouragement given to the twelve, who

might well be appalled at the prospect of standing before Gentile

kings. Jesus seems to discern how they shrank as they listened, at the

thought of having to bear testimony' before exalted personages, and,

with beautiful adaptation to their weakness, He interjects a great

promise, which, for the first time, presents the divine Spirit as

dwelling in the disciples' spirits. The occasion of the dawning of that

great Christian thought is very noteworthy, and not less so is the

designation of the Spirit as of your Father,' with all the implications

of paternal care and love which that name carries. Special crises bring

special helps, and the martyrologies of all ages and lands, from

Stephen outside the city wall to the last Chinese woman, have attested

the faithfulness of the Promiser. How often have some calm, simple

words from some slave girl in Roman cities, or some ignorant confessor

before Inquisitors, been manifestly touched with heavenly light and

power, and silenced sophistries and threats!

The solemn foretelling of persecution, broken for a moment, goes on and

becomes even more foreboding, for it speaks of dearest ones turned to

foes, and the sweet sanctities of family ties dissolved by the solvent

of the new Faith. There is no enemy like a brother estranged, and it is

tragically significant that it is in connection with the rupture of

family bonds that death is first mentioned as the price that Christ's

messengers would have to pay for faithfulness to their message. But the

prediction springs at a bound, as it were, from the narrow circle of

home to the widest range, and does not fear to spread before the eyes

of the twelve that they will become the objects of hatred to the whole

human race if they are true to Christ's charge. The picture is dark

enough, and it has turned out to be a true forecast of facts. It

suggests two questions. What right had Jesus to send men out on such an

errand, and to bid them gladly die for Him? And what made these men

gladly take up the burden which He laid on them? He has the right to

dispose of us, because He is the Son of God who has died for us.

Otherwise He is not entitled to say to us, Do my bidding, even if it

leads you to death. His servants find their inspiration to absolute,

unconditional self-surrender in the Love that has died for them. That

which gives Him His right to dispose of us in life and death gives us

the disposition to yield ourselves wholly to Him, to be His apostles

according to our opportunities, and to say, Whether I live or die, I am

the Lord's.'

That thought of world-wide hatred is soothed by the recurrence of the

talisman, For My name's sake,' and by a moment's showing of a fair

prospect behind the gloom streaked with lightning in the foreground. He

that endureth to the end shall be saved.' The same saying occurs in

chapter xxiv. 13, in connection with the prediction of the fall of

Jerusalem, and in the same connection in Mark xiii. 13, in both of

which places several other sayings which appear in this charge to the

apostles are found. It is impossible to settle which is the original

place for these, or whether they were twice spoken. The latter

supposition is very unfashionable at present, but has perhaps more to

say for itself than modern critics are willing to allow. But Luke (xxi.

19) has a remarkable variation of the saying, for his version of it is,

In your patience, ye shall win your souls.' His word patience' is a

noun cognate with the verb rendered in Matthew and Mark endureth,' and

to win one's soul' is obviously synonymous with being saved.' The

saying cannot be limited, in any of its forms, to a mere securing of

earthly life, for in this context it plainly includes those who have

been delivered to death by parents and brethren, but who by death have

won their lives, and have been, as Paul expected to be, thereby 'saved

into His heavenly kingdom.' To the Christian, death is the usher who

introduces him into the presence-chamber of the King, and he that

loseth his life for My name's sake,' finds it glorified in, and into,

life eternal.

But willingness to endure the utmost is to be accompanied with

willingness to take all worthy means to escape it. There has been a

certain unwholesome craving for martyrdom generated in times of

persecution, which may appear noble but is very wasteful. The worst use

that you can put a man to is to burn him, and a living witness may do

more for Christ than a dead martyr. Christian heroism may be shown in

not being afraid to flee quite as much as in courting, or passively

awaiting, danger. And Christ's Name will be spread when His lovers are

hounded from one city to another, just as it was when they that were

scattered abroad, went everywhere, preaching the word.' When the brands

are kicked apart by the heel of violence, they kindle flames where they

fall.

But the reason for this command to flee is perplexing. Ye shall not

have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come.' Is

Jesus here reverting to the narrower immediate mission of the apostles?

What coming' is referred to? We have seen that the first mission of the

twelve was the theme of verses 5-15, and was there pursued to its

ultimate consequences of final judgment on rejecters, whilst the wider

horizon of a future mission opens out from verse 16 onwards. A renewed

contraction of the horizon is extremely unlikely. It would be as if a

flower should shut and be a bud again.' The recurrence in verse 23 of

Verily I say unto you,' which has already occurred in verse 15, closing

the first section of the charge, makes it probable that here too a

section is completed, and that probability is strengthened if it is

observed that the same phrase occurs, for a third time, in the last

verse of the chapter, where again the discourse soars to the height of

contemplating the final reward. The fact that the apostles met with no

persecution on their first mission, puts out of court the explanation

of the words that refers them to that mission, and takes the coming' to

be Jesus' own appearances in the places they had preceded Him as His

heralds. The difficult question as to what is the terminus ad quem

pointed to here seems best solved by taking the coming of the Son of

Man' to be His judicial manifestation in the destruction of Jerusalem

and the consequent desolation of many of the cities of Israel,' whilst

at the same time, the nearer and smaller catastrophe is a prophecy and

symbol of the remoter and greater day of the Son of Man' at the end of

the days. The recognition of that aspect of the fall of Jerusalem is

forced on us by the eschatological parts of the Gospels, which are a

bewildering whirl without it. Here, however, it is the crash of the

fall itself which is in view, and the thought conveyed is that there

would be cities enough to serve for refuges, and scope enough for

evangelistic work, till the end of the Jewish possession of the land.

In verses 26-31, fear not' is thrice spoken, and at each occurrence is

enforced by a reason. The first of these encouragements is the

assurance of the certain ultimate world-wide manifestation of hidden

things. That same dictum occurs in other connections, and with other

applications, but in the present context can only be taken as an

assurance that the Gospel message, little known as it thus far was, was

destined to fill all ears. Therefore the disciples were to be fearless

in doing their part in making it known, and so working in alliance with

the divine purpose. It is the same thing that is meant by the covered'

that shall be revealed,' the hidden' that shall be known,' that which

is spoken in darkness,' and that which is whispered in the ear'; and

all four designations refer to the word which every Christian has it in

charge to sound out. We note that Jesus foresees a far wider range of

publicity for His servants' ministry than for His own, just as He

afterwards declared that they would do greater works' than His. He

spoke to a handful of men in an obscure corner of the world. His

teaching was necessarily largely confidential communication to the fit

few. But the spark is going to be a blaze, and the whisper to become a

shout that fills the world. Surely, then, we who are working in the

line of direction of God's working should let no fear make us dumb, but

should ever hear and obey the command: Lift up thy voice with strength,

lift it up, be not afraid.'

A second reason for fearlessness is the limitation of the enemy's power

to hurt, reinforced by the thought that, while the penalties that man

can inflict for faithfulness are only corporeal, transitory, and

incapable of harming the true self, the consequences of unfaithfulness

fling the whole man, body and soul, down to utter ruin. There is a fear

that makes cowards and apostates; there is a fear which makes heroes

and apostles. He who fears God, with the awe that has no torment and is

own sister to love, is afraid of nothing and of no man. That holy and

blessed fear drives out all other, as fire draws the heat out of a

burn. He that serves Christ is lord of the world; he that fears God

fronts the world, and is not afraid.

The last reason for fearlessness touches a tender chord, and discloses

a gracious thought of God as Father, which softens the tremendous

preceding word: Who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.'

Take both designations together, and let them work together in

producing the awe which makes us brave, and the filial trust which

makes us braver. A bird does not fall to the ground' unless wounded,

and if it falls it dies. Jesus had looked pityingly on the great

mystery, the woes of the creatures, and had stayed Himself on the

thought of the all-embracing working of God. The very dying sparrow,

with broken wing, had its place in that universal care. God is

immanent' in nature. The antithesis often drawn between His universal

care and His special providence' is misleading. Providence is special

because it is universal. That which embraces everything must embrace

each thing. But the immanent God is your Father,' and because of that

sonship, ye are of more value than many sparrows.' There is an

ascending order, and an increasing closeness and tenderness of

relation. A man is better than a sheep,' and Christians, being God's

children, may count on getting closer into the Father's heart than the

poor crippled bird can, or than the godless man can. Your Father,' on

the one hand, can destroy soul and body, therefore fear Him; but, on

the other, He determines whether you shall fall to the ground' or soar

above dangers, therefore fear none but Him.

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LIKE TEACHER, LIKE SCHOLAR

The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.

26. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the

servant as his lord.' --MATT. x. 24, 25.

These words were often on Christ's lips. Like other teachers, He too

had His favourite sayings, the light of which He was wont to flash into

many dark places. Such a saying, for instance, was, To him that hath

shall be given.' Such a saying is this of my text; and probably several

other of our Lord's utterances, which are repeated more than once in

different Gospels, and have too hastily been sometimes assumed to have

been introduced erroneously by the evangelists, in varying connections.

This half-proverb occurs four times in the Gospels, and in three very

different connections, pointing to three different subjects. Here, and

once in John's Gospel, in the fifteenth chapter, it is employed to

enforce the lesson of the oneness of Christ and His disciples in their

relation to the world; and that His servants cannot expect to be better

off than the Master was. If they have called Me Beelzebub they will not

call you anything else.'

Then in Luke's Gospel (vi. 40) it is employed to illustrate the

principle that the scholar cannot expect to be wiser than his master;

that a blind teacher will have blind pupils, and that they will both

fall into the ditch. Of course, the scholar may get beyond his master,

but then he will get up and go away from the school, and will not be

his scholar any longer. As long as he is a scholar, the best that can

happen to him, and that will not often happen, is to be on the level of

his teacher.

Then in another place in John's Gospel (xiii. 16) the saying is

employed in reference to a different subject, viz. to teach the meaning

of the pathetic, symbolical foot-washing, and to enforce the

exhortation to imitate Jesus Christ, as generally in conduct, so

specially in His wondrous humility. The servant is not greater than his

lord.' I have left you an example that ye should do as I have done to

you.'

So if we put these three instances together we get a threefold

illustration of the relation between the disciple and the teacher, in

respect to wisdom, conduct, and reception by the world. And these

three, with their bearing on the relation between Christians and Jesus

Christ, open out large fields of duty and of privilege. The very centre

of Christianity is discipleship, and the very highest hope, as well as

the most imperative command which the Gospel brings to men is, Be like

Him whom you profess to have taken as your Master. Be like Him here,

and you shall be like Him hereafter.'

I. Likeness to the teacher in wisdom is the disciple's perfection.

If the blind lead the blind both shall fall into the ditch.' The

disciple is not greater than his master.' It is enough for the disciple

that he be as his master.' If that be a true principle, that the best

that can happen to the scholar is to tread in his teacher's footsteps,

to see with his eyes, to absorb his wisdom, to learn his truth, we may

apply it in two opposite directions. First, it teaches us the

limitations, and the misery, and the folly of taking men for our

masters; and then, on the other hand, it teaches us the large hope, the

blessing, freedom, and joy of having Christ for our Master.

Now, first, look at the principle as bearing upon the relation of

disciple and human teacher. All such teachers have their limitations.

Each man has his little circle of favourite ideas that he is

perpetually reiterating. In fact, it seems as if one truth was about as

much as one teacher could manage, and as if, whensoever God had any

great truth to give to the world, He had to take one man and make him

its sole apostle. So that teachers become mere fragments, and to listen

to them is to dwarf and narrow oneself.

The chances are that no scholar shall be on his master's level. The

eyes that see truth directly and for themselves in this world are very

few. Most men have to take truth at second-hand, and few indeed are

they who, like a perfect medium, receive even the fragmentary truth

that human lips can impart to them, and transmit it as pure as they

receive it. Disciples present exaggerations, caricatures,

misconceptions, the limitations of the master becoming even more rigid

in the pupil. Schools spring up which push the founder's teaching to

extremes, and draw conclusions from it which he never dreamed of.

Instead of a fresh voice, we have echoes, which, like all echoes, give

only a syllable or two out of a sentence. Teachers can tell what they

see, but they cannot give their followers eyes, and so the followers

can do little more than repeat what their leader said he saw. They are

like the little suckers that spring up from the stool' of a cut-down

tree, or like the kinglets among whose feebler hands the great empire

of an Alexander was divided at his death.

It is a dwarfing thing to call any man master upon earth. And yet men

will give to a man the credence which they refuse to Christ. The

followers of some of the fashionable teachers of to-day--Comte,

Spencer, or others--protest, in the name of mental independence,

against accepting Christ as the absolute teacher of morals and

religion, and then go away and put a man in the very place which they

have denied to Him, and swallow down his dicta whole.

Such facts show how heart and mind crave a teacher; how discipleship is

ingrained in our nature; how we all long for some one who shall come to

us authoritatively and say, Here is truth--believe it and live on it.'

And yet it is fatal to pin one's faith on any, and it is miserable to

have to change guides perpetually and to feel that we have outgrown

those whom we reverence, and that we can look down on the height which

once seemed to touch the stars--and, if we cut ourselves loose from all

men's teaching, the isolation is dreary, and few of us are strong

enough of arm, or clear enough of eye, to force or find the path

through the tangled jungles of error.

So take this thought, that the highest hope of a disciple is to be like

the master in wisdom, in its bearing on the relation between us and

Christ, and look how it then flashes up into blessedness and beauty.

Such a teacher as we have in Him has no limitations, and it is safe to

follow Him absolutely and Him alone. All others have plainly borne the

impress of their age, or their nation, or their idiosyncrasy, in some

way or another; Christ Jesus is the only teacher that the world has

ever heard of, in whose teaching there is no mark of the age or

generation or set of circumstances in which it originated. This water

does not taste of any soil through which it has passed, it has come

straight down from Heaven, and is pure and uncontaminated as the Heaven

from which it has come. This teacher is safe to listen to absolutely:

there are no limitations there; you never hear Him arguing; there is no

sign about His words as if He had ever dug out for Himself the wisdom

that He is proclaiming, or had ever seen it less distinctly than He

sees it at the moment. The great peculiarity of His teaching is that He

does not reason, but declares that His Verily! Verily!' is the

confirmation of all His message. His teaching is Himself; other men

bring lessons about truth; He says, I am the Truth.' Other teachers

keep their personality in the background; He clashes His down in the

foreground. Other men say, Listen to what I tell you, never mind about

me.' He says, This is life eternal, that ye should believe on Me.' This

Teacher has His message level to all minds, high and low, wise and

foolish, cultivated and rude. This Teacher does not only impart wisdom

by words as from without, though He does that too, but He comes into

men's spirits, and communicates Himself, and so makes them wise. Other

teachers fumble at the outside, but in the hidden parts He makes me to

know wisdom.' So it is safe to take this Teacher absolutely, and to

say, Thou art my Master, Thy word is truth, and the opening of Thy lips

to me is wisdom.'

In following Christ as our absolute Teacher, there is no sacrifice of

independence or freedom of mind, but listening to Him is the way to

secure these in their highest degree. We are set free from men, we are

growingly delivered from errors and misconceptions, in the measure in

which we keep close to Christ as our Master. The Lord is that Teacher,

and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there, and there only, is liberty;

freedom from self, from the dominion of popular opinion, from the

coterie-speech of schools, from the imposing authority of individuals,

and from all that makes cowardly men say as other people say, and fall

in with the majority; and freedom from our own prejudices and our own

errors, which are cleared away when we take Christ for our Master and

cleave to Him.

His teaching can never cease until it has accomplished its purpose, and

not until we have gathered into our consciousness all the truth that He

has to give, and have received all the wisdom that He can impart unto

us as to God and Himself, does His teaching cease. Here we may grow

indefinitely in the knowledge of Christ, and in the future we shall

know even as we are known. His merciful teaching will not come to a

close till we have drunk in all His wisdom, and till He has declared to

us all which He has heard of the Father. He will pass us from one form

to another of His school, but in Heaven we shall still be His scholars;

Every one shall sit at Thy feet, every one shall receive of Thy words.'

So, then, let us turn away from men, from rabbis and Sanhedrins, from

authorities and schools, from doctors and churches. Why resort to

cisterns when we may draw from the spring? Why listen to men when we

may hear Christ? He is, as Dante called the great Greek thinker, the

Master of those who know.' Why should we look to the planets when we

can see the sun? Call no man master upon earth, for One is your Master,

and all ye are brethren.' And His merciful teaching will never cease

until everyone that is perfected shall be as his Master.'

II. Now, turn to the second application of this principle. Likeness to

the Master in life is the law of a disciple's conduct.

That pathetic and wonderful story about the foot-washing in John's

Gospel is meant for a symbol. It is the presenting, in a picturesque

form, of the very heart and essence of Christ's Incarnation in its

motive and purpose. The solemn prelude with which the evangelist

introduces it lays bare our Lord's heart and His reason for His action.

Having loved His own, which were in the world, He loved them to the

end.' His motive, then, was love. Again, the exalted consciousness

which accompanied His self-abasement is made prominent in the words,

Knowing that the Father had given all things into His hand, and that He

was come from God and went to God.' And the majestic deliberation and

patient continuance in resolved humility with which He goes down the

successive steps of the descent, are wonderfully given in the

evangelist's record of how He riseth from supper, and laid aside His

garments and girded Himself, and poured water into the basin.' It is a

parable. Thus, in the consciousness of His divine authority and

dignity, and moved by His love to the whole world, He laid aside the

garments of His glory, and vested Himself with the towel of His

humanity, the servant's garb, and took the water of His cleansing

power, and came to wash the feet of all who will let Him cleanse them

from their soil. And then, having reassumed His garments, He speaks

from His throne to those who have been cleansed by His humiliation and

His sacrifice, Know ye what I have done to you? The servant is not

greater than his lord.'

That is to say, dear brethren, in this one incident, which is the

condensation, so to speak, of the whole spirit of His life, is the law

for our lives as well. We, too, are bound to that same love as the main

motive of all our actions; we, too, are bound to that same stripping

off of dignity and lowly equalising of ourselves with those below us

whom we would help, and we, too, are bound to make it our main object,

in our intercourse with men, not merely that we should please nor

enlighten them, nor succour their lower temporal needs, but that we

should cleanse them and make them pure with the purity that Christ

gives.

A Christian life all moved and animated by self-denuding love, and

which came amongst men to make them better and purer, and all the

influence of which tended in the direction of helping poor foul hearts

to get rid of their filth, how different it would be from our lives!

What a grim contrast much of our lives is to the Master's example and

command! Did you ever strip yourself of anything, my brother, in order

to make some poor, wretched creature a little purer and liker the

Saviour? Did you ever drop your dignity and go down to the low levels

in order to lift up the people that were there? Do men see anything of

that example, as reproduced in your lives, of the Master that lays

aside the garments of Heaven for the vesture of earth, and dies upon

the Cross in order that He might make our poor hearts purer and liker

His own?

But, hard as such imitation is, it is only one case of a general

principle. Discipleship is likeness to Jesus Christ in conduct. There

is no discipleship worth naming which does not, at least, attempt that

likeness. What is the use of a man saying that he is the disciple of

Incarnate Love if his whole life is incarnate selfishness? What is the

use of your calling yourselves Christians, and saying that you are

followers of Jesus Christ, when He came to do God's will and delighted

in it, and you come to do your own, and never do God's will at all, or

scarcely at all, and then reluctantly and with many a murmur? What kind

of a disciple is he, the habitual tenor of whose life contradicts the

life of his Master and disobeys His commandments? And I am bound to say

that that is the life of an enormously large proportion of the

professing disciples in this age of conventional Christianity.

The disciple shall be as his master.' Do you make it your effort to be

like Him? If so, then the saying is not only a law, but a promise, for

it assures us that our effort shall not fail but progressively succeed,

and lead on at last to our becoming what we behold, and being conformed

to Him whom we love, and like the Master to whose wisdom we profess to

listen. They whose earthly life is a following of Christ, with

faltering steps and afar off, shall have for their heavenly

blessedness, that they shall follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.'

III. And now, lastly, likeness to the Master in relation to the world

is the fate that the disciple must put up with.

If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more

shall they call them of his household?' The disciple is not above his

master, nor the servant above his lord.' Our Lord reiterated the

statement in another place in John's Gospel, reminding them that He had

said it before.

If we are like Jesus Christ in conduct, and if we have received His

Word as the truth upon which we repose, depend upon it, in our measure

and in varying fashions, we shall have to bear the same kind of

treatment that He received from the world. The days of so-called

persecution are over in so-called Christian countries, but if you are a

disciple in the sense of believing all that Jesus Christ says, and

taking Him for your Teacher, the public opinion of this day will have a

great many things to say about you that will not be very pleasant. You

will be considered to be old-fashioned,' narrow,' behind the times,'

etc. etc. etc. Look at the bitter spirit of antagonism to an earnest

and simple Christianity and adoption of Christ as our authoritative

Teacher which goes through much of our high-class literature to-day. It

is a very small matter as measured with what Christian men used to have

to bear; but it indicates the set of things. We may make up our minds

that if we are not contented with the pared-down Christianity which the

world allows to pass at present, but insist upon coming to the New

Testament for our beliefs and practices, and avow--I believe all that

Jesus Christ says, and I believe it because He says it, and I take Him

as my model'; we shall find out that the disciple has to be as his

Master,' and that the Pharisees and the Scribes of to-day stand in the

same relation to the followers as their predecessors did to the Leader.

If you are like your Master in conduct, you will be no more popular

with the world than He was. As long as Christianity will be quiet, and

let the world go its own gait, the world is very well contented to let

it alone, or even to say polite things to it. Why should the world take

the trouble of persecuting the kind of Christianity that so many of us

display? What is the difference between our Christianity and their

worldliness? The world is quite willing to come to church on Sundays,

and to call itself a Christian world, if only it may live as it likes.

And many professing Christians have precisely the same idea. They

attend to the externals of Christianity, and call themselves

Christians, but they bargain for its having very little power over

their lives. Why, then, should two sets of people who have the same

ideas and practices dislike each other? No reason at all! But let

Christian men live up to their profession, and above all let them

become aggressive, and try to attack the world's evil, as they are

bound to do; let them fight drunkenness, let them go against the lust

of great cities, let them preach peace in the face of a nation howling

for war, let them apply the golden rules of Christianity to commerce

and social relationships and the like, and you will very soon hear a

pretty shout that will tell you that the disciple who is a disciple has

to share the fate of the Master, notwithstanding nineteen centuries of

Christian teaching.

If you do not know what it is to find yourselves out of harmony with

the world, I am afraid it is because you have less of the Master's

spirit than you have of the world's. The world loves its own. If you

are not of the world, the world will hate you.' If it does not, it must

be because, in spite of your name, you belong to it.

But if we are like Him in our relation to the world, because we are

like Him in character, our very share in His reproach,' and our sense

of being aliens' here, bear the promise that we shall be like Him in

all worlds. His fortune is ours. The disciple shall be as his master.'

If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. No cross, no

crown;--if cross, then crown! The end of discipleship is not reached

until the Master's image and the Master's lot are repeated in the

scholar.

Take Christ for your sacrifice, trust to His blood, listen to His

teaching, walk in His footsteps, and you shall share His sovereignty

and sit on His throne. It is enough,'--ay! more than enough, and

nothing less than that is enough,--for the disciple that he be as'--and

with--his master.' I shall be satisfied when I awake in Thy likeness.'

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THE KING'S CHARGE TO HIS AMBASSADORS

Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess

also before My Father which is in heaven. 33. But whosoever shall deny

Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in

heaven. 34. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not

to send peace, but a sword. 35. For I am come to set a man at variance

against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the

daughter in law against her mother in law. 36. And man's foes shall be

they of his own household. 37. He that loveth father or mother more

than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more

than Me is not worthy of Me. 38. And he that taketh not his cross, and

followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me. 39. He that findeth his life

shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it

40. He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and he that receiveth Me

receiveth Him that sent Me. 41. He that receiveth a prophet in the name

of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a

righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous

man's reward. 42. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these

little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily

I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.' --MATT. x. 32-42.

The first mission of the apostles, important as it was, was but a short

flight to try the young birds' wings. The larger portion of this charge

to them passes far beyond the immediate occasion, and deals with the

permanent relations of Christ's servants to the world in which they

live, for the purpose of bringing it into subjection to its true King.

These solemn closing words, which make our present subject, contain the

duty and blessedness of confessing Him, the vision of the antagonisms

which He excites, His demand for all-surrendering following, and the

rewards of those who receive Christ's messengers, and therein receive

Himself and His Father.

I. The duty and blessedness of confessing Him (vs. 32, 33). The

therefore' is significant. It attaches the promise which follows to the

immediately preceding thoughts of a watchful, fatherly care, extending

like a great invisible hand over the true disciple. Because each is

thus guarded, each shall be preserved to receive the honour of being

confessed by Christ. No matter what may befall His witnesses, the

extremest disaster shall not rob them of their reward. They may be

flung down from the house-tops where they lift up their bold voices,

but He who does not let a sparrow fall to the ground uncared for, will

give His angels charge concerning them who are so much more precious,

and they shall be borne up on outstretched wings, lest they be dashed

on the pavement below. Thus preserved, they shall all attain at last to

their guerdon. Nothing can come between Christ's servant and his crown.

The tender providence of the Father, whose mercy is over all His works,

makes sure of that. The river of the confessor's life may plunge

underground, and be lost amid persecutions, but it will emerge again

into the brighter sunshine on the other side of the mountains.

The confession which is to be thus rewarded, like the denial opposed to

it, is, of course, not merely a single utterance of the lip. So far

Judas Iscariot confessed Christ, and Peter denied Him. But it is the

habitual acknowledgment by lip and life, unwithdrawn to the end. The

context implies that the confession is maintained in the face of

opposition, and that the denial is a cowardly attempt to save one's

skin at the cost of treason to Jesus. The temptation does not come in

that sharpest form to us. Perhaps some cowards would be made brave if

it did. It is perhaps easier to face the gibbet and the fire, and screw

oneself up for once to a brief endurance, than to resist the more

specious blandishments of the world, especially when it has been

christened, and calls itself religious. The light laugh of scorn, the

silent pressure of the low average of Christian character, the close

associations in trade, literature, public and domestic life which

Christians have with non-Christians, make many a man's tongue lie

silent, to the sore detriment of his own religious life. Ye have not

yet resisted unto blood,' and find it hard to fulfil the easier

conflict to which you are called. The sun has more power than the

tempest to make the pilgrim drop his garment. But the duty remains the

same for all ages. Every man is bound to make the deepest springs of

his life visible, and to stand to his convictions, whatever they be. If

he do not, his convictions will disappear like a piece of ice hid in a

hot hand, which will melt and trickle away. This obligation lies with

infinitely increased weight on Christ's servants; and the consequences

of failing to discharge it are more tragic in their cases, in the exact

proportion of the greater preciousness of their faith. Corn hoarded is

sure to be spoiled by weevils and rust. The bread of life hidden in our

sacks will certainly go mouldy.

The reward and punishment of confession and denial come to them not as

separate acts, but as each being the revelation of the spiritual

condition of the doers. Christ implies that a true disciple cannot but

be a confessor, and that therefore the denier must certainly be one

whom He has never known. Because, therefore, each act is symptomatic of

the doer, each receives the congruous and correspondent reward. The

confessor is confessed; the denier is denied. What calm and assured

consciousness of His place as Judge underlies these words! His

recognition is God's acceptance; His denial is darkness and misery. The

correspondence between the work and the reward is beautifully brought

out by the use of the same word to express each. And yet what a

difference between our confession of Him and His of us! And what a hope

is here for all who have tremblingly, and in the consciousness of much

unworthiness, ventured to say that they were Christ's subjects, and He

their King, brother, and all! Their poor, feeble confession will be

endorsed by His. He will say, Yes, this man is mine, and I am his.'

That will be glory, honour, blessedness, life, heaven.

II. The vision of the discord which follows the coming of the King of

peace. It is not enough to interpret these words as meaning that our

Lord's purpose indeed was to bring peace, but that the result of His

coming was strife. The ultimate purpose is peace; but an immediate

purpose is conflict, as the only road to the peace. He is first King of

righteousness, and after that also King of peace. But, if His kingdom

be righteousness, purity, love, then unrighteousness, filthiness, and

selfishness will fight against it for their lives. The ultimate purpose

of Christ's coming is to transform the world into the likeness of

heaven; and all in the world which hates such likeness is embattled

against Him. He saw realities, and knew men's hearts, and was under no

illusion, such as many an ardent reformer has cherished, that the fair

form of truth need only be shown to men, and they will take her to

their hearts. Incessant struggle is the law for the individual and for

society till Christ's purpose for both is realised.

That conflict ranges the dearest in opposite ranks. The gospel is the

great solvent. As when a substance is brought into contact with some

chemical compound, which has greater affinity for one of its elements

than the other element has, the old combination is dissolved, and a new

and more stable one is formed, so Christianity analyses and destroys in

order to synthesis and construction. In verse 21 our Lord had foretold

that brother should deliver up brother to death. Here the severance is

considered from the opposite side. The persons who are set at variance'

with their kindred are here Christians. Perhaps it is fanciful to

observe that they are all junior members of families, as if the young

would be more likely to flock to the new light. But however that may

be, the separation is mutual, but the hate is all on one side. The

man's foes' are of his own household; but he is not their foe, though

he be parted from them.

III. Earthly love may be a worse foe to a true Christian than even the

enmity of the dearest; and that enmity may often be excited by the

Christian subordination of earthly to heavenly love. So our Lord passes

from the warnings of discord and hate to the danger of the

opposite--undue love.

He claims absolute supremacy in our hearts. He goes still farther, and

claims the surrender, not only of affections, but of self and life to

Him. What a strange claim this is! A Jewish peasant, dead nineteen

hundred years since, fronts the whole race of man, and asserts His

right to their love, which is strange, and to their supreme love, which

is stranger still. Why should we love Him at all, if He were only a

man, however pure and benevolent? We may admire, as we do many another

fair nature in the past; but is there any possibility of evoking

anything as warm as love to an unseen person, who can have had no

knowledge of or love to us? And why should we love Him more than our

dearest, from whom we have drawn, or to whom we have given, life? What

explanation or justification does He give of this unexampled demand?

Absolutely none. He seems to think that its reasonableness needs no

elucidation. Surely never did teacher professing wisdom, modesty, and,

still more, religion, put forward such a claim of right; and surely

never besides did any succeed in persuading generations unborn to yield

His demand, when they heard it. The strangest thing in the world's

history is that to-day there are millions who do love Jesus Christ more

than all besides, and whose chief self-accusation is that they do not

love Him more. The strange, audacious claim is most reasonable, if we

believe that Jesus is the Son of God, who died for each of us, and that

each man and woman to the last of the generations had a separate place

in His divine human love when He died. It is meet to love Him, if that

be true; it is not, unless it be. The requirement is as stringent as

strange. If the two ever seem to conflict, the earthly must give way.

If the earthly be withdrawn, there must be found sufficiency for

comfort and peace in the heavenly. The lower must not be permitted to

hinder the flight of the heavenly to its home. More than Me' is a

rebuke to most of us. What a contrast between the warmth of our earthly

and the tepidity or coldness of our heavenly love! How spontaneously

our thoughts, when left free, turn to the one; how hard we find it to

keep them fixed on the other! How sweet service is to the dear ones

here; how reluctantly it is given to Christ! How we long, when parted,

to rejoin them; how little we are drawn to the place where He is! We

have all to confess that we are not worthy of' Him; that we requite His

love with inadequate returns, and live lives which tax His love for its

highest exercise, the free forgiveness of sins against itself.

Compliance with that stringent law, and subordinating all earthly love

to His, is the true elevating and ennobling of the earthly. It is

promoted, not degraded, when it is made second, and is infinitely

sweeter and deeper then than when it was set in the place of supremacy,

where it had no right to be.

But Christ's demand is not only for the surrender of the heart, but for

the giving up of self, and, in a very profound sense, for the surrender

of life. How enigmatical that saying about taking up the cross must

have sounded to the disciples! They knew little about the cross, as a

punishment; they had not yet associated it in any way with their Lord.

This seems to have been the first occasion of His mentioning it, and

the allusion is so veiled as to be but partially intelligible. But what

was intelligible was bewildering. A strange royal procession that, of

the King with a cross on His shoulder, and all His subjects behind Him

with similar burdens! Through the ages that procession has marched, and

it marches still. Self-denial for Christ's sake is the badge of all our

tribe.' Observe that word take.' The cross must be willingly and by

ourselves assumed. No other can lay it on our shoulders. Observe that

other word his.' Each man has his own special form in which self-denial

is needful for him. We require pure eyes, and hearts kept in very close

communion with Jesus, to ascertain what our particular cross is. He has

them of many patterns, shapes, sizes, and materials. We can always make

sure of strength to carry the one which He means us to carry, but not

of strength to bear what is not ours.

IV. We have the rewards of those who receive Christ's messengers, and

therein receive Him and His Father. Our Lord first identifies these

twelve with Himself in a manner which must have sounded strange to them

then, but have heartened them for their work by the consciousness of

His mysterious oneness with them. The whole doctrine of Christ's unity

with His people lay in germ in these words, though much more was

needed, both of teaching and of experience, before their depth of

blessing and strengthening could be apprehended. We know that He dwells

in His true subjects by His Spirit, and that a most real union subsists

between the head and the members, of which the closest unions of earth

are but faint shadows, so as that not only those who receive His

followers receive Him, but, more wonderful still, His followers are

received at the last by God Himself as joined to Him, and portions of

His very self, and therefore accepted in the Beloved.' Our Lord adds to

these words the thought that, in like manner, to receive Him is to

receive the Father, and so implies that our relation to Him is in

certain real respects parallel with His relation to the Father. We too

are sent. He who sends abides with us, as the Son ever abode in God,

and God in Him. We are sent to be the brightness of Christ's glory, and

to manifest Him to men, as He was sent to reveal the Father.

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A LIFE LOST AND FOUND [1]

He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it.' --MATT. x. 39.

My heart impels me to break this morning my usual rule of avoiding

personal references in the pulpit. Death has been busy in our own

congregation this last week, and yesterday we laid in the grave all

that was mortal of a man to whom Manchester owes more than it knows.

Mr. Crossley has been for thirty years my close and dear friend. He was

long a member of this church and congregation. I need not speak of his

utter unselfishness, of his lifelong consecration, of his lavish

generosity, of his unstinted work for God and man; but thinking of him

and of it, I have felt as if the words of my text were the secret of

his life, and as if he now understood the fulness of the promise they

contain: He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it.' Now,

looking at these words in the light of the example so tenderly beloved

by some of us, so sharply criticised by many, but now so fully

recognised as saintly by all, I ask you to consider--

I. The stringent requirement for the Christian life that is here made.

Now we shall very much impoverish the meaning and narrow the sweep of

these great and penetrating words, if we understand by losing one's

life' only the actual surrender of physical existence. It is not only

the martyr on whose bleeding brows the crown of life is gently placed;

it is not only the temples that have been torn by the crown of thorns,

that are soothed by that unfading wreath; but there is a daily dying,

which is continually required from all Christian people, and is,

perhaps, as hard as, or harder than, the brief and bloody passage of

martyrdom by which some enter into rest. For the true losing of life is

the slaying of self, and that has to be done day by day, and not once

for all, in some supreme act of surrender at the end, or in some

initial act of submission and yielding at the beginning, of the

Christian life. We ourselves have to take the knife into our own hands

and strike, and that not once, but ever, right on through our whole

career. For, by natural disposition, we are all inclined to make our

own selves to be our own centres, our own aims, the objects of our

trust, our own law; and if we do so, we are dead whilst we live, and

the death that brings life is when, day by day, we crucify the old man

with his affections and lusts.' Crucifixion was no sudden death; it was

an exquisitely painful one, which made every nerve quiver and the whole

frame thrill with anguish; and that slow agony, in all its terribleness

and protractedness, is the image that is set before us as the true

ideal of every life that would not be a living death. The world is to

be crucified to me, and I to the world.

We have our centre in ourselves, and we need the centre to be shifted,

or we live in sin. If I might venture upon so violent an image, the

comets that career about the heavens need to be caught and tamed, and

bound to peaceful revolution round some central sun, or else they are

wandering stars to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for

ever.' So, brethren, the slaying of self by a painful, protracted

process, is the requirement of Christ.

But do not let us confine ourselves to generalities. What is meant?

This is meant--the absolute submission of the will to commandments and

providences, the making of that obstinate part of our nature meek and

obedient and plastic as the clay in the potter's hands. The tanner

takes a stiff hide, and soaks it in bitter waters, and dresses it with

sharp tools, and lubricates it with unguents, and his work is not done

till all the stiffness is out of it and it is flexible. And we do not

lose our lives in the lofty, noble sense, until we can say--and verify

the speech by our actions--Not my will but Thine be done.' They who

thus submit, they who thus welcome into their hearts, and enthrone upon

the sovereign seat in their wills, Christ and His will--these are they

who have lost their lives. When we can say, I live, yet not I, but

Christ liveth in me,' then, and only then, have we in the deepest sense

of the words lost our lives.'

The phrase means the suppression, and sometimes the excision, of

appetites, passions, desires, inclinations. It means the hallowing of

all aims; it means the devotion and the consecration of all activities.

It means the surrender and the stewardship of all possessions. And only

then, when we have done these things, shall we have come to practical

obedience to the initial requirement that Christ makes from us all--to

lose our lives for His sake.

I need not diverge here to point to that life from which my thoughts

have taken their start in this sermon. Surely if there was any one

characteristic in it more distinct and lovely than another, it was that

self was dead and that Christ lived. There may be sometimes a call for

the actual--which is the lesser--surrender of the bodily life, in

obedience to the call of duty. There have been Christian men who have

wrought themselves to death in the Master's service. Perhaps he of whom

I have been speaking was one of these. It may be that, if he had done

like so many of our wealthy men--had flung himself into business and

then collapsed into repose--he would have been here to-day. Perhaps it

would have been better if there had been a less entire throwing of

himself into arduous and clamant duties. I am not going to enter on the

ethics of that question. I do not think there are many of this

generation of Christians who are likely to work themselves to death in

Christ's cause; and perhaps, after all, the old saying is a true one,

Better to wear out than to rust out.' But only this I will say: we

honour the martyrs of Science, of Commerce, of Empire, why should not

we honour the martyrs of Faith? And why should they be branded as

imprudent enthusiasts, if they make the same sacrifice which, when an

explorer or a soldier makes, his memory is honoured as heroic, and his

cold brows are crowned with laurels? Surely it is as wise to die for

Christ as for England. But be that as it may; the requirement, the

stringent requirement, of my text is not addressed to any spiritual

aristocracy, but is laid upon the consciences of all professing

Christians.

II. Observe the grounds of this requirement.

Did you ever think--or has the fact become so familiar to you that it

ceases to attract notice?--did you ever think what an extraordinary

position it is for the son of a carpenter in Nazareth to plant Himself

before the human race and say, You will be wise if you die for My sake,

and you will be doing nothing more than your plain duty'? What business

has He to assume such a position as that? What warrants that autocratic

and all-demanding tone from His lips? Who art Thou'--we may fancy

people saying--that Thou shouldst put out a masterful hand and claim to

take as Thine the life of my heart?' Ah! brethren, there is but one

answer: Who loved me, and gave Himself for me.' The foolish, loving,

impulsive apostle that blurted out, before his time had come, I will

lay down my life for Thy sake,' was only premature; he was not

mistaken. There needed that His Lord should lay down His life for

Peter's sake; and then He had a right to turn to the apostle and say,

Thou shalt follow Me afterwards,' and lay down thy life for My sake.'

The ground of Christ's unique claim is Christ's solitary sacrifice. He

who has died for men, and He only, has the right to require the

unconditional, the absolute surrender of themselves, not only in the

sacrifice of a life that is submitted, but, if circumstances demand, in

the sacrifice of a death. The ground of the requirement is laid, first

in the fact of our Lord's divine nature, and second, in the fact that

He who asks my life has first of all given His.

But that same phrase, for My sake,' suggests--

III. The all-sufficient motive which makes such a loss of life

possible.

I suppose that there is nothing else that will wholly dethrone self but

the enthroning of Jesus Christ. That dominion is too deeply rooted to

be abolished by any enthusiasms, however noble they may be, except the

one that kindles its undying torch at the flame of Christ's own love.

God forbid that I should deny that wonderful and lovely instances of

self-oblivion may be found in hearts untouched by the supreme love of

Christ! But whilst I recognise all the beauty of such, I, for my part,

humbly venture to believe and assert that, for the entire deliverance

of a man from self-regard, the one sufficient motive power is the

reception into his opening heart of the love of Jesus Christ.

Ah! brethren, you and I know how hard it is to escape from the

tyrannous dominion of self, and how the evil spirits that have taken

possession of us mock at all lesser charms than the name which devils

fear and fly'; the Name that is above every name.' We have tried other

motives. We have sought to reprove our selfishness by other

considerations. Human love--which itself is sometimes only the love of

self, seeking satisfaction from another--human love does conquer it,

but yet conquers it partially. The demons turn round upon all other

would-be exorcists, and say, Jesus we know . . . but who are ye?' It is

only when the Ark is carried into the Temple that Dagon falls prone

before it. If you would drive self out of your hearts--and if you do

not it will slay you--if you would drive self out, let Christ's love

and sacrifice come in. And then, what no brooms and brushes, no spades

nor wheelbarrows, will ever do--namely, cleanse out the filth that

lodges there--the turning of the river in will do, and float it all

away. The one possibility for complete, conclusive deliverance from the

dominion and tyranny of Self is to be found in the words For My sake.'

Ah! brethren, I suppose there are none of us so poor in earthly love,

possessed or remembered, but that we know the omnipotence of these

words when whispered by beloved lips, For My sake'; and Jesus Christ is

saying them to us all.

IV. Lastly, notice the recompense of the stringent requirement.

Shall find it,' and that finding, like the losing, has a twofold

reference and accomplishment: here and now, yonder and then.

Here and now, no man possesses himself till he has given himself to

Jesus Christ. Only then, when we put the reins into His hands, can we

coerce and guide the fiery steeds of passion and of impulse, And so

Scripture, in more than one place, uses a remarkable expression, when

it speaks of those that believe to the acquiring of their souls.' You

are not your own masters until you are Christ's servants; and when you

fancy yourselves to be most entirely your own masters, you have

promised yourselves liberty and have become the slave of corruption. So

if you would own yourselves, give yourselves away. And such an one

shall find' his life, here and now, in that all earthly things will be

sweeter and better. The altar sanctifies the gift. When some pebble is

plunged into a sunlit stream, the water brings out the veined

colourings of the stone that looked all dull and dim when it was lying

upon the bank. Fling your whole being, your wealth, your activities,

and everything, into that stream, and they will flash in splendour else

unknown. Did not my friend, of whom I have been speaking, enjoy his

wealth far more, when he poured it out like water upon good causes,

than if he had spent it in luxury and self-indulgence? And shall we not

find that everything is sweeter, nobler, better, fuller of capacity to

delight, if we give it all to our Master? The stringent requirement of

Christ is the perfection of prudence. Who pleasure follows pleasure

slays,' and who slays pleasure finds a deeper and a holier delight. The

keenest epicureanism could devise no better means for sucking the last

drop of sweetness out of the clustering grapes of the gladnesses of

earth than to obey this stringent requirement, and so realise the

blessed promise, Whoso loseth his life for My sake shall find it.' The

selfish man is a roundabout fool. The self-devoted man, the

Christ-enthroning man, is the wise man.

And there will be the further finding hereafter, about which we cannot

speak. Only remember, how in a passage parallel with this of my text,

spoken when almost within sight of Calvary, our Lord laid down not only

the principle of His own life but the principle for all His servants,

when He said, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it

abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.' The

solitary grain dropped into the furrow brings forth a waving harvest.

We may not, we need not, particularise, but the life that is found at

last is as the fruit an hundredfold of the life that men called lost'

and God called 'sown.'

Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; they rest from their

labours, and their works do follow them.'

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[1] Preached after the funeral of Mr. F. W. Crossley.

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THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM, AND THEIR REWARD

He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a

prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of

a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. 42. And

whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of

cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he

shall in no wise lose his reward.' --MATT. x. 41, 42.

There is nothing in these words to show whether they refer to the

present or to the future. We shall probably not go wrong if we regard

them as having reference to both. For all godliness has promise of the

life that now is, as well as of that which is to come,' and in keeping

God's commandments,' as well as for keeping them, there is great

reward,' a reward realised in the present, even although Death holds

the keys of the treasure-house in which the richest rewards are stored.

No act of holy obedience is here left without foretastes of joy, which,

though they be but brooks by the way,' contain the same water of life

which hereafter swells to an ocean.

Some people tell us that it is defective morality in Christianity to

bribe men to be good by promising them Heaven, and that he who is

actuated by such a motive is selfish. Now that fantastic and

overstrained objection may be very simply answered by two

considerations: self-regard is not selfishness, and Christianity does

not propose the future reward as the motive for goodness. The motive

for goodness is love to Jesus Christ; and if ever there was a man who

did acts of Christian goodness only for the sake of what he would get

by them, the acts were not Christian goodness, because the motive was

wrong. But it is a piece of fastidiousness to forbid us to reinforce

the great Christian motive, which is love to Jesus Christ, by the

thought of the recompense of reward. It is a stimulus and an

encouragement of, not the motive for, goodness. This text shows us that

it is a subordinate motive, for it says that the reception of a

prophet, or of a righteous man, or of one of these little ones,' which

is rewardable, is the reception in the name of' a prophet, a disciple,

and so on, or, in other words, is the recognising of the prophet, or

the righteous man, or the disciple for what he is, and because he is

that, and not because of the reward, receiving him with sympathy and

solace and help.

So, with that explanation, let us look at these very remarkable words

of our text.

I. The first thing which I wish to observe in them is the three classes

of character which are dealt with--prophet,' righteous man,' these

little ones.'

Now the question that I would suggest is this: Is there any meaning in

the order in which these are arranged? If so, what is it? Do we begin

at the bottom, or at the top? Have we to do with an ascending or with a

descending scale? Is the prophet thought to be greater than the

righteous man, or less? Is the righteous man thought to be higher than

the little one, or to be lower? The question is an important one, and

worth considering.

Now, at first sight, it certainly does look as if we had here to do

with a descending scale, as if we began at the top and went downwards.

A prophet, a man honoured with a distinct commission from God to

declare His will, is, in certain very obvious respects, loftier than a

man who is not so honoured, however pure and righteous he may be. The

dim and venerable figures, for instance, of Isaiah and Jeremiah, tower

high above all their contemporaries; and godly men who hung upon their

lips, like Baruch on Jeremiah's, felt themselves to be, and were,

inferior to them. And, in like manner, the little child who believes in

Christ may seem to be insignificant in comparison with the prophet with

his God-touched lips, or the righteous man of the old dispensation with

his austere purity; as a humble violet may seem by the side of a rose

with its heart of fire, or a white lily regal and tall. But one

remembers that Jesus Christ Himself declared that the least of the

little ones' was greater than the greatest who had gone before; and it

is not at all likely that He who has just been saying that whosoever

received His followers received Himself, should classify these

followers beneath the righteous men of old. The Christian type of

character is distinctly higher than the Old Testament type; and the

humblest believer is blessed above prophets and righteous men because

his eyes behold and his heart welcomes the Christ.

Therefore I am inclined to believe that we have here an ascending

series--that we begin at the bottom and not at the top; that the

prophet is less than the righteous man, and the righteous man less than

the little one who believes in Christ. For, suppose there were a

prophet who was not righteous, and a righteous man who was not a

prophet. Suppose the separation between the two characters were

complete, which of them would be the greater? Balaam was a prophet;

Balaam was not a righteous man; Balaam was immeasurably inferior to the

righteous whose lives he did not emulate, though he could not but envy

their deaths. In like manner the humblest believer in Jesus Christ has

something that a prophet, if he is not a disciple, does not possess;

and that which he has, and the prophet has not, is higher than the

endowment that is peculiar to the prophet alone.

May we say the same thing about the difference between the righteous

man and the disciple? Can there be a righteous man that is not a

disciple? Can there be a disciple that is not a righteous man? Can the

separation between these two classes be perfect and complete? No! in

the profoundest sense, certainly not. But then at the time when Christ

spoke there were some men standing round Him, who, as touching the

righteousness which is of the law,' were blameless.' And there are many

men to-day, with much that is noble and admirable in their characters,

who stand apart from the faith that is in Jesus Christ; and if the

separation be so complete as that, then it is to be emphatically and

decisively pronounced that, if we have regard to all that a man ought

to be, and if we estimate men in the measure in which they approximate

to that ideal in their lives and conduct, the Christian is the highest

style of man.' The disciple is above the righteous men adorned with

many graces of character, who, if they are not Christians, have a worm

at the root of all their goodness, because it lacks the supreme

refinement and consecration of faith; and above the fiery-tongued

prophet, if he is not a disciple.

Now, brethren, this thought is full of very important practical

inferences. Faith is better than genius. Faith is better than brilliant

gifts. Faith is better than large acquirements. The poet's imagination,

the philosopher's calm reasoning, the orator's tongue of fire, even the

inspiration of men that may have their lips touched to proclaim God to

their brethren, are all less than the bond of living trust that knits a

soul to Jesus Christ, and makes it thereby partaker of that indwelling

Saviour. And, in like manner, if there be men, as there are, and no

doubt some of them among my hearers, adorned with virtues and graces of

character, but who have not rested their souls on Jesus Christ, then

high above these, too, stands the lowliest person who has set his faith

and love on that Saviour. Neither intellectual endowments nor moral

character are the highest, but faith in Jesus Christ. A man may be

endowed with all brilliancy of intellect and fair with many beauties of

character, and he may be lost; and on the other hand simple faith,

rudimentary and germlike as it often is, carries in itself the prophecy

of all goodness, and knits a man to the source of all blessedness.

Whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge,

it shall vanish away. Now abideth these three, faith, hope, charity.'

Rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice

because your names are written in Heaven.'

Ah! brethren, if we believed in Christ's classification of men, and in

the order of importance and dignity in which He arranges them, it would

make a wonderful practical difference to the lives, to the desires, and

to the efforts of a great many of us. Some of you students, young men

and women that are working at college or your classes, if you believed

that it was better to trust in Jesus Christ than to be wise, and gave

one-tenth, ay! one-hundredth part of the attention and the effort to

secure the one which you do to secure the other, would be different

people. Not many wise men after the flesh,' but humble trusters in

Jesus Christ, are the victors in the world. Believe you that, and order

your lives accordingly.

Oh! what a reversal of this world's estimates is coming one day, when

the names that stand high in the roll of fame shall pale, like

photographs that have been shut up in a portfolio, and when you take

them out have faded off the paper. The world knows nothing of its

greatest men,' but there is a time coming when the spurious mushroom

aristocracy that the world has worshipped will be forgotten, like the

nobility of some conquered land, who are brushed aside and relegated to

private life by the new nobility of the conquerors, and when the true

nobles, God's aristocrats, the righteous, who are righteous because

they have trusted in Christ, shall shine forth like the sun in the

Kingdom of My Father.'

Here is the climax: gifts and endowments at the bottom, character and

morality in the middle, and at the top faith in Jesus Christ.

II. Now notice briefly in the second place the variety of the reward

according to the character.

The prophet has his, the righteous man has his, the little one has his.

That is to say, each level of spiritual or moral stature receives its

own prize. There is no difficulty in seeing that this is so in regard

to the rewards of this life. Every faithful message delivered by a

prophet increases that prophet's own blessedness, and has joys in the

receiving of it from God, in the speaking of it to men, in the marking

of its effects as it spreads through the world, which belong to him

alone. In all these, and in many other ways, the prophet' has rewards

that no stranger can intermeddle with. All courses of obedient conduct

have their own appropriate consequences and satisfaction. Every

character is adapted to receive, and does receive, in the measure of

its goodness, certain blessings and joys, here and now. Surely the

righteous shall be recompensed in the earth.'

And the same principle, of course, applies if we think of the reward as

altogether future. It must be remembered, however, that Christianity

does not teach, as I believe, that if there be a prophet or a righteous

man who is not a disciple, that prophet or righteous man will get

rewards in the future life. It must be remembered, too, that every

disciple is righteous in the measure of his faith. Discipleship being

presupposed, then the disciple who is a prophet will have one reward,

and the disciple who is a righteous man shall have another; and where

all three characteristics coincide, there shall be a triple crown of

glory upon his head.

That is all plain and obvious enough, if only we get rid of the

prejudice that the rewards of a future life are merely bestowed upon

men by God's arbitrary good pleasure. What is the reward of Heaven?

Eternal life,' people say. Yes! Blessedness.' Yes! But where does the

life come from, and where does the blessedness come from? They are both

derived, they come from God in Christ; and in the deepest sense, and in

the only true sense, God is Heaven, and God is the reward of Heaven. I

am thy shield,' so long as dangers need to be guarded against, and

then, thereafter, I am thine exceeding great Reward.' It is the

possession of God that makes all the Heaven of Heaven, the immortal

life which His children receive, and the blessedness with which they

are enraptured. We are heirs of immortality, we are heirs of life, we

are heirs of blessedness, because, and in the measure in which, we

become heirs of God.

And if that be so, then there is no difficulty in seeing that in

Heaven, as on earth, men will get just as much of God as they can hold;

and that in Heaven, as on earth, capacity for receiving God is

determined by character. The gift is one, the reward is one, and yet

the reward is infinitely various. It is the same light which glows in

all the stars, but star differeth from star in glory.' It is the same

wine, the new wine of the Kingdom, that is poured into all the vessels,

but the vessels are of divers magnitudes, though each be full to the

brim.

And so in those two sister parables of our Master's, which are so

remarkably discriminated and so remarkably alike, we have both these

aspects of the Heavenly reward set forth--both that which declares its

identity in all cases, and the other which declares its variety

according to the recipient's character. All the servants receive the

same welcome, the same prize, the same entrance into the same joy;

although one of them had ten talents, and another five, and another

two. But the servants who were each sent out to trade with one poor

pound in their hands, and by their varying diligence reaped varying

profits, were rewarded according to the returns that they had brought;

and one received ten, and the other five, and the other two, cities

over which to have authority and rule. So the reward is one, and yet

infinitely diverse. It is not the same thing whether a man or a woman,

being a Christian, is an earnest, and devoted, and growing Christian

here on earth, or a selfish, and an idle, and a stagnant one. It is not

the same thing whether you content yourselves with simply laying hold

on Christ, and keeping a tremulous and feeble hold of Him for the rest

of your lives, or whether you grow in the grace and knowledge of our

Lord and Saviour. There is such a fate as being saved, yet so as by

fire, and going into the brightness with the smell of the fire on your

garments. There is such a fate as having just, as it were, squeezed

into Heaven, and got there by the skin of your teeth. And there is such

a thing as having an abundant entrance ministered, when its portals are

thrown wide open. Some imperfect Christians die with but little

capacity for possessing God, and therefore their heaven will not be as

bright, nor studded with as majestic constellations, as that of others.

The starry vault that bends above us so far away, is the same in the

number of its stars when gazed on by the savage with his unaided eye,

and by the astronomer with the strongest telescope; and the Infinite

God, who arches above us, but comes near to us, discloses galaxies of

beauty and oceans of abysmal light in Himself, according to the

strength and clearness of the eye that looks upon Him. So, brethren,

remember that the one glory has infinite degrees; and faith, and

conduct, and character here determine the capacity for God which we

shall have when we go to receive our reward.

III. The last point that is here is the substantial identity of the

reward to all that stand on the same level, however different may be

the form of their lives.

He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a

prophet's reward.' And so in the case of the others. The active

prophet, righteous man, or disciple, and the passive recogniser of each

in that character, who receives each as a prophet, or righteous man, or

disciple, stand practically and substantially on the same level, though

the one of them may have his lips glowing with the divine inspiration

and the other may never have opened his mouth for God.

That is beautiful and deep. The power of sympathising with any

character is the partial possession of that character for ourselves. A

man who is capable of having his soul bowed by the stormy thunder of

Beethoven, or lifted to Heaven by the ethereal melody of Mendelssohn,

is a musician, though he never composed a bar. The man who recognises

and feels the grandeur of the organ music of Paradise Lost' has some

fibre of a poet in him, though he be but a mute, inglorious Milton.'

All sympathy and recognition of character involve some likeness to that

character. The poor woman who brought the sticks and prepared food for

the prophet entered into the prophet's mission and shared in the

prophet's work and reward, though his task was to beard Ahab, and hers

was only to bake Elijah's bread. The old knight that clapped Luther on

the back when he went into the Diet of Worms, and said to him, Well

done, little monk!' shared in Luther's victory and in Luther's crown.

He that helps a prophet because he is a prophet, has the making of a

prophet in himself.

As all work done from the same motive is the same in God's eyes,

whatever be the outward shape of it, so the work that involves the same

type of spiritual character will involve the same reward. You find the

Egyptian medal on the breasts of the soldiers that kept the base of

communication as well as on the breasts of the men that stormed the

works at Tel-el-Kebir. It was a law in Israel, and it is a law in

Heaven: As his part is that goeth down into the battle, so shall his

part be that tarrieth by the stuff, they shall part alike.' I am going

down into the pit, you hold the ropes,' said Carey, the pioneer

missionary. They that hold the ropes, and the daring miner that swings

away down in the blackness, are one in the work, may be one in the

motive, and, if they are, shall be one in the reward. So, brethren,

though no coal of fire may be laid upon your lips, if you sympathise

with the workers that are trying to serve God, and do what you can to

help them, and identify yourself with them, and so hold the ropes, my

text will be true about you. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of

a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward.' They who by reason of

circumstances, by deficiency of power, or by the weight of other tasks

and duties, can only give silent sympathy, and prayer, and help, are

one with the men whom they help.

Dear brethren! remember that this awful, mystical life of ours is full

everywhere of consequences that cannot be escaped. What we sow we reap,

and we grind it, and we bake it, and we live upon it. We have to drink

as we have brewed; we have to lie on the beds that we have made. Be not

deceived: God is not mocked.' The doctrine of reward has two sides to

it. Nothing human ever dies.' All our deeds drag after them inevitable

consequences; but if you will put your trust in Jesus Christ, He will

not deal with you according to your sins, nor reward you according to

your iniquities; and the darkest features of the recompense of your

evil will all be taken away by the forgiveness which we have in His

blood. If you will trust yourselves to Him you will have that eternal

life, which is not wages, but a gift; which is not reward, but a free

bestowment of God's love. And then, if we build upon that Foundation on

which alone men can build their hopes, their thoughts, their

characters, their lives, however feeble may be our efforts, however

narrow may be our sphere,--though we be neither prophets nor sons of

prophets, and though our righteousness may be all stained and

imperfect, yet, to our own amazement and to God's glory, we shall find,

when the fire is kindled which reveals and tests our works, that, by

the might of humble faith in Christ, we have built upon that

Foundation, gold and silver and precious stones; and shall receive the

reward given to every man whose work abides that trial by fire.

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JOHN'S DOUBTS OF JESUS, AND JESUS' PRAISE OF JOHN

Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two

of his disciples, 3. And said unto Him, Art Thou He that should come,

or do we look for another? 4. Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and

shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: 5. 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 to them. 6. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended

in Me. 7. And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes

concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed

shaken with the wind? 8. But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed

in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings'

houses. 9. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto

you, and more than a prophet. 10. For this is he, of whom it is

written. Behold, I send My messenger before Thy face, which shall

prepare Thy way before Thee. 11. Verily I say unto you, Among them that

are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist:

notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater

than he. 12. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the

kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

13. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John--And if ye

will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. 16. He that hath

ears to hear, let him hear.'--MATT. xi. 2-15.

This text falls into two parts: the first, from verses 2-6 inclusive,

giving us the faltering faith of the great witness, and Christ's gentle

treatment of the waverer; the second, from verse 7 to the end, giving

the witness of Christ to John, exuberant in recognition,

notwithstanding his momentary hesitation.

I. We do not believe that this message of John's was sent for the sake

of strengthening his disciples' faith in Jesus as Messiah, nor that it

was merely meant as a hint to Jesus to declare Himself. The question is

John's. The answer is sent to him: it is he who is to ponder the things

which the messengers saw, and to answer his own question thereby. The

note which the evangelist prefixes to his account gives the key to the

incident. John was in prison,' in that gloomy fortress of Machaerus

which Herod had rebuilt at once for a sinful pleasure-house' and for an

impregnable refuge, among the savage cliffs of Moab. The halls of

luxurious vice and the walls of defence are gone; but the dungeons are

there still, with the holes in the masonry into which the bars were

fixed to which the prisoners--John, perhaps, one of them--were chained.

No wonder that in the foul atmosphere of a dark dungeon the spirit

which had been so undaunted in the free air of the desert began to

flag; nor that even he who had seen the fluttering dove descend on

Christ's head, and had pointed to Him as the Lamb of God, felt that all

his mind was clouded with a doubt.' It would have been wiser if

commentators, instead of trying to save John's credit at the cost of

straining the narrative, had recognised the psychological truth of the

plain story of his wavering conviction and had learned its lessons of

self-distrust. There is only one Man with whom it was always

high-water; all others have ebbs and flows in their religious life, and

variations in their grasp of truth.

The narrative further gives the motive for John's embassy, in the

report which had reached him of the works of Christ.' We need only

recall John's earlier testimony to understand how these works would not

seem to him to fill up the role which he had anticipated for Messiah.

Where is the axe that was to be laid at the root of the trees, or the

fan that was to winnow out the chaff? Where is the fiery spirit which

he had foretold? This gentle Healer is not the theocratic judge of his

warning prophecies. He is tending and nurturing, rather than felling,

the barren trees. A nimbus of merciful deeds, not of flashing wrath to

come,' surrounds His head. So John began to wonder if, after all, he

had been premature in his recognition. Perhaps this Jesus was but a

precursor, as he himself was, of the Messiah. Evidently he continues

firm in the conviction of Christ's being sent from God, and is ready to

accept His answer as conclusive; but, as evidently, he is puzzled by

the contrariety between Jesus' deeds and his own expectations. He asks,

Art Thou He that cometh' --a well-known name for Messiah--or are we to

expect another?' where it should be noted that the word for another'

means not merely a second, but a different kind of, person, who should

present the aspects of the Messiah as revealed in prophecy, and as

embodied in John's own preaching, which Jesus had left unfulfilled.

We may well take to heart the lesson of the fluctuations possible to

the firmest faith, and pray to be enabled to hold fast that we have. We

may learn, too, the danger to right conceptions of Christ, of

separating the two elements of mercy and judgment in His character and

work. John was right in believing that the Christ must come to judge. A

Christ without the fan in His hand is a maimed Christ. John was wrong

in stumbling at the gentleness, just as many to-day, who go to the

opposite extreme, are wrong in stumbling at the judicial side of His

work. Both halves are needed to make the full-orbed character. We have

not to look for a different' Christ, but we have to look for Him,

coming the second time, the same Jesus, but now with His axe in His

pierced hands, to hew down trees which He has patiently tended. Let

John's profound sense of the need for a judicial aspect in the Christ

who is to meet the prophecies written in men's hearts, as well as in

Scripture, teach us how one-sided and superficial are representations

of His work which suppress or slur over His future coming to judgment.

Our Lord does not answer Yes' or No.' To do so might have stilled, but

would not have removed, John's misconception. A more thorough cure is

needed. So Christ attacks it in its roots by referring him back for

answer to the very deeds which had excited his doubt. In doing so, He

points to, or indeed, we may say, quotes, two prophetic passages (Isa.

xxxv. 5, 6; lxi. 1) which give the prophetic notes' of Messiah. It is

as if He had said, Have you forgotten that the very prophets whose

words have fed your hopes, and now seem to minister to your doubts,

have said this and this about the Messiah?' Further, there is deep

wisdom in sending John back again to think over the very deeds at which

he was stumbling. It is not Christ's work which is wanting in

conformity to the divine idea; it is John's conceptions of that idea

that need enlarging. What he wants is not so much to be told that Jesus

is the Christ, as to grow up to a truer, because more comprehensive,

notion of what the Christ is to be. A wide principle is taught us here.

The very points in Christ's work which may occasion difficulty, will,

when we stand at the right point of view, become evidences of His

claims. What were stumbling-blocks become stepping-stones. Arguments

against become proofs of, the truth when we look at them with clearer

eyes, and from the proper angle. Further, we are taught here, that what

Christ does is the best answer to the question as to who He is. Still

He is doing these works among us. Darkened eyes are flooded with light

by His touch, and see a new world, because they gaze with faith on Him.

Lame limbs are endowed with strength, and can run in the way of His

commandments, and walk with unfainting perseverance the thorniest paths

of duty and self-sacrifice. Lepers are cleansed from the rotting

leprosy of sin, and their flesh comes again, as the flesh of a little

child.' Deaf ears hear the voice of the Son of God, and the dead who

hear live. Good news is preached to all the poor in spirit, and

whosoever knows himself to be in need of all things may claim all

things as his own in Christ. He who through the ages has been working

such works, and works them still, needs not to speak anything' to

confirm His claims, neither is there salvation in any other.' We look

for no second Christ; but we look for that same Jesus to come the

second time to be the Judge of the world of which He is the Saviour.

The benediction on him who finds none occasion of stumbling in Christ,

is at once a beatitude and a warning. It rebukes in the gentlest

fashion John's temper, which found difficulty in even the perfect

personality of Jesus, and made that which should have been the sure

foundation' of his spirit a stone of stumbling. Our Lord's

consciousness of absolute perfection of moral character, and of

absolute perfectness in His office and work, is distinct in the words.

He knows that there is none occasion of stumbling in Him,' and that

whoever finds any, brings it or makes it. He knows and warns us that

all blessedness lies for us in recognising Him for what He is--God's

sure foundation of our hopes, our peace, our thoughts, our lives. He

knows that all woe and loss are involved in stumbling on this stone,

against which whosoever falls is broken, and by which, when it begins

to move, and falls on a man, he is ground to powder, like the dust of

the threshing-floor. What tremendous arrogance of assertion! Who is he

who can venture on such words without blasphemy against God, and

universal ridicule from men?

II. The witness of Christ to John. Praise from Jesus is praise indeed;

and it is poured out here with no stinted hand on the languishing

prisoner whose doubts had just been brought to Him. Such an eulogium at

such a time is a wonderful instance of loving forbearance with a

true-hearted follower's weakness, and of a desire which, in a man, we

should call magnanimous, to shield John's character from depreciation

on account of his message. The world praises a man to his face, and

speaks of his faults behind his back. Christ does the opposite. Not

till the messengers were departing does He begin to speak concerning

John.' He lays bare the secret of the Baptist's power, and allocates

his place as greatest in one epoch and as less than the least in

another, with an authority more than human, and on principles which set

Himself high above all comparison with men, whether the greatest or the

least. The King places His subjects, and Himself sits enthroned above

them all.

First, Christ praises John's great personal character in the dramatic

and vivid questions which begin this section. He recalls the scenes of

popular enthusiasm when all Israel streamed out to the desert preacher.

A small man could not have made such an upheaval. What drew the crowds?

Just what will draw them; the qualities without which, either possessed

in reality or in popular estimation, no man can be a power religiously.

The first essential is heroic firmness. It was not reeds swaying in the

wind by Jordan's banks, nor a poor feeble man like these, that the

people flocked to listen to. His emblem was not the reed, but an iron

pillar.' His whole career had been marked by decisiveness, constancy,

courage. Nothing can be done worth doing in the world without a

wholesome obstinacy and imperturbability, which keep a man true to his

convictions and his task, whatever winds blow in his teeth. The

multitudes will not flock to listen to a teacher who does not speak

with the accent of conviction, nor will truths feebly grasped touch the

lips with fire. The first requisite for a religious teacher is that he

shall be sure of his message and of himself. Athanasius has to stand

against the world' before the world accepts his teaching. Though there

were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the house-tops, go I

will,' said Luther. That is the temper for God's instruments.

The next requisite, which John also had, is manifest indifference to

material ease. Silken courtiers do not haunt the desert. Kings' houses,

and not either the wilderness or kings' dungeons, are the sunny spots

where they spread their plumage. If the gaunt ascetic, with his girdle

of camel's hair and his coarse fare, had been a self-indulgent

sybarite, his voice would never have shaken a nation. The least breath

of suspicion that a preacher is such a man ends his power, and ought to

end it; for self-indulgence and the love of fleshly comforts eat the

heart out of goodness, and make the eyes too heavy to see visions. John

was the same man then as they had known him to be; therefore it was no

impatience of the hardships of his prison that had inspired his doubts.

Our Lord next speaks of John's great office. He was a prophet. The dim

recognition that God spoke in His fiery words had drawn the crowds,

weary of teachers in whose endless jangle and jargon of casuistry was

no inspiration. The voice of a man who gets his message at first-hand

from God has a ring in it which even dull ears detect as something

genuine. Alas for the bewildering babble of echoes and the paucity of

voices to-day!

So far Jesus had been appealing to His hearers' knowledge; He now goes

on to add higher truth concerning John. He declares that he is more

than a prophet, because he is His messenger before His face; that is,

immediately preceding Himself. We cannot stay to comment on the

remarkable variation between the original form of the quotation from

Malachi and Christ's version of it, which, in its substitution of thee'

for me,' bears so forcibly on the divinity of Christ; but we may mark

the principle on which John's superiority to the whole prophetic order

is based. It is that nearness to Jesus makes greatness. The closer the

relation to Him, the higher the honour. In that long procession the

King comes last; and of them that go before, crying, Hosanna to Him

that cometh,' the order of precedence is that the first are last, and

that the highest is he who walks in front of the Sovereign.

Next, we have the limitations of the forerunner and his relative

inferiority to the least in the kingdom of heaven. Another standard of

greatness is here from that of the world, which smiles at the contrast

between the uncultured preacher of repentance and the mighty thinkers,

poets, legislators, kingdom-makers, whom it enrols among the great. In

Christ's eyes greatness is nearness to Him, and understanding of Him

and His work. Neither natural faculty nor worth is in question, but

simply relation to the Kingdom and the King. He who had only to preach

of Him who should come after him, and had but a partial apprehension of

Christ and His work, stood on a lower level than the least who has to

look to a Christ who has come, and has opened the gates of the kingdom

to the humblest believer. The truths which were hid from ages, and were

but visible as in morning twilight to John, are sunlit to us. The

scholars in our Sunday-schools know familiarly more than prophets and

kings ever knew. We hold the grey barbarian lower than the Christian

child'; and not merely he, but the wisest of the prophets, and the

forerunner himself. The history of the world is parted into two by the

coming of Jesus Christ, as every dictionary of dates tells, and the

least of the greater is greater than the greatest of the less. What a

place, then, does Christ claim! Our relation to Him determines

greatness. To recognise Him is to be in the Kingdom of Heaven. Union to

Him brings us to fulfil the ideal of human nature; and this is life, to

know and trust Him, the King.

Our Lord adds a brief characterisation of the effect of John's

ministry. It was of mingled good and evil, and there is a tone of

sadness perceptible in the ambiguous words. John had aroused great

popular excitement, and had stirred multitudes to seek to enter the

Kingdom. So far was good. But had all the crowds understood what sort

of kingdom it was? Had they not too often dragged down the lofty

conception to their own vulgar level, and, with their dream of an

outward sovereignty, thought to gain it for their own by violence

instead of meekness, by arms and worldly force rather than by

submission? The earnestness was good, but Christ's sad insight saw how

much strange fire had mingled in the blaze, as if some earth-born smoky

flame should seek to blend with the pure sunlight. Such seems the most

natural interpretation of the words, but they are ambiguous, and may

possibly mean by the violent' those who had been roused to genuine

earnestness by the clarion voice which rang in the ears of that

slumbering generation.

Then follows the explanation of this new interest in the kingdom. All

the prophets and the law prophesied until John.' The whole period till

his coming was one of preparation, and it all converged on the epoch of

the forerunner. The eagerness to flock into the Kingdom which

characterised his time would have been impossible in the earlier days.

He closes that order of things, standing, as it were, on the isthmus

between prophecy and fulfilment, belonging properly to neither, but

having affinities with both, and being the transition from the one to

the other. Then our Lord closes His words concerning John with the

distinct statement, which He expects His hearers to have difficulty in

receiving, probably from the contradiction to it which John's present

condition seemed to give, that in him was fulfilled Malachi's prophecy

of the sending of Elijah the prophet before . . . day of the Lord.' The

fiery Tishbite, gaunt and grim, ascetic and solitary, who bearded Ahab,

and flamed across a corrupt age with a stern message of repentance or

destruction, was repeated in the lonely ascetic who had his Ahab in

Herod, and his Jezebel in Herodias, and like his prototype, knew no

fear, but flashed out the lightnings of his words on every sin. The two

men were brothers, and their voices answer each other across the

centuries. Christ crowns His witness to John while thus quoting the

last swansong of ancient prophecy, and thereby at once sets John on a

pinnacle of greatness, and advances a claim concerning Himself all the

more weighty, because He leaves it to be inferred. He that hath ears to

hear, let him hear'--this eulogium on the forerunner needs to be

reflected on ere all its bearings are seen. If John was Elias, the day

of the Lord was at hand, and the Sun of Righteousness' was already

above the horizon. Jesus' witness concerning John ends in witness

concerning Himself.

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THE FRIEND OF PUBLICANS AND SINNERS

The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man

gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But

wisdom is justified of her children,'--MATT. xi. 19.

Jesus very seldom took notice of His enemies' slanders. When He was

reviled He reviled not again.' If ever He did, it was for the sake of

those whom it harmed to distort His beauty. Thus, here He speaks,

without the slightest trace of irritation, of the capricious

inconsistency of condemning Himself and John on precisely opposite

grounds. John will not suit them because he neither eats nor drinks.

Well, one would think that Jesus would be hailed since He does both.

But He pleases them just as little. What was at the root of this

contrary working dislike? It was the dislike for the truths they both

preached, the rejection of the wisdom of which they were the

messengers. When men do not like the message, nothing that the

messengers do, or are, is right. Never mind consistency, but object to

this form of Christian teaching that it is too harsh, and to that, that

it is too soft; to this man that he is always thundering condemnation,

to that, that he is always preaching mercy; to one, that he has too

much to say about duty, to another, that he dwells too much on grace;

to this presentation of the gospel, that it is too learned and

doctrinal, to that, that it is too sentimental and emotional, and so

on, and so on. The generation of children who neither like piping nor

lamenting, lives still.

But my purpose now is not to dwell on the conduct with which our Lord

is dealing, but on this caricature of Him which His own lips repeat

without a sign of anger. It is the only calumny of antagonists reported

by Himself. We owe our knowledge of its currency to this saying. Like

other words of His enemies, this saying is a distorted refraction of

His glory. The facts it embodies are facts; the conclusions it draws

are false. If Jesus had not come eating and drinking, He could not have

been called gluttonous and a wine-bibber. If He had not drawn publicans

and sinners to Him in a conspicuous manner and degree, He could not

have been called their friend. The charge, like all others, is a

tribute. Let us try to see what was the blessed truth that it

caricatured. We may take the two points separately, for though closely

connected they are distinct, and cover different ground.

I. His enemies' witness to Christ's participation in common life.

(a) That participation witnesses to His true manhood.

Significant use of Son of Man' in context.

Because He is so, He must pass into all human circumstances.

Looked at in the light of incarnation, the simple fact that He shared

our common lot in all things assumes proportions of majestic

condescension.

Extend to all physical necessities, and to simple material pleasures.

What a witness this hostile criticism is to Christ's genial

identification of Himself with homely feasters!

(b) It sets forth the highest type of manhood.

John could be ascetic, but the Pattern Man could not.

The true perfecting of humanity is not the extirpation, but the

control, of the flesh by the spirit. And in accordance with this

thought, we may see in the eating and drinking Christ, the pattern for

the religious life. Asceticism is not the noblest form of sanctity.

There is nothing more striking in Old Testament than the way in which

its heroes and saints mingle in all ordinary duties. They are warriors,

statesmen, shepherds, they buy, they sell. Asceticism came later, along

with formalisms of other sorts. When devotion cools, it is crusted with

superstition and external marks of godliness. Propriety in posturing in

worship, casuistry in the interpretation of law, and abstinence from

common enjoyments, came in Pharisaic times. And into such a world Jesus

came, eating and drinking.

But His bearing in these matters is example for us. They were rigidly

kept in subordination. They were all done in communion with God.

So He has hallowed all by taking part in them.

Christ should be present in all our material enjoyments. If you cannot

think that He is with you, if you cannot conceive of His being there,

that is no place for you. If you cannot feel that He approves, that is

no fit enjoyment for you.

The tendency of this day is to take a wider view of the liberty allowed

to Christians in regard to partaking in material enjoyment, and I dare

say that many of you who have thought that I spoke well in insisting on

all things belonging to the Christian, will think that I am dropping

back into the old narrow groove in my next remark, that all such

thoughts need guarding.

One has heard the example of Christ invoked to justify unchristian

laxity and excess. Therefore I wish to say that the liberty permitted

to Christians in these matters is to be limited within the limits

within which Christ's was confined.

The excessive use of innocent things is not justified by His example,

nor is the use of things innocent in themselves, which are mixed up

with harmful things.

Christ's example does not warrant the importance attached to luxury,

the waste on mere eating and drinking. It is sometimes quoted as

against total abstinence. It has no bearing on the question. But if He

gave up heaven for His brethren, I think that they who give up an

indulgence for the sake of theirs are in the line of His action. I

venture to think that if Jesus Christ lived in England to-day, He would

be a total abstinence fanatic.

If thy hand offend thee, cut it off.' Asceticism is not the highest,

but it is sometimes necessary. If my indulgence in innocent things

hurts me, or if my abstinence from them would help others, or increase

my power for good, or if innocent things are intertwisted with things

not innocent, then it is vain to try to shelter under Christ's example,

and the only right course for His disciple is to abridge his liberty.

He came eating and drinking, therefore His followers may use all

innocent earthly blessings and bodily pleasures, subject to this one

law: Whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of

God,' and to this solemn warning: He that soweth to the flesh shall of

the flesh reap corruption.'

II. His enemies' witness to Jesus as the friend of the outcasts.

The fact was that He drew them to Himself and evidently was glad to

have them round Him. The inference natural to low natures was noscitur

a sociis and that the bond between Him and them was common evil

tendencies and ways. His censors could not conceive of any one's

seeking the outcasts from pity and for their good.

(a) Christ's consorting with these was the revelation of His love to

them.

It meant no complicity with, nor minimising of, sinfulness.

His sternness is as conspicuous as His love.

He warned, rebuked, tried to win back.

The highest purity is not repellent to sinners.

So in Jesus is the combination of tenderest love and intense moral

earnestness.

How difficult for anything but actual sight of such a life to have

painted it! Where did the evangelists get such an embodiment of two

attitudes so unlike each other, and which we so seldom see united in

fact? I venture to think that the combination in perfect harmony and

proportion of these, is a strong presumption in favour of the

historical truth of the Christ of the gospels.

But remember that if we take His own statement (He that hath seen Me

hath seen the Father'), we are to see in this kindly consorting with

sinners not only the love of a perfectly pure manhood, but a revelation

of the heart of God. And that adds wonderfulness and awe to the fact.

This man to whom sinners were drawn by strange attraction, in whom they

found the highest purity and yet softest tenderness, therein revealed

God.

(b) It witnesses to His boundless hope.

No outcasts were hopeless in His view. To man's eyes there are hopeless

classes, but He sees deeper. Perhaps a spark lies hid.' There are

dormant possibilities in all souls.

None are so hard as that they cannot be melted by the high temperature

of love, just as there are no metals that cannot be volatilised if

exposed to intense heat.

Carry the most thick-ribbed ice into the sun and it will thaw.

So the Christian view of mankind is much more hopeful than that of mere

educationists or moralists.

None of them paint human nature so black as it does, but none of them

have such boundless confidence in the possibility of making it

lustrously white.

Urge, then, that none are beyond the power of Christ's gospel. His

divine Spirit can change any man. There are no incurables in the

judgment of the great Physician.

(c) It witnesses to the truth that gross sin does not shut out from Him

so much as does self-complacent ignorance of our own need.

They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.'

Where should the physician be but at the sick man's bedside?

The one impassable barrier between us and Christ is fancying that we

are not sinners and do not need Him.

This boundless hopefulness and seeking after the outcasts is the unique

glory of Christianity. What has been the mainspring of all movements

for their elevation? What broke the chains of slavery? What has sent

men to the ends of the earth for the elevation of savage races? What is

the motive power in the benevolent works of this day? Is it

philosophical altruism or is it Christian faith? No doubt, there are

some sporadic movements among people who do not accept the gospel. At

present, I do not ask how far these are due to the underground

influence of Christianity filtering to men who stand apart from it. But

I gravely doubt whether you will ever get any large, continuous,

self-sacrificing efforts for the outcasts, unless they are the direct

result of the spirit of Christ moving on men who owe their own

deliverance to Him. We have not yet seen agnostic missionary societies

or the like.

This spirit must mark all living Christianity. If ever churches forget

their obligations to the publicans and sinners, they will cease to

grow. It will be a sign that they have lost their hold of Christ. They

will soon die, and no mourners will attend their funerals. It is a good

sign to-day that all Christian churches are waking up to feel more

their obligations to the outcasts. Only, we must take heed that we go

to them as Christ did, making no compromise with sin, speaking no false

flatteries, and bent on one thing, their emancipation from the evil

which is slaying them.

Let us all take the blessed thought for ourselves, that Jesus Christ is

our friend because He is the friend of sinners, and we are sinners.

Degrees of sinfulness vary, but the fact is invariable. The

universality of sinfulness makes the universality of Christ's love the

more wonderful and blessed. If He did not love sinners, there would be

none for Him to love. We may be His enemies, or may neglect all His

beseechings; but He is still our friend, wishing us well, and desiring

to bless us. But He cannot give us His deepest friendship unless we are

willing to recognise our sin. We must come to Him on the footing of

transgressors if we are to come to Him at all.

He will deliver us from our sins.

Appeal to give hearts to Him.

How has He shown His friendship? Greater love hath no man than this,'

that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.'

To be friends of Christ is the highest honour and blessing.

Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.'

He was called the friend of God.' Abraham's name in Mohammedan lands is

still El Khalil, the companion or friend. That is our highest title.

Christ's friends will not continue sinners.

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SODOM, CAPERNAUM, MANCHESTER

Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works

were done, because they repented not.' --MATT. xi. 20.

These words, and the woes which they introduce, are found in another

connection in Luke's Gospel. He attaches them to his report of the

mission of the seventy disciples. Matthew here introduces them in an

order which seems not to depend upon time, but upon identity of

subject. It is his method in his Gospel to group together similar

events, as we have it exemplified, for instance, in the Sermon on the

Mount, and in the long procession of miracles which immediately follows

it, as well as in other parts of the Gospel. In this chapter it is not

difficult to discover the common idea which binds its parts into a

whole. We have a number of instances strung together, illustrating the

different effects of Christ's appearance and work on different classes

of persons. There pass before us, John the Baptist with his doubts, the

excitable multitude ready to take the Kingdom of Heaven by storm, the

critics who cavilled with impartial inconsistency alike at John's

asceticism and at Christ's freedom. Then follow the woes pronounced by

Him upon the indifference of those who knew Him best, and these are

succeeded by His rejoicing in spirit over the babes who accepted Him;

and the whole is crowned by great words of invitation which extend

equally over those and over all other varieties of disposition, and,

since all labour and are heavy laden,' summon all, be they what they

may, to come and find rest in Him. Obviously, then, the order in this

chapter is not that of time, but that of subject.

Notice that of all these different classes and types of character that

pass in review before us, the one that is singled out for the solemn

denunciation of heavy judgment is that of the people who stood in a

blaze of light, and simply paid no attention to it. These are the worst

sort. I wonder how many of them are in my audience now?

Let me try, then, to bring before you the thoughts naturally suggested

by these introductory words, and the solemn, sorrowful forebodings of

retribution which follow them. I ask you to look at three things,--the

blaze of light; the neglect of the light; the rebuke for the neglected

light. Jesus began to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty

works were done.'

I. First, then, consider the blaze of light.

According to the words of my text, the larger number of the miracles of

our Lord were wrought in these three places. Cities,' our Bible calls

them; two of them were little fishing villages, the third a somewhat

considerable town. Where are these miracles recorded? Not in our

gospels. As for Chorazin, we never hear its name except in this verse,

and in the parallel in Luke's Gospel; and all that He did there is

swallowed up in oblivion. As for Bethsaida, there are a couple of

miracles, probably, recorded as having been wrought there, though there

is some obscurity in reference to the locality of at least one of them.

As for Capernaum, there are several miracles recorded as having been

performed in that place, and several others referred to as having been

done there. But there is nothing in the four gospels that would suggest

the statement of the text.

Now the inference (which has nothing to do with my present subject, but

which I just note in passing) is,--how extremely fragmentary and

incomplete these four gospels avowedly are! They harvest for us a few

ears plucked in the great waving cornfield,--and all the others

withered and died where they grew. The light falls upon one or two

groups in the crowd of miserables whom He helped, the rest lie in dim

shadow. You have to think of dozens, I suppose I should not be

exaggerating if I were to say hundreds, of miracles unrecorded but

known, lying behind the specimens that we have in the gospels. Many

other things truly did Jesus, which are not written in this book.'

Our Lord takes these two little fishing villages, and He parallels and

contrasts them with the two great maritime cities of Tyre and Sidon,

and says that these insignificant places have far more light than those

had. Then He isolates Capernaum, a place of more importance, and His

own usual settled residence; and, in like manner, He contrasts it with

the long-buried Sodom, and proclaims the superiority of the

illumination which fell on the more modern three. Why were they so

superior? Because they had Moses? because they had the prophets, the

law, the temple, the priesthood? By no means. Because they had Him. So

He sets Himself forth as being the highest and clearest of all the

revelations that God has made to the world, and asserts that in Him, in

His character, in His deeds, men ought to find motives that should bow

them in penitence before God; motives sweeter, tenderer, stronger than

any that the world knows besides. There is no such light of the

knowledge of the glory of God anywhere else as there is in the face of

Jesus Christ. And oh! brother; no thoughts of the nobleness of

rectitude, and the imperfection of one's own life, no thoughts of a

divine justice and a divine punishment, will bow a man in penitence

like having once caught a glimpse of the perfect sweetness and perfect

beauty of the perfect Humanity that is revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

But now, mark;--as Capernaum is to Sodom, so is Manchester to

Capernaum! I wonder if Jesus Christ were to come amongst us now,

whether He would not repeat in spirit the same lesson that is in my

text, and bid us contrast our greater illumination with the morning

twilight that dawned upon these men, and yet was light enough to bring

condemnation? Think,--these people of whom our Lord is speaking here,

and setting them high above Tyre and Sidon and Sodom, knew nothing

about His cross, death, resurrection, ascension. They knew Him only as

a dubious Name,' as a possible Divine Messenger and a Miracle-worker;

but all the sweetest and the deepest thoughts about Him lay unrevealed.

Whilst they stood but in the morning twilight, you and I stand in the

noonday blaze. They might be pardoned for doubting whether the light

that shone from Him was sunshine or candle, but men of this twentieth

century, who have the whole story of Christ, which is the gospel for

the world, wrought out through all the tragedy and pathos of His death,

and triumph and power of His resurrection, and who have, besides, the

history of the world and of the Church for nineteen centuries, are more

unpardonable unless they listen to Him with penitence and faith, than

were any of His contemporaries.

My brother, we stand in the very focus and fountain, as it were, of the

heavenly radiance. A whole Christ, a crucified Christ, a risen Christ,

an ascended Christ, a Christ who is the Lord of the Spirit, a Christ

who through the centuries is saving and blessing men, a Christ who can

point to nineteen hundred years and say, That is My work, in so far as

it is good and noble,'--this Christ shines with a clearer evidence than

the Miracle-worker of Capernaum and Bethsaida. And to you the word

comes, If the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done

in Bethsaida and Chorazin, they would have remained until this day.'

There are many of you here saturated with the knowledge of the gospel,

who from childhood have heard it and heard it and heard it. You have

lived in the light all your days. Alas! If the light that is' round

thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!'

II. That brings me in the next place to notice the negligent

indifference to the Light in all its blaze.

The men of these three little fishing towns were not sinners above all

the Galileans of their day. Their crime was that they did nothing. No

persecution is recorded as having been raised against Him by them;

there were no angry antagonisms, no scornful words, no violent

opposition. They simply stolidly stood like some black rock in the

sunshine, and let the sunshine pour down upon them, and remained grim

and black as ever. That was all.

That is to say, the thing that brings down the severest rebuke is not

the angry antagonism of the men who are contending in half-darkness,

with a misunderstood and therefore disliked Christ, but the sleek,

passive apathy that is never touched deeper than its ears by the

message of God's word. It is not a difficult thing to incur this

condemnation. You have simply to do what some of you are doing, and

have been doing all your lives, as to Christianity, and that

is--nothing! You have simply to acquiesce politely and respectfully, as

many of you do, and say you are Christians; and there an end. You have

simply to take my words (as I fear so many of those that listen to them

do) as matters of course, the proper things to be said on a Sunday, and

for me to say, which may be very true in some vague, general way, but

which have no felt application to you. That is all you have to do. It

is quite enough. Negative vices will ruin a man, in mind, body, and

estate; and the negative sin of simple indifference avails to put a

barrier between you and Jesus Christ, through which none of His

blessing can filter. If a sailor does not lash himself to something

fixed, the next sea that comes across the deck will do the rest. If a

sick man does not take the medicine, by doing nothing he has committed

suicide. And simple passivity, that is to say (to translate it out of

Latin into good, honest English), doing nothing, is all that is needed

in order to part you from Christ and Christ from you. He upbraided the

cities because they repented not.'

One can fancy some well-to-do and thoroughly respectable and

clean-living native of Capernaum saying, What! those foul beasts in

Sodom better off than I? Impossible!' Well, Jesus Christ says so upon

very intelligible grounds. The measure of light is the measure of

responsibility. That is one ground. And the not preferring Him is the

preferring of self and the world, and that is the sin of sins. He will

convince the world of sin because they believe not on Me.'

Now, one more point, viz. this gelatinous kind of indifference, as of a

disposition not stiff enough to take any impression, is found most

deeply seated, and hopeless, amongst--shall I venture?--amongst people

like you, who have been listening, listening, listening, until your

systems have become so habituated to this Christian preaching that it

does not produce the least effect. It all runs off you like rain off

waterproof. You have waterproofed your consciences and your spiritual

susceptibilities by long habit of listening and doing nothing.

And some of you have come to this point, that you positively rather

like the titillation and excitement, slight though it may be, which is

produced by coming in contact now and then with a good, wholesome,

rousing Christian appeal. Not that you ever intend to do anything, but

it is pleasant to see a man in earnest, and preaching as if he believed

what he was saying. And so perhaps some of you are feeling here

to-night.

Ah! my dear friends, it is possible for a man to live by the side of

Niagara until he cannot hear the cataract; and it is an awful thing for

men and women to live under the sound of Christian teaching until it

produces no more effect upon their wills and natures than the ringing

of the church bells, to which they pay no attention.

You do not know the despair that comes over us preachers time after

time, as we look down upon the faces of our congregations, and feel,

What shall I do to put a sharp enough point upon this truth to get it

into the heart of some man that has been sitting there as long as I

have been standing here, and is never a bit the better for it?' Our

most earnest preaching is like putting a red-hot iron into a pond: the

cold water puts it out and closes above it, and there is no more heard

nor seen of it. Our old Puritan forefathers used to talk about

gospel-hardened hearers.' I believe that there are people listening to

me now who have become so inured to Christian preaching that, like

artillery horses, they will not move a muscle or quiver if a whole

battery of cannon is fired off under their noses. God knows I despair

sometimes, many a time, when I think of the hundreds of people to whom

I speak, year after year, and how there seems next to nothing in the

world to come of it all.

III. Now lastly, notice here the rebuke of this negligence of the

light.

He began to upbraid the cities.' But oh! we shall misunderstand Him and

His purpose if we think that that upbraiding was anything but the

sorrowful expression of His own loving heart, which warned of what was

coming in order that He might never need to send it. Woe unto you; woe

unto you,' and His own lips quivered and His own heart felt the woe, as

He laid bare the sin and foreannounced the retribution.

I do not feel that I dare dwell upon, or that it beseems me to say much

about, this solemn thought. Only, dear friends, I do desire, if I

could, to wake some of you to look realities for once in the face, and

to be sure of this, that retribution is proportioned to light, and that

the sin of sins is the rejection of Jesus Christ. Beneath the broad

folds of that more tolerable' there lie infinite degrees of

retribution. The same deed done by a group of men may be indefinitely

varied in its culpability, according to the motives and the clearness

of knowledge which accompany or prompt the doing of it. And so, just

because the life beyond is the accurate outcome and issue of the whole

character and conduct, estimated according to motive and knowledge,

therefore there must be differences infinitely wide between the fate of

the servant that knew his Lord's will, and the servant that knew not.

Where do you think we gospel-drenched English men and women will stand

in that allocation of culpability? I do not presume to say more, but I

beseech you,--let no present controversies about the duration and the

possible termination of retribution in another state, or the possible

prolongation of a probation into another state, blind you to the fact

that however these questions be settled, this is a truth, independent

of them, but being forgotten amidst the dust of controversy, that the

next life is a life of retribution, and that there you and I will give

account of our deeds, and chiefly of our attitude to Jesus.

And now let me say, in one word,--hoisting the danger-signal is the

work of kindness, and Jesus Christ was never more loving than when from

His lips there came these words, heavy with His own sorrow, and stern

with the prophecy of retribution. I know that Christian teachers have

often spoken of the solemn things beyond, in tones much to be deplored,

and which weaken the force of their message. But surely, surely, if we

believe in a judgment to come, and if we believe that some of those

that listen to us are in peril of it, surely, surely, the plainest duty

is that with tears in our voice and pleading tenderness in our tone,

seeing the sword coming, we should give warning, and beseech men to

flee for refuge to the hope of the Gospel. The solemn words that we

have been looking at now, lead up to, and are intended to make more

impressive and gracious, the invitation with which this chapter ends:

Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give

you rest.'

Dear friends, we stand in the blaze of the light. Our familiarity with

Jesus Christ may be our ruin. We are tempted to pay no heed to His

words because we know them so well. Neglect of Christ on your part will

bring deeper woes on your head than the people of Capernaum pulled down

upon theirs. The brighter the sunshine, the louder the thunder and the

fiercer the lightning; the longer the summer day, the longer the winter

night; the closer the comet comes to the sun, the further away it

plunges, at the other extremity of its orbit, into space and darkness.

So I beseech you, listen as if you had never heard it before, and

listen as if your lives depended upon it (as indeed they do) to that

merciful invitation, Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy

laden,' and then you will get rest for your souls here, and at that day

when Sodom and Capernaum and Manchester--they and we--shall stand

before His throne, you may lift up your eyes, and be glad to see who it

is that sits on the tribunal, and that you learned to know and love the

face of your Saviour, before you saw Him enthroned as your Judge.

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CHRIST'S STRANGE THANKSGIVING

I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid

these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto

babes.' --MATT. xi. 25.

When Jesus was about to cure one dumb man, He lifted up His eyes to

heaven and sighed. Sorrow filled His soul in the act of working

deliverance. The thought of the depth of the miseries He had come to

heal, and of the ocean of them which He was then diminishing but by one

poor drop, saddened Him. When Jesus thought of the woes that had fallen

on the impenitent Sodom, and of the worse that still remained to be

revealed at the day of judgment, He rejoiced in spirit. Strange! and

yet all in harmony with His depth of love. This once, and this once

only, do we read that His heart filled with joy. Did He lift up His

solemn thanksgiving to God, for the woes that had fallen on Chorazin?

Oh no! For the blinding of the wise and prudent? Oh no! For the

revelation to babes? Yes, and not only for that, but for that full and

universal offer and possibility of salvation, which forms the reason

for both the revelation to babes and the hiding from the wise. If we

attend to the connection of this passage we get light on its force. It

begins with a clear prophecy of endless woe and sorrow upon the

rejecters. Then comes my text, alleviating the terror of that thought

of destruction by showing the principles on which the reception and

rejection are especially based, the sort of people who receive and who

reject. Then follows the reason why the wise are shut out and the babes

let in. That reason is not only God's inscrutable decree, but something

in the very nature of the Gospel. God is hidden from all human sight.

There is one divine Revealer apart from whom all is darkness. Neither

doth any man know the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son

willeth to reveal Him.' That is the characteristic which shuts out the

wise and lets in the simple.

Then follows the great call to all to come to Him. The practical issue

of all these solemn thoughts is that the Gospel is a Gospel for all the

world, and that the one qualification for coming within the terms of

its offer is to be weary and heavy laden.' Thus all ends in the broad

universality of the message, in its adaptation to all, in its offer to

all; and thus it is shown that every apparent exclusion of any is but

the result of its free offer to all, and that to say Thou hast hid

these things from the wise and prudent' is but to say, Ho, every one

that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.' Well then might joy fill the

heart of the Man of Sorrows. Well might He lift up His solemn

thanksgiving to God and say, I thank Thee, Father, Lord of Heaven and

Earth.'

Consider--

I. The Great Characteristics of the Gospel.

We shall only understand the ground of the revealing and of the hiding

if we understand what it is which is offered. It is of such a nature as

necessarily to involve a twofold effect, caused by a twofold attitude

towards it.

1. The Gospel addresses itself to all men--man as man--not to what is

sectional or accidental, not to classes, not to schools, not to the

鬩te. It is broad and universal. It speaks no dialect of a province,

but the universal language. It is addressed to Man as Man. We have all

of us one human heart.' It appeals to the noble and the peasant, to the

beggar on the dunghill and to the prince on his throne, in precisely

the same fashion. It is equal as the providence of God, impartial as

the light, universal as the air which reddens equally the blood that

flows in long-descended veins and that of the foundling on the streets.

In its sublime universality there are no distinctions. Death and the

Gospel know no ranks. In both, the rich and the poor meet together, the

Lord is the Maker of them all.' In Christ Jesus there is neither

circumcision nor uncircumcision.' The blue sky which bends above all

alike is like that great word.

2. It treats all as utterly helpless.

3. It offers to all Redemption as their most pressing want.

Consequently, in substance it is the gift not of culture, but

deliverance, and in form it is not a theory but a fact, not a system of

credenda but an action, not an -ology but a power.

4. It demands from all submission and trust.

These being the characteristics, consider--

II. The qualifications for reception as necessarily resulting from the

characteristics.

The persons who receive must be those who consent to take the station

which the Gospel assigns. They must be babes, by which is meant not

such as are innocent, but such as are reliant on a higher Power,

self-distrustful, willing to obey.

These qualifications are all moral. The organ for reception of the

Gospel is the heart, not the head. To receive it by faith is a

spiritual, not an intellectual process. Ignorance is no qualification

nor no disqualification. Ignorance or knowledge is immaterial. The one

condition is to be willing to accept.

III. The disqualification of the wise as necessarily resulting from the

qualification.

The organ for the reception is not the head but the heart. Therefore,

wisdom is a barrier only in this way, that it has nothing to do in the

matter. Its presence or its absence is quite indifferent here as in

many other spheres of experience. The joys of the affections, the joys

of common emotions, the joys of bodily life--all these are utterly

independent of the culture of the understanding.

Hence wisdom' becomes a barrier, because its possessors are accustomed

to think it the master key. Not intellect, but the pride of intellect,

trusting in it, glorying in wisdom is the disqualification.

It is not true that there is any discord between religion and

cultivated thought. The loftier the soul, the loftier all its

attributes, the nobler should be, may be, its religion. It is not true

that there is any natural affinity between ignorance and religion,

between narrow understandings and deep faith. That is not the Bible

truth. The religion of Christ is not like owls that love the twilight,

but like eagles that purge their sight at the very fountain itself of

heavenly radiance.'

Take history: the great names--an Augustine and a Luther, a Dante and a

Milton, a Bacon and a Pascal--are enough to show that there is no

antagonism. On the other hand, names enough rise to show that there is

no alliance. The inference is that the intellect has little to do with

a man's attitude towards the Revelation of God in Christ, but that the

moral is all.

Let me close with the repetition of the thought that the apparent

exclusion is the result of the universality, and that Come unto Me' is

Christ's commentary on my text. Well then may we rejoice when we think

of a gospel for the world. Whatever you are, it is for you if you are a

man. However foolish, though you cannot read a letter and know nothing,

it is for you. If you be enriched with all knowledge, you must come on

the same terms as that beggar at your side. That is a healthy

discipline. You are more than a student, than a scholar, than a

thinker; you are a man, you are a sinful man. There is a deeper chamber

in your heart than any into which knowledge can penetrate. Christ

brings a gospel for all. When we think of it, with its sublime

disregard of all peculiarities, we may well rejoice with him who said,

Ye see your calling, brethren,' and with Him, the loftiest, the

incarnate, Wisdom who said, I thank Thee, Father.' For if you rightly

grasp the bearing of this text, and mark what follows it in our Lord's

heart and thoughts, you will see these deep eyes of solemn joy turned

from the heaven to you, filmy with compassion, and those hands, then

lifted in rapt devotion, stretched out to beckon you and all the world

to His breast, and hear the voice that rose in that burst of

thanksgiving melting into tenderness as it woos you, be you wise or

ignorant, to come to Him and rest.

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THE REST GIVER

Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give

you rest. 29. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and

lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.'--MATT. xi. 28,

29.

One does not know whether tenderness or majesty is predominant in these

wonderful words. A divine penetration into man's true condition, and a

divine pity, are expressed in them. Jesus looks with clearsighted

compassion into the inmost history of all hearts, and sees the toil and

the sorrow which weigh on every soul. And no less remarkable is the

divine consciousness of power, to succour and to help, which speaks in

them. Think of a Jewish peasant of thirty years old, opening his arms

to embrace the world, and saying to all men, Come and rest on My

breast.' Think of a man supposing himself to be possessed of a charm

which could soothe all sorrow and lift the weight from every heart.

A great sculptor has composed a group where there diverge from the

central figure on either side, in two long lines, types of all the

cruel varieties of human pains and pangs; and in the midst stands,

calm, pure, with the consciousness of power and love in His looks, and

with outstretched hands, as if beckoning invitation and dropping

benediction, Christ the Consoler. The artist has but embodied the claim

which the Master makes for Himself here. No less remarkable is His own

picture of Himself, as meek and lowly in heart.' Did ever anybody

before say, I am humble,' without provoking the comment, He that says

he is humble proves that he is not'? But Jesus Christ said it, and the

world has allowed the claim; and has answered, Though Thou bearest

record of Thyself, Thy record is true.'

But my object now is not so much to deal with the revelation of our

Lord contained in these marvellous words, as to try, as well as I can,

to re-echo, however faintly, the invitation that sounds in them. There

is a very striking reduplication running through them which is often

passed unnoticed. I shall shape my remarks so as to bring out that

feature of the text, asking you to look first with me at the twofold

designation of the persons addressed; next at the twofold invitation;

and last at the twofold promise of rest.

I. Consider then the twofold designation here of the persons addressed,

Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden.'

The one word expresses effort and toil, the other a burden and

endurance. The one speaks of the active, the other of the passive, side

of human misery and evil. Toil is work which is distasteful in itself,

or which is beyond our faculties. Such toil, sometime or other, more or

less, sooner or later, is the lot of every man. All work becomes

labour, and all labour, sometime or other, becomes toil. The text is,

first of all, and in its most simple and surface meaning, an invitation

to all the men who know how ceaseless, how wearying, how empty the

effort and energy of life is, to come to this Master and rest.

You remember those bitter words of the Book of Ecclesiastes, where the

preacher sets forth a circle of labour that only comes back to the

point where it began, as being the law for nature and the law for man.

And truly much of our work seems to be no better than that. We are like

squirrels in a cage, putting forth immense muscular effort, and nothing

to show for it after all. All is vanity, and striving after wind.'

Toil is a curse; work is a blessing. But all our work darkens into

toil; and the invitation, Come unto Me, all ye that labour,' reaches to

the very utmost verge of the world and includes every soul.

And then, in like manner, the other side of human experience is set

forth in that other word. For most men have not only to work, but to

bear; not only to toil, but to sorrow. There are efforts that need to

be put forth, which task all our energy, and leave the muscles flaccid

and feeble. And many of us have, at one and the same moment, to work

and to weep, to toil whilst our hearts are beating like a forge-hammer;

to labour whilst memories and thoughts that might enfeeble any worker,

are busy with us. A burden of sorrow, as well as effort and toil, is,

sooner or later, the lot of all men.

But that is only surface. The twofold designation here before us goes a

great deal deeper than that. It points to two relationships to God and

to God's law of righteousness. Men labour with vague and yet with noble

effort, sometimes, to do the thing that is right, and after all efforts

there is left a burden of conscious defect. In the purest and the

highest lives there come both of these things. And Jesus Christ, in

this merciful invitation of His, speaks to all the men that have tried,

and tried in vain, to satisfy their consciences and to obey the law of

God, and says to them, Cease your efforts, and no longer carry that

burden of failure and of sin upon your shoulders. Come unto Me, and I

will give you rest.'

I should be sorry to think that I was speaking to any man or woman who

had not, more or less, tried to do what is right. You have laboured at

that effort with more or less of consistency, with more or less of

earnestness. Have you not found that you could not achieve it?

I am sure that I am speaking to no man or woman who has not upon his or

her conscience a great weight of neglected duties, of actual

transgressions, of mean thoughts, of foul words and passions, of deeds

that they would be ashamed that any should see; ashamed that their

dearest should catch a glimpse of. My friend, universal sinfulness is

no mere black dogma of a narrow Calvinism; it is no uncharitable

indictment against the race; it is simply putting into definite words

the consciousness that is in every one of your hearts. You know that,

whether you like to think about it or not, you have broken God's law,

and are a sinful man. You carry a burden on your back whether you

realise the fact or no, a burden that clogs all your efforts, and that

will sink you deeper into the darkness and the mire. Come unto Me, all

ye that labour,' and with noble, but, at bottom, vain, efforts have

striven after right and truth. Come unto Me all ye that are burdened,'

and bear, sometimes forgetting it, but often reminded of its pressure

by galled shoulders and wearied limbs, the burden of sin on your bent

backs.

This invitation includes the whole race. In it, as in a blank form, you

may each insert your name. Jesus Christ speaks to thee, John, Thomas,

Mary, Peter, whatever thy name may be, as distinctly as if you saw your

name written on the pages of your New Testament, when He says to you,

Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden.' For the all' is

but the sum of the units; and I, and thou, and thou, have our place

within the word.

II. Now, secondly, look at the twofold invitation that is here.

Come unto Me . . . Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me.' These two

things are not the same. Coming unto Me,' as is quite plain to the most

superficial observation, is the first step in the approach to a

companionship, which companionship is afterwards perfected and kept up

by obedience and imitation. The coming' is an initial act which makes a

man Christ's companion. And the Take My yoke upon you, and learn of

Me,' is the continuous act by which that companionship is manifested

and preserved. So that in these words, which come so familiarly to most

of our memories that they have almost ceased to present a sharp

meaning, there is not only a merciful summons to the initial act, but a

description of the continual life of which that act is the

introduction.

And now, to put that into simpler words, when Jesus Christ says Come

unto Me,' He Himself has taught us what is His inmost meaning in that

invitation, by another word of His: He that cometh unto Me shall never

hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst'; where the

parallelism of the clauses teaches us that to come to Christ is simply

to put our trust in Him. There is in faith a true movement of the whole

soul towards the Master. I think that this metaphor teaches us a great

deal more about that faith that we are always talking about in the

pulpit, and which, I am afraid, many of our congregations do not very

distinctly understand, than many a book of theology does. To come to

Him' implies, distinctly, that He, and no mere theological dogma,

however precious and clear, is the Object on which faith rests.

And, therefore, if Christ, and not merely a doctrinal truth about

Christ, be the Object of our faith, then it is very clear that faith,

which grasps a Person, must be something more than the mere act of the

understanding which assents to a truth. And what more is it? How is it

possible for one person to lay hold of and to come to another? By trust

and love, and by these alone. These be the bonds that bind men

together. Mere intellectual consent may be sufficient to fasten a man

to a dogma, but there must be will and heart at work to bind a man to a

person; and if it be Christ and not a theology, to which we come by our

faith, then it must be with something more than our brains that we

grasp Him and draw near to Him. That is to say, your will is engaged in

your confidence. Trust Him as you trust one another, only with the

difference befitting a trust directed to an absolute and perfect object

of trust, and not to a poor, variable human heart. Trust Him as you

trust one another. Then, just as husband and wife, parent and child,

friend and friend, pass through all intervening hindrances and come

together when they trust and love, so you come closer to Christ as the

very soul of your soul by an inward real union, than you do even to

your dear ones, if you grapple Him to your heart with the hoops of

steel, which, by simple trust in Him, the Divine Redeemer forges for

us. Come unto Me,' being translated out of metaphor into fact, is

simply Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.'

And still further, we have here, not only the initial act by which

companionship and union with Jesus Christ is brought about, but the

continual course by which it is kept up, and by which it is manifested.

The faith which saves a man's soul is not all which is required for a

Christian life. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me.' The yoke is

that which, laid on the broad forehead or the thick neck of the ox, has

attached to it the cords which are bound to the burden that the animal

draws. The burden, then, which Christ gives to His servants to pull, is

a metaphor for the specific duties which He enjoins upon them to

perform; and the yoke by which they are fastened to their burdens,

obliged' to their duties, is His authority, So to take His yoke' upon

us is to submit our wills to His authority. Therefore this further call

is addressed to all those who have come to Him, feeling their weakness

and their need and their sinfulness, and have found in Him a Saviour

who has made them restful and glad; and it bids them live in the

deepest submission of will to Him, in joyful obedience, in constant

service; and, above all, in the daily imitation of the Master.

You must put both these commandments together before you get Christ's

will for His children completely expressed. There are some of you who

think that Christianity is only a means by which you may escape the

penalty of your sins; and you are ready enough, or fancy yourselves so,

to listen when He says, Come to Me that you may be pardoned,' but you

are not so ready to listen to what He says afterwards, when He calls

upon you to take His yoke upon you, to obey Him, to serve Him, and

above all to copy Him. And I beseech you to remember that if you go and

part these two halves from one another, as many people do, some of them

bearing away the one half and some the other, you have got a maimed

Gospel; in the one case a foundation without a building, and in the

other case a building without a foundation. The people who say that

Christ's call to the world is Come unto Me,' and whose Christianity and

whose Gospel is only a proclamation of indulgence and pardon for past

sin, have laid hold of half of the truth. The people who say that

Christ's call is Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me,' and that

Christianity is a proclamation of the duty of pure living after the

pattern of Jesus Christ our great Example, have laid hold of the other

half of the truth. And both halves bleed themselves away and die, being

torn asunder; put them together, and each has power.

That separation is one reason why so many Christian men and women are

such poor Christians as they are--having so little real religion, and

consequently so little real joy. I could lay my fingers upon many men,

professing Christians--I do not say whether in this church or in other

churches--whose whole life shows that they do not understand that Jesus

Christ has a twofold summons to His servants; and that it is of no

avail once, long ago, to have come, or to think that you have come, to

Him to get pardon, unless day by day you are keeping beside Him, doing

His commandments, and copying His sweet and blessed example.

III. And now, lastly, look at the twofold promise which is here.

I do not know if there is any importance to be attached to the slight

diversity of language in the two verses, so as that in the one case the

promise runs, I will give you rest,' and in the other, Ye shall find

rest.' That sounds as if the rest that was contingent upon the first of

the invitations was in a certain and more direct and exclusive fashion

Christ's gift than the rest which was contingent upon the second. It

may be so, but I attach no importance to that criticism; only I would

have you observe that our Lord distinctly separates here between the

rest of coming,' and the rest of wearing His yoke.' These two,

howsoever they may be like each other, are still not the same. The one

is the perfecting and the prolongation, no doubt, of the other, but has

likewise in it some other, I say not more blessed, elements. Dear

brethren, here are two precious things held out and offered to us all.

There is rest in coming to Christ; the rest of a quiet conscience which

gnaws no more; the rest of a conscious friendship and union with God,

in whom alone are our soul's home, harbour, and repose; the rest of

fears dispelled; the rest of forgiveness received into the heart. Do

you want that? Go to Christ, and as soon as you go to Him you will get

that rest.

There is rest in faith. The very act of confidence is repose. Look how

that little child goes to sleep in its mother's lap, secure from harm

because it trusts. And, oh! if there steal over our hearts such a sweet

relaxation of the tension of anxiety when there is some dear one on

whom we can cast all responsibility, how much more may we be delivered

from all disquieting fears by the exercise of quiet confidence in the

infinite love and power of our Brother Redeemer, Christ! He will be a

covert from the storm, and a refuge from the tempest'; as rivers of

water in a dry place, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.'

If we come to Him, the very act of coming brings repose.

But, brethren, that is not enough, and, blessed be God! that is not

all. There is a further, deeper rest in obedience, and emphatically and

most blessedly there is a rest in Christ-likeness. Take My yoke upon

you.' There is repose in saying Thou art my Master, and to Thee I bow.'

You are delivered from the unrest of self-will, from the unrest of

contending desires, you get rid of the weight of too much liberty.

There is peace in submission; peace in abdicating the control of my own

being; peace in saying, Take Thou the reins, and do Thou rule and guide

me.' There is peace in surrender and in taking His yoke upon us.

And most especially the path of rest for men is in treading in Christ's

footsteps. Learn of Me,' it is the secret of tranquillity. We have done

with passionate hot desires,--and it is these that breed all the

disquiet in our lives--when we take the meekness and the lowliness of

the Master for our pattern. The river will no longer roll, broken by

many a boulder, and chafed into foam over many a fall, but will flow

with even foot, and broad, smooth bosom, to the parent sea.

There is quietness in self-sacrifice, there is tranquillity in ceasing

from mine own works and growing like the Master.

The Cross is strength; the solemn Cross is gain.

The Cross is Jesus' breast,

Here giveth He the rest,

That to His best beloved doth still remain.'

Take up thy cross daily,' and thou enterest into His rest.

My brother, the wicked is like the troubled sea that cannot rest, whose

waters cast up mire and dirt.' But you, if you come to Christ, and if

you cleave to Christ, may be like that sea of glass, mingled with

fire,' that lies pure, transparent, waveless before the Throne of God,

over which no tempests rave, and which, in its deepest depths, mirrors

the majesty of Him that sitteth upon the Throne, and of the Lamb.'

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THE PHARISEES' SABBATH AND CHRIST'S

At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath day through the corn; and His

disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to

eat. 2. But when the Pharisees saw it they said unto Him, Behold, Thy

disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the Sabbath day. 3.

But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an

hungred, and they that were with him; 4. How he entered into the house

of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat,

neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests! 5. Or

have ye not read in the law, how that on the Sabbath days the priests

in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless! 6. But I say unto

you, That in this place is one greater than the temple. 7. But if ye

had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye

would not have condemned the guiltless. 8. For the Son of Man is Lord

even of the Sabbath day 9. And when he was departed thence, He went

into their synagogue: 10. And, behold, there was a man which had his

hand withered. And they asked Him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the

Sabbath days? that they might accuse Him. 11. And He said unto them,

What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it

fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and

lift it out? 12. How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore

it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath days. 13. Then saith He to the

man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was

restored whole, like as the other. 14. Then the Pharisees went out, and

held a counsel against Him, how they might destroy Him.' --MATT. xii.

1-14.

We have had frequent occasion to point out that this Gospel is

constructed, not on chronological, but on logical lines. It groups

together incidents related in subject, though separated in time. Thus

we have the collection of Christ's sayings in the Sermon on the Mount,

followed by the collection of doings in chapters viii. and ix., the

collected charge to His ambassadors in chapter x., the collection of

instances illustrative of the relations of different classes to the

message of the Kingdom and its King in chapter xi., and now in this

chapter a series of incidents setting forth the growing bitterness of

antagonism on the part of the guardians of traditional and ceremonial

religion. This is followed, in the next chapter, with a series of

parables.

The present lesson includes two Sabbath incidents, in the first of

which the disciples are the transgressors of the sabbatic tradition; in

the second, Christ's own action is brought into question. The scene of

the first is in the fields, that of the second is in the synagogue. In

the one, Sabbath observance is set aside at the call of personal needs;

in the other, at the call of another's calamity. So the two correspond

to the old Puritan principle that the Sabbath law allowed of works of

necessity and of mercy.'

I. The Sabbath and personal needs. This is a strange sort of King who

cannot even feed His servants. What a glimpse into the penury of their

usual condition the quiet statement that the disciples were hungry

gives us, especially if we remember that it is not likely that the

Master had fared better than they! Indeed, His reference to David and

his band of hungry heroes suggests that He was an hungred' as well as

they that were with Him.' As they traversed some field path through the

tall yellowing corn, they gathered a few ears, as the merciful

provision of the law allowed, and hastily began to eat the rubbed-out

grains. As soon as they began,' the eager Pharisees, who seem to have

been at their heels, call Him to behold' this dreadful crime, which,

they think, requires His immediate remonstrance. If they had had as

sharp eyes for men's necessities as for their faults, they might have

given them food which it was lawful' to eat, and so obviated this

frightful iniquity. But that is not the way of Pharisees. Moses had not

forbidden such gleaning, but the casuistry which had spun its

multitudinous webs over the law, hiding the gold beneath their dirty

films, had decided that plucking the ears was of the nature of reaping,

and reaping was work, and work was forbidden, which being settled, of

course the inferential prohibition became more important than the law

from which it was deduced. That is always the case with human

conclusions from revelation; and the more questionable these are, the

more they are loved by their authors, as the sickly child of a family

is the dearest.

Our Lord does not question the authority of the tradition, nor ask

where Moses had forbidden what His disciples were doing. Still less

does He touch the sanctity of the Jewish Sabbath. He accepts His

questioners' position, for the time, and gives them a perfect answer on

their own ground. Perhaps there may be just a hint in the double Have

ye not read?' that they could not produce Scripture for their

prohibition, as He would do for the liberty which He allowed. He quotes

two instances in which ceremonial obligations gave way before higher

law. The first, that of David and his followers eating the shew-bread,

which was tabooed to all but priests, is perhaps chosen with some

reference to the parallel between Himself, the true King, now

unrecognised and hunted with His humble followers, and the fugitive

outlaw with his band. It is but a veiled allusion at most; but, if it

fell on good soil, it might have led some one to ask, If this is David,

where is Saul, and where is Doeg, watching him to accuse him?' This

example serves our Lord's purpose of showing that even a divine

prohibition, if it relates to mere ceremonial matter, melts, like wax,

before even bodily necessities. What a thrill of holy horror would meet

the enunciation of the doctrine that such a carnal thing as hunger

rightfully abrogated a sacred ritual proscription! The law of right is

rigid; that of external ceremonies is flexible. Better that a man

should die than that the one should be broken; better that the other

should be flung to the winds than that a hungry man should go unfed. It

may reasonably be doubted whether all Christian communities have

learned the sweep of that principle yet, or so judge of the relative

importance of keeping up their appointed forms of worship, and of

feeding their hungry brother. The brave Ahimelech, the son of Ahitub,'

was ahead of a good many people of to-day.

The second example comes still closer to the question in hand, and

supplies the reference to the Sabbath law, which the former had not.

There was much hard work done in the temple on the Sabbath--sacrifices

to be slain, fires and lamps to be kindled, and so on. That was not

Sabbath desecration. Why? Because it was done in the temple, and as a

part of divine service. The sanctity of the place, and the consequent

sanctity of the service, exempted it from the operation of the law. The

question, no doubt, was springing to the lips of some scowling

Pharisee, And what has that to do with our charge against your

disciples?' when it was answered by the wonderful next words, In this

place'--here among the growing corn, beneath the free heaven, far away

from Jerusalem--is one greater than the temple.' Profound words, which

could only sound as blasphemy or nonsense to the hearers, but which

touch the deepest truths concerning His person and His relations to

men, and which involve the destruction of all temples and rituals. He

is all that the temple symbolised. In Him the Godhead really dwells; He

is the meeting-place of God and man, the place of the oracle, the place

of sacrifice. Then, where He stands is holy ground, and all work done

with reference to Him is worship. These poor followers of His are

priests; and if, for His sake, they had broken a hundred Sabbath

regulations, they were guiltless.

So far our Lord has been answering His opponents; now He attacks. The

quotation from Hosea is often on His lips. Here He uses it to unmask

the real motives of His assailants. Their murmuring came not from more

religion, but from less love. If they had had a little more milk of

human kindness in them, it would have died on their lips; if they had

grasped the real meaning of the religion they professed, they would

have learned that its soul was mercy'--that is, of course, man's

gentleness to man--and that sacrifice and ceremony were but the body,

the help, and sometimes the hindrance, of that soul. They would have

understood the relative importance of disposition and of external

worship, as end and means, and not have visited a mere breach of

external order with a heat of disapprobation only warranted by a sin

against the former. Their judgment would have been liker God's if they

had looked at those poor hungry men with merciful eyes and with

merciful hearts, rather than with eager scrutiny that delighted to find

them tripping in a triviality of outward observance. What mountains of

harsh judgment by Christ's own followers on each other would have been

removed into the sea if the spirit of these great words had played upon

them!

The for' at the beginning of verse 8 seems to connect with the last

words of the preceding verse, I call them guiltless, for,' etc. It

states more plainly still the claim already put forward in verse 6. The

Son of Man,' no doubt, is equivalent to Messiah'; but it is more, as

revealing at once Christ's true manhood and His unique and complete

manhood, in which the very ideal of man is personally realised. It can

never be detached from His other name, the Son of God.' They are the

obverse and reverse of the same golden coin. He asserts His power over

the Sabbath, as enjoined upon Israel. His is the authority which

imposed it. It is plastic in His hands. The whole order of which it is

part has its highest purpose in witnessing of Him. He brings the true

rest.'

II. The Sabbath, and works of beneficence. Matthew appears to have

brought together here two incidents which, according to Luke, were

separated in time. The scene changes to a synagogue, perhaps that of

Capernaum. Among the worshippers is a man with a withered hand,' who

seems to have been brought there by the Pharisees as a bait to try to

draw out Christ's compassion. What a curious state of mind that

was,--to believe that Christ could work miracles, and to want Him to do

one, not for pity's sake, nor for confirmation of faith, but to have

material for accusing Him! And how heartlessly careless of the poor

sufferer they are, when they use him thus! He for his part stands

silent. Desire and faith have no part in evoking this miracle. Deadly

hatred and calculating malignity ask for it, and for once they get

their wish. Having baited their hook, and set the man with his shrunken

hand full in view, they get into their corners and wait the event.

Matthew tells us that they ask our Lord the question which Luke

represents Him as asking them. Perhaps we may say that He gave voice to

the question which they were asking in their hearts. Their motive is

distinctly given here. They wanted material for a legal process before

a local tribunal. The whole thing was an attempt to get Jesus within

the meshes of the law. Again, as in the former case, it is the

traditional, not the written, law, which healing would have broken. The

question evidently implies that, in the judgment of the askers, healing

was unlawful. Talmudical scholars tell us that in later days the rabbis

differed on the point, but that the prevalent opinion was, that only

sicknesses threatening immediate danger to life could lawfully be

treated on the Sabbath. The more rigid doctrine was obviously held by

Christ's questioners. It is a significant instance of the absurdity and

cruelty which are possible when once religion has been made a matter of

outward observance. Nothing more surely and completely ossifies the

heart and blinds common sense.

In His former answer Jesus had appealed to Scripture to bear out His

teaching that Sabbath observance must bend to personal necessities.

Here He appeals to the natural sense of compassion to confirm the

principle that it must give way to the duty of relieving others. His

question is as confident of an answer as the Pharisees' had been. But

though He takes it for granted that His hearers could only answer it in

one way, the microscopic and cold-blooded ingenuity of the rabbis,

since His day, answers it in another. They say, Don't lift the poor

brute out, but throw in a handful of fodder, and something for him to

lie upon, and let him be till next day.' A remarkable way of making

thine ox and thine ass' keep the Sabbath! There is a delicacy of

expression in the question; the owner of one sheep' would be more

solicitous about it than if he had a hundred; and our Shepherd looks on

all the millions of His flock with a heart as much touched by their

sorrow and needs as if each were His only possession. The question

waits for no answer; but Christ goes on (as if there could be but one

reply) to His conclusion, which He binds to His first question by

another, equally easy to answer. Man's superiority to animals makes his

claim for help more imperative. You would not do less for one another

than for a sheep in a hole, surely.' But the form in which our Lord put

His conclusive answer to the Pharisees gives an unexpected turn to the

reply. He does not say, It is lawful to heal,' but, It is lawful to do

well,' thus at once showing the true justification of healing, namely,

that it was a beneficent act, and widening the scope of His answer to

cover a whole class of cases. To do well' here means, not to do right,

but to do good, to benefit men. The principle is a wide one: the

charitable succour of men's needs, of whatever kind, is congruous with

the true design of that day of rest. Have the churches laid that lesson

to heart? On the whole, it is to be observed that our Lord here

distinctly recognises the obligation of the Sabbath, that He claims

power over it, that He permits the pressure of one's own necessities

and of others' need of help, to modify the manner of its observance,

and that He leaves the application of these principles to the spiritual

insight of His followers.

The cure which follows is done in a singular fashion. Without a whisper

of request from the sufferer or any one else, He heals him by a word.

His command has a promise in it, and He gives the power to do what He

bids the man do. Give what Thou commandest,' says St. Augustine, and

command what Thou wilt.' We get strength to obey in the act of

obedience. But beyond the possible symbolical significance of the mode

of cure, and beyond the revelation of Christ's power to heal by a word,

the manner of healing had a special reason in the very cavils of the

Pharisees. Not even they could accuse Him of breaking any Sabbath law

by such a cure. What had He done? Told the man to put out his hand.

Surely that was not unlawful. What had the man done? Stretched it

forth. Surely that broke no subtle rabbinical precept. So they were

foiled at every turn, driven off the field of argument, and baffled in

their attempt to find ground for laying an information against Him. But

neither His gentle wisdom nor His healing power could reach these

hearts, made stony by conceit and pedantic formalism; and all that

their contact with Jesus did was to drive them to intenser hostility,

and to send them away to plot His death. That is what comes of making

religion a round of outward observances. The Pharisee is always blind

as an owl to the light of God and true goodness; keen-sighted as a hawk

for trivial breaches of his cobweb regulations, and cruel as a vulture

to tear with beak and claw. The race is not extinct. We all carry one

inside us, and need God's help to cast him out.

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AN ATTEMPT TO ACCOUNT FOR JESUS

But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This man doth not cast out

demons, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons.'--MATT. xii. 24.

Mark's Gospel tells us that this astonishing explanation of Christ and

His work was due to the ingenious malice of an ecclesiastical

deputation, sent down from Jerusalem to prevent the simple folk in

Galilee from being led away by this new Teacher. They must have been

very hard put to it to explain undeniable but unwelcome facts, when

they hazarded such a preposterous theory.

Formal religionists never know what to make of a man who is in manifest

touch with the unseen. These scribes, like Christ's other critics,

judged themselves in judging Him, and bore witness to the very truths

that they were eager to deny. For this ridiculous explanation admits

the miraculous, recognises the impossibility of accounting for Christ

on any naturalistic hypothesis, and by its very outrageous absurdity

indicates that the only reasonable explanation of the facts is the

admission of His divine message and authority. So we may learn, even

from such words as these, how the glory of Jesus Christ shines, though

distorted and blurred, through the fogs of prejudice and malice.

I. Note, then, first, the unwelcome and undeniable facts that insist

upon explanation.

I have said that these hostile critics attest the reality of the

miracles. I know that it is not fashionable at present to attach much

weight to the fact that none of all the enemies that saw them ever had

a doubt about the reality of Christ's miracles. I know quite well that

in an age that believed in the possibility of the supernatural, as this

age does not, credence would be more easy, and that such testimony is

less valuable than if it had come from a jury of scientific twentieth

century sceptics. But I know, on the other hand, that for long

generations the expectation of the miraculous had died out before

Christ came; that His predecessor, John the Baptist, made no such

claims; and that, at first, at all events, there was no expectation of

Jesus working miracles, to lead to any initial ease of acceptance of

His claims. And I know that there were never sharper and more hostile

eyes brought to bear upon any man and his work than the eyes of these

ecclesiastical triers.' It would have been so easy and so triumphant a

way of ending the whole business if they could have shown, what they

were anxious to be able to show, that the miracle was a trick. And so I

venture to think that not without some weight is the attestation from

the camp of the enemy, This man casteth out demons.'

But you have to remember that amongst the facts to be explained is not

only this one of Christ's works having passed muster with His enemies,

but the other of His own reiterated and solemn claim to have the power

of working what we call miracles. Now, I wish to dwell on that for one

moment, because it is fashionable to put one's thumb upon it nowadays.

It is not unusual to eliminate from the Gospel narrative all that side

of it, and then to run over in eulogiums about the rest. But what we

have to deal with is this fact, that the Man whom the world admits to

be the consummate flower of humanity, meek, sane, humble, who has given

all generations lessons in self-abnegation and devotion, claimed to be

able to raise the dead, to cast out demons, and to do many wonderful

works. And though we should be misrepresenting the facts if we said

that He did what His followers have too often been inclined to do, i.e.

rested the stress of evidence upon that side of His work, yet it is an

equal exaggeration in the other direction to do, as so many are

inclined to do to-day, i.e. disparage the miraculous evidence as no

evidence at all. Go and tell John the things that ye see and

hear,'--that is His own answer to the question, Art Thou He that should

come?' And though I rejoice to believe that there are far loftier and

more blessed answers to it than these outward signs and tokens, they

are signs and tokens; and they are part of the whole facts that have to

be accounted for.

I would venture to widen the reference of my text for a moment, and

include not only the actual miracles of our Lord's earthly life, but

all the beneficent, hallowing, elevating, ennobling, refining results

which have followed upon the proclamation of His truth in the world

ever since. I believe, as I think Scripture teaches me to believe, that

in the world today Christ is working; and that it is a mistake to talk

about the results of Christianity,' meaning thereby some abstract

system divorced from Him. It is the working of Jesus Christ in the

world that has brought nobler manners, purer laws'; that has given a

new impulse and elevation to art and literature; that has lifted the

whole tone of society; that has suppressed ancient evils; that has

barred the doors of old temples of devildom, of lust, and cruelty, and

vice; and that is still working in the world for the elevation and the

deifying of humanity. And I claim the whole difference between B.C. and

A.D.'--the whole difference between Christendom and Heathendom--as

being the measure of the continuous power with which Jesus Christ has

grappled with and throttled the snakes that have fastened on men. That

continuous operation of His in delivering from the powers of evil has,

indeed, not yielded such results as might have been expected. But just

as on earth He was hindered in the exercise of His supernatural power

by men's unbelief, so that He could do no mighty works, save that He

laid His hands on a few sick folk' here and there, and healed them,' so

He has been thwarted by His Church, and hindered in the world, from

manifesting the fulness of His power. But yet, sorrowfully admitting

that, and taking as deserved the scoffs of the men that say, Your

Christianity does not seem to do so very much after all,' I still

venture to allege that its record is unique; and that these are facts

which wise men ought to take into account, and have some fairly

plausible way of explaining.

II. Secondly, note the preposterous explanation. This man doth not cast

out demons, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons.' That is the

last resort of prejudice so deep that it will father an absurdity

rather than yield to evidence. And Christ has no difficulty in putting

it aside, as you may remember, by a piece of common sense: If Satan

cast out Satan, he is divided against himself, and his kingdom cannot

stand.' There is an old play which has for its title, The Devil as an

Ass. He is not such an ass as that, to build up with one hand and cast

down with the other. As the proverb has it, Hawks do not pick out

hawks' eyes.' But this plainly hopeless attempt to account for Christ

and His work may be turned into a witness for both, and yield not

unimportant lessons.

This explanation witnesses to the insufficiency of all explanations

which omit the supernatural. These men felt that they had to do with a

Man who was in touch with a whole world of unseen powers; and that they

had here to deal with something to which ordinary measuring lines were

palpably inapplicable. And so they fell back upon by Beelzebub'; and

they thereby admitted that humanity without something more at the back

of it never made such a man as that. And I beg you to lay that to

heart. It is very easy to solve an insoluble problem if you begin by

taking all the insoluble elements out of it. And that is how a great

deal of modern thinking does with Christianity. Knock out all the

miracles; pooh-pooh all Christ's claims; say nothing about Incarnation;

declare Resurrection to be entirely unhistorical, and you will not have

much difficulty in accounting for the rest; and it will not be worth

the accounting for. But here is the thing to be dealt with, that whole

life, the Christ of the Gospels. And I venture to say that any

explanation professing to account for Him which leaves out His coming

from an unseen world, and His possession of powers above this world of

sense and nature, is ludicrously inadequate. Suppose you had a chain

which for thousands of years had been winding on to a drum, and link

after link had been rough iron, and all at once there comes one of pure

gold, would it be reasonable to say that it had been dug from the same

mine, and forged in the same fires, as its black and ponderous

companions? Generation after generation has passed across the earth,

each begetting sons after its own likeness; and lo! in the midst of

them starts up one sinless Man. Is it reasonable to say that He is the

product of the same causes which have produced all the millions, and

never another like Him? Surely to account for Jesus without the

supernatural is hopeless.

Further, this explanation may be taken as an instance showing the

inadequacy of all theories and explanations of Christ and Christianity

from an unbelieving point of view. It was the first attempt of

unbelievers to explain where Christ's power came from. Like all first

attempts, it was crude, and it has been amended and refined since.

Earlier generations did not hesitate to call the Apostles liars, and

Christ's contemporaries did not hesitate to call Him this deceiver.' We

have got beyond that; but we still are met by explanations of the power

of the Gospel and of Christ, its subject and Author, which trace these

to ignoble elements, and do not shrink from asserting that a blunder or

a hallucination lies at the foundation.

Now, I am not going to enter upon these matters at any length, but I

would just recall to you our Lord's broad, simple principle: A corrupt

tree cannot bring forth good fruit, neither doth a good tree bring

forth evil fruit.' And I would apply that all round. Christian teachers

have often made great mistakes, as it seems to me, by tracing the

prevalence of the power of some heathen religions to their vices and

lies. No system has ever had great moral power in this world but by

reason of its excellences and truths. Mohammedanism, for instance,

swept away, and rightly, a mere formal superstition which called itself

Christianity, because it grasped the one truth: There is no God but

God'; and it had faith of a sort. Monasticism held the field in Europe,

with all its faults, for centuries, because it enshrined the great

Christian truth of self-sacrifice and absolute obedience. And you may

take it as a fixed rule, that howsoever some mixture of falsehood doth

ever please,' as Bacon says, in his cynical way, the reason for the

power of any great movement has been the truth that was in it and not

the lie; and the reason why great men have exercised influence has been

their greatness and their goodness, and not their smallnesses and their

vices.

I apply that all round, and I ask you to apply it to Christianity; and

in the light of such plain principles to answer the question: Where did

this Man, so fair, so radiant, so human and yet so superhuman, so

universal and yet so individual--where did He come from? and where did

the Gospel, which flows from Him, and which has done such things in the

world as it has done--where did it come from? Do men gather grapes of

thorns, or figs of thistles?' If it is true that Jesus Christ is either

mistakenly represented in the Gospels, or that He made enthusiastic

claims which cannot be verified; and if it is true that the faith in a

Resurrection on which Christianity is suspended, and which has produced

such fruits as we know have been produced, is a delusion; then all I

can say is that the noblest lives that ever were lived in the world

have found their impulse in a falsehood or a dream; and that the

richest clusters that ever have yielded wine for the cup have grown

upon a thorn. If like produces like, you cannot account for Christ and

Christianity by anything short of the belief in His Divine mission.

Serpents' eggs do not hatch out into doves. This Man, when He claimed

to be God's Son and the world's Saviour, was no brain-sick enthusiast;

and the results show that the Gospel which His followers proclaim rests

upon no lie.

Again, this explanation is an instance of the credulity of unbelief.

Think of the mental condition which could swallow such an explanation

of such a Worker and such work. It is more difficult to believe the

explanation than the alternative which it is framed to escape. So it is

always. The difficulties of faith are small by comparison with those of

unbelief, gnats beside camels, and that that is so is plain from the

short duration of each unbelieving explanation of Jesus. One can

remember in the compass of one's own life more than one assailant

taking the field with much trumpeting and flag-waving, whose attack

failed and is forgotten. The child's story tells of a giant who

determined to slay his enemy, and belaboured an empty bed with his club

all night, and found his foe untouched and fresh in the morning. The

Gospel is here; what has become of its assailants? They are gone, and

the limbo into which the scribes' theory has passed will receive all

the others. So we may be quite patient, and sure that the sieve of

time, which is slowly and constantly working, will riddle out all the

rubbish, and cast it on the dunghill where so many exploded theories

rot forgotten.

III. And now, one word about the last point; and that is--the true

explanation.

Now, at this stage of my sermon, I must not be tempted to say a word

about the light which our Lord throws, in these declarations in the

context, into that dim unseen world. His words seem to me to be too

solemn and didactic to be taken as accommodations to popular prejudice,

and a great deal too grave to be taken as mere metaphor. And I, for my

part, am not so sure that, apart from Him, I know all things in heaven

and earth, as to venture to put aside these solemn words of His--which

lift a corner of the veil which hides the unseen--and to dismiss them

as unworthy of notice. Is it not a strange thing that a world which is

so ready to believe in spiritual communications when they are vouched

for by a newspaper editor, is so unwilling to believe them when they

are in the Bible? And is it not a strange thing that scientists, who

are always taunting Christians with the importance they attach to man

in the plan of the universe, and ask if all these starry orbs were

built for him, should be so incredulous of teachings which fill the

waste places with loftier beings? But that is by the way.

What does Christ say in the context? He tells the secret of His power.

I, by the Spirit of God, cast out demons.' And then He goes on to speak

about a conflict that He wages with a strong man; and about His binding

the strong man, and spoiling his house. All which, being turned into

modern language, is just this, that the Lord, by His incarnation, life,

death, resurrection, ascension, and government at the right hand of

God, has broken the powers of evil in their central hold. He has

crushed the serpent's head; and though He may still, as Milton puts it,

swinge the scaly horror of his folded tail,' it is but the flurries of

the dying brute. The conquering heel is firm on his head. So, brethren,

evil is conquered, and Christ is the Conqueror; and by His work in life

and death He has delivered them that were held captive of the devil.

And you and I may, if we will, pass into the liberty wherewith Christ

has made us free.'

That is the only explanation of Him--in His person, in His character,

in His work, and in the effects of that work in the world--that covers

all the facts, and will hold water. All others fail, and they mostly

fail by boldly eliminating the very facts that need to be accounted

for. Let us rather look to Him, thankful that our Brother has

conquered; and let us put our trust in that Saviour. For, if His

explanation is true, then a very solemn personal consideration arises

for each of us, If I, by the Spirit of God, cast out demons, then the

Kingdom of God is come unto you,' it stands beside us; it calls for our

obedience. Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone, can cast the evils out

of our natures. It is the Incarnate Christ, the Divine Christ, the

crucified Christ, the ascended Christ, the indwelling Christ, who will

so fill our hearts that there shall be no aching voids there to invite

the return of the expelled tyrants. If any other reformation pass upon

us than the thorough one of receiving Him by faith into our hearts,

then, though they may be swept and garnished, they will be empty; and

the demons will come back. With Jesus inside--they will be outside.

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MAKE THE TREE GOOD'

. . . Make the tree good, and his fruit good. . ..' --MATT. xii. 33.

In this Gospel we find that our Lord twice uses this image of a tree

and its fruit. In the Sermon on the Mount He applies it as a test to

false teachers, who hide, beneath the wool of the sheep's clothing, the

fangs and paws of ravening wolves. He says, By their deeds ye shall

know them; for as is the tree so is its fruit.' That is a rough and

ready test, which applies rather to the teacher than to his doctrine,

but it applies, to some extent, to the doctrine too, on the hypothesis

that the teacher's life fairly represents it. Of course, it is not the

only thing that we have to take into account; but it may prick many a

bladder, and unmask many an error, and it is the way by which the

masses generally judge of systems and of their apostles. A saintly life

has more power than dusty volumes of controversy.

But in our text Christ applies the same thoughts in rather a deeper

fashion. Here the lesson that He would have us draw is of the

connection between character and conduct; how what we do is determined

by what we are, and how, not of course with the same absolute

regularity and constancy, but still somewhat in the same fashion as the

fruit is true to the tree, so, after all allowance made for ups and

downs, for the irregular play of will and conscience, for the strife

that is waged within a man, for the temptations of external

circumstances, and the like--still, in general, as is the inner man, so

is the outward manifestation. The facts of a life are important mainly

as registering and making visible the inner condition of the doer. Now,

that seems very elementary. Everybody believes that out of the heart

are the issues of life,' as a wise man said long ago, but it is one of

the truths that, if grasped and worked into our consciousness, and out

in our lives, would do much to revolutionise them. And so, though it is

a very old story, and though we all admit it, I wish now to come face

to face with the consequences of this thought, that behind action lies

character, and that Doing is the second step, and Being is the first.

I. I would ask you to notice how here we are confronted with the great

problem for every man.

Make the tree good.' It takes a good man to do good things. So how

shallow is all that talk, do, do, do,' this, that, and the other thing.

All right, but be; that is the first thing; or, as Christ said, Make

the tree good, and the fruit' will take care of itself. So do you not

see how, if that is true about us, we are each brought full front up to

this, Am I trying to make my tree good? And what kind of success am I

having in the attempt?' The water that rises from some spring will

bring up with it, in solution, a trace of a bed of salt through which

it has come, and of all the minerals in the soil through which it has

passed. And as its sparkling waters come out into the light, if one

could analyse them completely, one might register a geological section

of the strata through which it has risen. So, our acts bear in them a

revelation of all the hidden beds through which they have risen; and

sometimes they are bitter and salt, but they are always true to the

self whose apocalypse they are to the world, or at all events to God.

Therefore, brethren, I have to urge this, that we shall not be doing

our true work as men and women, if we are simply trying to better our

actions, important as these are. By this saying the centre of gravity

is shifted, and in one aspect, the deeds are made less important. The

condition of the hidden man of the heart is the all-important thing.

Christ's word comes to each of us as the briefest statement of all that

it is our highest duty and truest wisdom to aim at in life--Make the

tree good.'

If you have ever tried it honestly, and have not been contented with

the superficial cleaning up of outsides, which consists in shifting the

dirt into another place only, not in getting rid of it, I know what met

you almost as soon as you began, like some great black rock that rises

in a mountain-pass, and forbids all farther advance--the consciousness

that you were not good met you. I am not going to talk theological

technicalities. Never mind about phrases--they have been the ruin of a

great deal of earnest preaching--call it what you like, here is a fact,

that whenever a man sets himself, with anything like resolute

determination and rigid self-examination, to the task of getting

himself right, he finds that he is wrong. That being the case, each of

us has to deal with a tremendous problem; and the more earnestly and

honestly we try to deal with it, the more we shall feel how grave it

is. You can cure a great deal, I know. God forbid that I should say one

word that seems to deny a man's power to do much in the direction of

self-improvement, but after all that is done, again you are brought

short up on this fact, the testimony of conscience. And so I see men

labouring at a task as vain as that of those who would twist the sands

into ropes, according to the old fable. I see men seeking after higher

perfection of purity than they will ever attain. That is the condition

of us all, of course, for our ideal must always outrun our realisation,

else we may as well lie down and die. But there is a difference between

the imperfect approximation, which we feel to be imperfect, and yet

feel to be approximation, and the despairing consciousness, that I am

sure a great many of my audience have had, more or less, that I have a

task set for me that is far beyond my strength. Talk about making the

tree good! I cannot do it.' So men fold their hands, and the foiled

endeavour begets despair. Or, as is the case with some of you, it

begets indifference, and you do not care to try any more, because you

have tried so often, and have made nothing of it.

There is the problem, how make the tree good,' the tree being bad, or,

at all events, if you do not like that broad statement, the tree having

an element of badness, if I may so say, in and amongst any goodness

that it has. I do not care which of the two forms of statement you

take, the fact remains the same.

II. Note the universal failure to solve the problem.

Make the tree good.'

Yes. And there are a whole set of would-be arboriculturists who tell

you they will do it if you will trust to them. Let us look at them.

First comes one venerable personage. He says, I am Law, and I prescribe

this, and I forbid that, and I show reward and punishment, and I tell

you--be a good man.' Well! what then? It is not for want of telling

that men are bad. The worst man in the world knows his duty a great

deal more than the best man in the world does it. And whether it is the

law of the land, or whether it is the law of society, or the law

written in Scripture, or the law written in a man's own heart, they all

come under the same fatal disability. They tell us what to do, and they

do not put out a finger to help us to do it. A lame man does not get to

the city because he sees a guide-post at the turning which tells him

which road to take. The people who do not believe in certain modern

agitations about the restrictions of the liquor traffic say, You cannot

make people sober by Act of Parliament,' which is absolutely true,

although it does not bear, I think, the inference that they would draw

from it, and it just puts into a rough form the fatal weakness of this

would-be gardener and improver of the nature of the trees. He tells us

our duty, and there an end.

Do you remember how the Apostle put the weakness of law in words, the

antique theological terminology of which should not prevent us from

seeing the large truth in them? If there had been a law given which

could have given life, then righteousness should have been by the law,'

which being translated into modern English is just this, If Law could

impart a power to obey its behests, then it is all that we want to make

us right. But until it can do that it fails in two points. It deals

with conduct, and we need to have character dealt with; and it does not

lift the burden that it lays on me with one of its fingers. So we may

rule Law out of court.

And then comes another, and he says, I am Culture, and intellectual

acquirement; or my name is Education, and I am going to make the tree

good in the most scientific fashion, because what makes men bad is that

they do not know, and if they only knew they would do the right.' Now,

I thoroughly believe that education diminishes crime. I believe it

weans from certain forms of evil. I believe that, other things being

equal, an educated man, with his larger interests and his cultivated

tastes, has a certain fastidiousness developed which keeps him from

being so much tempted by the grosser forms of transgression. I believe

that very largely you will empty your gaols in proportion as you fill

your schools. And let no man say that I am an obscurantist, or that I

am indifferent to the value of education and the benefits of

intellectual culture, when I declare that all these may be attained,

and the nature of the tree remain exactly what it was. You may prune,

you may train along the wall, you may get bigger fruit, you will not

get better fruit. Did you ever hear the exaggerated line that describes

one of the pundits of science as the greatest, wisest, meanest of

mankind'? The plain fact is that the cultivation of the understanding

has little to do with the purifying of the depths of the heart.

And then comes another, and says, I am the genius of Beauty and Art.

And my recipe is pictures and statues, and all that will refine the

mind, and lift the taste.' That is the popular gospel of this day, in a

great many quarters. Yes, and have we never heard of a period in

European history which was, as they call it, the Renaissance' of art

and the death of morality? Do we not know that side by side there have

been cultivated in all ages, and are being cultivated to-day, the most

exclusive devotion to the beauty that can be expressed by art, and the

most intense indifference to the beauty of holiness? Ah! brethren, it

wants something far deeper-going than pictures to purge the souls of

men. And whilst, as before, I thankfully acknowledge the refining

influence of this new cult, I would protest against the absurdity of

putting it upon a pedestal as the guide and elevator of corrupted

humanity.

And then come others, and they say, Environment is the thing that is to

blame for it all. How can you get decent lives in the slums?' No, I

know you cannot; and God bless every effort made to get the people out

of the slums, I say. Only do not let us exaggerate. You cannot change a

man, as deeply as we need to be changed, by any change of his

circumstances. Take the bitter tree,' as I remember an old Jewish

saying has it, take the bitter tree and plant it in Eden, and water it

with the rivers there; and let the angel Gabriel be the gardener, and

the tree will still bear bitter fruit.' Are all the people who live in

good houses good? Will a living wage'--eight shillings a day and eight

hours' play--will these change a man's character? Will these go deep

enough down to touch the springs of evil? You cannot alter the nature

of a set of objects by arranging them in different shapes,

parallelograms, or squares, or circles, or any others. As long as you

have the elements that are in human nature to deal with, you may do as

you like about the distribution of wealth, and the relation of Capital

to Labour, and the various cognate questions which are all included in

the vague word Socialism; and human nature will be too strong for you,

and you will have the old mischiefs cropping out again. Brethren, you

cannot put out Vesuvius by bringing to bear on it the squirts of all

the fire engines in creation. The water will go up in steam, and do

little or nothing to extinguish the fire. And whilst I would thankfully

help in all these other movements, and look for certain limited results

of good from them, I, for my part, believe, and therefore I am bound to

declare, that neither singly, nor all of them in combination, will they

ever effect the change on human nature which Jesus Christ regarded as

the only possible means for securing that human nature should bear good

fruit.

For, if there were no other reason, there are two plain ones which I

only touch. God is the source of all good, of all creatural purity as

well as all creatural blessedness. And if a life has a blank wall

turned to Him, and has cut itself off from Him, I do not care how you

educate it, fill it full of science, plunge it into an atmosphere of

art, make the most perfect arrangements for social and economical and

political circumstances, that soul is cut off from the possibility of

good, because it is cut off from the fontal source of all good. And

there is another reason which is closely connected with this, and that

is that the true bitter tang in us all is self-centring regard. That is

the mother-tincture that, variously coloured and compounded, makes in

all the poisonous element that we call sin, and until you get something

that will cast that evil out of a man's heart, you may teach and refine

and raise him and arrange things for him as you like, and you will not

master the source of all wrong and corrupt fruit.

III. Lastly, let me say a word about the triumphant solution.

Law says, Make the tree good,' and does not try to do it. Christ said,

Make the tree good,' and proceeds to do it. And how does He do it?

He does it by coming to us; to every soul of man on the earth, and

offering, first, forgiveness for all the past. I do not know that

amongst all the bonds by which evil holds a poor soul that struggles to

get away from it, there is one more adamantine and unyielding than the

consciousness that the past is irrevocable, and that what I have

written I have written,' and never can blot out. But Jesus Christ deals

with that consciousness. It is true that whatsoever a man soweth that

shall he also reap,' and the Christian doctrine of forgiveness does not

contradict that solemn truth, but it assures us that God's heart is not

turned away from us, notwithstanding the past, and that we can write

the future better, and break altogether the fatal bond that decrees,

apart from Him, that to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more

abundant,' and that past sin shall beget a progeny of future sins. That

fruitfulness of sin is at an end, if we take Christ for our Saviour.

He makes the tree good in another fashion still; for the very centre,

as it seems to me, of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that into our

spirits He will breathe a new life kindred with His own, a new nature

which is free from the law and bonds of past sin, and of present and

future death. The tree is made good because He makes those who believe

in Him new creatures in Christ Jesus.' Now, do not turn away and say

that that is mysticism. Be it mysticism or not, it is God's truth. It

is the truth of the Christian Revelation, that faith in Jesus Christ

puts a new nature into any man, however sinful he may have been, and

however deep the marks of the fetters may have been upon his limbs.

Christ makes the tree good in yet another fashion, because He brings to

the reinforcement of the new life which He imparts the mightiest

motives, and sways by love, which leads to the imitation of the

Beloved, which leads to obedience to the Beloved, which leads to

shunning as the worst of evils anything that would break the communion

with the Beloved, and which is in itself the decentralising of the

sinful soul from its old centre, and the making of Christ the Beloved

the centre round which it moves, and from which it draws radiance and

light and motion. By all these methods, and many more that I cannot

dwell upon now, the problem is triumphantly solved by Christianity. The

tree is made good, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle

tree.'

You may say, That is all very well in theory. What about the practice?

I do not see such a mighty difference between you Christians and us.'

Well, for myself and my brethren, I accept the rebuke. There is not

such a difference as there ought to be. But do you know why? Not

because our great Gardener cannot change the nature of the plant, but

because we do not submit ourselves to His power as we ought to do.

Debit us with as many imperfections and inconsistencies as you like, do

not lay them to the charge of Christ.

And yet we are willing to accept the test of Christianity which lies in

its power to change men. I point to the persecutor on the road to

Damascus. I point to the Bedfordshire tinker, to him that wrote

Pilgrim's Progress. I point to the history of the Christian Church all

down through the ages. I point to our mission fields to-day. I point to

every mission hall, where earnest, honest men are working, and where,

if you go and ask them, they will let you see people lifted from the

very depths of degradation and sin, and made honest, sober,

respectable, hard-working, though not very intelligent or refined,

Christian people. I suppose that there is no man in an official

position like mine who cannot look back over his ministry and remember,

some of them dozens, some of them scores, some of them hundreds, of

cases in which the change was made on the most hopeless people, by the

simple acceptance of the simple gospel, Christ died for me, and Christ

lives in me.' I know that I can recall such, and I am sure that my

brethren can.

People who are not Christians talk glibly about the failure of

Christianity to transform men. They have never seen the transformations

because they have never put themselves in the way of seeing them. They

are being worked to-day; they might be worked here and now.

Try the power of the Gospel for yourselves. You cannot make the tree

good, but you can let Jesus Christ do it. The Ethiopian cannot change

his skin, nor the leopard his spots, but Jesus can do both. The lion

shall eat straw like the ox.' It is weary work to be tinkering at your

acts. Take the comprehensive way, and let Him change your character. I

believe that in some processes of dyeing, a piece of cloth, prepared

with a certain liquid, is plunged into a vat full of dye-stuffs of one

colour, and is taken out tinged of another. The soul, wet with the

waters of repentance, and plunged into the Fountain opened for sin and

for uncleanness,' the crimson fountain of the blood of Christ, emerges

whiter than snow.' Let Him make the tree good and fruit will be good,'

for if not we shall be hewn down and cast into the fire,' because we

cannot bear any fruit unto holiness, nor can the end be everlasting

life.

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A GREATER THAN JONAS'

A greater than Jonas is here.'--MATT. xii. 41.

There never was any man in his right mind, still more of influence on

his fellows, who made such claims as to himself in such unmistakable

language as Jesus Christ does. To say such things of oneself as come

from His lips is a sign of a weak, foolish nature. It is fatal to all

influence, to all beauty of character. It is not only that He claims

official attributes as a fanatical or dishonest pretender to

inspiration may do. He does that, but He does more--He declares Himself

possessed of virtues which, if a man said he had them, it would be the

best proof that he did not possess them and did not know himself. I am

the way and the truth and the life.' I am the light of the world'--a

greater than the temple,' a greater than Jonah, a greater than

Solomon,' and then withal I am meek and lowly of heart.' And the world

believes Him, and says, Yes! it is true.

These three comparisons of Jesus with Temple, Jonas, and Solomon, carry

great claims and great lessons. By the first Jesus asserts that He is

in reality all that the Temple was in shadowy symbol, and sets Himself

above ritual, sacrifices, and priests. By the second he asserts His

superiority not only to one prophet but to them all. By the third He

asserts His superiority to Solomon, whom the Jews reverenced as the

bright, consummate flower of kinghood.

Now we may take this comparison as giving us positive thoughts about

our Lord. The points of comparison may be taken to be three, with Jonah

as one of an order, with Jonah in his personal character as a servant

of God, with Jonah as a prophet charged with a special work.

I. The prophets and the Son.

The whole prophetic order may fairly be taken as included here. And

over against all these august and venerable names, the teachers of

wisdom, the speakers of the oracles of God, this Nazarene peasant

stands there before Pharisees and Scribes, and asserts His superiority.

It is either the most insane arrogance of self-assertion, or it is a

sober truth. If it be true that self-consciousness is ever the disease

of the soul, and that the religious teacher who begins to think of

himself is lost, how marvellous is this assertion!

Compare it with Paul's, Unto me who am less than the least of all

saints'--I am not a whit behind the chief of the Apostles'--though I be

nothing'--Not I, but Christ in me.' And yet this is meekness, for it is

infinite condescension in Him to compare Himself with any son of man.

(a) The contrast is suggested between the prophets and the theme of the

prophets.

The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.' Though undoubtedly

the prophet order had other work than prediction to do, yet the soul of

their whole work was the announcement of the Messiah.

In testimony whereof, Elijah, who was traditionally the chief of the

prophets, stood beside Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, and

passed away as lost in His light.

(b) The contrast is suggested between the recipients of the word of God

and the Word of God.

The relation of the prophets to their message is contrasted with His

who was the Truth, who not merely received, but was, the Word of God.

There is nothing in Christ's teaching to show that He was conscious of

standing in a human relation to the truths which He spoke. His own

personality is ever present in His teaching instead of being

suppressed--as in all the prophets. His own personality is His

teaching, for His revelation is by being as much as by saying.

Similarly, His miracles are done by His own power.

(c) The contrast is suggested between the partial teacher of God's Name

and the complete revealer of it.

The foundation was laid by the prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the

chief corner stone (Hebrews i. 1).

II. The disobedient prophet and the perfect Son.

Jonah stands as the great example of human weakness in the chosen

instruments of God's hand.

Take the story--his shrinking from the message given him. We know not

why; but perhaps from faint-hearted fear, or from a sense of his

unworthiness and unfitness for the task. His own words about God as

long-suffering seem to suggest another reason, that he feared to go

with a message of judgment which seemed to him so unlikely to be

executed by the long-suffering God. If so, then what made him recreant

was not so much fear from personal motives as intellectual perplexity

and imperfect comprehension of the ways of God. Then we hear of his

pitiable flight with its absurdity and its wickedness. Then comes the

prayer which shows him to have been right and true at bottom, and

teaches us that what makes a good man is not the absence of faults, but

the presence of love and longing after God. Then we see the boldness of

his mission. Then follows the reaction from that lofty height, the

petulance or whatever else it was with which he sees the city spared.

Even the mildest interpretation cannot acquit him of much disregard for

the poor souls whom he had brought to repentance, and of dreadful

carelessness for the life and happiness of his fellows.

Now Jonah's behaviour is but a specimen of the vacillations, the

alternations of feeling which beset every man; the loftiest, the

truest, the best. Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah, John the Baptist,

Peter, Luther, Cranmer. And it is full of instruction for us.

Then we turn to the contrast in Christ's perfect obedience and

faithfulness in His prophetic office. In Him is no trace of shrinking

even when the grimness of the Cross weighed most on His heart. No

confusion of mind as to the Father's will, or as to the union in Him of

perfect righteousness and infinite mercy, ever darkened His clear

utterances or cast a shadow over his own soul. He was never weakened by

the collapse that follows on great effort or strong emotion. He never

failed in his mission through lack of pity.

But there is no need to draw out the comparison. We look on all God's

instruments, and see them all full of faults and flaws. Here is one

stainless name, one life in which is no blot, one heart in which are no

envy, no failings--one obedience which never varied. He says of

Himself, I do always those things which please Him,' and we, thinking

of all the noblest examples of virtue that the world has ever seen, and

seeing in them all some speck, turn to this whole and perfect

chrysolite and say, Yes! a greater than they!'

III. The bearer of a transitory message of repentance to one Gentile

people, and the bearer of an eternal message of grace and love to the

whole earth.

Jonah is remarkable as having had the sphere of his activity wholly

outside Israel.

The nature of his message; a preaching of punishment; a call to

repentance.

The sphere of it--one Gentile city. The effect of it--transitory. We

know what Nineveh became.

Jesus is greater than Jonah or any prophet in this respect, that His

message is to the world, and in this, that what He preaches and brings

far transcends even the loftiest and most spiritual words of any of

them.

His voice is sweetest, tenderest, clearest and fullest of all that have

ever sounded in men's ears. And just because it is so, the hearing of

it brings the most solemn responsibility that was ever laid on men, and

to us still more gravely and truly may it be said than to those who

heard Jesus speak on earth, The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment

with this generation and condemn it.'

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A GREATER THAN SOLOMON'

A greater than Solomon is here.'--MATT. xii. 42.

It is condescension in Him to compare Himself with any; yet if any

might have been selected, it is that great name. To the Jews Solomon is

an ideal figure, who appealed so strongly to popular imagination as to

become the centre of endless legends; whose dominion was the very apex

of national glory, in recounting whose splendours the historical books

seem to be scarce able to restrain their triumph and pride.

I. The Man. The story gives us a richly endowed and many-sided

character. It begins with lovely, youthful enthusiasm, with a profound

sense of his own weakness, with earnest longings after wisdom and

guidance. He lived a pure and beautiful youth, and all his earlier and

middle life was adorned with various graces. There is a certain

splendid largeness about the character. He had a rich variety of gifts:

he was statesman, merchant, sage, physicist, builder, one of the

many-sided men whom the old world produced. And on this we may build a

comparison and contrast.

The completeness of Christ's Humanity transcends all other men, even

the most various, and transcends all gathered together. Every type of

excellence is in Him. We cannot say that His character is any one thing

in special, it falls under no classification. It is a pure white light

in which all rays are blended. This all-comprehensiveness and symmetry

of character are remarkably shown in four brief records.

But we have to take into account the dark shadows that fell on

Solomon's later years. He clearly fell away from his early consecration

and noble ideals, and let his sensuous appetites gain power. He

countenanced, if he did not himself practise, idolatry. As a king he

became an arbitrary tyrant, and his love of building led him to oppress

his subjects, and so laid the foundation for the revolt under Jeroboam

which rent the kingdom. So his history is another illustration of the

possible shipwreck of a great character. It is one more instance of the

fall of a son of the morning.' We need not elaborate the contrast with

Christ's character. In Him is no falling from a high ideal, no fading

of morning glory into a cloudy noon or a lurid evening. There is no

black streak in that flawless white marble. Jesus draws the perfect

circle, like Giotto's O, while all other lives show some faltering of

hand, and consequent irregularity of outline. Greater than Solomon,

with his over-clouded glories and his character worsened by

self-indulgence, is Jesus, the Sun of righteousness,' the perfect round

of whose lustrous light is broken by no spots on the surface, no

indentations in the circumference, nor obscured by any clouds over its

face.

II. The Teacher.

Solomon was traditionally regarded as the author of much of the Book of

Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes was written as by him. Possibly the

attribution to him of some share in the former book may be correct, but

at any rate, his wisdom was said to have drawn the Queen of Sheba to

hear him, and that is the point of the comparison of our text.

If we take these two books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes into account,

as popularly attributed to him, they suggest points of comparison and

contrast with Jesus as a teacher, which we may briefly point out. Now,

Proverbs falls into two very distinct portions, the former part being a

connected fatherly admonition to the pursuit of wisdom, and the latter

a collection of prudential maxims, in which it is rare for any two

contiguous verses to have anything to do with each other. In the former

part Wisdom is set forth as man's chief good, and the Wisdom which is

so set forth is mainly moral wisdom, the right disposition of will and

heart, and almost identical with what the Old Testament elsewhere calls

righteousness. But it is invested, as the writer proceeds, with more

and more august and queenly attributes, and at last stands forth as

being, if not a divine person, at least a personification of a divine

attribute.

Bring that ancient teaching and set it side by side with Jesus, and

what can we say but that He is what the old writer, be he Solomon or

another, dimly saw? He is the wisdom' which was traditionally called

the wisdom of Solomon,' and which the Queen came from far to hear.

Jesus is greater, as the light is more than the eye, or as the theme is

more than the speaker. The power of God and the wisdom of God' is

greater than the sage or seer who celebrates it. What is true of

Solomon or whoever wrote that praise of Wisdom, is true of all teachers

and wise men, they are not that light,' they are sent to bear witness

of that light.' Jesus is Wisdom, other men are wise. Jesus is the

greatest teacher, for He teaches us Himself. He is lesson as well as

teacher. Unless He was a great deal more than Teacher, He could not be

the perfect Teacher for whom the world groans.

The second half of Proverbs is, as I have said, mostly a collection of

prudential and moral maxims, with very little reference to God or high

ideals of duty in them. They may represent to us the impotence of wise

saws to get themselves practised. A guide-post is not a guide. It

stretches out its gaunt wooden arms towards the city, but it cannot

bend them to help a lame man lying at its foot. Men do not go wrong for

lack of knowing the road, nearly so often as for lack of inclination to

walk in it. We have abundant voices to tell us what we ought to do. But

what we want is the swaying of inclination to do it, and the gift of

power to do it. And it is precisely because Jesus gives us both these

that He is what no collection of the wisest sayings can ever be, the

efficient teacher of all righteousness, and of the true wisdom which is

the principal thing.'

As for Ecclesiastes, though not his, it represents not untruly the tone

which we may suppose to have characterised his later days in its

dwelling on the vanity of life. The sadness of it may be contrasted

with the light thrown by the Gospel on the darkest problems. Solomon

cries, All is vanity'--Jesus teaches His scholars to sing, All things

work together for good.'

III. The Temple builder.

In this respect a greater than Solomon is here,' inasmuch as Jesus is

Himself the true Temple, being for all men, which Solomon's structure

only shadowed, the meeting-place of God and man, in whom God dwells and

through whom we can draw near to Him, the place where the true

Sacrifice is once for all offered, by which Sacrifice sin is truly put

away. And, further, Jesus is greater than Solomon in that He is,

through the ages, building up the great Temple of His Church of

redeemed men, the eternal temple of which not one stone shall ever be

taken down.

IV. The peaceful King.

There were no wars in Solomon's reign. But a dark shadow brooded over

it in its later years, which were darkened by oppression, luxury, and

incipient revolt.

Contrast with that merely external and sadly imperfect peacefulness,

the deep, inward peace of spirit which Jesus breathes into every man

who trusts and obeys Him, and with the peace among men which the

acceptance of His rule brings, and will one day bring perfectly, to a

regenerated humanity dwelling on a renewed earth. He is King of

righteousness, and after that also King of peace.

Surely from all these contrasts it is plain that a greater than Solomon

is here.'

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FOUR SOWINGS AND ONE RIPENING

The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. 2.

And great multitudes were gathered together unto Him, so that He went

into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. 8.

And He spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower

went forth to sow; 4. And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way

side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: 6. Some fell upon stony

places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up,

because they had no deepness of earth: 6. And when the sun was up, they

were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. 7. And

some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: 8.

But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an

hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. 9. Who hath ears to hear,

let him hear.'--MATT. xiii. 1-9.

The seven parables of the kingdom, in this chapter, are not to be

regarded as grouped together by Matthew. They were spoken

consecutively, as is obvious from the notes of time in verses 36 and

53. They are a great whole, setting forth the mystery of the kingdom'

in its method of establishment, its corruption, its outward and inward

growth, the conditions of entrance into it, and its final purification.

The sacred number seven, impressed upon them, is the token of

completeness. They fall into two parts: four of them being spoken to

the multitudes from the boat, and presenting the more obvious aspects

of the development of the kingdom; three being addressed to the

disciples in the house, and setting forth truths about it more fitted

for them.

The first parable, which concerns us now, has been generally called the

Parable of the Sower, but he is not the prominent figure. The subject

is much rather the soils; and the intention is, not so much to declare

anything about him, as to explain to the people, who were looking for

the kingdom to be set up by outward means, irrespective of men's

dispositions, that the way of establishing it was by teaching which

needed receptive spirits. The parable is both history and prophecy. It

tells Christ's own experience, and it foretells His servants'. He is

the great Sower, who has come forth' from the Father. His present

errand is not to burn up thorns or to punish the husbandmen, but to

scatter on all hearts the living seed, which is here interpreted, in

accordance with the dominant idea of this Gospel, as being the word of

the kingdom' (ver. 19). All who follow Him, and make His truth known,

are sowers in their turn, and have to look for the same issue of their

work. The figure is common to all languages. Truth, whether

intellectual, moral, or spiritual, is seminal, and, deposited in the

heart, understanding, or conscience, grows. It has a mysterious

vitality, and its issue is not a manufacture, but a fruit. If all

teachers, especially religious teachers, would remember that, perhaps

there would be fewer failures, and a good deal of their work would be

modified. We have here four sowings and one ripening--a sad proportion!

We are not told that the quantity of seed was in each case the same.

Rather we may suppose that much less fell on the wayside, and on the

rocky soil, and among the thorns, than on the good ground. So we cannot

say that seventy-five per cent, of it was wasted; but, in any case, the

proportion of failure is tragically large. This Sower was under no

illusion as to the result of His work.

It is folly to sow on the hard footpath, or the rocky ground, or among

thorns; but Christ and His servants have to do that, in endless hope

that these unreceptive hearts may become good soil. One lesson of the

parable is, Scatter the seed everywhere, on the most unlikely places.

I. Our Lord begins with the case in which the seed remains quite

outside the soil, or, without metaphor, in which the word finds

absolutely no entrance into the heart or mind. A beaten path runs by

the end, or perhaps through the middle, of the cornfield. It is of

exactly the same soil as the rest, but many passengers have trodden it

hard, and the very foot of the sower, as he comes and goes in his work,

has helped. Some of the seed, sown broadcast, of course falls there,

and lies where it falls, having no power to penetrate the hard surface.

As in our own English cornfields, a flock of bold, hungry birds watch

the sower; and, as soon as his back is turned, they are down with a

swift-winged swoop, and away goes the exposed grain. So there is an end

of it; and the path is as bare as ever, five minutes after it has been

strewed with seeds.

The explanation is too plain to be mistaken, but we may briefly touch

its main features. Notice, then, that our Lord begins with the case in

which there is least contact between His word and the soul, and that,

as the contact is least in degree, so it is shortest in duration. A

minute or two finishes it. Notice especially that the path has been

made hard by external pressure. It is not rock, but soil like the other

parts of the field. It represents the case of men whose insensibility

to the word is caused by outward things having made a thoroughfare of

their natures, and trodden them into incapacity to receive the message

of Christ's love. The heavy baggage-wagons of commerce, the light cars

of pleasure, merry dancers, and sad funeral processions, have all used

that way, and each footfall has beaten the once loose soil a little

firmer. We are made insensitive to the gospel by the effect of innocent

and necessary things, unless we take care to plough up the path along

which they travel, and to keep our spirits susceptible by a distinct

effort. How many hearers of every teacher are there, who never take in

his words at all, simply because they are so completely preoccupied!

Notice what becomes of the seed that lies thus bare. Immediately,' says

Mark, Satan cometh.' His agents are these light-winged thoughts that

flutter round the hearer as soon as the sermon or the lesson is over.

Talk of the weather, criticism of the congregation, or of the sower's

attitude as he flung the seed, or politics, or business, drive away the

remembrance of even the text, before many of our hearers are out of

sight of the church. Then the whirl of traffic begins again, and the

path is soon beaten a little harder. If the seed had got ever so little

way into the ground, the sharp beaks of the thieves would not have

carried it off so easily. Impressions so slight as Christ's word makes

on busy men are quickly rubbed out. But if the seed sown vanishes thus

swiftly, the fault is not in it, but in ourselves. Satan may seek to

snatch it away, but we can hinder him.

Our Lord uses a singular expression, This is he that was sown by the

way side,' which appears to identify the man with the seed rather than

with the soil. It has been suggested by some commentators that this

expression is to be regarded as conveying the truth that the seed sown

in the heart and growing up there becomes the life-spring of the

individual, and that therefore we may speak of him or of it as bearing

the fruit. But this explanation will not avail for the case where there

is no entrance of the word into the heart, and so no new birth by the

word. More probably we are to regard the expression simply as a

conversational shorthand form of speech, not strictly accurate, but

quite intelligible.

II. The next variety of soil differs from the preceding in having its

hindrance deep seated. Many a hillside in Galilee--as in Scotland or

New England--would show a thin surface of soil over rock, like skin

stretched tightly on a bone. No roots could get through the rock nor

find nourishment in it; while the very shallowness of earth and the

heat of the underlying stone would accelerate growth. Such premature

and feeble shoots perish as quickly as they spring up; the fierce

Eastern sun makes a speedy end of them, and a few days sees their

springing and withering. It is a case of lightly come, lightly go.'

Quick-sprouting herbs are soon-dying herbs. A shallow pond is up in

waves under a breeze which raises no sea on the Atlantic, and it is

calm again in a few minutes. Readily stirred emotion is transient.

Brushwood catches fire easily, and burns itself out quickly. Coal takes

longer to kindle, and is harder to put out.

The persons meant are those of excitable temperament, whose feelings

lie on the surface, and can be got at without first passing through the

understanding or the conscience. Such people are easily played on by

the epidemic influence of any prevalent enthusiasm or emotion, as every

revival of religion shows. Their very joy' in hearing the word is

suspicious; for a true reception of it seldom begins with joy, but

rather with the sorrow which worketh repentance not to be repented of.'

Their immediate reception of it is suspicious, for it suggests that

there has been no time to consult the understanding or to form a

deliberate purpose; stable resolutions are slowly formed. It is the

sunny side of religion which, has attracted them. They know nothing of

its difficulties and depths. Hence, as soon as they find out the

realities of the course which they have embraced so lightly, they

desert, like John Mark running away as soon as home comforts at Cyprus

were left behind. The Christian life means self-denial, toil, hard

resistance to many fascinations. It means sweat and blood, or it means

nothing. Whether there be persecution' or no, there will be affliction,

because of the word,' and all the joyful emotion will ooze out at the

man's finger-ends. The same superficial excitability which determined

his swift reception of the word will determine his hasty casting of it

aside, and immediately he stumbles. All his acts will be done in a

hurry, and none of his moods will last. Feeling is in its place down in

the engine-room, but it makes a poor pilot. Very significant is that

phrase, No root in himself.' His roots are in the accidents of the

moment. His religion has never really struck root in him, but only in

the superficial layer of him. His conscience, will, understanding, are

unpenetrated by its fibres. So it is easily pulled up, as well as soon

withered.

There is another profound truth in this picture. The hard, impenetrable

rock lies right under the thin skin of soil. The nature which is

over-emotional on its surface is utterly hard at its core. The most

heartless people are those whose feelings are always ready to gush; the

most unimpressible are those who are most easily brought to a certain

degree of emotion by the sound of the word. This class is an advance on

the former, in that there has been a real contact with the word, which

has lain longer in their hearts, and has had some growth. We may regard

it as either better or worse than the former, according as we consider

that it is better to accept and feel than not to accept at all, or that

it is worse to have in some measure possessed and felt than not to have

received the word of the kingdom.

III. In one part of the field was a patch where the soil was neither

rammed solid, as on the footpath, nor thin, as where the rock cropped

out, but where there had been a tangle of thorns, which grow

luxuriantly in Palestine. These had been cut down, but not stubbed up,

as is plain from the very fact that the seed reached the ground, as

also from the description of them as springing up.' The two growths

advance together. In this case, the seed has a longer life than in the

former. It roots and grows, and even, according to the other

evangelist's version, fruits, though it does not mature its fruit.

There is no question of falling away' here. Only the hardier growth,

which had the advantage of previous possession, and which pushes up its

shoots above ground all round the more tender plant, gets the start of

it, and smothers its green blades, overtopping it, and keeping it from

sun and air, as well as drawing to itself the nourishment from the

soil. The main point here is simultaneousness of the two growths. This

man is, as James calls him, a double-minded man.' He is trying to grow

both corn and thorn on the same soil. He has some religion, but not

enough to make thorough work of it. He is endeavouring to ride on two

horses at once. Religion says either--or'; he is trying both--and.' The

human heart has only a limited amount of love and trust to give, and

Christ must have it all. It has enough for one--that is, for Him; but

not enough for two,--that is, for Him and the world. This man's

religion has not been powerful enough to grub up the roots of the

thorns. They were cut down when the seed was sown, for a little while,

at the beginning of his course; the new life in him seemed to conquer,

but the roots of the old lay hid, and, in due time, showed again above

ground. Ill weeds grow apace'; and these, as is their nature, grow

faster than the good seed. So the only thing to do is to get them out

of the ground to the last fibre.

Christ specifies what He deems thorns. We can all understand care being

so called; but riches? Yes, they too have sharp prickles, as anybody

will find who stuffs a pillow with them. But our Lord chooses His words

to point the lesson that not outward things, but our attitude to them,

make the barrenness of this soil. It is not this world,' but the care

of this world,' not riches,' but the deceitfulness of riches,' that

choke the word. These two seem opposites, but they are really the same

thing on two opposite sides. The man who is burdened with the cares of

poverty, and the man who is deceived by the false promises of wealth,

are really the same man. The one is the other turned inside out. We

make the world our god, whether we worship it by saying, I am desolate

without thee,' or by fancying that we are secure with it. Note that the

issue in this case is--unfruitfulness. The man may, and I suppose

usually does, keep up a profession of Christianity all his life. He

very likely does not know that the seed is choked, and that he has

become unfruitful. But he is a stunted, useless Christian, with all the

sap and nourishment of his soul given to his worldly position, and his

religion is a poor pining growth, with blanched leaves and abortive

fruit. How much of Christ's field is filled with plants of that sort!

IV. The parable tells us nothing about the comparative acreage of the

path and the rocky and thorny soils on the one hand, and of the fertile

soil on the other. It is not meant to teach the proportion of success

to failure, but to exhibit the fact that the reception of the word

depends on men's dispositions. The good soil has none of the faults of

the rest of the field. It is loose, and thus unlike the path; deep, and

thus unlike the rocky bit; clean, and thus unlike the thorn brake. The

interpretation given of it by our Lord seems at first sight incomplete.

It is all summed up in one word, understandeth.' Then, did not the

second and third classes, at all events, understand? They received the

word, and it had some growth in them. The distinction between them and

the good-soil hearer is surely of a moral nature, rather than of so

purely intellectual a kind as understanding' suggests. Hence, Luke's

keep fast in an honest and good heart' may seem a more adequate

statement. But Biblical usage does not regard understanding' as a

purely intellectual process, but rather as the action of the whole

moral and spiritual nature. It knows nothing of dividing a man up into

water-tight compartments, one of which may be full of evil, and the

other clean and receptive of good. According to it, we understand'

religious truth by our hearts and moral nature in conjunction with the

dry light of intellect. So the word here is used in a pregnant sense,

and includes the grasp of the truth with the whole being, the complete

reception of the word of the kingdom not merely into the intellect, but

into the central self which is the undivided fountain from which flow

the issues of life, whether these be called intellect, or affection, or

conscience, or will. Only he who has thus become one with the word, and

housed it deep in his inmost soul, understands' it, in the sense in

which our Lord here uses that expression. Thy word have I hid in mine

heart' exactly corresponds to the understanding' which is here given as

the distinctive mark of the good soil.

The result of that reception into the depths of the spirit is that he

verily beareth fruit.' The man who receives the word is identified with

the plant that springs from the seed which he receives. The life of a

Christian is the result of the growth in him of a supernatural seed. He

bears fruit, yet the fruit comes not from him, but from the seed sown.

I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' Fruitfulness is the aim of

the sower, and the test of the reception of the seed. If there is not

fruit, manifestly there has been no real understanding of the word. A

touchstone, that, which will produce surprising results in detecting

spurious Christianity, if it be honestly applied!

There is variety in the degree of fruitfulness, according to the

goodness of the soil; that is to say, according to the thoroughness and

depth of the reception of the word. The great Husbandman does not

demand uniform fertility. He is glad when He gets an hundredfold, but

He accepts sixty, and does not refuse thirty, only He arranges them in

descending order, as if He would fain have the highest rate from all

the plants, and, not without disappointment, gradually stretches His

merciful allowance to take in even the lowest. He will accept the

scantiest fruitage, and will lovingly purge' the branch that it may

bring forth more fruit.'

No parable teaches everything. Paths, rocks, and thorns cannot change.

But men can plough up the trodden ways, and blast away the rock, and

root out the thorns, and, with God's help, can open the door of their

hearts, that the Sower and His seed may enter in. We are responsible

for the nature of the soil, else His warning were vain, Take heed,

therefore, how ye hear.'

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EARS AND NO EARS

Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.--MATT. xiii. 8.

This saying was frequently on our Lord's lips, and that in very various

connections. He sometimes, as in the instance before us, appended it to

teaching which, from its parabolic form, required attention to

disentangle the spiritual truth implied. He sometimes used it to

commend some strange, new revolutionary teaching to men's

investigation--as, for instance, after that great declaration of the

nullity of ceremonial worship, how that nothing could defile a man

except what came from his heart. In other connections, which I need not

now enumerate, we find it. Like printing a sentence in italics, or

underscoring it, this saying calls special attention to the thing

uttered. It is interesting to notice that our Lord, like the rest of

us, had to use such means of riveting and sharpening the attention of

His hearers. There is also a striking reappearance of the expression in

the last book of Scripture. The Christ who speaks to the seven

churches, from the heavens, repeats His old word spoken on earth, and

at the end of each of the letters says once more, as if even the Voice

that spoke from heaven might be listened to listlessly, He that hath an

ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.'

I. We all have ears.

Now, it is a very singular instance of the superficial, indolent way in

which people are led away by sound rather than by sense, that this

saying of my text has often been taken to mean that there is a certain

class that can listen, and that it is their business to listen, and

there is another class that cannot, and so they are absorbed from all

responsibility. The opposite conclusion is the correct one. Everybody

has ears, therefore everybody is bound to hear. Which being translated,

is that there is not a man or woman among us that has not the capacity

of hearing in the sense of understanding, and of hearing in the sense

of obeying the word that Jesus Christ speaks to us all. Every one of

us, whatever may be our diversities of education, temperament, natural

capacity in regard to other subjects of study and apprehension, has the

ears that are capable of receiving the message that comes to us all in

Jesus Christ.

For what is it that He addresses? Universal human nature, the universal

human wants, and mainly and primarily, as I believe, the sense of sin

which lies dormant indeed, but capable of being awakened, in all men,

because the fact of sin attaches to all men. There is no man but has

the needs to which Christ addresses Himself, and no man but has the

power of apprehending, of accepting, and of living by, the great

Incarnate Word and His message to the world. So that instead of there

being a restriction implied in the words before us, there is the

broadest implication of the universality of Christ's message. And just

as every man comes into the world with a pair of ears on his head, so

every man comes into the world with the capacity of listening to, and

accepting, that gracious Lord. That is the first thing that our Master

distinctly declares here, that we all have ears.

II. If we have ears we are bound to use them.

Let him hear.' In all regions, as I need not remind you, capacity and

responsibility go together; and the power that we possess is the

measure of the obligation under which we come. All our natural

faculties, for instance, are given to us with the implied command, See

that you make the best use of them.' So that even these bodily organs

of ours, much more the higher faculties and capacities of the spirit of

which the body is partly the symbol and partly the instrument, are

intrusted to us on terms of stewardship. And just as it is criminal for

a man to go through life with a pair of ears on his head, and a pair of

eyes in his forehead, neither of which he educates and cultivates, so

is it criminal for a man having the capacity of grasping the great

Revelation of God, who at sundry times and in divers manners hath

spoken unto the Fathers by the prophets, but in these last days hath

spoken unto us by the Son,' to turn away from that Voice, and pay no

heed to it.

It is universally true that obligation goes with capacity. It is

especially true with regard to our relation to Jesus Christ. We are all

bound to hear Him,' as the great Voice said on the Mount of

Transfiguration. The upshot of all that manifestation of the divine

glory welling up from the depths of Christ's nature, and transfiguring

His countenance, the upshot of all that solemn and mysterious communion

with the mighty dead, Moses and Elias, the end of all that encompassing

glory that wrapped Him, was the Voice from Heaven which proclaimed,

This is My beloved Son; hear ye Him.' Moses with his Law, Elijah with

his Prophecy, faded away and were lost. But there stood forth singly

the one Figure, relieved against the background of the glory-cloud, the

Christ to whom we are all bound to turn with the vision of longing

eyes, with the listening of docile ears, with the aspiration of

yearning affection, with the submission of absolute obedience.

Hear ye Him.' For just as truly as light is meant for the eye, so truly

are the words of the Incarnate Word, and the life which is speech and

revelation, meant to be the supreme objects of our attention, of our

contemplative regard, and of our practical submission. We are bound to

hear because we have ears; and of all the voices that are candidates

for our attention, and of all the music that sounds through the

universe, no voice is so sweet and weighty, no words so fundamental and

all-powerful, no music so melodious, so deep and thunderous, so

thrilling and gracious, as are the words of that Word who was made

flesh and dwelt among us. We are bound to hear, and we hear to most

profit when it is Him that we hear.

III. We shall not hear without an effort.

Christ says in my text, Let him hear,' as if the possession of the ear

did not necessarily involve that there should be hearing. And so it is;

Having ears, they hear not,' is a description verified in a great many

other walks of life than in regard to religious matters. But it is

verified there in the most conspicuous and in the most tragic fashion.

I wonder how many of us there are who, though we have heard with the

hearing of the outward ear, have not heard in the sense of attending,

have scarcely heard in the sense of apprehending, and have not heard at

all in the sense of obeying? Friend, what is it that keeps you from

hearing, if you do not hear? Let me run over two or three of the things

that thus are like wax in a man's ears, making him deaf to the message

of life in Jesus Christ, in order to bring out how needful it is that

these should be counteracted by an effort of will, and the vigorous

concentration of thought and heart upon that message.

What is it that keeps men from hearing? Being busy with other things is

one hindrance. There is an old story of St. Bernard riding along by a

lake on his way to a Council, and being so occupied with thoughts and

discussions, that after the day's travel he lifted up his eyes and

said, Where is the lake?' And so we, many of us, go along all our days

on the banks of the great sea of divine love, and we are so busy

thinking about other things, or doing other things, that at the end of

the journey we do not know that we have been travelling by the side of

the flashing waters all the day long. Everybody knows how possible it

is to be so engrossed with one's occupations or thoughts as that when

the clock strikes in the next steeple, we hear it and do not hear it.

We have read of soldiers being so completely absorbed in the fury of

the fight that a thunderstorm has rattled over their heads, and no man

heard the roll, and no man saw the flash. Many of us are so swallowed

up in our trade, in our profession, in our special branch of study, in

our occupations and desires, that all the trumpets of Sinai might be

blown into our ears, and we should hear them as though we heard them

not; and what is worse, that the pleading voice of that great Lord who

is ever saying to each of us, Come unto Me, all ye that labour, and are

heavy laden, and I will give you rest,' passes us by, and produces no

effect, any more than does the idle wind whistling through an archway.

Brethren, you have the need, the sin, the weakness, the transiency, to

which the Gospel appeals. You have the faculties to which it addresses

itself. Jesus Christ is speaking to every one of us. I beseech you to

ask yourselves, Do I hear Him?' If not, is it not because the clatter

of the world's business, or the more refined sounds of some profession

or study, have so taken up your attention that you have none to spare

for that which requires and repays it most?

Then there is another thing that makes attention, and concentration,

and a dead lift of resolution necessary, if you are rightly to hear,

and that is the very fact that, superficially, you have heard all your

days. You do not know the despair that sometimes comes over men in my

position when we face our congregations of people that are familiar to

weariness with everything that we have to say, and because they are

superficially so familiar with it, fancy that there is no need for them

to give heed any more. What can a poor man like me do to get through

that crust of familiarity with the mere surface of Christian truth and

teaching which is round many of you? You come and listen to me, and

say, Oh! he has nothing original to say. We have heard it all before.'

Yes, your ears have heard it. Have you heard? Jesus Christ died for

me,' you have been told that ever since you were a little child; and so

the thousand-and-first, the million-and-first, repetition of it has

little power over you. If once, just once, that truth could get through

the crust of familiarity, and touch your heart, your bare heart, with

its quick naked point of fire-shod love, I think there might be a wound

made that would mean healing. But some of you will go away presently,

just as you have gone away a thousand times before, and my words will

rebound from you like an india-rubber ball from a wall, or run off you

like water from the sea-bird's plumes, just because you think you have

heard it all before--and you have never heard it all your days. He that

hath ears to hear, let him hear.'

Then there is another hindrance. A man may put his fingers in his ears.

And some of you, I am afraid, are not ignorant of what it is to have

made distinct and conscious efforts to get rid of the impressions of

religion, and of Christ's voice to us.

And then there are some of us who, out of sheer listlessness, do not

hear. It is not because we are too busy. It is not because we have any

intellectual objection to the message. It is not because we have made

any definite effort to get away from it. It is not even because we have

been so accustomed to hear it, that it is impossible to make an

impression on our listless indifference. Go down into Morecambe Bay

when the tide is making; and, as the water is beginning to percolate

through the sand, try to make an impression with a stick upon the

tremulous jelly. As soon as you take out the point the impression is

lost. And there are many of us like that, who, out of sheer stolid

listlessness, retain no fragment of the truth that is sounding in our

ears. Dear friends, If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, how

shall we escape if we'--what? Reject? Deny? Fight against? Angrily

repel? No;--if we neglect so great salvation?' That is the question for

you negligent people, for you people who think you know all about it

and there an end, for you people who are so busy with your daily lives

that, amidst the hubbub of earth, heaven's silent voice is inaudible to

your ears. Neglect stops the ears and ruins the man. But you will not

hear, though you have ears, unless you make an effort of will and

concentration of attention.

IV. And now the last thing that I have to say is:--If we do not hear,

we shall become deaf.

That is what Christ said in the context. The sentence which I have

taken as my text was spoken at the close of the Parable of the Sower;

and when His disciples came and asked Him why He spake in parables, His

answer was in effect that the people to whom He spoke had not profited

by what they had heard, hearing, they heard not,' and therefore He

spoke in parables which veiled as well as revealed the truth. It was

not given to them to know the mysteries of the Kingdom, because they

had not given heed to what had been made known to them. The great law

was taking effect which gives to him that has and takes from him that

has not; and that law applied not only to the form of Christ's

teaching, but also to the faculty of receiving it. That diminished

capacity is sometimes represented as men's own act, and sometimes as

the divinely inflicted penalty of not hearing, but in either case the

same fact is in view--namely, the loss of susceptibility by neglect,

the dying out of faculties by disuse.

Just as in the bodily life capacities untrained and unexercised become

faint and disappear; just as the Indian fakir, who holds his arm up

above his head for years, never using the muscles, has the muscles

atrophied, and at last cannot bring his arm down to his side;--so the

people who neglect to use the ears that God has given them by degrees

will lose the capacity of hearing at all. Which, being put into plain

English, just comes to this: that if we do not listen to Jesus Christ

when He calls to us in His love, we shall gradually have the capacity

of hearing diminished until--I do not know if it ever reaches that

point here--until its ultimate extinction.

Dear friends, this word of the love and pity and pardon and purifying

power of God manifest in Jesus Christ for us all, which I am trying to

preach to you now, is not without an effect even on the men by whom it

is most superficially and perfunctorily heard. It either softens or

hardens. As the old mystics used to say, the same heat that melts wax

hardens clay into brick. The same light that brings blessing to one eye

brings pain to another. You have heard, and hearing you have not heard;

and you will cease to be able to hear at all; and then the thunders may

rattle over your heads, and be inaudible to you; and that Voice which

is as loud as the sound of many waters, and sweet as harpers harping on

their harps, and which says to each of us, Come to Me, and I will be

thy peace and thy rest and thy strength,' will no more be audible in

your atrophied ears. Dear friends! I do not know, as I have said,

whether that ultimate tragic result is ever wholly reached in this

world. I am sure that it is not reached with some of you as yet. And I

beseech you to obey that voice which says, This is My beloved Son; hear

Him,' and to let there not be only outward hearing, but to let there be

inward acceptance, attention, apprehension, and obedience. And then we

shall be able to say, Blessed are our ears, for they hear; blessed are

our eyes, for they see.' Many prophets and righteous men desired to

hear the things that ye hear, and heard them not, take care that, since

you are thus advanced in the outward possession of the perfect word of

God, there be also the yielding to, and reception of it.

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TO HIM THAT HATH SHALL BE GIVEN'

Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more

abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even

that he hath.'-- MATT. xiii. 12.

There are several instances in the Gospels of our Lord's repetition of

sayings which seem to have been, if we may use the expression,

favourites with Him; as, for instance, There are first which shall be

last, and there are last which shall be first'; or, again, The servant

is not greater than his master, nor the disciple than his lord.' My

text is one of these. It is here said as part of the explanation why He

chose to speak in parables, in order that the truth, revealed to the

diligent and attentive, might be hidden from the careless. Again, we

find it in two other Gospels, in a somewhat similar connection, though

with a different application, where Jesus enunciates it as the basis of

His warning, Take heed how'--or, in another version, what'--ye hear.'

Again He employs it in this Gospel in the parable of the talents, as

explaining the principle on which the retribution to the slothful

servant was meted out. And we find it yet once more in the parable of

the pounds in Luke's Gospel, which, though entirely different in

conception and purpose from that of the talents, is identical in the

portion connected with the slothful servant.

So there are two very distinct directions in which this saying looks,

as it was used by our Lord--one in reference to the attitude of men

towards the Revelation of God, and one in reference to the solemn

subject of future retribution. I wish, now, mainly to try and

illustrate the great law which is set forth here, and to follow out the

various spheres of its operation, and estimate the force of its

influence. For I think that large and very needful lessons for us all

may be drawn therefrom. The principle of my text shapes all life. It is

a paradox, but it is a deep truth. It sounds harsh and unjust, but it

contains the very essence of righteous retribution. The paradox is

meant to spur attention, curiosity, and inquiry. The key to it lies

here--to use is to have. There is a possession which is no possession.

That I have rights of property in a thing, as contradistinguished to

your rights, does not make it in any deep and real sense mine. What I

use I have; and all else is, as one of the other evangelists has it,

but seeming' to have.

So much, then, by way of explanation of our text. Now, let me ask you

to look with me into two or three of the regions where we shall find

illustrations of its working.

I. Take the application of this principle to common life.

The lowest instance is in regard to material possessions. It is a

complaint that is made against the present social arrangements and

distribution of wealth, that money makes money; that wealth has a

tendency to clot; the rich man to get richer, and the poor man to get

poorer. Just as in a basin of water when the plug is out, and circular

motion is set up, the little bits of foreign matter that may be there

all tend to get together, so it is in regard to these external

possessions. To him that hath shall be given'; and people grumble about

that and say, It never rains but it pours, and the man that needs more

money least gets it most easily.' Of course. Treasure used grows;

treasure hoarded rusts and dwindles. The millionaire will double his

fortune by a successful speculation. The man with half a dozen large

shops drives the poor little tradesman out of the field. So it is all

round: To him that hath shall be given; but from him that hath not

shall be taken even that he hath.'

Next, go a step higher. Look at how this law works in regard to powers

of body. That is a threadbare old illustration. The blacksmith's arm we

have all heard about; the sailor's eye, the pianist's wrist, the

juggler's fingers, the surgeon's deft hand--all these come by use. To

him that hath shall be given.' And the same man who has cultivated one

set of organs to an almost miraculous fineness or delicacy or strength

will, by the operation of the other half of the same principle, have

all but atrophied another set. So with the blacksmith's arm, which has

grown muscular at the expense of his legs. Part of the physical frame

has monopolised what might have been distributed throughout the whole.

Use is strength; use makes growth. We have what we employ. And even in

regard to our bodily frame the organs that we do not use we carry about

with us rather as a weight attached to us than as a possession.

Again, come a little higher. This great principle largely goes to

determine our position in the world and our work. The man that can do a

thing gets it to do. In the long run the tools come to the hand that

can use them. So here is one medical man's consulting-room crammed full

of patients, and his neighbour next door has scarcely one. The whole

world runs to read A's, B's, or C's books. The briefless barrister

complains that there is no middle course between having nothing to do

and being overwhelmed with briefs. To him that hath shall be

given'--the man can do a thing, and he gets it to do--and from him that

hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath,' That law largely

settles every man's place in the world.

Let us come still higher. The same law has much--not all, but much--to

do in making men's characters. For it operates in its most intense

fashion, and with results most blessed or most disastrous, in the inner

life. The great example that I would adduce is conscience. Use it, obey

it, listen for its voice, never thwart it, and it grows and grows and

grows, and becomes more and more sensitive, more and more educated,

more and more sovereign in its decisions. Neglect it, still more, go in

its teeth, and it dwindles and dwindles and dwindles; and I suppose it

is possible--though one would fain hope that it is a very exceptional

case--for a man, by long-continued indifference to the voice within

that says Thou shalt' or Thou shalt not,' to come at last to never

hearing it at all, or to its never speaking at all. It is seared as

with a hot iron,' says one of the Apostles; and in seared flesh there

is no feeling any more. Are any of you, dear friends, bringing about

such a state? Are you doing what you know you ought not to do? Then you

will be less and less troubled as the days go on; and, by neglecting

the voice, you will come at last to be like the profligate woman in the

book of Proverbs, who, after her sin, wipes her mouth and says, I have

done no harm.' Do you think that is a desirable state--to put out the

eyes of your soul, to stifle what is the truest echo of God's voice

that you will ever hear? Do you not think that it would be wiser to get

the blessed half of this law on your side, instead of the dreadful one?

Listen to that voice. Never, as you value yourselves, neglect it.

Cultivate the habit of waiting for its monitions, its counsels

prohibitory or commendatory, and then you will have done much to secure

that your spirit shall be enriched by the operations of this

wide-spread law.

Take another illustration. People who, by circumstances, are placed in

some position of dependence and subordination, where they have seldom

to exercise the initiative of choice, but just to do what they are bid,

by degrees all but lose the power of making up their minds about

anything. And so a slave set free is proverbially a helpless creature,

like a bit of driftwood; and children who have been too long kept in a

position of pupilage and subordination, when they are sent into the

world are apt to turn out very feeble men, for want of a good, strong

backbone of will in them. So, many a woman that has been accustomed to

leave everything in her husband's hands, when the clods fall on his

coffin finds herself utterly helpless and bewildered, just because in

the long, happy years she never found it necessary to exercise her own

judgment or her own will about practical matters.

So do not get into the habit of letting circumstances settle what you

are to do, or you will lose the power of dominating them, before very

long. And if a man for years leaves himself, as it were, to be guided

by the stream of circumstances, like long green weeds in a river, he

will lose the power of determining his own fate, and the Will will die

clean out of him. Cultivate it, and it will grow.

Again, this same principle largely settles our knowledge, our

convictions, the operations and the furniture of our understandings. If

a man holds any truth slackly, or in the case of truths that are meant

to influence life and conduct, does not let it influence these, then

that is a kind of having truth that is sure to end in losing it. If you

want to lose your convictions grasp them loosely--do not act upon them,

do not take them for guides of your life--and they will soon relieve

you of their unwelcome presence. If you wish mind and knowledge to

grow, grip with a grip of iron what you do know, and let it dominate

you, as it ought. He that truly has his learning will learn more and

pile by slow degrees stone upon stone, until the building is complete.

So, dear friends, here, in these illustrations, which might have been

indefinitely enlarged, we see the working of a principle which has much

to do in making men what they are. What you use you increase, what you

leave unused you lose. There are grey heads in my present audience who,

when they were young men, had dreams and aspirations that they bitterly

smile at now. There are men here who began life with possibilities that

have never blossomed or fruited, but have died on the stem. Why?

Because they were so much occupied with the vulpine craft of making

their position and their pile' that generous emotions and noble

sympathies and lofty aspirations, intellectual or otherwise, were all

neglected, and so they are dead; and the men are the poorer

incalculably, because of what has thus been shed away from them. You

make your characters by the parts of yourselves that you choose to

cultivate and employ. Do you think that God gave us whatever of an

intellectual and emotional and moral kind is in us, in order that it

might be all used up in our daily business? A very much scantier outfit

would have done for all that is wanted for that. But there are abortive

and dormant organs in your spiritual nature, as there are in the

corporeal, which tell you what you were meant for, and which it is your

sin to leave undeveloped. Brethren, the law of my text shapes us in the

two ways, that whatever we cultivate, be it noble or be it bestial,

will grow, and whatever we repress or neglect will die. Choose which of

the two halves of yourselves you will foster, and on which you will

frown.

So much, then, for the first general application of these words. Now

let me turn for a moment to another.

II. I would note, secondly, the application of this two-fold law in

regard to God's revelation of Himself.

That is the bearing of it in the immediate context from which our text

is taken. Our Lord explains that teaching by parable--a transparent

veil over a truth--was adopted in order that the veiled truth might be

a test as well as a revelation. And although I do not believe that the

Christian revelation has been made in any degree less plain and obvious

than it could have been made, I cannot but recognise the fact that the

necessities of the case demand that, when God speaks to us, He should

speak in such a fashion as that it is possible to say, Tush! It is not

God that is speaking; it is only Eli!' and so to turn about the young

Samuel's mistake the other way. I do not believe that God has

diminished the evidence of His Revelation in order to try us; but I do

maintain that the Revelation which He has made does come to us, and

must come to us, in such a form as that, not by mathematical

demonstration but by moral affinity, we shall be led to recognise and

to bow to it. He that will be ignorant, let him be ignorant, and he

that will come asking for truth, it will flood his eyeballs with a

blessed illumination. The veil will but make more attractive to some

eyes the outlines of the fair form beneath it, whilst others are

offended at it and say, Unless we see the truth undraped, we will not

believe that it is truth at all.'

So, brethren, let me remind you--what is really but a repetition in

reference to another subject of what I have already said,--that in

regard to God's speech to men, and especially in regard to what I, for

my part, believe to be the complete and ultimate and perfect speech of

God to men, in Jesus Christ our Saviour, the principle of my text holds

good.

To him that hath shall be given.' If you will make that truth your own

by loyal faith and honest obedience, if you will grapple it to your

heart, then you will learn more and more. Whatever tiny corner of the

great whole you have grasped, hold on by that and draw it into

yourselves, and you will by degrees get the entire, glorious, golden

web to wrap round you. If any man wills to do His will he shall know.'

That is Christ's promise; and it will be fulfilled to us all. To him

that hath shall be given.'

If, on the other hand, you have' Christian truth and Christ, who is the

Truth, in the fashion in which so many of us have it and Him, as a

form, as a mere intellectual possession, so that we can, when we go to

church, repeat the creed without feeling that we are telling a lie, but

that when we go to market we do not carry the Commandments with us--if

that is our Christianity, then it will dribble away into nothing. We

shall not be much the poorer for the loss of such a sham possession,

but it will go. It drops out of the hands that are not clasped to hold

it. It is just that a thing so neglected shall some day be a thing

withdrawn. So in regard to Revelation and a man's perception and

reception of it, my text holds good in both its halves.

III. Lastly, look at the application of these words in the future.

That is our Lord's own application of them, twice out of the five times

in which the saying appears in the three Gospels: in the parable of the

talents and in the parallel portion of the parable of the pounds. I do

not venture into the regions of speculation about that future, but from

the words before us there come clearly enough two aspects of it. The

man with the ten talents received more; the man that had hid the talent

or the pound in the ground was deprived of that which he had not used.

Now, with regard to the former there is no difficulty in translating

the representations of the parables, sustained as they are by distinct

statements of other portions of Scripture. They come to this, that, for

the life beyond, indefinite progress in all that is noble and blessed

and Godlike in heart and character, in intellect and power, are

certain; that faith, hope, love, here cultivated but putting forth few

blossoms and small fruitage, there, in that higher house where these be

planted, will flourish in the courts of the Lord, and will bear fruit

abundantly; that here the few things faithfully administered will be

succeeded yonder by the many things royally ruled over; that here one

small coin, as it were, is put into our palm--namely the present

blessedness and peace and strength and purity of a Christian life; and

that yonder we possess the inheritance of which what we have here is

but the earnest. It used to be the custom when a servant was hired for

the next term-day to give him one of the smallest coins of the realm as

what was called arles'--wages in advance, to seal the bargain.

Similarly, in buying an estate a bit of turf was passed over to the

purchaser. We get the earnest here of the broad acres of the

inheritance above. To him that hath shall be given.'

And the other side of the same principle works in some terrible ways

that we cannot speak about. From him that hath not shall be taken away

even that which he hath.' I have spoken of the terrible analogy to this

solemn prospect which is presented us by the imperfect experiences of

earth. And when we see in others, or discover in ourselves, how it is

possible for unused faculties to die entirely out, I think we shall

feel that there is a solemn background of very awful truth, in the

representation of what befell the unfaithful servant. Hopes unnourished

are gone; opportunities unimproved are gone, capacities undeveloped are

gone; fold after fold, as it were, is peeled off the soul, until there

is nothing left but the naked self, pauperised and empty-handed for

evermore. Take it from him'; he never was the better for it; he never

used it; he shall have it no longer.

Brethren, cultivate the highest part of yourselves, and see to it that,

by faith and obedience, you truly have the Saviour, whom you have by

the hearing of the ear and by outward profession. And then death will

come to you, as a nurse might to a child that came in from the fields

with its hands full of worthless weeds and grasses, to empty them in

order to fill them with the flowers that never fade. You can choose

whether Death--and Life too, for that matter--shall be the porter that

will open to you the door of the treasure-house of God, or the robber

that will strip you of misused opportunities and unused talents.

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SEEING AND BLIND

They seeing, see not.'--MATT. xiii. 13.

This is true about all the senses of the word seeing'; there is not one

man in ten thousand who sees the things before his eyes. Is not this

the distinction, for instance, of the poet or painter, and man of

science--just that they do see? How true is this about the eye of the

mind, what a small number really understand what they know! But these

illustrations are of less moment than the saddest example--religious

indifference. I wish to speak about this now, and to ask you to

consider-- I. The extent to which it prevails. II. The causes from

which it springs. III. The fearful contrasts it suggests. IV. The end

to which it conducts.

I. The extent to which it prevails.

I have no hesitation in saying that it is the condition of by far the

largest proportion of our nation. It is the true enemy of souls. I do

not believe that any large proportion of Englishmen are actual

disbelievers, who reject Christianity as unworthy of credence, or

attach themselves to any of the innumerable varieties of deistical and

pantheistical schools. I am not saying at present whether it would be a

more or less hopeful state if it were so, but only that it is not so,

and that a complacent taking for granted of religious truth, a torpor

of soul, an entire carelessness about God and Christ, and the whole

mighty scheme of the Gospel, is the characteristic of many in all

classes of English society. We have it here in our churches and chapels

as the first foe we have to fight with. Disbelief slays its thousands,

and dissipation its tens of thousands, but this sleek, well-to-do

carelessness, its millions. As some one says, it is as if an opium sky

had rained down soporifics.

II. The causes from which it springs.

Of course, the great cause of this condition is man's evil heart of

alienation, the spirit of slumber--but we may find proximate and

special causes.

There is the indifference springing from the absorbing interests of the

present. A man has only a certain quantity of interest to put forth. If

he expends it all on small things, he has none for great. This

overmastering, overshadowing present draws us all to itself, and we

have no power of attention or interest to spare for anything else, or

for reflection upon Christian truth in connection with our own conduct.

Then there is the indifference caused by fear of what the results of

attention might be. It is sometimes broken in upon, and men are in

danger of having their eyes opened, then with an effort they fling

themselves into some distraction, and sleep again. As the text says,

Their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes.'

Then there is the indifference fed by an indolent acquiescence in the

truth. That is a favourite way of breaking the force of all unwelcome

moral truth, and especially of the Gospel. A man says, Oh yes, it is

true,' and because it is, therefore he thinks he has done enough when

he has acknowledged it. Many do not seem to dream that the Word has any

personal application to them at all.

Then there is the indifference which comes from long familiarity with

the truth. It is this which haunts our congregations and makes it so

impossible to get at many who know all our message already. You can

tell them nothing they do not know. As with men who live by a forge,

the sound of the blow of the hammer only lulls them to sleep. The

Gospel is so familiar to them that there is no longer any power about

it. The vulgar emotion of wonder is not excited, and the other of love

and admiration has not taken its place.

Men who live in mountain scenery do not know its beauties, and as with

all other operations of the listless eye so with this, the old is

deemed to be uninteresting, and the common is the commonplace. As even

in the piece of earth that you have trodden on longest, you would find

marvels that you do not dream of if you would look, so here. You have

heard too much and reflected too little. Oh, brethren, it oppresses a

man who has to speak to you when he reflects how often you have heard

it all, how the flow of the river only seems to have worn your souls

smooth enough to let it glide past without one stoppage.

III. The contrasts it suggests.

Contrast the indolence here with the earnestness in life. The same men

who sit with faces stolid and expressionless over a sermon--meet them

on Monday morning! They go to sleep at prayer or over a Bible, but see

them in a bargain or over a ledger. Think of what powers of intense

love, yea, of almost fearful devotion and energy, lie in us, ay and

come out of us, and then think how poor, how cold we are here, and we

may well be ashamed. It is as if a burning mountain with its cataract

of fire were suddenly quenched and locked in everlasting frost, and all

the flaming glory running down its heaving sides turned into a slow

glacier. There comes ice instead of fire, frost instead of flame, snow

instead of sparks. It is as if some magician waved a wand and stiffened

men into a paralysis. Religion seems to numb men instead of inspiring

them. It is an awful thought of how they serve themselves and the

world, how they can love one another, how they can be stirred to noble

enthusiasm, and how little of all this ever comes to God.

Contrast the indifference of the men and the awfulness of the things

they are indifferent about. God--Christ--their souls--heaven--hell. The

grandest things men can think about, the mightiest realities in the

universe, the eternal, the most powerful, these it is which some of

you, seeing, see not.

Contrast men's indifference and the earnestness of the rest of the

creation. God rose early and sent His prophets. He so loved the world

that He gave His Son. Christ died, lives, works, rules, expects,

beseeches. Angels desire to look into the wonders that you seeing, see

not'. What makes heaven fill with rapture, and flash through all her

golden glories with light, what makes hell look on with the lurid scowl

of baffled malignity, that is what you are careless about. My friend,

you and other men like you are the only beings in the universe careless

about the salvation of your souls.

IV. The end to which it conducts.

That end is certain ruin. Ah, dear friends, you do not need to do much

to ruin your own souls. You have only to continue indifferent and you

will do it effectually. Negligence is quite enough. Ruin is what it

will certainly end in.

And remember that when the possibility of salvation ends, your

indifference will end too. The poor toad that is fascinated by the

serpent, and drops powerless into the cruel jaws, wakes from the stupor

when it feels the pang. And the lifelong torpor will be dissolved for

you when you pass into another world. What an awful awaking that will

be when men look back and see by the light of eternity what they were

doing here! Oh! friends, would to God that any poor word of mine could

rouse you from this drugged and opiate sleep! Believe me, it is

merciful violence which would rouse you. Anything rather than that the

poison should work on till the heavy slumber darkens into death. Let me

implore you, as you value your own souls, as you would not fling away

your most precious jewel to awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from

the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.' Beware of the treacherous

indifference which creeps on, till, like men in the Arctic regions, the

sleepers die.

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MINGLED IN GROWTH, SEPARATED IN MATURITY

Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven

is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: 25. But while

men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his

way. 26. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit,

then appeared the tares also. 27. So the servants of the householder

came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field?

from whence then hath it tares? 28. He said unto them, An enemy hath

done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and

gather them up? 29. But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the

tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. 80. Let both grow together

until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the

reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles

to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.' --MATT. xiii. 24-30.

The first four parables contained in this chapter were spoken to a

miscellaneous crowd on the beach, the last three to the disciples in

the house. The difference of audience is accompanied with a diversity

of subject. The former group deals with the growth of the kingdom, as

it might be observed by outsiders, and especially with aspects of the

growth on which the multitude needed instruction; the latter, with

topics more suited to the inner circle of followers. Of these four, the

first three are parables of vegetation; the last, of assimilation. The

first two are still more closely connected, inasmuch as the person of

the sower is prominent in both, while he is not seen in the others. The

general scenery is the same in both, but with a difference. The

identification of the seed sown with the persons receiving it, which

was hinted at in the first, is predominant in the second. But while the

former described the various results of the seed, the latter drops out

of sight the three failures, and follows its fortunes in honest and

good hearts, showing the growth of the kingdom in the midst of

antagonistic surroundings. It may conveniently be considered in three

sections: the first teaching how the work of the sower is

counter-worked by his enemy; the second, the patience of the sower with

the thick-springing tares; and the third, the separation at the

harvest.

I. The work of the sower counter-worked by his enemy, and the mingled

crops.

The peculiar turn of the first sentence, The kingdom of heaven is

likened unto a man that sowed,' etc., suggests that the main purpose of

the parable is to teach the conduct of the king in view of the growth

of the tares. The kingdom is concentrated in Him, and the likening' is

not effected by the parable, but, as the tenses of both verbs show, by

the already accomplished fact of His sowing. Our Lord veils His claims

by speaking of the sower in the third person; but the hearing ear

cannot fail to catch the implication throughout that He Himself is the

sower and the Lord of the harvest. The field is his field,' and His own

interpretation tells us that it means the world.' Whatever view we take

of the bearing of this parable on purity of communion in the visible

Church, we should not slur over Christ's own explanation of the field,'

lest we miss the lesson that He claims the whole world as His, and

contemplates the sowing of the seed broadcast over it all. The Kingdom

of Heaven is to be developed on, and to spread through, the whole

earth. The world belongs to Christ not only when it is filled with the

kingdom, but before the sowing. The explanation of the good seed takes

the same point of view as in the former parable. What is sown is the

word'; what springs from the seed is the new life of the receiver. Men

become children of the kingdom by taking the Gospel into their hearts,

and thereby receive a new principle of growth, which in truth becomes

themselves.

Side by side with the sower's beneficent work the counter-working of

his enemy' goes on. As the one, by depositing holy truth in the heart,

makes men children of the kingdom,' the other, by putting evil

principles therein, makes men children of evil.' Honest exposition

cannot eliminate the teaching of a personal antagonist of Christ, nor

of his continuous agency in the corruption of mankind. It is a glimpse

into a mysterious region, none the less reliable because so momentary.

The sulphurous clouds that hide the fire in the crater are blown aside

for an instant, and we see. Who would doubt the truth and worth of the

unveiling because it was short and partial? The devil is God's ape.'

His work is a parody of Christ's. Where the good seed is sown, there

the evil is scattered thickest. False Christs and false apostles dog

the true like their shadows. Every truth has its counterfeit. Neither

institutions, nor principles, nor movements, nor individuals, bear

unmingled crops of good. Not merely creatural imperfection, but hostile

adulteration, marks them all. The purest metal oxidises, scum gathers

on the most limpid water, every ship's bottom gets foul with weeds. The

history of every reformation is the same: radiant hopes darkened,

progress retarded, a second generation of dwarfs who are careless or

unfaithful guardians of their heritage.

There are, then, two classes of men represented in the parable, and

these two are distinguishable without doubt by their conduct. Tares are

said to be quite like wheat until the heads show, and then there is a

plain difference. So our Lord here teaches that the children of the

kingdom and those of evil are to be discriminated by their actions. We

need not do more than point in a sentence to His distinct separation of

men (where the seed of the kingdom has been sown) into two sets. Jesus

Christ holds the unfashionable, narrow' opinion that, at bottom, a man

must either be His friend or His enemy. We are too much inclined to

weaken the strong line of demarcation, and to think that most men are

neither black nor white, but grey.

The question has been eagerly debated whether the tares are bad men in

the Church, and whether, consequently, the mingled crop is a

description of the Church only. The following considerations may help

to an answer. The parable was spoken, not to the disciples, but to the

crowd. An instruction to them as to Church discipline would have been

signally out of place; but they needed to be taught that the kingdom

was to be a rose amidst thorns,' and to grow up among antagonisms which

it would slowly conquer, by the methods which the next two parables set

forth. This general conception, and not directions about ecclesiastical

order, was suited to them. Again, the designation of the tares as the

children of evil' seems much too wide, if only a particular class of

evil men--namely, those who are within the Church--are meant by it.

Surely the expression includes all, both in and outside the Church, who

do iniquity.' Further, the representation of the children of the

kingdom, as growing among tares in the field of the world, does not

seem to contemplate them as constituting a distinct society, whether

pure or impure; but rather as an indefinite number of individuals,

intermingled in a common soil with the other class. The kingdom of

heaven' is not a synonym for the Church. Is it not an anachronism to

find the Church in the parable at all? No doubt, tares are in the

Church, and the parable has a bearing on it; but its primary lesson

seems to me to be much wider, and to reveal rather the conditions of

the growth of the kingdom in human society.

II. We have the patience of the husbandman with the quick-springing

tares.

The servants of the householder receive no interpretation from our

Lord. Their question is silently passed by in His explanation. Clearly

then, for some reason, He did not think it necessary to say any more

about them; and the most probable reason is, that they and their words

have no corresponding facts, and are only introduced to lead up to the

Master's explanation of the mystery of the growth of the tares, and to

His patience with it. The servants cannot be supposed to represent

officials in the Church, without hopelessly destroying the consistency

of the parable; for surely all the children of the kingdom, whatever

their office, are represented in the crop. Many guesses have been

made,--apostles, angels, and so on. It is better to say The Lord hath

not showed it me.'

The servant's first question expresses, in vivid form, the sad, strange

fact that, where good was sown, evil springs. The deepest of all

mysteries is the origin of evil. Explain sin, and you explain

everything. The question of the servants is the despair of thinkers in

all ages. Heaven sows only good; where do the misery and the wickedness

come from? That is a wider and sadder question than, How are churches

not free from bad members? Perhaps Christ's answer may go as far

towards the bottom of the bottomless as those of non-Christian

thinkers, and, if it do not solve the metaphysical puzzles, at any rate

gives the historical fact, which is all the explanation of which the

question is susceptible.

The second question reminds us of Wilt Thou that we command fire. . .

from heaven, and consume them?' It is cast in such a form as to put

emphasis on the householder's will. His answer forbidding the gathering

up of the tares is based, not upon any chance of mistaking wheat for

them, nor upon any hope that, by forbearance, tares may change into

wheat, but simply on what is best for the good crop. There was a danger

of destroying some of it, not because of its likeness to the other, but

because the roots of both were so interlaced that one could not be

pulled up without dragging the other after it.

Is this prohibition, then, meant to forbid the attempt to keep the

Church pure from un-Christian members? The considerations already

adduced are valid in answering this question, and others may be added.

The crowd of listeners had, no doubt, many of them, been influenced by

John the Baptist's fiery prophecies of the King who should come, fan in

hand, to purge His floor,' and were looking for a kingdom which was to

be inaugurated by sharp separation and swift destruction. Was not the

teaching needed then, as it is now, that that is not the way in which

the kingdom of heaven is to be founded and grow? Is not the parable

best understood when set in connection with the expectations of its

first hearers, which are ever floating anew before the eyes of each

generation of Christians? Is it not Christ's apologia for His delay in

filling the r? which John had drawn out for him? And does that

conception of its meaning make it meaningless for us? Observe, too,

that the rooting up which is forbidden is, by the proprieties of the

emblem, and by the parallel which it must necessarily afford to the

final burning, something very solemn and destructive. We may well ask

whether excommunication is a sufficiently weighty idea to be taken as

its equivalent. Again, how does the interpretation which sees

ecclesiastical discipline here comport with the reason given for

letting the tares grow on? By the hypothesis in the parable, there is

no danger of mistake; but is there any danger of casting out good men

from the Church along with the bad, except through mistake? Further, if

this parable forbids casting manifestly evil men out of the Church, it

contradicts the divinely appointed law of the Church as administered by

the apostles. If it is to be applied to Church action at all, it

absolutely forbids the separation from the Church of any man, however

notoriously un-Christian, and that, as even the strongest advocates of

comprehension admit, would destroy the very idea of the Church. Surely

an interpretation which lands us in such a conclusion cannot be right.

We conclude, then, that the intermingling which the parable means is

that of good men and bad in human society, where all are so interwoven

that separation is impossible without destroying its whole texture;

that the rooting up, which is declared to be inconsistent with the

growth of the crop, means removal from the field, namely, the world;

that the main point of the second part of the parable is to set forth

the patience of the Lord of the harvest, and to emphasise this as the

law of the growth of His kingdom, that it advances amidst antagonism;

and that its members are interlaced by a thousand rootlets with those

who are not subjects of their King. What the interlacing is for, and

whether tares may become wheat, are no parts of its teaching. But the

lesson of the householder's forbearance is meant to be learned by us.

While we believe that the scope of the parable is wider than

instruction in Church discipline, we do not forget that a fair

inference from it is that, in actual churches, there will ever be a

mingling of good and evil; and, though that fact is no reason for

giving up the attempt to make a church a congregation of faithful men,

and of such only, it is a reason for copying the divine patience of the

sower in ecclesiastical dealings with errors of opinion and faults of

conduct.

III. The final separation at the harvest.

The period of development is necessarily a time of intermingling, in

which, side by side, the antagonistic principles embodied in their

representatives work themselves out, and beneficially affect each

other. But each grows towards an end, and, when it has been reached,

the blending gives place to separation. John's prophecy is plainly

quoted in the parable, which verbally repeats his gather the wheat into

his barn,' and alludes to his words in the other clause about burning

the tares. He was right in his anticipations; his error was in

expecting the King to wield His fan at the beginning, instead of at the

end of the earthly form of His kingdom. At the consummation of the

allotted era, the bands of human society are to be dissolved, and a new

principle of association is to determine men's place. Their moral and

religious affinities will bind them together or separate them, and all

other ties will snap. This marshalling according to religious character

is the main thought of the solemn closing words of the parable and of

its interpretation, in which our Lord presents Himself as directing the

whole process of judgment by means of the angels' who execute His

commands. They are His angels,' and whatever may be the unknown

activity put forth by them in the parting of men, it is all done in

obedience to Him. What stupendous claims Jesus makes here! What becomes

of the tares is told first in words awful in their plainness, and still

more awful in their obscurity. They speak unmistakably of the absolute

separation of evil men from all society but that of evil men; of a

close association, compelled, and perhaps unwelcome. The tares are

gathered out of His kingdom,'--for the field of the world has then all

become the kingdom of Christ. There are two classes among the tares:

men whose evil has been a snare to others (for the things that offend'

must, in accordance with the context, be taken to be persons), and the

less guilty, who are simply called them that do iniquity.'

Perhaps the bundles' may imply assortment according to sin, as in

Dante's circles. What a bond of fellowship that would be! The furnace,'

as it is emphatically called by eminence, burns up the bundles. We may

freely admit that the fire is part of the parable, but yet let us not

forget that it occurs not only in the parable, but in the

interpretation; and let us learn that the prose reality of everlasting

destruction,' which Christ here solemnly announces, is awful and

complete. For a moment He passes beyond the limits of that parable, to

add that terrible clause about weeping and gnashing of teeth,' the

tokens of despair and rage. So spoke the most loving and truthful lips.

Do we believe His warnings as well as His promises?

The same law of association according to character operates in the

other region. The children of the kingdom are gathered together in what

is now the kingdom of My Father,' the perfect form of the kingdom of

Christ, which is still His kingdom, for the throne of God and of the

Lamb,' the one throne on which both sit to reign, is in it.' Freed from

association with evil, they are touched with a new splendour, caught

from Him, and blaze out like the sun; for so close is their

association, that their myriad glories melt as into a single great

light. Now, amid gloom and cloud, they gleam like tiny tapers far

apart; then, gathered into one, they flame in the forehead of the

morning sky, a glorious church, not having spot, nor wrinkle, nor any

such thing.'

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LEAVEN

The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and bid

to three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.'--MATT. xiii.

33.

How lovingly and meditatively Jesus looked upon homely life, knowing

nothing of the differences, the vulgar differences, between the small

and great! A poor woman, with her morsel of barm, kneading it up among

three measures of meal, in some coarse earthenware pan, stands to Him

as representing the whole process of His work in the world. Matthew

brings together in this chapter a series of seven parables of the

kingdom, possibly spoken at different times, and gathered here into a

sequence and series, just as he has done with the great procession of

miracles that follows the Sermon on the Mount, and just as, perhaps, he

has done with that sermon itself. The two first of the seven deal with

the progress of the Gospel in individual minds and the hindrances

thereto. Then there follows a pair, of which my text is the second,

which deal with the geographical expansion of the kingdom throughout

the world, in the parable of the grain of mustard-seed growing into the

great herb, and with the inward, penetrating, diffusive influence of

the kingdom, working as an assimilating and transforming force in the

midst of society.

I do not purpose to enter now upon the wide and difficult question of

the relation of the kingdom to the Church. Suffice it to say that the

two terms are by no means synonymous, but that, at the same time,

inasmuch as a kingdom implies a community of subjects, the churches, in

the proportion in which they have assimilated the leaven, and are

holding fast by the powers which Christ has lodged within them, are

approximate embodiments of the kingdom. The parable, then, suggests to

us, in a very striking and impressive form, the function and the

obligations of Christian people in the world.

Let me deal, in a purely expository fashion, with the emblem before us.

The kingdom of heaven is like leaven.' Now of course, leaven is

generally in Scripture taken as a symbol of evil or corruption. For

example, the preliminary to the Passover Feast was the purging of the

houses of the Israelites of every scrap of evil ferment, and the bread

which was eaten on that Feast was prescribed to be unleavened. But

fermentation works ennobling as well as corruption, and our Lord lays

hold upon the other possible use of the metaphor. The parable teaches

that the effect of the Gospel, as ministered by, and residing in, the

society of men, in whom the will of God is supreme, is to change the

heavy lump of dough into light, nutritious bread. There are three or

four points suggested by the parable which I could touch upon; and the

first of them is that significant disproportion between the apparent

magnitude of the dead mass that is to be leavened, and the tiny piece

of active energy which is to diffuse itself throughout it.

We get there a glimpse into our Lord's attitude, measuring Himself

against the world and the forces that were in it. He knows that in Him,

the sole Representative, at the moment, of the kingdom of heaven upon

earth--because in Him, and in Him alone, the divine will was,

absolutely and always, supreme--there lie, for the time confined to

Him, but never dormant, powers which are adequate to the transformation

of humanity from a dead, lumpish mass into an aggregate all-penetrated

by a quickening influence, and, if I might so say, fermented with a new

life that He will bring. A tremendous conception, and the strange thing

about it is that it looks as if the Nazarene peasant's dream was going

to come true! But He was speaking to the men whom He was charging with

a delegated task, and to them He says, There are but twelve of you, and

you are poor, ignorant men, and you have no resources at your back, but

you have Me, and that is enough, and you may be sure that the tiny

morsel of yeast will penetrate the whole mass.' Small beginnings

characterise the causes which are destined to great endings; the things

that are ushered into the world large, generally grow very little

further, and speedily collapse. An inheritance may be gotten hastily at

the beginning, but the end shall not be blessed.' The force which is

destined to be worldwide, began with the one Man in Nazareth, and

although the measures of meal are three, and the ferment is a scrap, it

is sure to permeate and transform the mass.

Therefore, brethren, let us take the encouragement that our Lord here

offers. If we are adherents of unpopular causes, if we have to stand

alone with two or three,' do not let us count heads, but measure

forces. What everybody says must be true,' is a cowardly proverb. It

may be a correct statement that an absolutely universal opinion is a

true opinion, but what most people say is usually false, and what the

few say is most generally true. So if we have to front--and if we are

true men we shall sometimes have to front--an embattled mass of

antagonism, and we be in a miserable minority, never mind! We can say,

They that be with us are more than they that be with them.' If we have

anything of the leaven in us, we are mightier than the lump of dough.

But there is another point here, and that is the contact that is

necessary between the leaven and the dough. We have passed from the old

monastic idea of Religion being seclusion from life. But that mistake

dies hard, and there are many very Evangelical and very Protestant--and

in their own notions superlatively good--people, who hold a modern

analogue of the old monastic idea; and who think that Christian men and

women should be very tepidly interested in anything except what they

call the preaching of the Gospel, and the saving of men's souls. Now

nobody that knows me, and the trend of my preaching, will charge me

with undervaluing either of these things, but these do not exhaust the

function of the Church in the world, nor the duty of the Church to

society. We have to learn from the metaphor in the parable. The dough

is not kept on one shelf and the leaven on another; the bit of leaven

is plunged into the heart of the mass, and then the woman kneads the

whole up in her pan, and so the influence is spread. We Christians are

not doing our duty, nor are we using our capacities, unless we fling

ourselves frankly and energetically into all the currents of the

national life, commercial, political, municipal, intellectual, and make

our influence felt in them all. The salt of the earth' is to be rubbed

into the meat in order to keep it from putrefaction; the leaven is to

be kneaded up into the dough in order to raise it. Christian people are

to remember that they are here, not for the purpose of isolating

themselves, but in order that they may touch life at all points, and at

all points bring into contact with earthly life the better life and the

principles of Christian morality.

But in this contact with all phases of life and forms of activity,

Christian men are to be sure that they take the leaven with them. There

are professing Christians that say: Oh! I am not strait-laced and

pharisaical. I do not keep myself apart from any movements of humanity.

I count nothing that belongs to men alien to a Christian.' All right!

but when you go into these movements, when you go into Parliament, when

you become a city Councillor, when you mingle with other men in

commerce, when you meet other students in the walks of intellect, do

you take your Christianity there, or do you leave it behind? The two

things are equally necessary, that Christians should be in all these

various spheres of activity, and that they should be there, distinctly,

manifestly, and, when need be, avowedly, as Christian men.

Further, there is another thought here, on which I just say one word,

and that is the effect of the leaven on the dough.

It is to assimilate, to set up a ferment. And that is what Christianity

did when it came into the world, and

Cast the kingdoms old

Into another mould.'

And that is what it ought to do to-day, and will do, if Christian men

are true to themselves and to their Lord. Do you not think that there

would be a ferment if Christian principles were applied, say, for

instance, to national politics? Do you not think there would be a

ferment if Christian principles were brought to bear upon all the

transactions on the Exchange? Is there any region of life into which

the introduction of the plain precepts of Christianity as the supreme

law would not revolutionise it? We talk about England as a Christian

country. Is it? A Christian country is a country of Christians, and

Christians are not people that only say I have faith in Jesus Christ.'

but people that do His will. That is the leaven that is to change, and

yet not to change, the whole mass; to change it by lightening it, by

putting a new spirit into it, leaving the substance apparently

unaffected except in so far as the substance has been corrupted by the

evil spirit that rules. Brethren, if we as Christians were doing our

duty, it would be true of us as it was of the early preachers of the

Cross, that we are men who turn the world upside down.

But there is one more point on which I touch. I have already

anticipated some of what I would say upon it, but I must dwell upon it

for a little longer; and that is, the manner in which the leaven is to

work.

Here is a morsel of barm in the middle of a lump of dough. It works by

contact, touches the particles nearest it, and transforms them into

vehicles for the further transmission of influence. Each particle

touched by the ferment becomes itself a ferment, and so the process

goes on, outwards and ever outwards, till it permeates the whole mass.

That is to say, the individual is to become the transmitter of the

influence to him who is next him. The individuality of the influence,

and the track in which it is to work, viz. upon those in immediate

contiguity to the transformed particle which is turned from dough into

leaven, are taught us here in this wonderful simile.

Now that carries a very serious and solemn lesson for us all. If you

have received, you are able, and you are bound, to transmit this

quickening, assimilating, transforming, lightening influence, and you

need never complain of a want of objects upon which to exercise it, for

the man or woman that is next you is the person that you ought to

affect.

Now I have already said, in an earlier portion of these remarks, that

some good people, taking an erroneous view of the function and

obligations of the Church in the world, would fain keep its work to

purely evangelistic effort upon individual souls in presenting to them

the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Saviour. But whilst I vehemently protest

against the notion that that is the whole function of the Christian

Church, I would as vehemently protest against the notion that the

so-called social work of the Church can ever be efficiently done except

upon the foundation laid of this evangelistic work. First and foremost

amongst the ways in which this great obligation of leavening humanity

is to be discharged, must ever stand, as I believe, the appeal to the

individual conscience and heart, and the presentation to single souls

of the great Name in which are stored all the regenerative and

quickening impulses that can ever alleviate and bless humanity. So

that, first and foremost, I put the preaching of the Gospel, the Gospel

of our salvation, by the death and in the life of the Incarnate Son of

God.

But then, besides that, let me remind you there are other ways,

subsidiary but indispensable ways, in which the Church has to discharge

its function; and I put foremost amongst these, what I have already

touched upon, and therefore need not dilate on now, the duty of

Christians as Christians to take their full share in all the various

forms of national life. I need not dwell upon the evils rampant amongst

us, which have to be dealt with, and, as I believe, may best if not

only, be dealt with, upon Christian principles. Think of drink, lust,

gambling, to name but three of them, the hydra-headed serpent that is

poisoning the English nation. Now it seems to me to be a deplorable,

but a certainly true thing, that not only are these evils not attacked

by the Churches as they ought to be, but that to a very large extent

the task of attacking them has fallen into the hands of people who have

little sympathy with the Church and its doctrines. They are fighting

the evils on principles drawn from Jesus Christ, but they are not

fighting the evils to the extent that they ought to do, with the

Churches alongside. I beseech you, in your various spheres, to see to

it that, as far as you can make it so, Christian people take the place

that Christ meant them to take in the conflict with the miseries, the

sorrows, the sins that honeycomb England to-day, and not to let it be

said that the Churches shut themselves up and preach to people, but do

not lift a finger to deal with the social evils of the nation.

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TREASURE AND PEARL

The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which

when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth

all that he hath, and buyeth that field. 45. Again, the kingdom of

heaven is like unto a merchantman, seeking goodly pearls: 46. Who, when

he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had,

and bought it.'--MATT. xiii. 44-46.

In this couple of parables, which are twins, and must be taken

together, our Lord utilises two very familiar facts of old-world life,

both of them arising from a similar cause. In the days when there were

no banks and no limited liability companies, it was difficult for a man

to know what to do with his little savings. In old times government

meant oppression, and it was dangerous to seem to have any riches. In

old days war stalked over the land, and men's property must be portable

or else concealed. So, on the one hand we find the practice of hiding

away little hoards in some suitable place, beneath a rock, in the cleft

of a tree, or a hole dug in the ground, and then, perhaps, the man died

before he came back for his wealth. Or, again, another man might prefer

to carry his wealth about with him. So he went and got jewels, easily

carried, not easily noticed, easily convertible into what he might

require.

And, says our Lord, these two practices, with which all the people to

whom He was speaking were very much more familiar than we are, teach us

something about the kingdom of God. Now, I am not going to be tempted

to discuss what our Lord means by that phrase, so frequent upon His

lips, the kingdom of God' or of heaven.' Suffice it to say that it

means, in the most general terms, a state or order of things in which

God is King, and His will supreme and sovereign. Christ came, as He

tells us, to found and to extend that kingdom upon earth. A man can go

into it, and it can come into a man, and the conditions on which he

enters into it, and it into him, are laid down in this pair of

parables. So I ask you to notice their similarities and their

divergences. They begin alike and they run on alike for a little way,

and then they diverge. There is a fork in the road, and they reunite at

the end again. They agree in their representation of the treasure; they

diverge in their explanation of the process of discovering it, and they

unite at last in the final issue. So, then, we have to look at these

three points.

I. Let me ask you to think that the true treasure for a man lies in the

kingdom of God.

It is not exactly said that the treasure is the kingdom, but the

treasure is found in the kingdom, and nowhere else. Let us put away the

metaphor; it means that the only thing that will make us rich is loving

submission to the supreme law of the God whom we love because we know

that He loves us. You may put that thought into half a dozen different

forms. You may say that the treasure is the blessing that comes from

Christianity, or the inward wealth of a submissive heart, or may use

various modes of expression, but below them all lies this one great

thought, that it is laid on my heart, dear brethren, to try and lay on

yours now, that, when all is said and done, the only possession that

makes us rich is--is what? God Himself. For that is the deepest meaning

of the treasure. And whatever other forms of expression we may use to

designate it, they all come back at last to this, that the wealth of

the human soul is to have God for its very own.

Let me run over two or three points that show us that. That treasure is

the only one that meets our deepest poverty. We do not all know what

that is, but whether you know it or not, dear friend, the thing that

you want most is to have your sins dealt with, in the double way of

having them forgiven as guilt, and in having them taken away from you

as tyrants and dominators over your wills. And it is only God who can

do that, God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing

their trespasses unto them,' and giving them, by a new life which He

breathes into dead souls, emancipation from the tyrants that rule over

them, and thus bringing them into the liberty of the glory of the sons

of God.' Thou sayest that Thou art rich and increased with goods . . .

and knowest not that thou art poor . . . and naked.' Brother, until you

have found out that it is only God who will save you from being

bankrupt, and enable you to pay your debts, which are your duties, you

do not know where your true riches are. And if you have all that men

can acquire of the lower things of life, whether of what is generally

called wealth or of other material benefits, and have that great

indebtedness standing against you, you are but an insolvent after all.

Here is the treasure that will make you rich, because it will pay your

debts, and endow you with capacity enough to meet all future

expenditure--viz. the possession of the forgiving and cleansing grace

of God which is in Jesus Christ. If you have that, you are rich; if you

do not possess it, you are poor. Now you believe that, as much as I do,

most of you. Well, what do you do in consequence?

Further, the possession of God, who belongs to all those that are the

subjects of the kingdom of God, is our true treasure, because that

wealth, and that alone, meets at once all the diverse wants of the

human soul. There is nothing else of which that can be said. There are

a great many other precious things in this world--human loves, earthly

ambitions of noble and legitimate kinds. No one but a fool will deny

the convenience and the good of having a competency of this world's

possessions. But all these have this miserable defect, or rather

limitation, that they each satisfy some little corner of a man's

nature, and leave all the rest, if I may so say, like the beasts in a

menagerie whose turn has not yet come to be fed, yelping and growling

while the keeper is at the den of another one. There is only one thing

that, being applied, as it were, at the very centre, will diffuse

itself, like some fragrant perfume, through the whole sphere, and fill

the else scentless air with its rich and refreshing fragrance. There is

but one wealth which meets the whole of human nature. You, however

small you are, however insignificant people may think you, however

humbly you may think of yourselves, you are so great that the whole

created Universe, if it were yours, would be all too little for you.

You cannot fill a bottomless bog with any number of cartloads of earth.

And you know as well as I can tell you that he that loveth silver shall

not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with

increase,' and that none of the good things here below, rich and

precious as many of them are, are large enough to fill, much less to

expand, the limitless desires of one human heart. As the ancient Latin

father said, Lord, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is

unquiet till it attains to Thee.'

Closely connected with that thought, but capable of being dealt with

for a moment apart, is the other, that this is our true treasure,

because we have it all in one.

You remember the beautiful emphasis of one of the parables in our text

about the man that dissipated himself in seeking for many goodly

pearls? He had secured a whole casket full of little ones. They were

pearls, they were many; but then he saw one Orient pearl, and he said,

The one is more than the many. Let me have unity, for there is rest;

whereas in multiplicity there is restlessness and change.' The sky

to-night may be filled with galaxies of stars. Better one sun than a

million twinkling tininesses that fill the heavens, and yet do not

scatter the darkness. Oh, brethren, to have one aim, one love, one

treasure, one Christ, one God--there is the secret of blessedness.

Unite my heart to fear Thy name'; and then all the miseries of

multiplicity, and of drawing our supplies from a multitude of separate

lakes, will be at an end, when our souls are flooded from the one

fountain of life that can never fail or be turbid. Thus, the unity of

the treasure is the supreme excellence of the treasure.

Nor need I remind you in more than a word of how this is our true

treasure, because it is our permanent one. Nothing that can be taken

from me is truly mine. Those of you who have lived in a great

commercial community as long as I have done, know that it is not for

nothing that sovereigns are made circular, for they roll very rapidly,

and riches take to themselves wings and fly away.' We can all go back

to instances of men who set their hearts upon wealth, and flaunted

their little hour before us as kings of the Exchange, and were objects

of adoration and of envy, and at last were left stranded in poverty.

Nothing that can be stripped from you by the accidents of life, or by

inevitable death, is worth calling your good.' You must have something

that is intertwined with the very fibres of your being. And I, unworthy

as I am, come to you, dear friends, now, with this proffer of the great

gift of wealth from which 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, shall be able to separate

us.' And I beseech you to ask yourselves, Is there anything worth

calling wealth, except that wealth which meets my deepest need, which

satisfies my whole nature, which I may have all in one, and which, if I

have, I may have for ever? That wealth is the God who may be the

strength of your hearts and your heritage for ever.'

II. Now notice, secondly, the concealment of the treasure.

According to the first of our parables, the treasure was hid in a

field. That is very largely local colouring, which gives veracity and

vraisemblance to the fact of the story. And there has been a great deal

of very unnecessary and misplaced ingenuity spent in trying to force

interpretations upon every feature of the parable, which I do not

intend to imitate, but I just wish to suggest one thing. Here was this

man in the story, who had plodded across that field a thousand times,

and knew every clod of it, and had never seen the wealth that was lying

six inches below the surface. Now, that is very like some of my present

hearers. God's treasure comes to the world in a form which to a great

many people veils, if it does not altogether hide, its preciousness.

You have heard sermons till you are sick of sermons, and I do not

wonder at it, if you have heard them and never thought of acting on

them. You know all that I can tell you, most of you, about Jesus

Christ, and what He has done for you, and what you should do towards

Him, and your familiarity with the Word has blinded you to its spirit

and its power. You have gone over the field so often that you have made

a path across it, and it seems incredible to you that there should be

anything worth your picking up there. Ah! dear friends, Jesus Christ,

when He was here, in whom were hid all the treasures of wisdom and

knowledge,' had to the men that looked upon Him neither form nor

comeliness that they should desire Him,' and He was to them a

stumbling-block and foolishness. And Christ's Gospel comes among busy

men, worldly men, men who are under the dominion of their passions and

desires, men who are pursuing science and knowledge, and it looks to

them very homely, very insignificant; they do not know what treasure is

lying in it. You do not know what treasure is lying--may I venture to

say it?--in these poor words of mine, in so far as they truly represent

the mind and will of God. Dear brethren, the treasure is hid, but that

is not because God did not wish you to see it; it is because you have

made yourselves blind to its flashing brightness. If our Gospel be hid,

it is hid to them . . . in whom the god of this world hath blinded

their eyes.' If your whole desires are passionately set on that which

Manchester recognises as the summum bonum, or, if you are living

without a thought beyond this present, how can you expect to see the

treasure, though it is lying there before your eyes? You have buried

it, or, rather, you have made that which is its necessary envelope to

be its obscuration. I pray you, look through the forms, look beneath

the words of Scripture, and try and clear your eyesight from the

hallucinations of the dazzling present, and you will see the treasure

that is hid in the field.

III. Again, let me ask you to notice, further, the two ways of finding.

The rustic in the first story, who, as I said, had plodded across the

field a hundred times, was doing it for the hundred and first, or

perhaps was at work there with his mattock or his homely plough. And,

perchance, some stroke of the spade, or push of the coulter, went a

little deeper than usual, and there flashed the gold, or some shower of

rain came on, and washed away a little of the superincumbent soil, and

laid bare the bag. Now, that is what often happens, for you have to

remember that though you are not seeking God, God is always seeking

you, and so the great saying comes to be true, I am found of them that

sought Me not.' There have been many cases like the one of the man who,

breathing out threatenings and slaughter, with no thought in his mind

except to bind the disciples and bring them captive to Jerusalem, saw

suddenly a light from heaven flashing down upon him, and a Voice that

pulled him up in the midst of his career. Ah! it would be an awful

thing if no one found Christ except those who set out to seek for Him.

Like the dew on the grass that waiteth not for men, nor tarrieth for

the sons of men,' He often comes to hearts that are thinking about

nothing less than about Him.

There are men and women listening to me now who did not come here with

any expectation of being confronted with this message to their souls;

they may have been drawn by curiosity or by a hundred other motives. If

there is one such, to whom I am speaking, who has had no desires after

the treasure, who has never thought that God was his only Good, who has

been swallowed up in worldly things and the common affairs of life, and

who now feels as if a sudden flash had laid bare the hidden wealth in

the familiar Gospel, I beseech such a one not to turn away from the

discovered treasure, but to make it his own. Dear friend, you may not

be looking for the wealth, but Christ is looking for His lost coin.

And, though it has rolled away into some dusty corner, and is lying

there all unaware, I venture to say that He is seeking you by my poor

words to-night, and is saying to you: I counsel thee to buy of Me gold

tried in the fire.'

But then another class is described in the other parable of the

merchantman who was seeking many goodly pearls. I suppose he may stand

as a representative of a class of whom I have no doubt there are some

other representatives hearing me now, namely, persons who, without

yielding themselves to the claims of Christ, have been searching,

honestly and earnestly, for whatsoever things are lovely and of good

report.' Dear brethren, if you have been smitten by the desire to live

noble lives, if you have been roused

To follow knowledge, like a sinking star,

Beyond the furthest bounds of human thought,'

or if in any way you are going through the world with your eyes looking

for something else than the world's gross good, and are seeking for the

many pearls, I beseech you to lay this truth to heart, that you will

never find what you seek, until you understand that the many have not

it to give you, and that the One has. And when Christ draws near to you

and says, Whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, whatsoever

things are true, whatsoever things are venerable, if thou seekest them,

take Me, and thou wilt find them all,' I beseech you, accept Him. There

are two ways of finding the treasure. It is flashed on unexpectant

eyes, and it is disclosed to seeking souls.

III. And now, lastly, let us look at the point where the parables

converge.

There are two ways of finding; there is only one way of getting. The

one man went and sold all that he had and bought the field. Never mind

about the morality of the transaction: that has nothing to do with our

Lord's purpose. Perhaps it was not quite honest of this man to bury the

treasure again, and then to go and buy the field for less than it was

worth, but the point is that, however a soul is brought to see that God

in Christ is all that he needs, there is only one way of getting Him,

and that is, sell all that thou hast.'

Then it is barter, is it? Then it is salvation by works after all?' No!

To sell all that thou hast' is first, to abandon all hope of acquiring

the treasure by anything that thou hast. We buy it when we acknowledge

that we have nothing of our own to buy it with. Buy it without money

and without price'; buy it by yielding your hearts; buy it by ceasing

to cling to earth and creatures, as if they were your good. That trust

in Jesus Christ, which is the condition of salvation is selling all

that thou hast.' Self is all that thou hast.' Abandon self and clutch

Him, and the treasure is thine. But the initial act of faith has to be

carried on through a life of self-denial and self-sacrifice, and the

subjection of self-will, which is the hardest of all, and the

submission of one's self altogether to the kingdom of God and to its

King. If we do thus we shall have the treasure, and if we do not thus

we shall not.

Surely it is reasonable to fling away paste pearls for real ones.

Surely it is reasonable to fling away brass counters for gold coins.

Surely, in all regions of life, we willingly sacrifice the second best

in order to get the very best. Surely if the wealth which is in God is

more precious than all besides, you have the best of the bargain, if

you part with the world and yourselves and get Him. And if, on the

other hand, you stick to the second best and cleave to yourselves and

to this poor diurnal sphere and what it contains, then I will tell you

what your epitaph will be. It is written in one of the Psalms, He shall

leave them in the midst of his days, and at his latter end shall be a

fool.'

And there is a more foolish fool still--the man who, when he has seen

the treasure, flings another shovelful of earth upon it, and goes away

and does not buy it, nor think anything more about it. Dear brother, do

not do that, but if, by God's help, any poor words of mine have stirred

anything in your hearts of recognition of what your true wealth is, do

not rest until you have done what is needful to possess it, given away

yourselves, and in exchange received Christ, and in Him wealth for

evermore.

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THE MARTYRDOM OF JOHN

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, 2. And said

unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead;

and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him. 3. For

Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for

Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife. 4. For John said unto him,

It is not lawful for thee to have her. 5. And when he would have put

him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a

prophet. 6. But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of

Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod. 7. Whereupon he

promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask. 8. And she,

being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John

Baptist's head in a charger. 9. And the king was sorry: nevertheless

for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded

it to be given her. 10. And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison.

11. And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and

she brought it to her mother. 12. And his disciples came, and took up

the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.'--MATT. xiv. 1-12.

The singular indifference of the Bible to the fate of even its greatest

men is exemplified in the fact that the martyrdom of John is only told

incidentally, in explanation of Herod's alarm. But for that he would

apparently have dropped out of the narrative, as a man sinks in the

sea, without a bubble or a ripple. Christ is the sole theme of the

Gospels, and all others are visible only as His light falls on them.

It took a long time for news of Christ to reach the ears of Herod.

Peasants hear of Him before princes, whose thick palace walls and

crowds of courtiers shut out truth. The first thing to note is the

alarm of the conscience-stricken king. We learn from the other

evangelists that there was a difference of opinion among the attendants

of Herod--not very good judges of a religious teacher--as to who this

new miracle-working Rabbi might be, but the tetrarch has no hesitation.

There is no proof that Herod was a Sadducee; but he probably thought as

little about a resurrection as if he had been, and, in any case, did

not expect dead men to be starting up again, one by one, and mingling

with the living. His conscience made a coward of him, and his fear made

that terrible which would else have been thought impossible. In his

terror he makes confidants of his slaves, overleaping the barriers of

position, in his need of some ears to pour his fears into. He was right

in believing that he had not finished with John, and in expecting to

meet him again with mightier power to accuse and condemn. If twere done

when tis done,' says Macbeth; but it is not done. There is a

resurrection of deeds as well as of bodies, and all our buried

badnesses will front us again, shaking their gory locks at us, and

saying that we did them.

Instead of following closely the narrative, we may best gather up its

lessons by considering the actors in the tragedy.

I. We see in Herod the depths of evil possible to a weak character. The

singular double which he, Herodias and John present to Ahab, Jezebel

and Elijah, has been often noticed. In both cases a weak king is drawn

in opposite directions by the stronger-willed temptress at his side,

and by the stern ascetic from the desert. How John had found his way

into kings' houses' we do not know; but, as he carried thither his

undaunted boldness of plain-spoken preaching of morality and

repentance, it was inevitable that he should soon find his way from the

palace to the dungeon. There must have been some intercourse between

Herod and him before his imprisonment, or he could not have shaken the

king's conscience with his blunt denunciations. From the account in

Mark, it would appear that, after his imprisonment, he gained great

influence over the tetrarch, and led him some steps on the way of

goodness. But Herod was infirm of purpose,' and a beautiful fiend was

at his side, and she had an iron will sharpened to an edge by hatred,

and knew her own mind, which was murder. Between them, the weaker

nature was much perplexed, and like a badly steered boat, yawed in its

course, now yielding to the impulse from John, now to that from

Herodias. Matthew attributes his hesitation as to killing John to his

fear of the popular voice, which, no doubt, also operated. Thus he let

I dare not wait upon I would,' and had not strength of mind enough to

hold to the one and despise the other of his discordant counsellors. He

was evidently a sensual, luxurious, feeble-willed, easily frightened,

superstitious and cunning despot; and, as is always the case with such,

he was driven farther in evil than he meant or wished. He was entrapped

into an oath, and then, instead of saying, Promises which should not

have been made should not be kept,' he weakly consents, from fantastic

fear of what his guests will say of him, and unwillingly, out of pure

imbecility, stains his soul for ever with blood. In this wicked world,

weak men will always be wicked men; for it is less trouble to consent

than to resist, and there are more sirens to whisper Come' than

prophets to thunder, It is not lawful.' Strength of will is needful for

all noble life.

We may learn from Herod, also, how far we may go on the road of

obedience to God's will, and yet leave it at last. What became of all

his eager listening, of his partial obedience, of his care to keep John

safe from Herodias's malice? All vanished like early dew. What became

of his conscience-stricken alarms on hearing of Christ? Did they lead

to any deep convictions? They faded away, and left him harder than

before. Convictions not followed out ossify the heart. If he had sent

for Christ, and told Him his fears, all might have been well. But he

let them pass, and, so far as we know, they never returned. He did meet

Jesus at last, when Pilate sent him the Prisoner, as a piece of

politeness, and in what mood?--childish pleasure at the chance of

seeing a miracle. How did Jesus answer his torrent of frivolous

questions? He answered him nothing.' That sad silence speaks Christ's

knowledge that now even His words would be vain to create one ripple of

interest on the Dead Sea of Herod's soul. By frivolity, lust, and

neglect he had killed the germ of a better life, and silence was the

kindest answer which perfect love could give him.

He shows us, too, the intimate connection of all sins. The common root

of every sin is selfishness, and the shapes which it takes are protean

and interchangeable. Lust dwells hard by hate. Sensual crimes and

cruelty are closely akin. The one vice which Herod would not surrender,

dragged after it a whole tangle of other sins. No sin dwells alone.

There is none barren among them.' They are gregarious, and a solitary

sin is more seldom seen than a single swallow. Herod is an

illustration, too, of a conscience fantastically sensitive while it is

dead to real crimes. He has no twinges for his sin with Herodias, and

no effective ones at killing John, but he thinks it would be wrong to

break his oath. The two things often go together; and many a brigand in

Calabria, who would cut a throat without hesitation, would not miss

mass, or rob without a little image of the Virgin in his hat. We often

make compensation for easy indulgence in great sins by fussy

scrupulosity about little faults, and, like Herod, had rather commit

murder than not be polite to visitors.

II. The next actors in the tragedy are Herodias and her daughter. What

a miserable destiny to be gibbeted for ever by half a dozen sentences!

One deed, after which she no doubt wiped her mouth, and said, I have

done no harm,' has won for the mother an immortality of ignominy. Her

portrait is drawn in few strokes, but they are enough. In strength of

will and unscrupulous carelessness of human life, she is the sister of

Jezebel, and curiously like Shakespeare's awful creation, Lady Macbeth;

but she adds a stain of sensuous passion to their vices, which

heightens the horror. Her first marriage was with her full uncle; and

her second, if marriage it can be called when her husband and Herod's

wife were both living, was with her step-uncle, and thus triply

unlawful. John's remonstrance awoke no sense of shame in her, but only

malignant and murderous hate. Once resolved, no failures made her

swerve from her purpose. Hers was no passing fury, but cold-blooded,

deliberate determination. Her iron will and unalterable persistence

were accompanied by flexibility of resource. When one weapon failed,

she drew another from a full quiver. And the means which were finally

successful show not only her thorough knowledge of the weak man she had

to deal with, but her readiness to stoop to any degradation for herself

and her child to carry her point. A thousand claims to' abhorrence meet

in her, as mother, wife, and queen.' Many a shameless woman would have

shrunk from sullying a daughter's childhood, by sending her to play the

part of a shameless dancing-girl before a crew of half-tipsy revellers,

and from teaching her young lips to ask for murder. But Herodias sticks

at nothing, and is as insensible to the duty of a mother as to that of

a wife. If we put together these features in her character, her hot

animal passions, her cool inflexible revenge, her cynical disregard of

all decency, her deadness to natural affection for her child, her

ferocity and her cunning, we have a hideous picture of corrupted

womanhood. We cannot but wonder whether, in after days, remorse ever

did its merciful work upon Herodias. She urged Herod to his ruin at

last by her ambition, which sought for him the title of king, and, with

one redeeming touch of faithfulness, went with him into dreary exile in

Gaul. Perhaps there, among strangers, and surrounded by the wreck of

her projects, and when the hot fire of passion had died down, she may

have remembered and repented her crime.

The criminality of the daughter largely depends upon her age, of which

we have no knowledge. Perhaps she was too mere a child to understand

the degradation of the dance, or the infamy of the request which her,

we hope, innocent and panting lips were tutored to prefer. But, more

probably, she was old enough to be her mother's fellow-conspirator,

rather than her tool, and had learned only too well her lessons of

impurity and cruelty. What chance had a young life in such a sty of

filth? When the mother becomes the devil's deputy, what can the

daughter grow up to be, but a worse edition of her? This poor girl, so

sinning, and so sinned against, followed in Herodias's footsteps, and

afterwards married, according to the custom of the Herods, her uncle,

Philip the tetrarch. She inherited and was taught evil; that was her

misfortune. She made it her own; that was her crime. As she stands

there, shameless and flushed, in that hideous banqueting-hall, with her

grim gift dripping red blood on the golden platter, and wicked triumph

gleaming in her dark eyes, she suggests grave questions as to parents'

responsibility for children's sins, and is a living symbol of the

degradation of art to the service of vice, and of the power of an evil

soul to make hideous all the grace of budding womanhood.

III. There is something dramatically appropriate in the silent death in

the dungeon of the lonely forerunner. The faint noise of revelry may

have reached his ears, as he brooded there, and wondered if the coming

King would never come for his enlargement. Suddenly a gleam of light

from the opened door enters his cell, and falls on the blade of the

headsman's sword. Little time can be wasted, for Herodias waits. With

short preface the blow falls. The King has come, and set His forerunner

free, sending him to prepare His way before Him in the dim regions

beyond. A world where Herod sits in the festal chamber, and John lies

headless in the dungeon, needs some one to set it right. When the need

is sorest, the help is nearest. Truth succeeds by the apparent failure

of its apostle. Herodias may stab the dead tongue, as the legend tells

that she did, but it speaks louder after death than ever. Herod kept

his birthday with drunken and bloody mirth; but it was a better

birthday for his victim.

IV. It needed some courage for John's disciples to come to that gloomy,

blood-stained fortress, and bear away the headless trunk which scornful

cruelty had flung out to rot unburied. When reverent love and sorrow

had finished their task, what was the little flock without a shepherd

to do? The possibility of their continued existence as a company of

disciples was at an end. They show by their action that their master

had profited from his last message to Jesus. At once they turn to Him,

and, no doubt, the bulk of them were absorbed in the body of His

followers. Sorrowful and bereaved souls betake themselves naturally to

His sweet sympathy for soothing, and to His gentle wisdom for

direction. The wisest thing that any of us can do is to go and tell

Jesus' our loneliness, and let it bind us more closely to Him.

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THE GRAVE OF THE DEAD JOHN AND THE GRAVE OF THE LIVING JESUS

And John's disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and

went and told Jesus.'--MATT. xiv. 12.

And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great

joy.'--MATT. xxviii. 8.

There is a remarkable parallel and still more remarkable contrast

between these two groups of disciples at the graves of their respective

masters. John the Baptist's followers venture into the very jaws of the

lion to rescue the headless corpse of their martyred teacher from a

prison grave. They bear it away and lay it reverently in its unknown

sepulchre, and when they have done these last offices of love they feel

that all is over. They have no longer a centre, and they disintegrate.

There was nothing to hold them together any more. The shepherd had been

smitten, and the flock were scattered. As a school' or a distinct

community they cease to be, and are mostly absorbed into the ranks of

Christ's followers. That sorrowful little company that turned from

John's grave, perhaps amidst the grim rocks of Moab, perhaps in his

native city amongst the hills of Judah, parted then, to meet no more,

and to bear away only a common sorrow that time would comfort, and a

common memory that time would dim.

The other group laid their martyred Master in His grave with as tender

hands and as little hope as did John's disciples. The bond that held

them together was gone too, and the disintegrating process began at

once. We see them breaking up into little knots, and soon they, too,

will be scattered. The women come to the grave to perform the woman's

office of anointing, and they are left to go alone. Other slight hints

are given which show how much the ties of companionship had been

relaxed, even in a day, and how certainly and quickly they would have

fallen asunder. But all at once a new element comes in, all is changed.

The earliest visitors to the sepulchre leave it, not with the lingering

sorrow of those who have no more that they can do, but with the quick,

buoyant step of people charged with great and glad tidings. They come

to it wrapped in grief--they leave it with great joy. They come to it,

feeling that all was over, and that their union with the rest who had

loved Him was little more than a remembrance. They go away, feeling

that they are all bound together more closely than ever.

The grave of John was the end of a school.' The grave of Jesus was the

beginning of a Church. Why? The only answer is the message which the

women brought back from the empty sepulchre on that Easter day: The

Lord is risen.' The whole history of the Christian Church, and even its

very existence, is unintelligible, except on the supposition of the

resurrection. But for that, the fate of John's disciples would have

been the fate of Christ's--they would have melted away into the mass of

the nation, and at most there would have been one more petty Galilean

sect that would have lived on for a generation and died out when the

last of His companions died. So from these two contrasted groups we may

fairly gather some thoughts as to the Resurrection of Christ, as

attested by the very existence of a Christian Church, and as to the joy

of that resurrection.

I. Now the first point to be considered is, that the conduct of

Christ's disciples after His death was exactly the opposite of what

might have been expected.

They held together. The natural thing for them to do would have been to

disband; for their one bond was gone; and if they had acted according

to the ordinary laws of human conduct, they would have said to

themselves, Let us go back to our fishing-boats and our tax-gathering,

and seek safety in separation, and nurse our sorrow apart. A few

lingering days might have been given to weep together at His grave, and

to assuage the first bitterness of grief and disappointment; but when

these were over, nothing could have prevented Christianity and the

Church from being buried in the same sepulchre as Jesus. As certainly

as the stopping up of the fountain would empty the river's bed, so

surely would Christ's death have scattered His disciples. And that

strange fact, that it did not scatter them, needs to be looked well

into and fairly accounted for in some plausible manner. The end of

John's school gives a parallel which brings the singularity of the fact

into stronger relief; and looking at these two groups as they stand

before us in these two texts, the question is irresistibly suggested,

Why did not the one fall away into its separate elements, as the other

did? The keystone of the arch was in both cases withdrawn--why did the

one structure topple into ruin while the other stood firm?

Not only did the disciples of Christ keep united, but their conceptions

of Jesus underwent a remarkable change, after His death. We might have

expected, indeed, that, when memory began to work, and the disturbing

influence of daily association was withdrawn, the same idealising

process would have begun on their image of Him, which reveals and

ennobles the characters of our dear ones who have gone away from us.

Most men have to die before their true worth is discerned. But no

process of that sort will suffice to account for the change and

heightening of the disciples' thoughts about their dead Lord. It was

not merely that, when they remembered, they said, Did not our hearts

burn within us by the way while He talked with us?--but that His death

wrought exactly the opposite effect from what it might have been

expected to do. It ought to have ended their hope that He was the

Messiah, and we know that within forty-eight hours it was beginning to

do so, as we learn from the plaintive words of disappointed and fading

hope: We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed

Israel.' If, so early, the cold conviction was stealing over their

hearts that their dearest expectation was proved by His death to have

been a dream, what could have prevented its entire dominion over them,

as the days grew into months and years? But somehow or other that

process was arrested, and the opposite one set in. The death that

should have shattered Messianic dreams confirmed them. The death that

should have cast a deeper shadow of incomprehensibleness over His

strange and lofty claims poured a new light upon them, which made them

all plain and clear. The very parts of His teaching which His death

would have made those who loved Him wish to forget, became the centre

of His followers' faith. His cross became His throne. Whilst He lived

with them they knew not what He said in His deepest words, but, by a

strange paradox, His death convinced them that He was the Son of God,

and that that which they had seen with their eyes, and their hands had

handled, was the Eternal Life. The cross alone could never have done

that. Something else there must have been, if the men were sane, to

account for this paradox.

Nor is this all. Another equally unlikely sequel of the death of Jesus

is the unmistakable moral transformation effected on the disciples.

Timorous and tremulous before, something or other touched them into

altogether new boldness and self-possession. Dependent on His presence

before, and helpless when He was away from them for an hour, they

become all at once strong and calm; they stand before the fury of a

Jewish mob and the threatenings of the Sanhedrim, unmoved and

victorious. And these brave confessors and saintly heroes are the men

who, a few weeks before, had been petulant, self-willed, jealous,

cowardly. What had lifted them suddenly so far above themselves? Their

Master's death? That would more naturally have taken any heart or

courage out of them, and left them indeed as sheep in the midst of

wolves. Why, then, do they thus strangely blaze up into grandeur and

heroism? Can any reasonable account be given of these paradoxes? Surely

it is not too much to ask of people who profess to explain Christianity

on naturalistic principles, that they shall make the process clear to

us by which, Christ being dead and buried, His disciples were kept

together, learned to think more loftily of Him, and sprang at once to a

new grandeur of character. Why did not they do as John's disciples did,

and disappear? Why was not the stream lost in the sand, when the

head-waters were cut off?

II. Notice then, next, that the disciples' immediate belief in the

Resurrection furnishes a reasonable, and the only reasonable,

explanation of the facts.

There is no better historical evidence of a fact than the existence of

an institution built upon it, and coeval with it. The Christian Church

is such evidence for the fact of the Resurrection; or, to put the

conclusion in the most moderate fashion, for the belief in the

Resurrection. For, as we have shown, the natural effect of our Lord's

death would have been to shatter the whole fabric: and if that effect

were not produced, the only reasonable account of the force that

hindered it is, that His followers believed that He rose again. Since

that was their faith, one can understand how they were banded more

closely together than ever. One can understand how their eyes were

opened to know Him who was declared to be the Son of God with power by

the resurrection from the dead.' One can understand how, in the

enthusiasm of these new thoughts of their Lord, and in the strength of

His victory over death, they put aside their old fears and littlenesses

and clothed themselves in armour of light. The Lord is risen indeed'

was the belief which made the continuous existence of the Church

possible. Any other explanation of that great outstanding fact is lame

and hopelessly insufficient.

We know that that belief was the belief of the early Church. Even if

one waived all reference to the Gospels, we have the means of

demonstrating that in Paul's undisputed epistles. Nobody has questioned

that he wrote the First Epistle to the Corinthians. The date most

generally assumed to that letter brings it within about five-and-twenty

years of the crucifixion. In that letter, in addition to a multitude of

incidental references to the Lord as risen, we have the great passage

in the fifteenth chapter, where the apostle not only declares that the

Resurrection was one of the two facts which made his gospel,' but

solemnly enumerates the witnesses of the risen Lord, and alleges that

this gospel of the Resurrection was common to him and to all the

Church. He tells us of Christ's appearance to himself at his

conversion, which must have taken place within six or seven years of

the crucifixion, and assures us that at that early period he found the

whole Church believing and preaching Christ's resurrection. Their

belief rested on their alleged intercourse with Him a few days after

His death, and it is inconceivable that within so short a period such a

belief should have sprung up and been universally received, if it had

not begun when and as they said that it did.

But we are not left even to inferences of this kind to show that, from

the beginning, the Church witnessed to the Resurrection of Jesus. Its

own existence is the great witness to its faith. And it is important to

observe that, even if we had not the documentary evidence of the

Pauline epistles as the earliest records, of the Gospels, and of the

Acts of the Apostles, we should still have sufficient proof that the

belief in the Resurrection is as old as the Church. For the continuance

of the Church cannot be explained without it. If that faith had not

dawned on their slow, sad hearts on that Easter morning, a few weeks

would have seen them scattered; and if once they had been scattered, as

they inevitably would have been, no power could have reunited them, any

more than a diamond once shattered can be pieced together again. There

would have been no motive and no actors to frame a story of

resurrection, when once the little company had melted away. The

existence of the Church depended on their belief that the Lord was

risen. In the nature of the case that belief must have followed

immediately on His death. It, and it only, reasonably accounts for the

facts. And so, over and above Apostles, and Gospels, and Epistles, the

Church is the great witness, by its very being, to its own immediate

and continuous belief in the Resurrection of our Lord.

III. Again, we may remark that such a belief could not have originated

or maintained itself unless it had been true.

Our previous remarks have gone no farther than to establish the belief

in the Resurrection of Christ, as the basis of primitive Christianity.

It is vehemently alleged, and we may freely admit that the step is a

long one from subjective belief to objective reality. But still it is

surely perfectly fair to argue that a given belief is of such a nature

that it cannot be supposed to rest on anything less solid than a fact;

and this is eminently the case in regard to the belief in Christ's

Resurrection. There have been many attempts on the part of those who

reject that belief to account for its existence, and each of them in

succession has had its day, and ceased to be.' Unbelief devours its own

children remorselessly, and the succession to the throne of

antichristian scepticism is won, as in some barbarous tribes, by

slaying the reigning sovereign. The armies of the aliens turn their

weapons against one another, and each new assailant of the historical

veracity of the Gospels commences operations by showing that all

previous assailants have been wrong, and that none of their

explanations will hold water.

For instance, we hear nothing now of the coarse old explanation that

the story of the Resurrection was a lie, and became current through the

conscious imposture of the leaders of the Church. And it was high time

that such a solution should be laid aside. Who, with half an eye for

character, could study the deeds and the writings of the apostles, and

not feel that, whatever else they were, they were profoundly honest,

and as convinced as of their own existence, that they had seen Christ

alive after His passion, by many infallible proofs'? If Paul and Peter

and John were conspirators in a trick, then their lives and their words

were the most astounding anomaly. Who, either, that had the faintest

perception of the forces that sway opinion and frame systems, could

believe that the fair fabric of Christian morality was built on the

sand of a lie, and cemented by the slime of deceit bubbling up from the

very pit of hell? Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

That insolent hypothesis has had its day.

Then when it was discredited, we were told that the mythical tendency

would explain everything. It showed us how good men could tell lies

without knowing it, and how the religious value of an alleged fact in

an alleged historical revelation did not in the least depend on its

being a fact. And that great discovery, which first converted solid

historical Christianity into a gaseous condition, and then caught the

fumes in some kind of retort, and professed to hand us them back again

improved by the sublimation, has pretty well gone the way of all

hypotheses. Myths are not made in three days, or in three years, and no

more time can be allowed for the formation of the myth of the

Resurrection. What was the Church to feed on while the myth was

growing? It would have been starved to death long before.

Then, the last new explanation which is gravely put forward, and is the

prevailing one now, sustains itself by reference to undeniable facts in

the history of religious movements, and of such abnormal attitudes of

the mind as modern spiritualism. On the strength of which analogy we

are invited to see in the faith of the early Christians in the

Resurrection of the Lord a gigantic instance of hallucination.' No

doubt there have been, and still are, extraordinary instances of its

power, especially in minds excited by religious ideas. But we have only

to consider the details of the facts in hand to feel that they cannot

be accounted for on such a ground. Do hallucinations lay hold on five

hundred people at once? Does a hallucination last for a long country

walk, and give rise to protracted conversation? Does hallucination

explain the story of Christ eating and drinking before His disciples?

The uncertain twilight of the garden might have begotten such an airy

phantom in the brain of a single sobbing woman; but the appearances to

be explained are so numerous, so varied in character, embrace so many

details, appeal to so many of the senses--to the ear and hand as well

as to the eye--were spread over so long a period, and were

simultaneously shared by so large a number, that no theory of such a

sort can account for them, unless by impugning the veracity of the

records. And then we are back again on the old abandoned ground of

deceit and imposture. It sounds plausible to say, Hallucination is a

proved cause of many a supposed supernatural event--why not of this?

But the plausibility of the solution ceases as soon as you try it on

the actual facts in their variety and completeness. It has to be eked

out with a length of the fox's skin of deceit before it covers them;

and we may confidently assert that such a belief as the belief of the

early Church in the Resurrection of the Lord was never the product

either of deceit or of illusion, or of any amalgam of the two.

What new solutions the fertility of unbelief may yet bring forth, and

the credulity of unbelief may yet accept, we know not; but we may

firmly hold by the faith which breathed new hope and strange joy into

that sad band on the first Easter morning, and rejoice with them in the

glad, wonderful fact that He is risen from the dead.

IV. For that message is a message to us as truly as to the

heavy-hearted unbelieving men that first received it. We may think for

a moment of the joy with which we ought to return from the empty

sepulchre of the risen Saviour.

How little these women knew that, as they went back from the grave in

the morning twilight, they were the bearers of great joy which should

be to all people'! To them and to the first hearers of their message

there would be little clear in the rush of glad surprise, beyond the

blessed thought, Then He is not gone from us altogether. Sweet visions

of the resumption of happy companionship would fill their minds, and it

would not be until calmer moments that the stupendous significance of

the fact would reveal itself.

Mary's rapturous gesture to clasp Him by the feet, when the certainty

that it was in very deed He flooded her soul with dazzling light,

reveals her first emotion, which no doubt was also the first with them

all, Then we shall have Him with us again, and all the old joy of

companionship will be ours once more.' Nor were they wrong in thinking

so, however little they as yet understood the future manner of their

fellowship, or anticipated His leaving them again so soon. Nor are we

without a share even in that phase of their joy; for the Resurrection

of Jesus Christ gives us a living Lord for our love, an ever present

Companion and Brother for our hearts to hold, even if our hands cannot

clasp Him by the feet. A dead Christ might have been the object of

faint historical admiration, and the fair statue might have stood

amidst others in the galleries of history; but the risen, living Christ

can love and be loved, and we too may be glad with the joy of those who

have found a heart to rest their hearts upon, and a companionship that

can never fail.

As the early disciples learned to reflect upon the fact of Christ's

Resurrection, its riches unfolded themselves by degrees, and the

earliest aspect of its power' was the light it shed on His person and

work. Taught by it, as we have seen, they recognised Him for the

Messiah whom they had long expected, and for something more--the

Incarnate Son of God. That phase of their joy belongs to us too. If

Christ, who made such avowals of His nature as we know that He did, and

hazarded such assertions of His claims, His personality and His office,

as fill the Gospels, were really laid in the grave and saw corruption,

then the assertions are disproved, the claims unwarranted, the office a

figment of His imagination. He may still remain a great teacher, with a

tremendous deduction to be made from the worth of His teaching, but all

that is deepest in His own words about Himself and His relation to men

must be sorrowfully put on one side. But if He, after such assertions

and claims, rose from the dead, and rising, dieth no more, then for the

last time, and in the mightiest tones, the voice that rent the heavens

at His baptism and His transfiguration proclaims: This is My beloved

Son; hear ye Him.' Our joy in His Resurrection is the joy of those to

whom He is therein declared to be the Son of God, and who see in Christ

risen their accepted Sacrifice, and their ever-living Redeemer.

Such was the earliest effect of the Resurrection of Jesus, if we trust

the records of apostolic preaching. Then by degrees the joyful thought

took shape in the Church's consciousness that their Shepherd had gone

before them into the dark pen where Death pastured his flocks, and had

taken it for His own, for the quiet resting-place where He would make

them lie down by still waters, and whence He would lead them out to the

lofty mountains where His fold should be. The power of Christ's

Resurrection as the pattern and pledge of ours is the final source of

the joy which may fill our hearts as we turn away from that empty

sepulchre.

The world has guessed and feared, or guessed and hoped, but always

guessed and doubted the life beyond. Analogies, poetic adumbrations,

probabilities drawn from consciousness and from conscience, from

intuition and from anticipation, are but poor foundations on which to

build a solid faith. But to those to whom the Resurrection of Christ is

a fact their own future life is a fact. Here we have a solid certainty,

and here alone. The heart says as we lay our dear ones in the grave,

'Surely we part not for ever.' The conscience says, as it points us to

our own evil deeds, After death the judgment.' A deep indestructible

instinct prophesies in every breast of a future. But all is vague and

doubtful. The one proof of a life beyond the grave is the Resurrection

of Jesus Christ. Therefore let us be glad with the gladness of men

plucked from a dark abyss of doubt and planted on the rock of solid

certainty; and let us rejoice with joy unspeakable, and laden with a

prophetic weight of glory, as we ring out the ancient Easter morning's

greeting, The Lord is risen indeed!'

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THE FOOD OF THE WORLD

He gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples to the

multitude. 20. And they did all eat, and were filled; and they took up

of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.'--MATT. xiv. 19,

20.

The miracles of Scripture are not merely wonders, but signs. It is one

of their most striking characteristics that they are not, like the

pretended portents of false faiths, mere mighty deeds standing in no

sort of intellectual relation to the message of which they claim to be

the attestation, but that they have themselves a doctrinal

significance. Our Lord's miracles have been called the great bell

before the sermon,' but they are more than that. They are themselves no

unimportant part of the sermon. In fact, it would not be difficult to

construct from them a revelation of His nature, person, and work,

scarcely less full and explicit than that contained in His words, or

even than that more systematic and developed one which we receive in

the writings of His apostles.

This miracle, for instance, of the feeding of the five thousand with

five barley loaves and two small fishes, is one of the few which the

Apostle John relates in his Gospel, and his reason for selecting it

seems to be the commentary with which our Lord followed it, and which

John alone has preserved. That commentary is all the wonderful

discourse about Christ as the bread of life, and eating His flesh as

our means of receiving His life into ourselves. We are warranted, then,

in regarding this miracle as a symbolic revelation of Christ as

supplying all the wants of this hungry world. If so, we may perhaps

venture to take one more step, and regard the manner in which He

dispenses His gifts as also significant. His agents are His disciples,

or as would appear probable from the twelve baskets full of fragments,

the twelve apostles, the nucleus and representatives of His Church.

Thus we come to the point from which we wish to regard this narrative

now. There are three stages in the words of our text--the distribution,

the meal, and the gathering up of the abundance that was left. These

three stages may guide us to some thoughts regarding the work to which

Christ calls His Church, the success which attends it, and the results

to the distributors themselves.

I. Christ feeds the famishing world by means of His Church.

He gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples to the

multitude.' One very striking feature in all our Lord's miracles is

economy of power. The miraculous element being admitted for some good

and sufficient reason, it is kept down to the lowest possible point.

Precisely so much of it as is needed is permitted, and not one

hairsbreadth more. It does not begin to make its appearance at any

point in the process where ordinary human agency can be used. It does

not produce a result beyond the actual necessity. It does not last one

instant longer than is required. It inosculates closely with the

natural order of things.

Take an illustration from the beginning of miracles where Jesus

manifested forth His glory, at the marriage in Cana of Galilee--that

great miracle in which our Lord hallowed the ties of human affection,

and consecrated the joy of united hearts. The necessity is felt before

He supplies it. The servants fill the waterpots. The water is used as

the material on which the miraculous power operates. Only so much as is

drawn for present use becomes wine. The servants are used as the agents

for the distribution, and all is done so unostentatiously, though it be

the manifesting of His glory, that no man knows but they.

Take another illustration from the other great contrasted miracle at

the grave of Lazarus, where our Lord hallowed the breaking of earthly

bonds by death, and sanctified the sorrows of parted love. He does not

work His wonder from the other side Jordan, but comes. He does not

avert the death which He will conquer, nor prevent the grief which He

shares. He goes to the side of the grave--true human tears are wet upon

His cheek. They have to roll away the stone. Then, there is flung into

the darkness of the tomb the mighty word, Lazarus! come forth.' The

inconceivable miraculous act is done, and life stirs in the sheeted

dead. But there the miraculous ceases. The man with his restored life

has himself to come out of the grave, and human hands have tremblingly

to lift the napkin from the veiled face (how they must have thrilled as

they did it, wondering what nameless horror they might see in the eyes

that had looked on the inner chamber of death), and human help has to

unfold the grave-clothes from the tightly swathed and stumbling limbs,

Loose him, and let him go.'

This marked characteristic of all our Lord's miracles is full of

instruction, which it would lead us too far from our present purpose to

indicate at any length. But we may just observe in passing, that it

brings these into striking parallel with the divine creative act, where

there is ever the same precise adaptation of power employed to result

contemplated, the same background of veiled omnipotence, the same

emergence of proportioned, adequate, but not superfluous force, so

that, in fact, economy of power may be said to be the very signature

and broad arrow of divinity stamped on all His works. Again, it

presents a broad contrast to the wild, reckless miracle-mongering of

false faiths, and is at once a test of the genuineness of all lying

signs and wonders,' and an indication of the self-restraint of the

Worker, and of the fine sanity and truthfulness of the narrators, of

these Gospel miracles. And yet, again, it is one phase of the

disciplinary character of the whole revelation of God in Christ--not

obtrusive, though obvious, capable of being overlooked if men will.

There was the hiding of His power. If any man wills to be ignorant, let

him be ignorant.'

But coming more immediately to the narrative before us, we find this

same characteristic in full prominence in it. The people are allowed to

hunger. The disciples are permitted to feel themselves at their wits'

end. They are bid to bring their poor resources to Christ. The lad who

had come with his little store, perhaps a fisherman's boy from some of

the lake villages who hoped to sell his loaves and fishes in the crowd,

supplies the material on which Christ wills to exercise His miraculous

power. The disciples' agency is pressed into the service. Each man

separately receives his portion, and when all are supplied, the

fragments are carefully preserved for the use of those who had been fed

by miracle, and of Him who had fed them!

Besides the general lessons already referred to, as naturally arising

from this feature of the miracle, there is that one which belongs to it

especially, namely, that Christ feeds the famishing world by means of

His Church.

Precisely as in the miracles in general, so in the work of Christ as a

whole, the field of supernatural intervention is rigidly confined, and

fits in with the established order of things. The Incarnation and

Sacrifice of our Lord are the purely supernatural work of the divine

Power and Mercy. He comes, enters into our human conditions, assumes

our humanity, dies the death for us all. I have trodden the wine-press

alone.' There is no question of any human agency co-operating there,

any more than there is in the word Lazarus, come forth,' or in the

multiplication of the loaves. There, by Christ alone, is brought to us

and is finished for us an eternal redemption, with which the whole race

of man have nothing to do but to receive it, to eat and be filled. But

this having been done by the solitary work of Jesus Christ, this new

power having been introduced into the world, human agency is henceforth

called into operation to diffuse it, just as the servants at Cana had

to draw the wine which He had made, just as the disciples at the Sea of

Tiberias have to give to the multitude the bread which was blessed and

broken by His hands.

The supernaturally given Bread of Life is to be carried over the world

in accordance with the ordinary laws by which all other truth is

diffused and all other gifts that belong to one man are held by him in

stewardship for all his fellows. True, there is ever in and with that

word of life a divine Spirit, which is the real cause of its progress,

which guards it from destruction though all men were faithless, and

keeps it alive though all Israel bowed the knee to Baal. But, however

easy it may be for us to confuse ourselves with metaphysical puzzles

about the relation between the natural and the supernatural

elements--the human agency and the divine energiser--in the successful

discharge of the Church's work, practically the matter is very plain.

The truth that it behoves us all to lay to heart is just this--that

Christian people are Christ's instruments for effecting the realisation

of the purposes of His death. Not without them shall He see of the

travail of His soul. Not without them shall the preaching be fully

known. Not without the people willing in the day of His power, and

clothed in priestly beauty, shall the Priest King set His feet upon His

enemies. Not without the armies of heaven following Him, shall the Word

of God' ride forth to victory. Neither the divine decree, nor the

expansive power of the Truth, nor the crowned expectancy of the waiting

Lord, nor the mighty working of the Comforter, are the complete means

for the accomplishment of the divine promise that all nations shall be

blessed in Him. Could all these be conceived of as existing without the

service and energies of God's Church proclaiming the name of Christ,

they were not enough. He has willed that to us, less than the least of

all saints, should this grace be given, that we should make known the

unsearchable riches of Christ. God reveals His truth, that men who

believe it may impart it. God gives the word, that, caught up by those

who receive it into an honest and good heart, it may be poured forth,

in mighty chorus from the lips of the great company of them that

publish it.' He gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples to

the multitude.'

Christian men! learn your high vocation, and your solemn

responsibilities. What! came the word of God out from you, or came it

unto you only?' For what did you receive it? For the same reason for

which you have received everything else which you possess--that you

might share it with your brethren. How did you receive it? As a gift,

unmerited, the result of a miracle of divine mercy, that you might feel

bound to give as ye have received, and spread the free divine gift by

cheerful human work of distribution. From whom did you receive it? From

Christ, who in the very act of giving binds you to live for Him and not

for yourselves, and to mould your lives after the pattern of His. What

a multitude of motives converge on the solemn duty of work for Christ,

if we read in the light of this deeper meaning the simple words of our

text, He gave the loaves to the disciples!' What manner of servant is

he who can bear to have no part in the blessed work that follows--and

the disciples to the multitude'?

It is further noticeable how these apostles were prepared for the work

which they had to do. The first lesson which they had to learn was the

almost ludicrous disproportion between the resources at their command

and the necessities of the crowd. How many loaves have ye? go and see.'

And this is the first lesson that we have to learn in all our work for

Christ and for our brethren, that in ourselves we have nothing fit for

the task before us. Think of what that task is as measured by the

necessities and sorrows of men. Think of all the sighs that go up at

every moment from burdened hearts, of the tears that run down so many

blanched and anxious cheeks. Think of all the misery that is done under

the sun!' If it could be made visible, what a dark pall would swathe

the world, an atmosphere of sorrow rolling ever with it through space.

The sight is too sad to be seen by any but by Him who cures it all, and

it wrung from His heart the sigh with which ere He cured one poor

sufferer--a drop in the ocean--He looked up to heaven, as in mute

appeal against all these heaped miseries of suffering man.

And we, what can we do in ourselves? On what comparison of our

resources do we not feel utterly inadequate to the work? If we think of

the proportion in numbers, we have to say, like the narrator of the

wars in Israel, The children of Israel pitched before them like two

little flocks of kids, but the Syrians filled the country.' If we think

of the strength that we ourselves possess and look at our own tremulous

faith, at our own feeble love, at the uncertain hold which we ourselves

have on the Gospel that we profess, at the mists and darkness which

cover so much of God's revelation from our own understandings, at the

sins and faults of our own lives, must we not cry out, Send whom Thou

wilt send, O Lord, but take not me, so sinful, so little influenced by

Thy grace, to be the messenger of Thy grace? Who is sufficient for

these things?' And such contemplations, when they drive home to our

hearts the wholesome lesson of our own weakness, are the beginning, and

the only possible beginning, of divine strength. The only temper in

which we can serve God and bless man is that of lowliest

self-abasement. God works with bruised reeds, and out of them makes

polished shafts, pillars in His house. Only when we are low on our

faces before God, crying out,' Unclean, unclean,' does the purifying

coal touch our lips and the prophet strength flow into our souls.

Be humble and self-distrustful, and then learn the further lesson of

this narrative, and carry your poor inadequate resources to Christ.

Bring them hither to Me.' In His hands they become sufficient. He

multiplies them. He gives wisdom, strength, and all that fits for the

task to which He calls us. Bring your little faith to Him and He will

increase it. Bring your feeble love to Him, and ask Him to kindle it

from the pure flame of His own, and He will make your heart burn within

you. Bring your partial understanding of His will and way to Him, and

He will be to you wisdom. Bring all the poverty of your natures, all

the insufficiency of your religious character, all the inadequacy of

your poor work, to your Lord. Feel it all. Let the conviction of your

nothingness sink into your soul. Then wait before Him in simple faith,

in lowly obedience, and power will come to you equal to your desire and

to your duties, and He will put His spirit upon you, and will anoint

you to proclaim liberty to the captives and to give bread to all the

hungry. Who is sufficient for these things?' must ever precede, and

will ever be followed by, our sufficiency is of God.'

Mark again that the disciples seem themselves to have partaken of the

bread before they parted it among the multitudes. That is our true

preparation for the work of feeding the hungry. The Church which feeds

the world is able to do so, only because, and in proportion as, it has

found in Christ its own sustenance and life. It is only they who can

say we have tasted and felt and handled of the word of life' who can

declare it to others. Personal participation in the bread of life makes

any man able to offer it to some fainting spirit. Nothing else makes

him able. Ability involves responsibility. Power to its last particle

is duty.' You, dear friends, who have tasted that the Lord is

gracious,' have thereby come under weighty obligations. Your own

personal experience of that precious bread has fitted you to do

something in offering it to others. The manner in which you do so must

be determined by your character and circumstances. Every one has his

proper walk; but something you can do. To some lips you can commend the

food for all the world. Somewhere your word is a power. See that you do

what you can do. Remember that Christ feeds the world by His Church,

and that every man who has himself eaten of the bread of life is

thereby consecrated to carry it to those who yet are perishing in the

far-off hunger-ridden land, and trying to fill their bellies with the

husks that the swine eat.

II. The Bread is enough for all the world.

They did all eat and were filled.' One can fancy how doubtingly and

grudgingly the apostles doled out the supplies at first, and how the

portion of each was increased, as group after group was provided, and

no diminution appeared in Christ's full hands, until, at last, all the

five thousand, of all ages, of both sexes, of every sort, were fed, and

the fragments lying uncared for proved how sufficient had been the

share of each.

May we not see in that scene a picture of the full supply for all the

wants of the whole world which there is in that Bread of Life which

came down from heaven? The Gospel proclaims a full feast, which is

enough for all mankind, which is intended for all mankind, which shall

one day satisfy all mankind.

This universal adaptation of the message of the Gospel to the whole

world arises from the obvious fact that it addresses itself to

universal wants, to the great rudimentary, universally diffused

characteristics of human nature, and that it provides for all these, in

the grand simplicity of its good tidings, the one sufficing word. It

entangles itself with no local or historical peculiarities of the time

and place of its earthly origin, which can hinder it in its universal

diffusion. It commits itself to no transient human opinions. It

addresses itself to no sectional characteristics of classes of men. It

brushes aside all the surface distinctions which separate us from one

another, and goes right down to the depths of the central identities in

which we are all alike. However we may differ from one another, in

training, in habits, in cast of thought, in idiosyncrasies of

character, in circumstances, in age--all these are but the upper strata

which vary locally. Beneath all these there lie everywhere the solid

foundations of the primeval rocks, and beneath these, again, the

glowing central mass, the flaming heart of the world. Christianity

sends its shaft right down through all these upper and local beds, till

it reaches the deepest depths which are the same in every man--the

obstinate wilfulness of a nature averse from God, and the yet

deeper-lying longings of a soul that flames with the consciousness of

God, and yearns for rest and peace. To the sense of sin, to the sense

of sorrow, to the conscience never wholly stifled, to the desires after

good never utterly eradicated and never slaked by aught besides itself,

does this mighty word come. Not to this or that sort of man, not to men

in this or that phase of progress, age of the world, or stage of

civilisation, does it address itself, but to the common humanity which

belongs to all, to the wants and sorrows and inward consciousness which

belong to man as man, be he philosopher or fool, king or slave, Eastern

or Western, pagan suckled in a creed outworn,' or Englishman with the

new lights and material science of this twentieth century.

Hence its universal adaptation to mankind. It alone of all so-called

faiths overleaps all geographical limits and lives in all centuries. It

alone wins its trophies and bestows its gifts on all sorts and

conditions of men. Other plants which the Heavenly Father hath not

planted' have their zones of vegetation and die outside certain degrees

of latitude, but the seed of the kingdom is like corn, an exotic

nowhere, for wherever man lives it will grow, and yet an exotic

everywhere, for it came down from heaven. Other food requires an

educated palate for its appreciation, but any hungry man in any land

will relish bread. For every soul on earth this living dying love of

the Lord Jesus Christ addresses itself to, and satisfies, his deepest

wants. It is the bread which gives life to the world.

And one of the constituents of that company by the Galilean lake was

children. It is one great glory of Christianity that its merciful

mysteries can find their way to the hearts of the little children. Its

mysteries, we say--for the Gospel has its mysteries no less than these

old systems of heathenism which fenced round their deepest truths with

solemn barriers, only to be passed by the initiated. But the difference

lies here--that its mysteries are taught at first to the neophytes, and

that the sum of them lies in the words which we learned at our mother's

knees so long ago that we have forgotten that they were ever new to us:

God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that

whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but should have eternal

life.' The little child who has learned his earliest lessons of what

father and son, loving and giving, trust and life mean, by the sweet

experiences of his own father's home and his own mother's love, can

grasp these blessed words. They carry the deepest mysteries which will

still gleam before us unfathomed in all their profundity,

unappropriated in all their blessedness, when millenniums have passed

since we stood in the inner shrine of heaven. Wonderful is the word

which blesses the child, which transcends the angel before the throne!

This is the bread for the world--meant for it, and one day to be

partaken of by it. For these ordered fifties at their Christ-provided

meal are for us a prophecy of the day that shall surely dawn, when all

the hunger of wandering prodigals is over, and the deceived heart of

the idol-worshipper no longer drawing him aside to feed on ashes, they

shall come from the East and from the West, and from the North and from

the South, and sit at the feast which the Lord hath prepared for all

nations, and when all the earth shall be satisfied with the goodness of

His house, even of His holy temple.

III. The Bread which is given to the famishing is multiplied for the

future of the Distributors.

They took of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.' More was

gathered than they had possessed at first. They preserved over, for

their own sustenance and refreshment in days to come, a far larger

store than the five loaves and two small fishes with which they had

begun. The fact contains a principle which is true about almost all

except material possessions, which is often in God's providence made

true about them, and which is emphatically true about spiritual

blessings, about our religious emotions, our Christian beliefs, the

joys and powers which Christ comes to give.

For all these, the condition of increase is diffusion. To impart to

others is to gain for oneself. Every honest effort to bring some other

human heart into conscious possession of Christ's love deepens one's

own sense of its preciousness. Every attempt to lead some other

understanding to the perception of the truth, as it is in Jesus, helps

me to understand it better myself. If you would learn, teach. That will

clear your mind, will open hidden harmonies, will reveal unsuspected

deficiencies and contradictions in your own conceptions, will help you

to feel more the truths that come from your lips. It will perhaps shame

your cold appreciation of them, when you see how others grasp at them

from your teaching, or give you more confidence in the Gospel as the

power of God unto salvation, when you behold it, even as ministered

through you, mighty to pull down strongholds. At the lowest, it will

keep your own mind in healthy contact with what you art but too apt to

forget. If you would learn to love Christ more, try to lead some one

else to love Him, You will catch new gleams from His gracious heart in

the very act of commending Him to others. If you would have your own

spiritual life strengthened and deepened, remember that not by solitary

meditation or raptures of silent communion alone can that be

accomplished, but by these and by honest manful work for God in the

world. The Mount of Transfiguration must be left, although there were

there Moses and Elias, and the cloud of the divine glory and the words

of approval from heaven, because there were a demoniac boy and his

weeping, despairing father needing Christ down below. Work for God if

you would live with God. Give the bread to the hungry, if you would

have it for the food of your own souls.

The refusal to engage in such service is one fruitful cause of the low

state of spiritual health in which so many Christians pass their days.

They seem to think that they receive the bread from heaven only for

their own use, and that they have done all that they have to do with

it, when they eat it themselves. And so come all manner of spiritual

diseases. A selfish, that is an inactive, religion is always more or

less a morbid religion. For health you need exercise. In the sweat of

thy brow thou shalt eat bread'; that law expresses not only the fact

that work is needed to get it, but that toil must give the appetite and

fit the frame to digest it. There is such a thing as a morbid

Christianity brought on by want of healthy exercise.

There is that scattereth and yet increaseth, and there is that

withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty.' Good

husbandry does not grind up all the year's wheat for loaves for one's

own eating, but keeps some of it for seed to be scattered in the

furrows. And if Christian men will deal with the great love of God, the

great work of Christ, the great message of the Gospel, as if it were

bestowed on them for their own sakes only, they will have only

themselves to blame if holy desires die out in their hearts, and the

consciousness of Christ's love becomes faint, and all the blessed words

of truth come to sound far off and mythical in their ears. The standing

water gets green scum on it. The close-shut barn breeds weevils and

smut. Let the water run. Fling the seed broadcast. Thou shalt find it

after many days,' bread for thy own soul--even as these ministering

apostles were enriched whilst they gave, and the full-handed liberality

with which they carried Christ's gifts among the crowd' had something

to do in providing the large residue which filled their stores for days

to come.

Thus, then, this scene on the sweet springing grass down by the side of

blue Gennesaret is an emblem of the whole work of the Church in this

starving world. The multitudes famish. Tell Christ of their wants.

Count your own small resources till you have completely learned your

poverty, then take them to Jesus. He will accept them, and in His hands

they will become mighty, being transfigured from human thoughts and

forces into divine words, into spiritual powers. On that bread which He

gives, do you yourselves live. Then carry it boldly to all the hungry.

Rank after rank will eat. All races, all ages, from grey hairs to

babbling childhood, will find there the food of their souls. As you

part the blessing, it will grow beneath His eye; and the longer you

give, the fuller-handed you will become. Nor shall the bread fail, nor

the word become weak, till all the world has tasted of its sweetness

and been refreshed by its potent life.

This miracle is the lesson for the workers. There is another wondrous

meal recorded in Scripture, which is the prophecy for the workers when

they rest. The little ship has been tossing all the night on the waters

of that Galilean lake. Fruitless has been the fishing. The morning

breaks cold and grey, and lo! there stands on the shore One who first

blesses the toilers' work, and then bids them to His table. There,

mysteriously kindled, burns the fire with the welcome meal already laid

upon it. They add to it the contribution of their night of toil, and

then, hushed and blessed in His still company, they sup with Him and He

with them. So when the weary work is over for the Church on earth, we

shall be aware of His merciful presence on the shore, and, coming at

the last safe to land, we shall rest from our labours,' in that we see

the fire of coals, and fish laid thereon and bread'; and our works

shall follow us,' in that we are bidden to bring of the fish that we

have caught.' Then, putting off the wet fisher's coat, and leaving

behind the tossing of the unquiet sea and the toil of the weary

fishing, we shall sit down with Him at that meal spread by His hands,

who blesseth the works of His servants here below, and giveth to them a

full fruition of immortal food at His table at the last.

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THE KING'S HIGHWAY

And straightway Jesus constrained His disciples to get into a ship, and

to go before Him unto the other side, while He sent the multitudes

away. 23. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a

mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there

alone. 24. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with

waves: for the wind was contrary. 25. And in the fourth watch of the

night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. 26. And when the

disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is

a spirit; and they cried out for fear. 27. But straightway Jesus spake

unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. 28. And

Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee

on the water. 29. And He said, Come. And when Peter was come down out

of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. 30. But when he

saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he

cried, saying, Lord, save me. 31. And immediately Jesus stretched forth

His hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith,

wherefore didst thou doubt. 32. And when they were come into the ship,

the wind ceased. 33. Then they that were in the ship came and

worshipped Him, saying, Of a truth Thou art the Son of God. 34. And

when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret. 35.

And when the men of that place had knowledge of Him, they sent out into

all that country round about, and brought unto Him all that were

diseased; 36. And besought Him that they might only touch the hem of

His garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.' --MATT.

xiv. 22-36.

The haste and urgency with which the disciples were sent away, against

their will, after the miracle of feeding the five thousand, is

explained in John's account. The crowd had been excited to a dangerous

enthusiasm by a miracle so level to their tastes. A prophet who could

feed them was something like a prophet. So they determine to make him a

king. Our Lord, fearing the outburst, resolves to withdraw into the

lonely hills, that the fickle blaze may die down. If the disciples had

remained with Him, He could not have so easily stolen away, and they

might have caught the popular fervour. To divide would distract the

crowd, and make it easier for Him to disperse them, while many of them,

as really happened, would be likely to set off by land for Capernaum,

when they saw the boat had gone. The main teaching of this miracle,

over and above its demonstration of the Messianic power of our Lord, is

symbolical. All the miracles are parables, and this eminently so. Thus

regarding it, we have--

I. The struggling toilers and the absent Christ.

They had a short row of some five or six miles in prospect, when they

started in the early evening. An hour or so might have done it, but,

for some unknown reason, they lingered. Perhaps instead of pulling

across, they may have kept inshore, by the head of the lake, expecting

Jesus to join them at some point. Thus, night finds them but a short

way on their voyage. The paschal moon would be shining down on them,

and perhaps in their eager talk about the miracle they had just seen,

they did not make much speed. A sudden breeze sprang up, as is common

at nightfall on mountain lakes; and soon a gale, against which they

could make no headway, was blowing in their teeth. This lasted for

eight or nine hours. Wet and weary, they tugged at the oars through the

livelong night, the seas breaking over them, and the wind howling down

the glens.

They had been caught in a similar storm once before, but then He had

been on board, and it was daylight. Now it was dark, and Jesus had not

yet come to them,' How they would look back at the dim outline of the

hills, where they knew He was, and wonder why He had sent them out into

the tempest alone! Mark tells us that He saw them distressed, hours

before He came to them, and that makes His desertion the stranger. It

is but His method of lovingly training them to do without His personal

presence, and a symbol of what is to be the life of His people till the

end. He is on the mountain in prayer, and He sees the labouring boat

and the distressed rowers. The contrast is the same as is given in the

last verses of Mark's Gospel, where the serene composure of the Lord,

sitting at the right hand of God, is sharply set over against the

wandering, toiling lives of His servants, in their evangelistic

mission. The commander-in-chief sits apart on the hill, directing the

fight, and sending regiment after regiment to their deaths. Does that

mean indifference? So it might seem but for the words which follow, the

Lord working with them.' He shares in all the toil; and the lifting up

of His holy hands sways the current of the fight, and inclines the

balance. His love appoints effort and persistent struggle as the law of

our lives. Nor are we to mourn or wonder; for the purpose of the

appointment, so far as we are concerned, is to make character, and to

give us the wrestling thews that throw the world.' Difficulties make

men of us. Summer sailors, yachting in smooth water, have neither the

joy of conflict nor the vigour which it gives. Better the darkness,

when we cannot see our way, and the wind in our faces, if the good of

things is to be estimated by their power to strengthen us with strength

in our soul!'

II. We have the approaching Christ.

Not till the last watch of the night does He come, when they have long

struggled, and the boat is out in the very middle of the lake, and the

storm is fiercest. We may learn from this the delays of His love.

Because He loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus, He stayed still, in

strange inaction, for two days, after their message. Because He loved

Peter and the praying band, He let him lie in prison till the last hour

of the last watch of the last night before his intended execution, and

then delivered him with a leisureliness (making him put on article

after article of dress) which tells of conscious omnipotence. Heaven's

clock goes at a different rate from our little timepieces. God's day is

a thousand years, and the longest tarrying is but a little while.' When

He has come, we find that it is right early,' though before He came He

seemed to us to delay. He comes across the waves. Their restless and

yielding crests are smoothed and made solid by the touch of His foot.

He walketh on the sea as on a pavement' (Septuagint version of Job ix.

8). It is a revelation of divine power. It is one of the very few

miracles affecting Christ's own person, and may perhaps be regarded as

being, like the Transfiguration, a casual gleam of latent glory

breaking through the body of His humiliation, and so, in some sense,

prophetic. But it is also symbolic. He ever uses tumults and unrest as

a means of advancing His purposes. The stormy sea is the recognised Old

Testament emblem of antagonism to the divine rule; and just as He

walked on the billows, so does He reach His end by the very opposition

to it, girding Himself' with the wrath of men, and making it to praise

Him. In this sense, too, His paths are in the great waters.' In another

aspect, we have here the symbol of Christ's using our difficulties and

trials as the means of His loving approach to us. He comes, giving a

deeper and more blessed sense of His presence by means of our sorrows,

than in calm sunny weather. It is generally over a stormy sea that He

comes to us, and golden treasures are thrown on our shores after a

tempest.

III. We have the terror and the recognition.

The disciples were as yet little lifted above their fellows; they had

no expectation of His coming, and thought just what any rude minds

would have thought, that this mysterious Thing stalking towards them

across the waters came from the unseen world, and probably that it was

the herald of their drowning. Terror froze their blood, and brought out

a shriek (as the word might be rendered) which was heard above the dash

of waves and the raving wind. They had gallantly fought the tempest,

but this unmanned them. We too often mistake Christ, when He comes to

us. We do not recognise His working in the storm, nor His presence

giving power to battle with it. We are so absorbed in the circumstances

that we fail to see Him through them. Our tears weave a veil which

hides Him, or the darkness obscures His face, and we see nothing but

the threatening crests of the waves, curling high above our little

boat. We mistake our best friend, and we are afraid of Him as we dimly

see Him; and sometimes we think that the tokens of His presence are

only phantasms of our own imagination.

They who were deceived by His appearance knew Him by His voice, as Mary

did at the sepulchre. How blessed must have been the moment when that

astounding certitude thrilled through their souls! That low voice is

audible through all the tumult. He speaks to us by His word, and by the

silent speech in our spirits, which makes us conscious that He is

there. He does speak to us in the deepest of our sorrows, in the

darkest of our nights; and when we hear of His voice, and with wonder

and joy cry out, It is the Lord,' our sorrow is soothed, and the

darkness is light about us.

The consciousness of His presence banishes all fear. Be not afraid,'

follows It is I.' It is of no use to preach courage unless we preach

Christ first. If we have not Him with us, we do well to fear: His

presence is the only rational foundation for calm fearlessness. Only

when the Lord of Hosts is with us, ought we not to fear, though the

waters roar . . . and be troubled.' Through the dear might of Him that

walked the waves' can we feeble creatures face all terrors, and feel no

terror.

IV. We have the end of the storm and of the voyage.

The storm ceases as soon as Jesus is on board. John does not mention

the cessation of the tempest, but tells us that they were immediately

at the shore. It does not seem necessary to suppose another miracle,

but only that the voyage ended very speedily. It is not always true

that His presence is the end of dangers and difficulties, but the

consciousness of His presence does hush the storm. The worst of trouble

is gone when we know that He shares it; and though the long swell after

the gale may last, it no longer threatens. Nor is it always true that

His coming, and our consciousness that He has come, bring a speedy

close to toils. We have to labour on, but in how different a mood these

men would bend to their oars after they had Him on board! With Him

beside us toil is sweet, burdens are lighter, and the road is

shortened. Even with Him on board, life is a stormy voyage; but without

Him, it ends in shipwreck. With Him, it may be long, but it will look

all the shorter while it lasts, and when we land the rough weather will

be remembered but as a transient squall. These wearied rowers, who had

toiled all night, stepped on shore as the morning broke on the eastern

bank. So we, if we have had Him for our shipmate, shall land on the

eternal shore, and dry our wet garments in the sunshine, and all the

stormy years that seemed so long shall be remembered but as a watch in

the night.

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PETER ON THE WAVES

And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto

Thee on the water.'--MATT. xiv. 28.

We owe this account of an episode in the miracle of Christ's walking on

the waters to Matthew alone. Singularly enough there is no reference to

Peter's venturesomeness and failure in the Gospel which is generally

believed to have been written under his special inspection and

suggestion. Mark passes by that part of the narrative without a word.

That may be because Peter was somewhat ashamed of it, or it may be from

a natural disinclination to make himself prominent in the story at all.

But, whatever the reason, we may be thankful that in this first Gospel

we have the story, for it is not only interesting as illustrating the

characteristics of the apostle in a very picturesque fashion, but also

as carrying in it very plainly large lessons that are of use for us

all.

I. Note, first, Peter's venturesomeness, half faith, and half

presumption.

There is a singular mixture of good and bad in it. Looked at one way,

it seems all right; like a bit of shot silk, in one light it is bright,

and in another it is black enough. What was good in it? Well, there was

the man's out-and-out confidence in his Master; and there was, further,

the unconsidered, instinctive shoot of love in his heart to the

mysterious figure standing there upon the water, so that his desire was

to be beside Him. It was far more Bid me come to Thee!' than Bid me

come to Thee on the water.' The incident was a kind of rehearsal, with

a noticeable difference, and yet with nearly parallel circumstances, of

the other incident when, after the Resurrection, he discovered the Lord

standing on the shore, and floundered through the water anyhow; whether

on it or in it did not matter to him, so long as he could get near his

Master. But though the apostle's action was blended with a great deal

that was childish and sensuous, and was perhaps quite as much the

result of mere temperament as of conscious affection, still there was

good in that eager longing to be beside his Lord, which it would be

well for us if we in some measure shared, and in that indifference to

the perils of the strange path so long as it led to Christ's side,

which, if it were ours, would ennoble our lives, and in that perfect

confidence that Christ could enable him to tread the unquiet sea, which

would make us lords of all storms, if it wrought in us.

What was bad in it? First, the characteristic pushing of himself to the

front, and wish to be singled out from his brethren by some special

token. Bid me come.' Why should he be bidden any more than John, who

sits quietly and gazes, or the others, who are tugging at the oars?

Then the impetuous rashness and signal over-estimate of his own

capacity and courage were bad. Perhaps, too, there was a little dash of

a boyish kind of wish to do a strange thing, and now that he sees his

Master there, walking on the waters, he thinks he would like to try it

too. So the request is a rash, self-confident pushing of himself before

his brethren into circumstances of wholly unnecessary peril and trial,

of which he had not estimated the severity till he felt the water

beginning to yield under his feet and the wind smiting him on the face.

So that the incident is a rehearsal and anticipation of the precisely

similar thing that he did when, on the morning of Christ's trial, he

shouldered himself unnecessarily into the high priest's palace, and got

himself close up against the fire there, without a moment's reflection

on the possible danger he was running of having his loyalty melted by a

fiercer flame, and little dreaming that he was going to fall, and all

his courage to ooze out at his finger-ends, before the sharp tongue of

a maid-servant. In like manner as he says here, Bid me come to Thee,'

without the smallest doubt that when he was bade to come he would be

able to do it, so he said that night: Though all should forsake Thee,

yet will not I,'--and yet he denied Him.

Let us take the warning from this venturesomeness of a generous,

impulsive, enthusiastic religious nature, and remember that the most

genuine faith and religious emotion need to be sobered and steadied by

reflection, and by searching into our own motives, before we venture

upon the water, howsoever much we may wish to go there. Make very sure

that your zeal for the Lord has an element of sober permanence in it,

and that it is the result, not of a mere transitory feeling, but of a

steady, settled purpose. And do not push yourself voluntarily into

places of peril or of difficulty, where the fighting is hard and the

fire heavy, unless you have reasonable grounds for believing that you

can stand the strain. Bring quiet, sober reason into the loftiest and

loveliest enthusiasm of your faith, and then there will be something in

it that will live through storm, and walk the water with unwetted and

unsinking foot. An impure alloy of selfish itching for pre-eminence and

distinction does not seldom mingle with the fine gold of religious

enthusiasm and desire to serve and be near our Lord. Therefore we have

to test our motives and seek to refine our purest emotions, and the

more scrupulously the purer they seem, lest we be yielding to the

impulses of self while we fancy that we are being drawn by the

magnetism of Christ.

II. We have here the momentary triumph and swift collapse of an impure

faith.

One can fancy with what hushed expectation the other apostles looked at

Peter as he let himself down over the side of the ship, and his feet

touched the surges and did not sink. Christ's grave, single-worded

answer Come' barely sanctions the apostle's request. It is at most a

permission, but scarcely a command, and it is permission to try, in

order that Peter may learn his own weakness. He did walk on the water

to go to Jesus. What kept him up? Not Christ's hand, nor any power

bestowed on the apostle, but simply the exercise of Christ's will. But

if he was held up by the operation of that will, why did he begin to

sink? The vivid narrative tells us: When he saw the wind boisterous, he

was afraid.' That was why. It had been blowing every bit as hard before

he stepped out of the ship. The waves were not running any higher after

than when he said, Bid me come to Thee.' But he was down amongst them,

and that makes a wonderful difference. For a moment he stood, and then

the peril into which he had so heedlessly thrust himself began to tell

on him. Presumption subsided swiftly into fright, as it usually does,

and fear began to fulfil itself, as it usually does. He became afraid,'

and that made him heavy and he began to sink. Not because the gale was

any more violent, not because the uneven pavement was any more

yielding, but because he was frightened, and his faith began to falter

at the close sight of the danger.

And why did the ebbing away of faith mean the withdrawal of Christ's

will to keep him up? Why? Because it could not but be so. There is only

one door through which Christ's upholding power gets into a man, and

that is the door of the man's trust in the power; and if he shuts the

door, the power stops outside. So Peter went down. The text does not

tell us how far down he went. Depend upon it, it was further than over

the shoes! But he went down because he began to lose his trust that

Christ could hold him up; and when he lost his trust, Christ lost His

power over him.

All this is a parable, carrying very plain and important lessons. We

are upborne by Christ's power, and that power, working on and in our

weakness, invests us with prerogatives in some measure like His own. If

He can stand quiet on the heaving wave, so can His servant. The works

that I do shall ye do also'--and the depths of the sea "become" a way

for the ransomed to pass over.' That power is exercised on condition of

our faith. As soon as faith ceases the influx of His grace is stayed.

Peter, though probably he was not thinking of this incident, has put

the whole philosophy of it into plain words in his own letter, when he

says, You who are kept by the power of God through faith unto

salvation.' He was held up as long as he believed. His belief was a

hand, and that which it grasped was what held him up, and that was

Christ's will and power. So we shall be held up everywhere, and in any

storm, as long as, and no longer than, we set our confidence upon Him.

Our faith is sure to fail when we turn away our eyes from Christ to

look at the tempest and the dangers. If we keep our gaze fixed upon

Him, the consciousness and the confidence of His all-sustaining power

will hold us up. If once we turn aside to look at the waves as they

heave, and prick our ears to listen to the wind as it whistles, then we

shall begin to doubt whether He is able to keep us up. Looking off'

from all these dangers unto Jesus' is needful if we are to run the race

set before us.

A man walking along a narrow ledge of some Alpine height has only one

chance of safety, and that is, not to look at his feet or at the icy

rocks beside him, or at the gulf beneath, into which he will be dashed

if he gazes down. He must look up and onwards, and then he will walk

along a knife-edge, and he shall not fall. So, Peter, never mind the

water, never mind the wind; look at Jesus and you will get to Him dry

shod. If you turn away your eyes from Him, and take counsel of the

difficulties and trials and antagonisms, down you will be sure to go.

They sank to the bottom like a stone, the depths covered them.' Christ

holds us up. He cannot hold us up unless we trust Him. Faith and fear

contend for supremacy in our hearts. If we rightly trust, we shall not

be afraid. If we are afraid, terror will slay trust. To look away from

Christ, and occupy our thoughts with dangers and obstacles, is sure to

lead to the collapse of faith and the strengthening of terror. To look

past and above the billows to Him that stands on them is sure to cast

out fear and to hearten faith. Peter ignored the danger at the wrong

time, before he dropped over the side of the boat, and he was aware of

it at the wrong time, while he was actually being held up and delivered

from it. Rashness ignores peril in the wrong way, and thereby ensures

its falling on the presumptuous head. Faith ignores it in the right

way, by letting the eye travel past it, to Christ who shields from it,

and thereby faith brings about the security it expects, and annihilates

the peril from which it looks away to Jesus.

III. We have here the cry of desperate faith and its immediate answer.

The very thing which had broken Peter's faith mended it again. Fear

sunk him by making him falter in his confidence; and, as he was

sinking, the very desperation of his terror drove him back to his

faith, and he cried' with a shrill, loud voice, heard above the roar of

the boisterous wind, Lord, save me.' So difficulties and dangers, when

they begin to tell upon us, often send us back to the trust which the

anticipation of them had broken; and out of the very extremity of fear

we sometimes can draw its own antidote. Just as with flint and steel

you may strike a spark, so danger, striking against our heart, brings

out the flash that kindles the tinder.

This brief cry for help singularly blends faith and fear. There is

faith in it, else Peter would not have appealed to Christ to save him.

There is mortal terror in it, else he would not have felt that he

needed to cry. But faith is uppermost now, and the very terror feeds

it. So, by swift transition, our fears may pass into their own opposite

and become courageous trust. Just as in a coal fire the thick black

smoke sometimes gets alight and passes into ruddy flame, so our fears

may catch fire and flash up as confidence and prayer.

Note the merciful swiftness of Christ's answer. Immediately He caught

him,' because another moment would have been too late. There will be

time to teach him the lessons of his presumption, but when the water is

all but up to the lips that shrieked for help, there is but one thing

to do. He must be saved first and talked to afterwards. Our cries for

deliverance in temporal matters are not always answered so quickly, for

it is often better for us to be left to struggle with the waves and

winds. But our appeals for Christ's helping hand in soul-peril are

always answered without delay. No appreciable time is consumed in the

passage of the telegram or in flashing back the answer. The apostle was

not caught by Christ's hand before he knew his danger, for it was good

for him that he should go down some way, but he was caught as soon as

he called on the Master, and before he had come to any harm. The trial

lasted long enough to wash the stiffening of self-confidence out of

him, and then it had done its work--and Christ's strong hand held him

up.

The manner of the answer is noteworthy. It is determined by, and

adapted to, his weak faith. He could not be upheld now as he had been a

moment ago, before his fear had weighted him, by the exercise of

Christ's will only. Then Christ could hold him up without touching him,

but now the palpable grasp of the hand was needed to assure the

tremulous, doubting heart. So we, too, sometimes need and get material

and outward signs which make it easier to feel the reality of

sustaining grace. But whether we do or no, Christ's swift help always

takes the form best suited to our faith, and He has regard to the

capacity of our clasping hands in the measure and manner of His gifts.

The time and tone of Christ's gentle remonstrance are remarkable.

Deliverance comes first, and rebuke afterwards. Having first shown him,

by the fact of safety, that his doubts were irrational, Christ then,

and not till then, puts His gentle question. Perhaps there was a smile

on His face, as surely there was love in His voice, that softened the

rebuke and went to Peter's heart.

What does Christ rebuke him for? Getting out of the boat? No. He does

not blame him for venturing too much, but for trusting too little. He

does not blame him for attempting something beyond his strength, but

for not holding fast the beginning of his confidence firm unto the end.

And so the lesson for us is, that we cannot expect too much if we

expect it perseveringly. We cannot set our conceptions of Christ's

possible help to us too high if only we keep at the height to which we

once have set them, and are assured that He will hold us up when we are

down amongst the weltering waves, as we fancied ourselves to be when we

were sitting in the boat wishing to be with Him. That is the question

that He will meet us with when we get up on the shore yonder; and we

shall not have any more to say for ourselves, in vindication of our

tremulous trust, than Peter, silenced for once, had to say on this

occasion.

It will be good for us all if, like this apostle, our trials

consolidate our characters, and out of the shifting, fluctuating,

impetuous nature that was blown about like sand by every gust of

emotion there be made, by the pressure of responsibility and trial, and

experience of our own unreliableness, the Rock' of a stable character,

steadfast and unmovable, with calm resolution and fixed faith, on which

the Great Architect can build some portion of His great temple.

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CRUMBS AND THE BREAD

Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

22. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and

cried unto Him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my

daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. 23. But He answered her not

a word. And His disciples came and besought Him, saying, Send her away;

for she crieth after us. 24. But He answered and said, I am not sent

but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 25. Then came she and

worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me. 26. But He answered and said, It

is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. 27.

And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall

from their masters' table. 28. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O

woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her

daughter was made whole from that very hour. 29. And Jesus departed

from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a

mountain, and sat down there. 30. And great multitudes came unto Him,

having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many

others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and He healed them: 31.

Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak,

the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and

they glorified the God of Israel.'--MATT. xv. 21-31.

The King of Israel has passed beyond the bounds of Israel, driven by

the hostility of those who should have been His subjects. The delegates

of the priestly party from Jerusalem, who had come down to see into

this dangerous enthusiasm which was beginning in Galilee, have made

Christ's withdrawal expedient, and He goes northward, if not actually

into the territory of Tyre and Sidon, at any rate to the border land.

The incident of the Syro-Phoenician woman becomes more striking if we

suppose that it took place on Gentile ground. At all events, after it,

we learn from Mark that He made a considerable circuit, first north and

then east, and so came round to the eastern side of the sea of Galilee,

where the last paragraph of this section finds Him. The key to its

meaning lies in the contrast between the single cure of the woman's

demoniac daughter, obtained after so long imploring, and the

spontaneous abundance of the cures wrought when Jesus again had Jewish

sufferers to do with, even though it were on the half-Gentilised

eastern shore of the lake. The contrast is an illustration of His

parable of the crumbs that fell from the table and the plentiful feast

that was spread upon it for the children.

The story of the Syro-Phoenician woman naturally falls into four parts,

each marked by the recurrence of He answered.'

I. There is the piteous cry, and the answer of silence. Mark tells us

that Jesus sought concealment in this journey; but distress has quick

eyes, and this poor woman found Him. Canaanite as she is, and thus a

descendant of the ancient race of Israel's enemies, she has learned to

call Him the Son of David, owning His kingship, which His born subjects

disowned. She beseeches for that which He delights to give, identifying

herself with her poor child's suffering, and asking as for herself His

mercy. As Chrysostom says: It was a sight to stir pity to behold a

woman calling aloud in such distress, and that woman a mother, and

pleading for a daughter, and that daughter in such evil plight.' In her

humility she does not bring her child, nor ask Him to go to her. In her

agony, she has nothing to say but to spread her grief before Him, as

thinking that He, of whose pity she has heard, needs but to know in

order to alleviate, and requires no motives urged to induce Him to

help. In her faith, she thinks that His power can heal from afar. What

more could He have desired? All the more startling, then, is His

demeanour. All the conditions which He usually required, were present

in her; but He, who was wont to meet these with swift and joyful

over-answers, has no word to say to this poor, needy, persevering,

humble, and faithful suppliant. The fountain seems frozen, from which

such streams of blessing were wont to flow. His mercy seems clean gone,

and His compassion to have failed. A Christ silent to a sufferer's cry

is a paradox which contradicts the whole gospel story, and which, we

may be very sure, no evangelist would have painted, if he had not been

painting from the life.

II. There is the disciples' intercession answered by Christ's statement

of the limitations of His mission. Their petition evidently meant,

Dismiss her by granting her request'; they knew in what fashion He was

wont to send away' such suppliants. They seem, then, more pitiful than

He is. But their thoughts are more for themselves than for her. That

us' shows the cloven foot. They did not like the noise, and they feared

it might defeat His purpose of secrecy; and so, by their phrase, Send

her away,' they unconsciously betray that what they wanted was not

granting the prayer, but getting rid of the petitioner. Perhaps, too,

they mean, Say something to her; either tell her that Thou wilt or that

Thou wilt not; break Thy silence somehow.' No doubt, it was intensely

disagreeable to have a shrieking woman coming after them; and they were

only doing as most of us would have done, and as so many of us do, when

we give help without one touch of compassion, in order to stop some

imploring mouth.

Their apparently compassionate but really selfish intercession was put

aside by the answer, which explains the paradox of His silence. It puts

emphasis on two things: His subordination to the divine will of the

Father, and the restrictions imposed thereby on the scope of His

beneficent working. He was obeying the divine will in confining His

ministry to the Jewish people, as we know that He did. Clearly, that

restriction was necessary. It was a case of concentration in order to

diffusion. The fire must be gathered on the hearth, if it is afterward

to warm the chamber. There must be geographical and national limits to

His life; and the Messiah, who comes last in the long series of the

kings and prophets, can only be authenticated as the world's Messiah,

by being first the fulfiller to the children of the promises made to

the fathers. The same necessity, which required that revelation should

be made through that nation, required that the climax and fulfiller of

all revelation should limit His earthly ministry to it. This limitation

must be regarded as applying only to His own personal ministry. It did

not limit His sympathies, nor interfere with His consciousness of being

the Saviour and King of the whole world. He had already spoken the

parables which claimed it all for the area of the development of His

kingdom, and in many other ways had given utterance to His

consciousness of universal dominion, and His purpose of universal

mercy. But He knew that there was an order of development in the

kingdom, and that at its then stage the surest way to attain the

ultimate universality was rigid limitation of it to the chosen people.

This conviction locked His gracious lips against even this poor woman's

piteous cry. We may well believe that His sympathy outran His

commission, and that it would have been hard for so much love to be

silent in the presence of so much sorrow, if He had not felt the solemn

pressure of that divine necessity which ruled all His life. He was

bound by His instructions, and therefore He answered her not a word.

Individual suffering is no reason for transcending the limits of

God-appointed functions; and he is absolved from the charge of

indifference who refrains from giving help, which he can only give by

overleaping the bounds of his activity, which have been set by the

Father.

III. We have, next, the persistent suppliant answered by a refusal

which sounds harsh and hopeless. Christ's former words were probably

not heard by the woman, who seems to have been behind the group. She

saw that something was being said to Him, and may have gathered, from

gestures or looks, that His reply was unfavourable. Perhaps there was a

short pause in their walk, while they spoke, during which she came

nearer. Now she falls at His feet, and with beautiful shamelessness,'

as Chrysostom calls it, repeats her prayer, but this time with pathetic

brevity, uttering but the one cry, Lord, help me!' The intenser the

feeling, the fewer the words. Heart-prayers are short prayers. She does

not now invoke Him as the Son of David, nor tell her sorrow over again,

but flings herself in desperation on His pity, with the artless and

unsupported cry, wrung from her agony, as she sees the hope of help

fading away. Like Jacob, in his mysterious struggle, she wept, and made

supplication unto Him.'

As it would seem, her distress touched no chord of sympathy; and from

the lips accustomed to drop oil and wine into every wound, came words

like swords, cold, unfeeling, keen-edged, fitted and meant to lacerate.

We shall not understand them, or Him, if we content ourselves with the

explanation which jealousy for His honour as compassionate and tender

has led many to adopt, that He meant all the long delay in granting her

request, and the words which He spoke, only as tests of her faith. His

refusal was a real refusal, founded on the divine decree, which He was

bound to obey. His words to her, harsh as they unquestionably sound,

are but another way of putting the limitation on which He had just

insisted in His answer to the disciples. The bread' is the blessing

which He, as the sent of God, brings; the children' are the lost sheep

of the house of Israel'; the dogs' are the Gentile world. The meaning

of the whole is simply the necessary restriction of His personal

activity to the chosen nation. It is not meant to wound nor to insult,

though, no doubt, it is cast in a form which might have been offensive,

and would have repelled a less determined or less sorrowful heart. The

form may be partly explained by the intention of trying her

earnestness, which, though it is not the sole, or even the principal,

is a subordinate, reason of our Lord's action. But it is also to be

considered in the light of the woman's quick-witted retort, which drew

out of it an inference which we cannot suppose that Christ did not

intend. He uses a diminutive for dogs,' which shows that He is not

thinking of the fierce, unclean animals, masterless and starving, that

still haunt Eastern cities, and deserve their bad character, but of

domestic pets, who live with the household, and are near the table. In

fact, the woman seized His intention much better than later critics who

find national scorn' in the words; and the fair inference from them is

just that which she drew, and which constituted the law of the

preaching of the Gospel,--To the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.'

IV. We have the woman's retort, which wrings hope out of apparent

discouragement, answered by Christ's joyful granting of her request.

Out of His very words she weaves a plea. Yes, Lord; I am one of the

dogs; then I am not an alien, but belong to the household.' The Revised

Version does justice to her words by reading for even' instead of yet,'

She does not enter a caveat against the analogy, but accepts it wholly,

and only asks Him to carry out His own metaphor. She takes the sword

from His hand, or, as Luther says, she catches Him in His own words.'

She does not ask a place at the table, nor anything taken from those

who have a prior claim to a more abundant share in His mercies. A crumb

is enough for her, which they will never miss. In other and colder

words, she acquiesces in the divine appointment which limits His

mission to Israel; but she recognises that all nations belong to God's

household, and that she and her countrymen have a real, though for the

time inferior, position in it. She pleads that her gain will not be the

children's loss, nor the answer to her prayers an infraction of the

spirit of His mission. Perhaps, too, there may be a reference to the

fact of His being there on Gentile soil, in her words, Which fall from

the children's table.' She does not want the bread to be thrown from

the table to her. She is not asking Him to transfer His ministry to

Gentiles; but here He is. A crumb has fallen, in His brief visit. May

she not eat of that? In this answer faith, humility, perseverance,

swift perception of His meaning, and hallowed ingenuity and boldness,

are equally admirable. By admitting that she was a dog,' and pleading

her claim on that footing, she shows that she was a child.' And

therefore, because she has shown herself one of the true household, in

the fixedness of her faith, in the meekness of her humility, in the

persistence of her prayers, Christ joyfully recognises that here is a

case in which He may pass the line of ordinary limitation, and that, in

doing so, He does not exceed His commission. Such faith is entitled to

the fullest share of His gift. She takes her place beside the Gentile

centurion as the two recipients of commendation from Him for the

greatness of their faith. It had seemed as if He would give nothing;

but He ends with giving all, putting the key of the storehouse into her

hand, and bidding her take, not a crumb, but as thou wilt.' Her

daughter is healed, by His power working at a distance; but that was

not, we may be very sure, the last nor the best of the blessings which

she took from that great treasure of which He made her mistress. Nor

can we doubt that He rejoiced at the removal of the barrier which

dammed back His help, as much as she did at the abundance of the stream

which reached her at last.

V. The final verses of our lesson give us a striking contrast to this

story. Jesus is again on the shores of the lake, after a tour through

the Tyrian and Sidonian territory, and then eastwards and southwards,

to its eastern bank. There He, as on several former occasions, seeks

seclusion and repose in the hills, which is broken in upon by the

crowds. The old excitement and rush of people begin again. And large

numbers of sick, lame, blind, dumb, maimed and many others,' are

brought. They are cast down at His feet' in hot haste, with small

ceremony, and, as would appear, with little petitioning for His healing

power. But the same grace, for which the Canaanitish woman had needed

to plead so hard, now seems to flow almost unasked. She had, as it

were, wrung a drop out; now it gushes abundantly. She had not got her

crumb' without much pleading; these get the bread almost without

asking. It is this contrast of scant and full supplies which the

evangelist would have us observe. And he points his meaning plainly

enough by that expression, they glorified the God of Israel,' which

seems to be Matthew's own, and not his quotation of what the crowd

said. This abundance of miracle witnesses to the pre-eminence of Israel

over the Gentile nations, and to the special revelation of Himself

which God made to them in His Son. The crowd may have found in it only

fuel for narrow national pride and contempt; but it was the divine

method for the founding of the kingdom none the less; and these two

scenes, set thus side by side, teach the same truth, that the King of

men is first the King of Israel.

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THE DIVINE CHRIST CONFESSED, THE SUFFERING CHRIST DENIED

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Phllippi, He asked His

disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am? 14. And

they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and

others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. 15. He saith unto them, But

whom say ye that I am? 16. And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art

the Christ, the Son of the living God. 17. And Jesus answered and said

unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath

not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. 18. And I

say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will

build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

19. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and

whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be hound in heaven: and

whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 20.

Then charged He His disciples that they should tell no man that He was

Jesus the Christ. 21. From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His

disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things

of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be

raised again the third day. 22. Then Peter took Him, and began to

rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto

Thee. 23. But He turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind Me,

Satan: thou art an offence unto Me: for thou savourest not the things

that be of God, but those that be of men. 24. Then said Jesus unto His

disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and

take up his cross, and follow Me. 25. For whosoever will save his life

shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find

it. 26. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world,

and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his

soul? 27. For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with

His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works.

28. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not

taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in His

kingdom.'--MATT. xvi. 13-28.

This section is embarrassing from its fulness of material. We can but

lightly touch points on which volumes might be, and indeed have been,

written.

I. The first section (vs. 13-20) gives us Peter's great confession in

the name of the disciples, and Christ's answer to it. The centre of

this section is the eager avowal of the impetuous apostle, always

foremost for good or evil. We note the preparation for it, its

contents, and its results. As to the preparation,--our Lord is entering

on a new era in His work, and desires to bring clearly into His

followers' consciousness the sum of His past self-revelation. The

excitement, which He had checked after the first miraculous feeding,

had died down. The fickle crowd had gone away from Him, and the shadows

of the cross were darkening. Amid the seclusion of the woods,

fountains, and rocks of Caesarea, far away from distracting influences,

He puts these two momentous questions. Following the Revised Version

reading, we have a double contrast between the first and second. Men'

answers to ye,' and the Son of Man' to I.' The first question is as to

the partial and conflicting opinions among the multitudes who had heard

His name for Himself from His own lips; the second, in its use of the

I,' hints at the fuller unveiling of the depths of His gracious

personality, which the disciples had experienced, and implies, Surely

you, who have been beside Me, and known Me so closely, have reached a

deeper understanding.' It has a tone of the same wistfulness and wonder

as that other question of His, Have I been so long time with you, and

yet hast thou not known Me?' For their sakes, He seeks to draw out

their partly unconscious faith, that had been smouldering, fed by their

daily experience of His beauty and tenderness. Half-recognised

convictions float in many a heart, which need but a pointed question to

crystallise into master-truths, to which, henceforward, the whole being

is subject. Great are the dangers of articulate creeds; but great is

the power of putting our shadowy beliefs into plain words. With the

mouth confession is made unto salvation.'

Why should this great question have been preceded by the other?

Probably to make the disciples feel more distinctly the chaotic

contradictions of the popular judgment, and their own isolation by

their possession of the clearer light. He wishes them to see the gulf

opening between them and their fellows, and so to bind them more

closely to Himself. This is the question the answer to which settles

everything for a man. It has an intensely sharp point. We cannot take

refuge from it in the general opinion. Nor does any other man's

judgment about Him matter one whit to us. This Christ has a strange

power, after nineteen hundred years, of coming to each of us, with the

same persistent interrogation on His lips. And to-day, as then, all

depends on the answer which we give. Many answer by exalted estimates

of Him, like these varying replies which ascribed to Him prophetic

authority, but they have not understood His own name for Himself, nor

drunk in the meaning of His self-revelation, unless they can reply with

the full-toned confession of the apostle, which sets Him far above and

apart from the highest and holiest.

As to the contents of the confession, it includes both the human and

the divine sides of Christ's nature. He is the Messiah, but He is more

than what a Jew meant by that name; He is the Son of the living God,'

by which we cannot indeed suppose that Peter meant all that he

afterwards learned it contained, or all that the Church has now been

taught of its meaning, but which, nevertheless, is not to be watered

down as if it did not declare His unique filial relation to the Father,

and so His divine nature. Nathanael had burst into rapturous adoration

of Jesus as the Son of God' at the very beginning; and the disciples'

glad confidence, which cast out the fear of the dim form striding

across the sea, had echoed the confession; all had heard His words, No

man knoweth the Father but the Son.' So we need not hesitate to

interpret this confession as in essence and germ containing the whole

future doctrine of our Lord's divinity. True, the speaker did not know

all which lay in His words. Do we? Do we not see here an illustration

of the method of Christian progress in doctrine, which consists not in

the winning of new truths, but in the penetrating further into the

meaning of old and initial truths? The conviction which made and makes

a Christian, is this of Peter's; and Christian growth is into, not away

from, it.

As to the results, they are set forth in our Lord's answer, which

breathes of delight, and we may almost say gratitude. His manhood knew

the thrill of satisfaction at having some hearts which understood

though partially, and loved even better than they knew. The solemn

address to the apostle by his ancestral name, gives emphasis to the

contrast between his natural weakness and his divine illumination and

consequent privilege. The name of Peter is not here bestowed, but

interpreted. Christ does not say Thou shalt be,' but Thou art,' and so

presupposes the former conferring of the name. Unquestionably, the

apostle is the rock on which the Church is built. The efforts to avoid

that conclusion would never have been heard of, but for the Roman

Catholic controversy; but they are as unnecessary as unsuccessful. Is

it credible that in the course of an address which is wholly occupied

with conferring prerogatives on the apostle, a clause should come in,

which is concerned about an altogether different subject from the thou'

of the preceding and the thee' of the following clauses, and which yet

should take the very name of the apostle, slightly modified, for that

other subject? We do not interpret other books in that fashion. But it

was not the flesh and blood' Peter, but Peter as the recipient and

faithful utterer of the divine inspiration in his confession, who

received these privileges. Therefore they are not his exclusive

property, but belong to his faith, which grasped and confessed the

divine-human Lord; and wherever that faith is, there are these gifts,

which are its results. They are the natural' consequences of the true

faith in Christ, in that higher region where the supernatural is the

natural. Peter's grasp of Christ's nature wrought upon his character,

as pressure does upon sand, and solidified his shifting impetuosity

into rock-like firmness. So the same faith will tend to do in any man.

It made him the chief instrument in the establishment of the early

Church. On souls steadied and made solid by like faith, and only on

such, can Christ build His Church. Of course, the metaphor here regards

Jesus, not as the foundation, as the Scripture generally does, but as

the founder. The names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are on the

foundations of the heavenly city; and, in historical fact, the name of

this apostle is graven on the deepest and first laid. In like

subordinate sense, all who share that heroic faith and proclaim it are

used by the Master-builder in the foundations of His Church; and Peter

himself is eager to share his name among his brethren, when he says Ye

also, as living stones.'

Built on men who hold by that confession, the Church is immortal; and

the armies who pour out of the gates of the pale kingdoms of the unseen

world shall not be able to destroy it. Peter, as confessor of his

Lord's human-divine nature, wields the keys of the kingdom of heaven,

like a steward of a great house; and that too was fulfilled in his

apostolic activity in his admitting Jews at Pentecost, and Gentiles in

the house of Cornelius. But the same power attends all who share his

faith and avowal, for the preaching of that faith is the opening of

heaven's door to men. He receives the power of binding and loosing, by

which is not meant that of forgiving or retaining sins, but that of

prohibiting or allowing actions, or, in other words, of laying down the

law of Christian conduct. This meaning of the metaphors is made certain

by the common Jewish use of them. Despotic legislative power is not

here committed to the apostle, but the great principle is taught that

the morality of Christianity flows directly from its theology, and that

whosoever, like Peter, grasps firmly the cardinal truth of Christ's

nature, and all which flows therefrom, will have his insight so cleared

that his judgments on what is permitted or forbidden to a Christian man

will correspond with the decisions of heaven, in the measure of his

hold upon the truth which underlies all religion and all morality,

namely, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' These are

gifts to Peter indeed, but only as possessor of that faith, and are

much more truly understood as belonging to all who possess like

precious faith' (as Peter says), than as the prerogative of any

individual or class.

II. The second section (vs. 21-23) contains the startling new

revelation of the suffering Messiah, and the disciples' repugnance to

it. The Gospel has two parts: Jesus is the Christ, and the Christ must

suffer and enter into His glory. Our Lord has made sure that the

disciples have learned the first before He leads to the second. The

very conviction of His dignity and divine nature made that second truth

the more bewildering, but still the only road to it was through the

first. Verse 21 covers an indefinite time, during which Jesus gradually

taught His sufferings. Ordinarily we exaggerate the suddenness, and

therefore the depth, of Peter's fall, by supposing that it took place

immediately after his confession; but the narrative discountenances the

idea, and merely says that Jesus then began' His new teaching. There

had been veiled hints of it (such as John ii. 19, and Matt. ix. 15,

xii. 40), but henceforward it assumed prominence, and was taught

without veil. It was no new thought to Himself, forced on Him by the

growing enmity of the nation. The cross always cast its shadow on His

path. He was no enthusiast, beginning with the dream of winning a world

to His side, and slowly and heroically making up His mind to die a

martyr, but His purpose in being born was to minister and to die, a

ransom for the many. We have not here to do with a growing

consciousness, but simply with an increasing clearness of utterance.

Note the detailed accuracy of His prevision, which points to Jerusalem

as the scene, and to the rulers of the nation as the instruments, and

to death as the climax, and to resurrection as the issue, of His

sufferings; the clear setting forth of the divine necessity which, as

it ruled all His life, ruled here also, and is expressed in that solemn

must'; and the perfectly willing acceptance by Him of that necessity,

implied in that go,' and certified by many another word of His. The

necessity was no external compulsion, driving Him to an unwelcome

sacrifice, but one imposed alike by filial obedience and by brotherly

love. He must die because He would save.

How vividly the scene of Peter's rash rejection of the teaching is

described! The apostle, full of eager love, still, as of old, swift to

speak, and driven by unexamined impulse, lays his hand on Christ, and

draws Him a little apart, while he begins' to pour out words which show

that he has forgotten his confession. Rebuke' must not be softened down

into anything less vehement or more respectful. He knows better than

Jesus what will happen. Perhaps his assurance that this shall never be'

means We will fight first.' But he is not allowed to finish what he

began; for the Master, whom he loved unwisely but well, turns His back

on him, as in horror, and shows by the terrible severity of His rebuke

how deeply moved He is. He repels the hint in almost the same words as

He had used to the tempter in the wilderness, of whom that Peter, who

had so lately been the recipient and proclaimer of a divine

illumination, has become the mouthpiece. So possible is it to fall from

sunny heights to doleful depths! So little can any divine inspiration

be permanent, if the man turn away from it to think man's thoughts, and

set his affections on the things which men desire! So certainly does

minding these degrade to becoming an organ of Satan! The words are full

of restrained emotion, which reveal how real a temptation Peter had

flung in Christ's path. The rock has become a stone of stumbling; the

man Jesus shrank from the cross with a natural and innocent shrinking,

which never made His will tremulous, but was none the less real; and

such words from loving lips did affect him. Let us note, on the whole,

that the complete truth about Jesus Christ must include these two

parts,--His divine nature and Messiahship, and His death on the cross;

and that neither alone is the gospel, nor is he a disciple, such as

Christ desires, who does not cleave to both with mind and heart.

III. In verses 24-28, the law, which ruled the Master's life, is

extended to the servants. They recoiled from the thought of His having

to suffer. They had to learn that they must suffer too if they would be

His. First, the condition of discipleship is set before them as being

the fellowship of His suffering. If any man will' gives them the option

of withdrawal. A new epoch is beginning, and they will have to enlist

again, and to do so with open eyes. He will have no unwilling soldiers,

nor any who have been beguiled into the ranks. No doubt, some went

away, and walked no more with Him. The terms of service are clear.

Discipleship means imitation, and imitation means self-crucifixion. At

that time they would only partially understand what taking up their

cross was, but they would apprehend that a martyred master must needs

have for followers men ready to be martyrs too. But the requirement

goes much deeper than this. There is no discipleship without

self-denial, both in the easier form of starving passions and desires,

and in the harder of yielding up the will, and letting His will

supplant ours. Only so can we ever come after Him, and of such

sacrifice of self the cross is the eminent example. We cannot think too

much of it as the instrument of our reconciliation and forgiveness, but

we may, and too often do, think too little of it as the pattern of our

lives. When Jesus began to teach His death, He immediately presented it

as His servants' example. Let us not forget that fact.

The ground of the law is next stated in verse 25. The desire to save

life is the loss of life in the highest sense. If that desire guide us,

then farewell to enthusiasm, courage, the martyr spirit, and all which

makes man's life nobler than a beast's. He who is ruled mainly by the

wish to keep a whole skin, loses the best part of what he is so anxious

to keep. In a wider application, regard for self as a ruling motive is

destruction, and selfishness is suicide. On the other hand, lives

hazarded for Christ are therein truly saved, and if they be not only

hazarded, but actually lost, such loss is gain; and the same law, by

which the Master must' die and rise again, will work in the servant.

Verse 26 urges the wisdom of such apparent folly, and enforces the

requirement by the plain consideration that life' is worth more than

anything beside, and that on the two grounds, that the world itself

would be of no use to a dead man, and that, once lost, life' cannot be

bought back. Therefore the dictate of the wisest prudence is that

seemingly prodigal flinging away of the lower life' which puts us in

possession of the higher. Note that the appeal is here made to a

reasonable regard to personal advantage, and that in the very act of

urging to crucify self. So little did Christ think, as some people do,

that the desire to save one's soul is selfishness.

Verse 27 confirms all the preceding by the solemn announcement of the

coming of the Son of Man as Judge. Mark the dignity of the words. He is

to come in the glory of the Father.' That ineffable and inaccessible

light which rays forth from the Father enwraps the Son. Their glory is

one. The waiting angels are His.' He renders to every man according to

his doing (his actions considered as one whole). Thus He claims for

Himself universal sway, and the power of accurately determining the

whole moral character of every life, as well as that of awarding

precisely graduated retribution. They surely shall then find their

lives who have followed Him here.

Verse 28 adds, with His solemn verily,' a confirmation of this

announcement of His coming to judge. The question of what event is

referred to may best be answered by noting that it must be one

sufficiently far off from the moment of speaking to allow of the death

of the greater number of His hearers, and sufficiently near to allow of

the survival of some; that it must also be an event, after which these

survivors would go the common road into the grave; that it is

apparently distinguished from His coming in the glory of the Father,'

and yet is of such a nature as to afford convincing proof of the

establishment of His kingdom on earth, and to be, in some sort, a sign

of that final act of judgment. All these requirements (and they are all

the fair inferences from the words) meet only in the destruction of

Jerusalem, and of the national life of the chosen people. That was a

crash of which we faintly realise the tremendous significance. It swept

away the last remnant of the hope that Israel was to be the kingdom of

the Messiah; and from out of the dust and chaos of that fall the

Christian Church emerged, manifestly destined for world-wide extension.

It was a great and terrible day of the Lord,' and, as such, was a

precursor and a prophecy of the day of the Lord, when He shall come in

the glory of the Father,' and render unto every man according to his

deeds.'

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CHRIST FORESEEING THE CROSS

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that

He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and

chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third

day.'--MATT. xvi. 21.

The time' referred to in the text was probably a little more than six

months before the Crucifixion, when Jesus was just on the point of

finally leaving Galilee, and travelling towards Jerusalem. It was an

epoch in His ministry. The hostility of the priestly party in the

capital had become more pronounced, and simultaneously the fickle

enthusiasm of the Galilean crowds, which had been cooled by His

discouragement, had died down into apathy. He and His followers are

about to leave familiar scenes and faces, and to plunge into perilous

and intrude paths. He is resolved that, if they will come after Him,'

as He bids them in a subsequent verse, it shall be with their eyes

open, and as knowing that to come after Him now means to cut themselves

loose from old moorings, and to put out into the storm. They shall be

abundantly certified that their journeying to Jerusalem is not a

triumphal procession to a crown, but a march to a cross.

So, this new epoch in His life is attended with a new development of

His teaching. My text sums up the result of many interviews in which,

by slow degrees, He sought to put the disciples in possession of this

unwelcome truth. It was prepared for, by the previous conversation in

which His question elicited from Peter, as the mouthpiece of the

apostles, the great confession of His Messiahship and Divinity. Settled

in their belief of these truths, however imperfect their intellectual

grasp of them, they might perhaps be able to receive the mournful

mystery of His passion.

I. We have here set forth in the first place our Lord's anticipation of

the Cross.

Mark the tone of the language, the minuteness of the detail, the

absolute certainty of the prevision. That is not the language of a man

who simply is calculating that the course which he is pursuing is

likely to end in his martyrdom; but the thing lies there before Him, a

definite, fixed certainty; every detail known, the scene, the

instruments, the non-participation of these in the final act of His

death, His resurrection, and its date,--all manifested and mapped out

in His sight, and all absolutely certain.

Now this was by no means the first time that the certainty of the Cross

was plain to Christ. It was not even the first time that it had been

announced in His teaching. Veiled hints; allusions, brief but pregnant,

had been scattered through His earlier ministry--such, for instance, as

the enigmatical word at its very beginning, Destroy this Temple, and in

three days I will raise it up'; or as the profound word to the rabbi

that sought Him by night, As Moses lifted up the serpent in the

wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up'; or as the passing

hint, dropped to the people, in symbolical language, about the sign of

the prophet Jonas'; or as the grief foreshadowed dimly to the apostles,

of the withdrawal of the Bridegroom, and their fasting in those days.'

These hints, and no doubt others unrecorded, had cropped to the surface

before; and what we have to do with here, is neither the dawning of an

expectation in Christ, nor the first utterance of the certainty of the

Cross, but simply the beginning of a continuous and unenigmatical

teaching of it, as an element in His instructions to His disciples.

So then, we have to recognise the fact that our Lord's prevision of the

end--shone, I was going to say, perhaps it might be truer to say,

darkened,--all the path along which He had to travel.

I think that people dogmatise a great deal too glibly as to what they

know very little about, the interaction of the divine and the human

elements in Christ, and on the one side are far too certain in their

affirmation that His humanity possessed in some reflected fashion the

divine gift of omniscience; and on the other hand, that His manhood,

passing through the process of human development, and increasing in

wisdom, was necessarily in its earlier stages void of the consciousness

of His Messianic mission. I dare not affirm either yes' or no' about

that matter; but this I am sure of, that if ever there was a time in

the development of the Manhood of Jesus Christ when He began to know

Himself as the Messias, at that same time He began to be certain of the

Cross. For His Messianic work required the Cross, and the divine thing

that was in Him was born into the world for a double purpose, to

minister and to die.

So, dear friends, putting aside mere metaphysics, which are superficial

after all, we have to recognise this as the fact, that all through His

career there arose before our Lord the certainty of that death, and

that it did not assume to Him the aspect which such a prospect might

have assumed to others as a possible result of a mission that failed,

but it assumed to Him the aspect of the certain result of a work that

was accomplished. He began His career with no illusions, such as other

teachers, reformers, philanthropists, men that have moved society, have

always begun with. Moses might suppose his brethren would have

understood how that God by His hand would deliver them,' but Christ had

no such illusion. He knew from the beginning that He came to be

rejected and to die. And so He trod life's common way,' with that grim

certainty rising ever before Him. I suppose that He did not, as you and

I do, forget the death that awaits us, and find the non-remembrance of

it the condition of much of our energy, but that it was perpetually in

His sight.

Now I do not think that we sufficiently dwell upon that fact as an

element in the human experience of our Lord. What beauty it gives to

His gentleness, to the leisureliness of heart with which He was ready

to make everybody's sorrow His own, and to lay a healing and a loving

finger upon every wound! With this certainty before Him, there was yet

no strain manifest upon His spirit, no self-absorption, no shutting

Himself out from other people's burdens because He had so heavy ones of

His own to carry; but He was ready for every joy, ready for all

sympathy, ready for every help; and if we cannot say that, in cheerful

godliness,' as I think we may, at least we can say that with solemn joy

and untroubled readiness, He journeyed towards that Cross. This Isaac

was under no illusions as to who the Lamb for the offering was, but

knowing it, He patiently carried the wood and climbed the hill, ready

for the Father's will.

II. That brings me to notice the second point here, our Lord's

recognition of the necessity of His suffering.

Mark that He does not say that He shall suffer. Certainty is not all

that He proclaims here, however absolute that certainty might be, but

it is He must.' He is speaking not only of the historical fact, but of

the need, deep in the nature of things, for His sufferings that were to

follow.

And though these were wrought out by His own willing submission on the

one hand, and by the unfettered play of the evil passions of the worst

of men on the other, yet over all that apparent chaos of unbridled

devildom there ruled the unalterable purpose of God; and the must' was

wrought out through the passions of evil-doers and the voluntary

submission of the innocent sufferer; thus setting before us, in the

central fact of the history of humanity, viz. the Cross and passion of

Jesus Christ, the eminent example of that great mystery how the

absolute freedom of the human will, and the responsibility of the guilt

of human wrong-doers, are congruous with the fixed purpose of an

all-determining and all-ruling Providence.

But that is apart from my purpose. Mark then, that our Lord's

recognition of this necessity for His suffering is, on the first and

plainest aspect of it, His recognition that His suffering was necessary

on the ground of filial obedience. All through His life we hear that

must' echoing, and His whole spirit bowed to it. As He says Himself,

The Son can do nothing of Himself.' As was said for Him of old: Lo, I

come. In the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do

Thy will, and Thy law is within My heart.' So the Father's will is the

Son's law; and the Father's Thou shalt' is answered by the Son's I

must.'

But yet that necessity grounded on filial obedience was no mere

external necessity determined solely by the divine will. God so willed

it, because it must be so; that it must be so was not because God so

willed it. That is to say, the work to which Christ had set His hand

was a work that demanded the Cross, nor could it be accomplished

without it. For it was the work of redeeming the world, and required

more than a beautiful life, more than a divine gentleness of heart,

more than the homely and yet deep wisdom of His teachings, it required

the sacrifice that He offered on the Cross.

So, dear friends, Christ's must' is but this: My work is not

accomplished except I die.' And remember that the connection between

our Lord's work and our Lord's death is not that which subsists between

the works and the deaths of great teachers, or heroic martyrs, or

philanthropists and benefactors, who will gladly pay the price of life

in order to carry out their loving or their wise designs. It is no mere

appendage to His work, nor the price that He paid for having done it,

but it is His very work in its vital centre.

I pray you to consider if there is any theory of the meaning and power

of the death of Jesus Christ which adequately explains this must,'

except the one that He died a sacrifice for the sins of the world. On

any other hypothesis, as it seems to me, of what His death meant, it is

surplusage, over and above His work: not adding much, either to His

teaching or to the beauty of His example, and having no absolute

stringent necessity impressed upon it. There is one doctrine--that when

He died He bare the sins of the whole world--which makes His death a

necessity; and I ask you, Is there any other doctrine which does? Take

care of a Christianity which would not be much impoverished if the

Cross were struck out of it altogether.

There is a deeper question, on which, as I believe, it does not become

us to enter, and that is, What is the necessity for the necessity? Why

must it be that He, who is the Redeemer of the world, must needs be the

Sacrifice for the world? We do not know enough about the depths of the

divine nature and the divine government to speak very wisely or

reverently upon that subject, and I, for one, abjure the attempt, which

seems to me to be presumptuous--the attempt to explain why there was

needed a sacrifice for sin in order to the forgiveness of sin. If I

knew all about God, I could tell you; and nobody, that does not, can.

But we can see, as far as concerns us, that, as the history of all

religions tells us, for the forgiveness and acceptance of sinful men a

pure sacrifice is needed; and that for teaching us the love of God, the

hideousness and wages of sin, for our emancipation from evil, for the

quieting of our consciences, for a foothold for faith, for an adequate

motive of self-surrender and obedience, his sacrificial death is

needful. The life and death of Jesus Christ, regarded as God's

sacrifice for the world's sin, does all this. The life and death of

Jesus Christ, regarded in any other aspect, does not do this.

Historically speaking, mutilated forms of Christianity, which have not

known what to do with the Cross of Christ, have lost their

constraining, purifying, and aggressive power. For us sinful men, if we

are to be delivered from evil and become sons of God, He must suffer

many things, and be killed, and rise again the third day.

III. Now note further, how we have here also our Lord's willing

acceptance of the necessity.

It is one thing to recognise, and another thing to accept, a needs-be.

This must' was no unwelcome obligation laid upon Him against His will,

but one to which His whole nature responded and which He accepted. No

doubt there was in Him the innocent instinctive physical shrinking from

death. No doubt the Cross, in so far, was pain and suffering. No doubt

we are to trace the reality of a temptation in Peter's rash words which

follow, as indicated to us by the severity and almost vehemence of the

action with which Christ puts it away. No doubt there is a profound

meaning in that answer of His, Thou art a stumbling-block to Me.' The

Rock' is turned into a stone of stumbling, and Peter's suggestion

appeals to something in Him which responded to it.

That shrinking might be a shrinking of nature, but it was not a recoil

of will. The ship may toss in dreadful billows, but the needle points

to the pole. The train may rock upon the line, but it never leaves the

rails. Christ felt that the Cross was an evil, but that feeling never

made Him falter in His determination to bear it. His willing acceptance

of the necessity was owing to His full resolve to save the world. He

must die because He would redeem, and He would redeem because He could

not but love. He saved others,' and therefore Himself He cannot save.'

So the must' was not an iron chain that fastened Him to His Cross. Like

some of the heroic martyrs of old, who refused to be bound to the

funeral pile, He stood there chained to it by nothing but His own will

and loving purpose to save the world.

And, brethren, in that loving purpose, each of us may be sure that we

had an individual and a personal share. Whatever the interaction

between the divinity and the humanity, this at all events is certain,

that every soul of man has his distinct and definite place in Christ's

knowledge and in Christ's love. Each of us all may be sure that one

strand of the cords of love which fastened Him to the Cross was His

love for me; and each of us may say--He must die, because He loved me,

and gave Himself for me.'

IV. Lastly, notice here our Lord's teaching the necessity of His death.

This announcement was preceded, as I remarked, by that conversation

which led to the crystallising of the half-formed convictions of the

apostles in a definite creed, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the

living God.' But that was not all that they needed to know and believe

and trust to. That was the first volume of their lesson-book. The

second volume was this, that Christ must suffer.' And so let us learn

the central place which the Cross holds in Christ's teaching. They tell

us that the doctrine of Christ as the Sacrifice for the world is not in

the Gospels. Where are the eyes that read the Gospels and do not see

it? The theory of it is not there; the announcements of it are. And in

this latest section of our Lord's ministry, they are fuller and more

frequent than in the earlier, for the plain reason which is implied by

the preparation through which He passed these disciples, ere He

ventured to communicate the mournful and the bewildering fact. There

must be, first, the grasp of His Messiahship, and some recognition that

He is the Son of God, ere it is possible to go on to speak of the

Cross, the full message concerning which could not be spoken until

after the Resurrection and the Ascension.

But note, you do not understand Christ's Cross unless you bring to it

the faith in Christ's Messiahship and the belief in some measure that

He is the Son of God. Neither the pathos nor the power of His death is

intelligible if it be simply like other deaths--the dying of a man who

is born subject to the law of mortality, and who yields to it by

natural process. Unless you and I take upon our lips, though with far

deeper meaning, the words with which the heathen centurion gazed upon

the dying Christ, and say, Truly this was the Son of God!' His Cross is

common and trivial and insignificant; but if we can thus speak, then it

stands before us as the crown of all God's manifestations in the

world,' the wisdom of God and the power of God.'

And then note, still further, how, without the Cross, these other

truths are not the whole gospel. There were disciples then, as there

have been disciples since, and as there are to-day, who were willing to

accept, Thou art the Christ'; and willing in some sense to say Thou art

the Son of God,' but stumbled when He said, The Son of Man must

suffer.' Brethren, I venture to urge that the gospel of the

Incarnation, precious as it is, is not the whole gospel, and that the

full-orbed truth about Jesus Christ is that He is the Christ, and that

He died for our sins, and rose again to live for ever, our Priest and

King.

We need a whole Christ. For our soul's salvation, for the quieting of

our consciences, the forgiveness of our sins, for new life, for peace,

purity, obedience, love, joy, hope, our faith must grasp Christ, and

Him crucified.' A half Christ is no Christ, and unless we have as

sinful men laid hold of the one Sacrifice for sins for ever, which He

offered, we do not understand even the preciousness of the half Christ

whom we perceive, nor know the full beauty of His example, the depth of

His teaching, nor the tenderness of His heart.

I beseech you, ask yourselves, What Christ can do for me the things

which I need to have done, except the Christ that died, yea, rather,

that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also

maketh intercession for us'?

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THE KING IN HIS BEAUTY

And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and

bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, 2. And was transfigured

before them: and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was

white as the light. 3. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and

Elias talking with Him. 4. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus.

Lord, it is good for us to be here: if Thou wilt, let us make here

three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

5. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and

behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in

whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him. 6. And when the disciples heard

it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. 7. And Jesus came

and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. 8. And when they

had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. 9. And as

they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the

vision to no man, until the Son of Man be risen again from the dead.

10. And His disciples asked Him, saying, Why then say the scribes that

Elias must first come? 11. And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias

truly shall first come, and restore all things. 12. But I say unto you,

That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto

him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of Man suffer

of them. 13. Then the disciples understood that He spake unto them of

John the Baptist.'--MATT. xvii. 1-13.

The early guess at Tabor as the scene of the Transfiguration must be

given up as untenable. Some one of the many peaks of Hermon rising

right over Caesarea is a far more likely place. But the silence of all

the accounts as to the locality surely teaches us the unimportance of

knowledge on the point. The dangers of knowing would more than outweigh

the advantages. A similar indefiniteness attaches to the when. Are we

to think of it as occurring by night, or by day? Perhaps the former is

slightly the more probable, from the fact of the descent being made the

next day' (Luke). Our conception of the scene will be very different,

as we think of that lustre from His face, and that bright cloud, as

outshining the blaze of a Syrian sun, or as filling the night with

glory. But we cannot settle which view is correct.

There are three distinct parts in the whole incident: the

Transfiguration proper; the appearance of Moses and Elijah; and the

cloud with the voice from it.

I. The Transfiguration proper.

The general statement that Jesus was transfigured before them' is

immediately followed out into explanatory details. These are

twofold--the radiance of His face, and the gleaming whiteness of His

raiment, which shone like the snow on Hermon when it is smitten by the

sunshine. Probably we are to think of the whole body as giving forth

the same mysterious light, which made itself visible even through the

white robe He wore. This would give beautiful accuracy and

appropriateness to the distinction drawn in the two metaphors,--that

His face was as the sun,' in which the undiluted glory was seen; and

His garments as the light,' which is sunshine diffused and weakened.

There is no hint of any external source of the brightness. It does not

seem to have been a reflection from the visible symbol of the divine

presence, as was the fading radiance on the face of Moses. That symbol

does not come into view till the last stage of the incident. We are

then to think of the brightness as rising from within, not cast from

without. We cannot tell whether it was voluntary or involuntary. Luke

gives a pregnant hint, in connecting it with Christ's praying, as if

the calm ecstasy of communion with the Father brought to the surface

the hidden glory of the Son. Can it be that such glory always

accompanied His prayers, and that its presence may have been one reason

for the sedulous privacy of these, except on this one occasion, when He

desired that His faithful three should be eye-witnesses of His

majesty'? However that may be, we have probably to regard the

Transfiguration as the transient making visible, in the natural,

symbolic form of light, of the indwelling divine glory, which dwelt in

Him as in a shrine, and then shone through the veil of His flesh. John

explains the event, though His words go far beyond it, when he says, We

beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father.'

What was the purpose of the Transfiguration? Matthew seems to tell us

in that before them.' It was for their sakes, not for His, as indeed

follows from the belief that it was the irradiation from within of the

indwelling light. The new epoch of His life, in which they were to have

a share of trial and cross-bearing, needed some great encouragement

poured into their tremulous hearts; and so, for once, He deigned to let

them look on His face shining as the sun, for a remembrance when they

saw it covered with shame and spitting' and His brow bleeding from the

thorns. But perhaps we may venture a step farther, and see here some

prophecy of that body of His glory in which He now reigns. Speculations

as to the difference between the earthly body of our Lord and ours are

fascinating but unsubstantial. It was a true human body, susceptible of

hunger, pain, weariness; but we are not taught that it carried in it

the necessity of death. It may have been more pliable to the spirit's

behests, and more transparent to its light, than ours. There may have

been in that hour of radiance some approximation to the perfect harmony

between the perfect spirit and the body, which is its fit organ, which

we know is His now, and to which we also know that He will conform the

body of our humiliation. Then His face shone as the sun'; when one of

these three saw Him in His glory, His countenance was as the sun

shineth in his strength'; and His own promise to us is that we too

shall shine forth as the sun.' Then His garments were white as the

light; His promise is that they who are worthy shall walk with Him in

white.' The Transfiguration was a revelation and a prophecy.

II. The appearance of Moses and Elijah.

While the three are gazing with dazzled eyes, suddenly, as if shaped

out of air, there stand by Jesus two mighty forms, evidently men, and

yet, according to Luke, encompassed in the white radiance, walking with

the Son of Man in a better furnace. What a stound of awe and wonder

must have touched the gazers as the conviction who these were filled

their minds, and they recognised, we know not how, the mighty

lineaments of the lawgiver and the prophet! Did the three mortals

understand the meaning of the words of the heavenly three? We cannot

tell. Nor does Matthew tell us what was the theme of that wondrous

colloquy. These two might have asked, Why hast Thou disquieted us to

bring us up?' What is the answer? Wherefore were they there? To tell

Jesus that He was to die? No, for that lay plain before Him. To learn

from Him the mystery of His passion, that they might be His heralds,

the one in Paradise, the other in the pale kingdoms of Hades? Perhaps,

but, more probably, they came to minister to Him strength for His

conflict, even as women did of their substance, and an angel did in

Gethsemane. Perhaps the strength came to Jesus from seeing how they

yearned for the fulfilment of the typified redemption; perhaps it came

from His being able to speak to them as He could not to any on earth.

At all events, surely Moses and Elijah were not brought there for their

own sakes alone, nor for the sake of the witnesses, but also for His

sake who was prepared by that converse for His cross.

Further, their appearance set forth Christ's death, which was their

theme, as the climax of revelation. The Law with its requirement and

its sacrifices, and Prophecy with its forward-looking gaze, stand

there, in their representatives, and bear witness that their converging

lines meet in Jesus. The finger that wrote the law, and the finger that

smote and parted Jordan, are each lifted to point to Him. The stern

voices that spoke the commandments and that hurled threatenings at the

unworthy occupants of David's throne, both proclaim, Behold the Lamb of

God, the perfect Fulfiller of law, the true King of Israel.' Their

presence and their speech were the acknowledgment that this was He whom

they had seen from afar; their disappearance proclaims that their work

is done when they have pointed to Him.

Their presence also teaches us that Jesus is the life of all the living

dead. Of course, care must be exercised in drawing dogmatic conclusions

from a manifestly abnormal incident, but some plain truths do result

from it. Of these two, one had died, though mystery hung round his

death and burial; the other had passed into the heavens by another gate

than that of death; and here they both stand with lives undiminished by

their mysterious changes, in fulness of power and of consciousness,

bathed in glory, which was as their native air now. They are witnesses

of an immortal life, and proofs that His yet unpierced hands held the

keys of life and death. He opened the gate which moves backwards to no

hand but His, and summoned them; and they come, with no napkins about

their heads, and no trailing grave-clothes entangling their feet, and

own Him as the King of life.

They speak too of the eager onward gaze which the Old Testament

believers turned to the coming Deliverer. In silent anticipation,

through all these centuries, good men had lain down to die, saying, I

wait for Thy salvation,' and after death their spirits had lived

expectant and crying, like the souls under the altar, How long, O Lord,

how long?' Now these two are brought from their hopeful repose,

perchance to learn how near their deliverance was; and behind them we

seem to discern a dim crowd of holy men and women, who had died in

faith, not having received the promises, and who throng the portals of

the unseen world, waiting for the near advent of the better Samson to

bear away the gates to the city on the hill, and lead thither their

ransomed train.

Peter's bewildered words need not long detain us. He is half dazed,

but, true to his rash nature, thinks that he must say something, and

that to do something will relieve the tension of his spirit. His

proposal, so ridiculous as it is, shows that he had not really

understood what he saw. It also expresses his feeling that it is much

better to be there than to be travelling to a cross--and so may stand

as an instance of a very real temptation for us all, that of avoiding

unwelcome duties and shrinking from rough work, on the plea of holding

sweet communion with Jesus on the mountain. It was not good' to stay

there, and leave demoniacs uncured in the plain.

III. The cloud and the witnessing voice.

Peter's words receive no answer, for, while he is speaking, another

solemn and silencing wonder has place. Suddenly a strange cloud forms

in the cloudless sky. It is bright' with no reflection caught from the

sun; it is borne along by no wind; slowly it settles down upon them,

like a roof, and, bright though it is, casts a strange shadow.

According to one reading of Luke's account, Christ and the two heavenly

witnesses pass within its folds, leaving the disciples without, and

that separation seems confirmed by Matthew's saying that the voice came

out of the cloud.' Our evangelist points to its brightness as singular.

It was not merely bright, as if smitten by the sunlight, but its whole

substance was luminous. It is almost a contradiction to speak of a

cloud of light, and the anomalous expression points to something beyond

nature. We cannot but remember the pillar which had a heart of fire,

and glowed in the darkness over the sleeping camp, and the cloud which

filled the house, and drove the priests from the sanctuary by its

brightness. Nor should we forget that at His Ascension Jesus was not

lost to sight in the blue; but while He was yet visible in the act of

blessing, a cloud received Him out of their sight.' It is, in fact, the

familiar symbol of the divine presence, which had long been absent from

the temple, and now reappears. We may note the beauty and felicity of

the emblem. It blends light and darkness, so suggesting how the very

same attributes' of God are both; and how His revelation of Himself

reveals Him as unrevealable. The manifestation of His power is also the

hiding of His power.' The inaccessible light is also thick darkness.

The same characteristics of His nature are light and joy to some, and

blackness and woe to others.

We may note, too, Christ's passage into the cloud. Moses and Elijah,

being purged from mortal weakness, could pass thither. But Jesus, alone

of men, could pass in the flesh into that brightness, and be hid in its

fiery heart, unshrinking and unconsumed. Who among us shall dwell with

everlasting burnings? His entrance into it is but the witness to the

purity of His nature, and the absence in Him of all fuel for fire. That

bright cloud was His own calm home, His habitation from eternity,' and

where no man, compassed with flesh and sin, could live, He enters as

the Son into the bosom of the Father.

Then comes the articulate witness to the Son. The solemnity and force

of the attestation are increased, if we conceive of the disciples as

outside the cloud, and parted from Jesus. This word is meant for them

only, and so is distinguished from the similar voice at the baptism,

and has added the imperative Hear him.' The voice bears witness to the

mystery of our Lord's person. It points to the contrast between His two

attendants and Him. They are servants, this is the Son.' It sets forth

His supernaturally born humanity, and, deeper still, His true and

proper divinity, which John unfolds, in his Gospel, as the deepest

meaning of the name. It testifies to the unbroken union of love between

the Father and Him, and therein to the absolute perfection of our

Lord's character. He is the adequate object of the eternal, divine

love. As He has been from the timeless depths of old, He is, in His

human life, the object of the ever-unruffled divine complacency, in

whom the Father can glass Himself as in a pure mirror. It enjoins

obedient listening. God's voice bids us hear Christ's voice. If He is

the beloved Son, listening to Him is listening to God. This is the

purpose of the whole, so far as we are concerned. We are to hear Him,

when He declares God; when He witnesses of Himself, of His love, His

work, His death, His judgeship; when He invites us to come to Him, and

find rest; when He commands and when He promises. Amid the Babel of

this day, let us listen to that voice, low and gentle, pleading and

soft, authoritative, majestic, and sovereign. It will one day shake not

the earth only, but also the heaven.' But, as yet, it calls us with

strange sweetness, and the music of love in every tone. Well for us if

our hearts answer, Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth.'

Matthew tells us that this voice from the cloud completely unmanned the

disciples, who fell on their faces, and lay there, we know not how

long, till Jesus came and laid a loving hand on them, bidding them

arise, and not fear. So when they staggered to their feet, and looked

around, they saw nothing but the grey stones of the hillside and the

blue sky. That dread voice was past,' and the silence was broken only

by the hum of insects or the twitter of a far-off bird. The strange

guests have gone; the radiance has faded from the Master's face, and

all is as it used to be. They saw no one, save Jesus only.' It is the

summing up of revelation; all others vanish, He abides. It is the

summing up of the world's history. Thickening folds of oblivion wrap

the past, and all its mighty names become forgotten; but His figure

stands out, solitary against the background of the past, as some great

mountain, which travellers see long after the lower summits are sunk

beneath the horizon. Let us make this the summing up of our lives. We

can venture to take Him for our sole helper, pattern, love, and aim,

because He, in His singleness, is enough for our hearts. There are many

fragmentary precious things, but there is only one pearl of great

price. And then this will be a prophecy of our deaths--a brief

darkness, a passing dread, and then His touch and His voice saying,

Arise, be not afraid.' So we shall lift up our eyes, and find earth

faded, and its voices fallen dim, and see no one any more, save Jesus

only.'

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THE SECRET OF POWER

Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast

him out? 20. And Jesus said unto them, Because of your

unbelief.'--MATT. xvii. 19, 20.

And when He had called unto Him His twelve disciples, He gave them

power against unclean spirits to cast them out.' That same power was

bestowed, too, on the wider circle of the seventy who returned again

with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through Thy

name.' The ground of it was laid in the solemn words with which Christ

met their wonder at their own strength, and told how He beheld Satan as

lightning fall from heaven.' Therefore had they triumphed, showing the

fruits of their Master's victory; and therefore had He a right to renew

the gift, in the still more comprehensive promise, I give unto you

power--over all the power of the enemy.'

What a commentary on such words this story affords! What has become of

the disciples' supernatural might? Has it ebbed away as suddenly as it

flowed? Is their Lord's endowment a shadow or His assurances delusion?

Has He taken back what He gave? Not so. And yet His servants are

ignominiously beaten. One poor devil-ridden boy brings all their

resources to nothing. He stands before them writhing in the gripe of

his tormentor, but they cannot set him free. The importunity of the

father's prayers is vain, and the tension of expectancy in his eager

face relaxes into the old hopeless languor as he slowly droops to the

conviction that they could not cast him out.' The malicious scorn in

the eyes of the Scribes, those hostile critics who knew that it would

be so,' helps to produce the failure which they anticipated. The

curious crowd buzz about them, and in the midst of it all stand the

little knot of baffled disciples, possessors of power which seems to

leave them when they need it most, with the unavailing spells dying

half spoken on their lips, and their faint hearts longing that their

Master would come down from the mount, and cover their weakness with

His own great strength.

No wonder that, as soon as Christ and they are alone, they wish to know

how their mortifying defeat has come about. And they get an answer

which they little expected, for the last place where men look for the

explanation of their failures is within; but they will ascend into the

heavens, and descend into the deeps for remote and recondite reasons,

before they listen to the voice which says, The fault is nigh thee, in

thy heart.' Christ's reply distinctly implies that the cause of their

impotence lay wholly in themselves, not in any defect or withdrawal of

power, but solely in that in them which grasped the power. They little

expected, too, to be told that they had failed because they had not

been sure they would succeed. They had thought that they believed in

their ability to cast out the demon. They had tried to do so, with some

kind of anticipation that they could. They had been surprised when they

found that they could not. They had wonderingly asked why. And now

Christ tells them that all along they had had no real faith in Him and

in the reality of His gift. So subtly may unbelief steal into the

heart, even while we fancy that we are working in faith. And a further

portion of our Lord's reply points them to the great means by which

this conquering faith can be maintained--namely, prayer and fasting.

If, then, we put all these things together, we get a series of

considerations, very simple and commonplace indeed, but all the better

and truer therefor, which I venture to submit to you, as having a very

important bearing on all our Christian work, and especially on the

missionary work of the Church. The principles which the text suggests

touch the perpetual possession of the power which conquers; the

condition of its victorious exercise by us, as being our faith; the

subtle danger of unsuspected unbelief to which we are exposed; and the

great means of preserving our faith pure and strong. I ask your

attention to a few considerations on these points in their order.

But first, let me say very briefly, that I would not be understood as,

by the selection of such a text, desiring to suggest that we have

failed in our work. Thank God! we can point to results far, far greater

than we have deserved, far greater than we have expected, however they

may be beneath our desires, and still further below what the gospel was

meant to accomplish. It may suit observers who have never done anything

themselves, and have not particularly clear eyes for appreciating

spiritual work, to talk of Christian missions as failures; but it would

ill become us to assent to the lie. Failures indeed! with half a

million of converts, with new forms of Christian life budding in all

the wilderness of the peoples, with the consciousness of coming doom

creeping about the heart of every system of idolatry! Is the green life

in the hedges and in the sweet pastures starred with rathe primroses,

and in the hidden copses blue with hyacinths, a failure, because the

east wind bites shrewdly, and the tender ash delays to clothe herself

with green'? No! no, we have not failed. Enough has been done to

vindicate the enterprise, more than enough to fill our lips with

thanksgiving, enough to entitle us to say to all would-be critics--Do

you the same with your enchantments. But, on the other hand, we have to

confess that the success has been slow and small, chequered and

interrupted, that often we have been foiled, that we have confronted

many a demon whom we could not cast out, and that at home and abroad

the masses of evil seem to close in around us, and we make but little

impression on their serried ranks. We have had success enough to assure

us that we possess the treasure, and failures enough to make us feel

how weak are the earthen vessels which hold it.

And now let us turn to the principles which flow from this text.

I. We have an unvarying power.

No doubt the explanation of their defeat which most naturally suggested

itself to these disciples would be that somehow or other--perhaps

because of Christ's absence--they had lost the gift which they knew

that they once had. And the same way of accounting for later want of

success lingers among Christian people still. You will sometimes hear

it said: God sends forth His Spirit in special fulness at special

times, according to His own sovereign will; and till then we can only

wait and pray.' Or, The miraculous powers which dwelt in the early

Church have been withdrawn, and therefore the progress is slow.' The

strong imaginative tendency to make an ideal perfect in the past leads

us to think of the primitive age of the Church as golden, in opposition

to the plain facts of the case. We fancy that because apostles were its

teachers, and the Cross within its memory, the infant society was

stronger, wiser, better than any age since, and had gifts which we have

lost. What had it which we do not possess? The power of working

miracles. What have we which it did not possess? A completed Bible, and

the experience of nineteen centuries to teach us to understand it, and

to confirm by facts our confidence that Christ's gospel is for all time

and every land. What have we in common with it? The same mission to

fulfil, the same wants in our brethren to meet, the same gospel, the

same spirit, the same immortal Lord. All that any age has possessed to

fit it for the task of witnessing for Christ we too possess. The Church

has in it a power which is ever adequate to the conquest of the world;

and that power is constant through all time, whether we consider it as

recorded in an unvarying gospel, or as energised by an abiding spirit,

or as flowing from and centred in an unchangeable Lord.

We have a gospel which never can grow old. Its adaptation to the

deepest needs of men's souls remains constant with these needs. These

vary not from age to age. No matter what may be the superficial

differences of dress, the same human heart beats beneath every robe.

The great primal wants of men's spirits abide, as the great primal

wants of their bodily life abide. Food and shelter for the one,--a

loving, pardoning God, to know and love, for the other--else they

perish. Wherever men go they carry with them a conscience which needs

cleansing, a sense of separation from God joined with a dim knowledge

that union with Him is life, a will which is burdened with its own

selfhood, an imagination which paints the misty walls of this earthly

prison with awful shapes that terrify and faint hopes that mock, a

heart that hungers for love, and a reason which pines in atrophy

without light. And all these the gospel which is lodged in our hands

meets. It addresses itself to nothing in men that is not in man.

Surface differences of position, culture, clime, age, and the like, it

brushes aside as unimportant, and it goes straight to the universal

wants. People tell us it has done its work, and much confident

dogmatism proclaims that the world has outgrown it. We have a right to

be confident also, with a confidence born of our knowledge, that it has

met and satisfied for us the wants which are ours and every man's, and

to believe that as long as men live by bread, so long will this word

which proceedeth out of the mouth of God be the food of their souls.

Areopagus and Piccadilly, Benares and Oxford, need the same message and

will find the same response to all their wants in the same word.

Many of the institutions in which Christendom has embodied its

conceptions of God's truth will crumble away. Many of the conceptions

will have to be modified, neglected truths will grow, to the

dislocation of much systematic theology, and the Word better understood

will clear away many a portentous error with which the Church has

darkened the Word. Be it so. Let us be glad when the things which can

be shaken are removed,' like mean huts built against the wall of some

cathedral, masking and marring the completeness of its beauty; that the

things which cannot be shaken may remain,' and all the clustered

shafts, and deep-arched recesses, and sweet tracery may stand forth

freed from the excrescences which hid them.

The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away. But the word

of the Lord endureth for ever.'

We have an abiding Spirit, the Giver to us of a power without

variableness or the shadow of turning, I will pray the Father, and He

shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you for ever.'

The manner of His operations may vary, but the reality of His energy

abides. The works' of wonder which Jesus did on earth may no more be

done, but the greater works than these are still the sign of His

presence, without whom no spiritual life is possible. Prophecies may

fail, tongues may cease, but the more excellent gifts are poured out

now as richly as ever. We are apt to look back to Pentecost and think

that that marked a height to which the tide has never reached since,

and therefore we are stranded amidst the ooze and mud. But the river

which proceeds from the throne of God and of the Lamb is not like one

of our streams on earth, that leaps to the light and dashes rejoicingly

down the hillside, but creeps along sluggish in its level course, and

dies away at last in the sands. It pours along the ages the same full

volume with which it gushed forth at first. Rather, the source goes

with the Church in all ages, and we drink not of water that came forth

long ago in the history of the world, and has reached us through the

centuries, but of that which wells out fresh every moment from the Rock

that follows us. The Giver of all power is with us.

We have a Lord, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. Lo, I am

with you alway, even to the end of the world.' We have not merely to

look back to the life and death of Christ in history, and recognise

there the work, the efficacy of which shall endure for ever. But whilst

we do this, we have also to think of the Christ that is risen again,

who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for

us.' And the one thought, as the other, should strengthen our

confidence in our possession of all the might that we need for bringing

the world back to our Lord.

A work in the past which can never be exhausted or lose its power is

the theme of our message. The mists of gathering ages wrap in slowly

thickening folds of forgetfulness all other men and events in history,

and make them ghostlike and shadowy; but no distance has yet dimmed or

will ever dim that human form divine. Other names are like those stars

that blaze out for a while, and then smoulder down into almost complete

invisibility; but He is the very Light itself, that burns and is not

consumed. Other landmarks sink below the horizon as the tribes of men

pursue their solemn march through the centuries, but the Cross on

Calvary shall stand for an ensign of the people, and to it shall the

Gentiles seek.' To proclaim that accomplished salvation, once for all

lodged in the heart of the world's history, and henceforth for ever

valid, is our unalterable duty. The message carries in itself its own

immortal strength.

A living Saviour in the present, who works with us, confirming the word

with signs following, is the source of our power. Not till He is

impotent shall we be weak. The unmeasurable measure of the gift of

Christ defines the degree, and the unending duration of His life who

continueth for ever sets the period, of our possession of the grace

which is given to every one of us. He is ever bestowing. He never

withdraws what He once gives. The fountain sinks not a hairs-breadth,

though nineteen centuries have drawn from it. Modern astronomy begins

to believe that the sun itself by long expense of light will be shorn

of its beams and wander darkling in space, circled no more by its

daughter planets. But this Sun of our souls rays out for ever the

energies of life and light and love, and after all communication

possesses the infinite fulness of them all. His name shall be continued

as long as the sun; all nations shall call Him blessed.'

Here then, brethren, are the perpetual elements of our constant power,

an eternal Word, an abiding Spirit, an unchanging Lord.

II. The condition of exercising this power is Faith.

With such a force at our command--a force that could shake the

mountains and break the rocks--how come we ever to fail? So the

disciples asked, and Christ's answer cuts to the very heart of the

matter. Why could you not cast him out? For one reason only, because

you had lost your hold of My strength, and therefore had lost your

confidence in your own derived power, or had forgotten that it was

derived, and essayed to wield it as if it were your own. You did not

trust Me, so you did not believe that you could cast him out; or you

believed that you could by your own might, therefore you failed. He

throws them back decisively on themselves as solely responsible.

Nowhere else, in heaven or in earth or hell, but only in us, does the

reason lie for our breakdown, if we have broken down. Not in God, who

is ever with us, ready to make all grace abound in us, whose will is

that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth;

not in the gospel which we preach, for it is the power of God unto

salvation'; not in the demon might which has overcome us, for greater

is He that is in us than he that is in the world.' We are driven from

all other explanations to the bitterest and yet the most hopeful of

all, that we only are to blame.

And what in us is to blame? Some of us will answer--Our modes of

working; they have not been free enough, or not orderly enough, or in

some way or other not wisely adapted to our ends. Some will answer--Our

forms of presenting the truth; they have not been flexible enough, or

not fixed enough; they have been too much a reproduction of the old;

they have been too licentious a departure from the old. Some will

answer--Our ecclesiastical arrangements; they have been too democratic;

they have been too priestly. Some will answer--Our intellectual

culture; it has been too great, obscuring the simplicity that is in

Christ; it has been too small, sending poorly furnished men into the

field to fight with ordered systems of idolatry which rest upon a

philosophical basis, and can only be overturned by undermining that. It

is no part of my present duty to discuss these varying answers. No

doubt there is room for improvement in all the fields which they

indicate. But does not the spirit of our Lord's words here beckon us

away from these purely secondary subjects to fix our self-examination

on the depth and strength of our faith, as incomparably the most

important element in the conditions which determine our success or our

failure? I do not undervalue the worth of wise methods of action, but

the history of the Church tells us that pretty nearly any methods of

action are fruitful in the right hands, and that without living faith

the best of them become like the heavy armour which half-smothered a

feeble man. I do not pretend to that sublime indifference to dogma

which is the modern form of supreme devotion to truth, but experience

has taught us that wherever the name of Christ, as the Saviour of the

world, has been lovingly proclaimed, there devils have been cast out,

whatever private and sectional doctrines the exerciser has added to it.

I do not disparage organisation, but courage is more than drill; and

there is such a thing as the very perfection of arrangement without

life, like cabinets in a museum, where all the specimens are duly

classified, and dead. I believe, with the old preacher, that if God

does not need our learning, He needs our ignorance still less, but it

is of comparatively little importance whether the draught of living

water be brought to thirsty lips in an earthen cup or a golden vase.

The main thing is, does it hold good measure?

Heaven soon sets right all other matters.'

And therefore, while leaving full scope for all improvements in these

subordinate conditions, let me urge upon you that the main thing which

makes us strong for our Christian work is the grasp of living faith,

which holds fast the strength of God. There is no need to plunge into

the jungle of metaphysical theology here. Is it not a fact that the

might with which the power of God has wrought for men's salvation has

corresponded with the strength of the Church's desire and the purity of

its trust in His power? Is it not a truth plainly spoken in Scripture

and confirmed by experience, that we have the awful prerogative of

limiting the Holy One of Israel, and quenching the Spirit? Was there

not a time in Christ's life on earth when He could do no mighty works

because of their unbelief? We receive all spiritual gifts in proportion

to our capacity, and the chief factor in settling the measure of our

capacity is our faith. Here on the one hand is the boundless ocean of

the divine strength, unfathomable in its depth, full after all

draughts, tideless and calm, in all its movement never troubled, in all

its repose never stagnating; and on the other side is the empty aridity

of our poor weak natures. Faith opens these to the influx of that great

sea, and according to our faith,' in the exact measure of our

receptivity, does it enter our hearts. In itself the gift is boundless.

It has no limit except the infinite fulness of the power which worketh

in us. But in reference to our possession it is bounded by our

capacity, and though that capacity enlarges by the very fact of being

filled, and so every moment becomes greater through fruition, yet at

each moment it is the measure of our possession, and our faith is the

measure of our capacity. Our power is God's power in us, and our faith

is the power with which we grasp God's power and make it ours. So then,

in regard to God, our faith is the condition of our being strengthened

with might by His Spirit.

Consider, too, how the same faith has a natural operation on ourselves

which tends to fit us for casting out the evil spirits. Given a man

full of faith, you will have a man tenacious in purpose, absorbed in

one grand object, simple in his motives, in whom selfishness has been

driven out by the power of a mightier love, and indolence stirred into

unwearied energy. Such a man will be made wise to devise, gentle to

attract, bold to rebuke, fertile in expedients, and ready to be

anything that may help the aim of his life. Fear will be dead in him,

for faith is the true anaesthesia of the soul; and the knife may cut

into the quivering flesh, and the spirit be scarce conscious of a pang.

Love, ambition, and all the swarm of distracting desires will be driven

from the soul in which the lamp of faith burns bright. Ordinary human

motives will appeal in vain to the ears which have heard the tones of

the heavenly music, and all the pomps of life will show poor and tawdry

to the sight that has gazed on the vision of the great white throne and

the crystal sea. The most ignorant and erroneous religious

sentiment'--to use a modern phrase--is mightier than all other forces

in the world's history. It is like some of those terrible compounds of

modern chemistry, an inert, innocuous-looking drop of liquid. Shake it,

and it flames heaven high, shattering the rocks and ploughing up the

soil. Put even an adulterated and carnalised faith into the hearts of a

mob of wild Arabs, and in a century they will stream from their

deserts, and blaze from the mountains of Spain to the plains of Bengal.

Put a living faith in Christ and a heroic confidence in the power of

His Gospel to reclaim the worst sinners into a man's heart, and he will

out of weakness be made strong, and plough his way through obstacles

with the compact force and crashing directness of lightning. There have

been men of all sorts who have been honoured to do much in this world

for Christ. Wise and foolish, learned and ignorant, differing in tone,

temper, creed, forms of thought, and manner of working, in every

conceivable degree; but one thing, and perhaps one thing only, they

have all had--a passion of enthusiastic personal devotion to their

Lord, a profound and living faith in Him and in His salvation. All in

which they differed is but the gay gilding on the soldier's coat. That

in which they were alike is as the strong arm which grasps the sword,

and has its muscles braced by the very clutch. Faith is itself a source

of strength, as well as the condition of drawing might from heaven.

Consider, too, how faith has power over men who see it. The exhibition

of our own personal convictions has more to do in spreading them than

all the arguments which we use. There is a magnetism and a contagious

energy in the sight of a brother's faith which few men can wholly

resist. If you wish me to weep, your own tears must flow; and if you

would have me believe, let me see your soul heaving under the emotion

which you desire me to feel. The arrow may be keen and true, the shaft

rounded and straight, the bow strong, and the arm sinewy; but unless

the steel be winged it will fall to the ground long before it strikes

the butt. Your arrows must be winged with faith, else orthodoxy, and

wise arrangements, and force and zeal, will avail nothing. No man will

believe in, and no demon will obey, spells which the would-be exorcist

only half believes himself. Even if he speak the name of Christ, unless

he speak it with unfaltering confidence, all the answer he will get

will only be the fierce and taunting question, Jesus I know, and Paul I

know, but who are ye?' Brethren, let us give heed to the solemn rebuke

which our Master lovingly reads to us in these words, and while we aim

at the utmost possible perfection in all subordinate matters, let us

remember that they all without faith are weak, as an empty suit of

armour with no life beneath the corselet; and that faith without them

all is strong, like the knight of old, who rode into the bloody field

in simple silken vest, and conquered. That which determines our success

or failure in the work of our Lord is our faith.

III. Our faith is ever threatened by subtle unbelief.

It would appear that the disciples were ignorant of the unbelief that

had made them weak. They fancied that they had confidence in their

Christ-given power, and they certainly had in some dull kind of fashion

expected to succeed in their attempt. But He who sees the heart knew

that there was no real living confidence in their souls; and His words

are a solemn warning to us all, of how possible it is for us to have

our faith all honeycombed by gnawing doubt while we suspect it not,

like some piece of wood apparently sound, the whole substance of which

has been eaten away by hidden worms. We may be going on with Christian

work, and may even be looking for spiritual results. We may fancy

ourselves faithful stewards of the gospel, and all the while there may

be an utter absence of the one thing which makes our words more than so

much wind whistling through an archway. The shorn Samson went out to

shake himself as at other times,' and knew not that the Spirit of the

Lord had departed from him. Who among us is not exposed to the assaults

of that pestilence that walketh in darkness? and, alas! who among us

can say that he has repelled the contagion? Subtly it creeps over us

all, the stealthy intangible vapour, unfelt till it has quenched the

lamp which alone lights the darkness of the mine, and clogged to

suffocation the labouring lungs.

I will not now speak of the general sources of danger to our faith,

which are always in operation with a retarding force as constant as

friction, as certain as the gravitation which pulls the pendulum to

rest at its lowest point. But I may very briefly particularise two of

the enemies of that faith, which have a special bearing on our

missionary work, and may be illustrated from the narrative before us.

First, all our activity in spreading the Gospel, whether by personal

effort or by our gifts, like every form of outward action, tends to

become mechanical, and to lose its connection with the motive which

originated it. Of course it is also true, on the other side, that all

outward action also tends to strengthen the motive from which it flows.

But our Christian work will not do so, unless it be carefully watched,

and pains be taken to keep it from slipping off its original

foundation, and so altering its whole character. We may very easily

become so occupied with the mere external occupation as to be quite

unconscious that it has ceased to be faithful work, and has become

routine, dull mechanism, or the result of confidence, not in Christ,

whose power once flowed through us, but in ourselves the doers. So

these disciples may have thought, We can cast out this devil, for we

have done the like already,' and have forgotten that it was not they,

but Christ in them, who had done it.

How widely this foe to our faith operates amid the multiplied

activities of this busy age, one trembles to think. We see all around

us a Church toiling with unexampled expenditure of wealth, and effort,

and time. It is difficult to repress the suspicion that the work is out

of proportion to the life. Ah, brethren, how much of all this energy of

effort, so admirable in many respects, will He whose fan is in His hand

accept as true service--how much of it will be wheat for the garner,

how much chaff for the fire? It is not for us to divide between the

two, but it is for us to remember that it is not impossible to make of

our labours the most dangerous enemy to the depth of our still life

hidden with Christ in God, and that every deed of apparent service

which is not the real issue of living faith is powerless for good to

others, and heavy with hurt to ourselves. Brethren and fathers in the

ministry! how many of us know what it is to talk and toil away our

early devotion; and all at once to discover that for years perhaps we

have been preaching and labouring from mere habit and routine, like

corpses galvanised into some ghastly and transient caricature of life.

Christian men and women, beware lest this great enterprise of missions,

which our fathers began from the holiest motives and in the simplest

faith, should in our hand be wrenched away from its only true basis,

and be done with languid expectation and more languid desires of

success, from no higher motive than that we found it in existence, and

have become accustomed to carry it on. If that be our reason, then we

harm ourselves, and mask from our own sight our own unbelief. If that

be the case the work may go on for a while, like a clock ticking with

fainter and fainter beats for a minute after it has run down; but it

will soon cease, and neither heaven nor earth will be much the poorer

for its ending.

Again, the atmosphere of scornful disbelief which surrounded the

disciples made their faith falter. It was too weak to sustain itself in

the face of the consciousness that not a man in all that crowd believed

in their power; and it melted away before the contempt of the scribes

and the incredulous curiosity of the bystanders, without any reason

except the subtle influence which the opinions and characters of those

around us have on us all.

And, brethren, are not we in danger to-day of losing the firmness of

our grasp on Christ, as our Saviour and the world's, from a precisely

similar cause? We live in an atmosphere of hesitancy and doubt, of

scornful rejection of His claims, of contemptuous disbelief in anything

which a scalpel cannot cut. We cannot but be conscious that to hold by

Jesus Christ as the Incarnate God, the supernatural Beginning of a new

life, the sole Hope of the world, is to expose ourselves to the

contempt of so-called advanced and liberal thinkers, and to be out of

harmony with the prevailing set of opinions. The current of educated

thought runs strongly against such beliefs, and I suppose that every

thoughtful man among us feels that a great danger to our faith to-day

comes from the force with which that current swings us round, and

threatens to make some of us drag our anchors, and drift, and strike

and go to pieces on the sands. For one man who is led by the sheer

force of reason to yield to the intellectual grounds on which modern

unbelief reposes, there are twenty who simply catch the infection in

the atmosphere. They find that their early convictions have evaporated,

they know not how; only that once the fleece was wet with dew and now

it is dry. For unbelief has a contagious energy wholly independent of

reason, no less than has faith, and affects multitudes who know nothing

of its grounds, as the iceberg chills the summer air for leagues, and

makes the sailors shiver long before they see its barren peaks.

Therefore, brethren, let us all take heed to ourselves, lest we suffer

our grasp of our dear Lord's hand to relax for no better reason than

because so many have left His side. To us all His pleading love, which

knows how much we are moulded by the example of others, is saying, in

view of the fashion of unbelief, Will ye also go away?' Let us answer,

with a clasp that clings the tighter for our danger of being sucked in

by the strong current, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words

of eternal life.' We cannot help seeing that the creeping paralysis of

hesitancy and doubt about even the power of Christ's name is stealing

over portions of the Church, and stiffening the arm of its activity.

Lips that once spoke with full confidence the words that cast out

devils, mutter them now languidly with half-belief. Hearts that were

once full of sympathy with the great purpose for which Christ died are

growing cold to the work of preaching the Gospel to the heathen,

because they are growing to doubt whether, after all, there is any

Gospel at all. This icy breath, dear brethren, is blowing over our

Churches and over our hearts. And wherever it reaches, there labour for

Jesus and for men languishes, and we recoil baffled with unavailing

exorcisms dying in our throats, and the rod of our power broken in our

hands. Why could not we cast him out? Because of your unbelief.'

IV. Our faith can only be maintained by constant devotion and rigid

self-denial.

I can touch but very lightly on that solemn thought in which our Lord

sets forth the condition of our faith, and therefore of our power. This

kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. The discipline then which

nurtures faith is mainly moral and spiritual--not as a substitute for,

or to the exclusion of, the intellectual discipline, which is

presupposed, not neglected, in these words.

The first condition of the freshness and energy of faith is constant

devotion. The attrition of the world wears it thin, the distractions of

life draw it from its clinging hold on Christ, the very toil for Him is

apt to entice our thoughts from out of the secret place of the most

High into the busy arena of our strife. Therefore we have ever need to

refresh the drooping flowers of the chaplet by bathing them in the

Fountain of Life, to rise above all the fevered toil of earth to the

calm heights where God dwells, and in still communion with Him to

replenish our emptied vessels and fill our dimly burning lamps with His

golden oil. The sister of the cumbered Martha is the contemplative

Mary, who sits in silence at the Master's feet and lets His words sink

into her soul; the closest friend of Peter the apostle of action is

John the apostle of love. If our work is to be worthy, it must ever be

freshened anew by our gaze into His face; if our communion with Him is

to be deep, it must never be parted from outward service. Our Master

has left us the example, in that, when the night fell and every man

went to his own home, Jesus went to the Mount of Olives; and thence,

after His night of prayer, came very early in the morning to the

temple, and taught. The stream that is to flow broad and life-giving

through many lands must have its hidden source high among the pure

snows that cap the mount of God. The man that would work for God must

live with God. It was from the height of transfiguration that He came,

before whom the demon that baffled the disciples quailed and slunk away

like a whipped hound. This kind goeth not out but by prayer.

The second condition is rigid self-denial. Fasting is the expression of

the purpose to control the lower life, and to abstain from its delights

in order that the life of the spirit may be strengthened. As to the

outward fact, it is nothing--it may be practised or not. If it be, it

will be valuable only in so far as it flows from and strengthens that

purpose. And such vigorous subordination of all the lower powers, and

abstinence from many an inferior good, both material and immaterial, is

absolutely necessary if we are to have any wholesome strength of faith

in our souls. In the recoil from the false asceticism of Roman

Catholicism and Puritanism, has not this generation of the Church gone

too far in the opposite direction? and in the true belief that

Christianity can sanctify all joys, and ensure the harmonious

development of all our powers, have we not been forgetting that hand

and foot may cause us to stumble, and that we had better live maimed

than die with all our limbs? There is a true asceticism, a

discipline--a gymnastic unto godliness,' as Paul calls it. And if our

faith is to grow high and bear rich clusters on the topmost boughs that

look up to the sky, we must keep the wild lower shoots close nipped.

Without rigid self-control and self-limitation, no vigorous faith.

And without them no effectual work! It is no holiday task to cast out

devils. Self-indulgent men will never do it. Loose-braced, easy souls,

that lie open to all the pleasurable influences of ordinary life, are

no more fit for God's weapons than a reed for a lance, or a bit of

flexible lead for a spear-point. The wood must be tough and compact,

the metal hard and close-grained, out of which God makes His shafts.

The brand that is to guide men through the darkness to their Father's

home must glow with a pallor of consuming flame that purges its whole

substance into light. This kind goeth not out but by prayer and

fasting.

Dear brethren, what solemn rebuke these words have for us all! How they

winnow our works of Christian activity! How they show us the hollowness

of our services, the self-indulgence of our lives, the coldness of our

devotion, the cowardice of our faith! How marvellous they make the

fruits which God's great goodness has permitted us to see even from our

doubting service! Let us turn to Him with fresh thankfulness that unto

us, who are less than the least of all saints, is this grace given,

that we should preach among the nations the unsearchable riches of

Christ.' Let us not be driven from our confidence that we have a gospel

to preach for all the world; but strong in the faith which rests on

impregnable historical grounds, on our own experience of what Christ

has done for us, and on nineteen centuries of growing power and

unfolding wisdom, let us thankfully welcome all that modern thought may

supply for the correction of errors in belief, in organisation, and in

life, that may have gathered round His perfect and eternal

gospel--being assured, as we have a right to be, that all will but lift

higher the Name which is above every name, and set forth more plainly

that Cross which is the true tree of life to all the families of men.

Let us cast ourselves before Him with penitent confession, and say,--O

Lord, our strength! we have not wrought any deliverance on earth; we

have been weak when all Thy power was at our command; we have spoken

Thy word as if it were an experiment and a peradventure whether it had

might; we have let go Thy hand and lost Thy garment's hem from our

slack grasp; we have been prayerless and self-indulgent. Therefore Thou

hast put us to shame before our foes, and our enemies laugh among

themselves. Thou that dwellest between the cherubim, shine forth; stir

up Thy strength and come and save us!' Then will the last words that He

spoke on earth ring out again from the throne: All power is given unto

Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations; and

lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.'

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THE COIN IN THE FISH'S MOUTH

And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What

thinkest them, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or

tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? 26. Peter saith unto

Him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children

free.'--MATT. xvii. 25, 26.

All our Lord's miracles are signs' as well as wonders.' They have a

meaning. They not only authenticate His teaching, but they are

themselves no inconsiderable portion of the teaching. They are not only

the great bell before His sermon,' but they are also a portion of the

sermon.

That doctrinal or dogmatic purpose characterises all the miracles in

varying degrees. It is the only purpose of the one before us. This

singular miracle of finding the coin in the fish's mouth and giving it

for the tribute-money is unlike our Lord's other works in several

particulars. It is the only miracle--with the exception of the cursing

of the barren fig-tree, and the episode of the unclean spirits entering

into the swine--in which there is no message of love or blessing for

man's sorrow and pain. It is the only miracle in which our Lord uses

His power for His own service or help, and it is like the whole brood

of legendary miracles, and unlike all the rest of Christ's in that, at

first sight, it seems done for a very trivial end--the providing of

some three shillings of our money.

Now, if we put all these things together, the absence of any

alleviation of man's sorrow, the presence of a personal end, and the

apparent triviality of the result secured, I think we shall see that

the only explanation of the miracle is given by regarding it as being

what I may call a teaching one, full of instruction with regard to our

Lord's character, person, and work. It is a parable as well as a

miracle, and it is in that aspect that I wish to look at it now, and

try to bring out its lessons.

I. We have here, first, the freedom of the Son.

The whole point of the story depends upon the fact that this

tribute-money was not a civil, but an ecclesiastical impost. It had

originally been levied in the Wilderness, at the time of the numbering

of the people, and was enjoined to be repeated at each census, when

every male Israelite was to pay half a shekel for a ransom for his

soul,' an acknowledgment that his life was forfeited by sin. In later

years it came to be levied as an annual payment for the support of the

temple and its ceremonial. It was never compulsory, there was no power

to exact it. The question of the collectors, Doth not your Master pay

tribute?' does not sound like the imperative demand which a publican'

would have made for payment of an impost due to the Roman Government.

It was an optional church-rate,' and the very fact that it was so,

would make Jews who were, or wished to be considered, patriotic or

religious, the more punctilious in paying it.

The question put to Peter possibly implies a doubt whether this Rabbi,

who held lax views on so many points of Pharisaical righteousness,

would be likely to recognise the obligation of the tax. Peter's quick

answer seems to be prompted by zeal for his Master's honour, on which

the question appears to him to cast a slur. It was perhaps too quick,

but the apostle has been too much blamed for his answer, which was in

fact correct, and for which our Lord does not blame him. When he comes

to Christ to tell what has happened, before he can speak, Christ puts

to him this little parable which I have taken as part of my text: How

thinkest thou? Do kings of this world take custom?'--meaning thereby

not imports or exports, but taxes of all kinds of things,--or

tribute,'--meaning thereby taxes on persons--from their own children,

or from subjects who are not their children?' The answer, of course,

is, From the latter.' So the answer comes, Then are the children free.'

Christ then here claims in some sense, Sonship to Him to whom the

tribute is paid, that is, to God, and therefore freedom from the

obligation to pay the tribute. But notice, for this is an important

point in the explanation of the words, that the plural in our Lord's

words, Then are the children free,' is not intended to include Peter

and the others in the same category as Himself. The only question in

hand is as to His obligation to pay a certain tax; and to include any

one else would have been irrelevant, as well as erroneous. The plural

belongs to the illustration, not to its application, and corresponds

with the plural in the question, Of whom do the kings of the earth take

custom?' The kings of the earth are contrasted with the one King of the

heavens, the supreme and sole Sovereign; and the children of the kings

of the earth are contrasted with the only begotten Son of the only King

of kings and Lord of lords.

So that here there is no mixing up of Himself with others, or of others

with Himself, but the claiming of an unique position, singular and

sole, belonging to Him only, in which He stands as the Son of the

mighty Monarch to whom the tribute is paid. He claims to have the

divine nature, the divine prerogatives, to bear a specific relationship

to God Himself, and to be, as other words in Scripture put it, the

brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person.'

If there is anything certain about Jesus Christ's teaching, this is

certain about it, that He proclaimed Himself to be the Son of God, in

such a sense as no man shared with Him, and in such a sense as

vindicated the attitude which He took up, the demands which He made,

and the gifts which He offered to men.

What a deduction must be made from the wisdom of His teaching, and from

the meekness of His Spirit, if that claim was an illusion! What shall

we say of the sanity of a man who poses himself before the whole race,

claiming to be the Son of God, and whose continual teaching to them

therefore is, not, Believe in goodness'; Believe in virtue'; Believe in

truth'; Believe in My word'; but Believe in Me'? Was there ever

anywhere else a religious teacher, all of whose words were gracious and

wise and sweet, but who--

Make the important stumble,

Of saying that he, the sage and humble,

Was likewise--one with the Creator'?

But now what is the freedom based on sonship which our Lord here

claims?

I have said that this tax was levied with a double meaning; first, it

was an atonement or ransom for the soul; second, it was devoted to the

temple and its worship. And now, mark, that in both these aspects our

Lord alleges His true sonship as the reason why He is exempt from it.

That is to say, first, Jesus Christ claims to have no need of a ransom

for His soul. Never one word dropped from His lips which indicated the

smallest consciousness of flaw or failure, of defect or imperfection,

still less of actual transgression. He takes His position outside the

circle of sinful men which includes all others. It is a strange

characteristic in a religious teacher, very unlike the usual tone of

devout men. And stranger still is the fact that the absence of this

consciousness of evil has never been felt to be itself evil and a blot.

Think of a David's agony of penitence. Think of a Paul's, Of whom I am

chief!' Think of the long wail of an Augustine's confessions. Think of

the stormy self-accusations of a Luther; and then think that He who

inspired them all, never, by word or deed, betrayed the slightest

consciousness that in Himself there was the smallest deflection from

the perfect line of right, the least speck or stain on the perfect gold

of His purity. And remember, too, that when He challenges the world

with, Which of you convinceth Me of sin?' with the exception of half a

dozen men, of whom we can scarcely say whether their want of spiritual

insight or their arrogance of self-importance is the most flagrant,

who, in the course of nineteen centuries, have ventured to fling their

little handfuls of mud at Him, the whole world has answered, Thou art

fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into Thy lips.'

The Son needs no ransom for His soul,' which, being translated, is but

this: the purity and the innocence of Jesus Christ, which is a manifest

fact in His biography, is only explicable when we believe that we have

before us the Incarnate God, and therefore the Perfect Man. And the Son

needs no temple for His worship. His whole life, as human, was a life

of communion and prayer with His Father in heaven. And just because He

dwelt in' God's bosom all the year,' for Him ritual and temple were

nought. Sense-bound men needed them; He needed them not. In this

place,' said He, is one greater than the temple.' He was all which the

temple symbolised. Was it the dwelling-place of God, the place of

sacrifice, the meeting-place of man with God, the place of divine

manifestation? The temple of His body' was in deepest reality all

these. In it dwelt the whole fulness of the Godhead. It was at once

sacrifice and place of sacrifice, even as He is the true everlasting

Priest. In Him men see God, and meet with God. He is greater than the

temple because He is the true temple, and He is the true temple because

He is the Son. And because He is the Son, therefore He is free from all

dependence upon, and connection with, the outward worship of ceremony

and sacrifice and priest and ritual.

Now, dear brethren, let me pause for one moment to press upon you and

upon myself this question: Do I welcome that Christ with the full

conviction that He is the Son of God? It seems to me that, in this

generation, the question of questions, as far as religion is concerned,

is the old one which Christ asked of His disciples by the fountains and

woods of Caesarea Philippi: Whom say ye that I, the Son of Man, am?'

Can you lift up your face to meet His clear and all-searching eye, and

say: Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God'? If you can, you

are on the way to understanding Him and His work; if you cannot, His

life and work are all wrapped in darkness for you, His death robbed of

its truest power, and your life deprived of its surest anchor.

II. Now, there is a second lesson that I would gather from this

miracle--the voluntary submission of the Son to the bonds from which He

is free.

He bids His disciple pay the tribute for Him, for a specific reason:

Lest we should offend them.' That, of course, is simply a piece of

practical wisdom, to prevent any narrow or purblind souls from

stumbling at His teaching, by reason of His neglect of this trivial

matter. The question of how far religious teachers or any others are at

liberty, when they are not actuated by personal motives, to render

compliance with ceremonies which are of no value to them, is a wide

one, which I have no need to dwell upon here. But, turning from that

specific aspect of the incident, I think we may look upon it as being

an illustration, in regard to a very small matter, of what is really

the essence of our Lord's relation to the whole world and

ourselves--His voluntary taking upon Himself of bonds from which He is

free.

Is it not a symbol of the very heart of the meaning of His Incarnation?

For as much as the children are partakers of flesh and blood He also

Himself likewise takes part of the same.' He is found in fashion as a

man.' He chooses to enter within the limits and the obligations of

humanity. Round the radiant glories of the divinity, He gathers the

folds of the veil of human flesh. He immerses the pillar of fire in a

cloud of smoke. He comes amongst us, taking on His own wrists the

fetters that bind us, suffering Himself to be cribbed, cabined, and

confined' within the narrow limits of our manhood, in order that by His

voluntary acceptance of it we may be redeemed from our corruption.

Is it not a parable of His life and lowly obedience? He proclaimed the

same principle as the guide for all His conduct, when, sinless, He

presented Himself to John for the baptism of repentance,' and overcame

the baptiser's scruples with the words, Thus it becometh us to fulfil

all righteousness.' He comes under the law. Bound to no such service,

He binds Himself to all human duties that He may hallow the bonds which

He has worn, may set us the pattern of perfect obedience, and may know

a servant's heart.

The Prince is free, but King's Son though He be, He goes among His

Father's poor subjects, lives their squalid lives, makes experience of

their poverty, and hardens His hands by labouring like them. Sympathy

He learned in huts where poor men lie.'

Is it not the rehearsal in parable of His death? He was free from the

bonds of mortality, and He took upon Him our human flesh. He was free

from the necessity of death, even after He had taken our flesh upon

Him. But, being free from the necessity, He submitted to the actuality,

and laid down His life of Himself, because of His loving will, to save

and help each of us. Oh, dear friends! we never can understand the

meaning and the beauty, either of the life or of the death of our

Master, unless we look at each from this point of view, that it is His

willing acceptance of the bonds that bind us. His own loving will

brought Him here; His own loving will kept Him here; His own loving

will impelled Him along the path of life, though at every step of it He

trod as with naked feet upon burning iron; His own loving Will brought

Him to the Cross; His own loving will, and not the Roman soldiers'

nails, fastened Him to it. Let us look, then, to Him with thankfulness,

and recognise in that death His thorough identification with all the

bonds and miseries of our condition. He took part of the same that

through death He might deliver them that by fear of death were all

their lifetime subject to bondage.'

III. Then there is another lesson which I think we may fairly gather

from this miracle, viz. that we have here the supernatural glory which

ever accompanies the humiliation of the Son.

The miracle, at first sight, appears to be for a very trivial end. Men

have made merry with it by reason of that very triviality. But the

miracle is vindicated, peculiar as it is, by a deep divine congruity

and decorum. He will submit, Son though He be, to this complete

identification of Himself with us. But He will so submit as, even in

submitting, to assert His divine dignity. As has been well said, In the

midst of the act of submission majesty flashes forth.' A multiform

miracle--containing many miracles in one--a miracle of omniscience, and

a miracle of influence over the lower creatures is wrought. The first

fish that rises carries in its mouth the exact sum needed.

Here, therefore, we have another illustration of that remarkable

blending of humiliation and glory, which is a characteristic of our

Lord's life. These two strands are always twined together, like a

twisted line of gold and black. At each moment of special abasement

there is some special coruscation of the brightness of His glory.

Whensoever He stoops there is something accompanying the stooping, to

tell how great and how merciful He is who bows. Out of the deepest

darkness there flashes some light. So at His cradle, which seems to be

the identifying of Him with humanity in its most helpless and lowest

condition, there shall be angels, and the stars in their courses shall

bow and move to guide wise men from afar with offerings to His feet.

And at His Cross, where He sounds the very bass string and touches the

lowest point of humiliation and defeat, a clearer vision sees in that

humiliation the highest glory.

And thus, here, He will not only identify Himself with sinful men who

need a ransom, and with sense-bound men who need a sacrifice and a

temple, but He will so identify Himself with them as that He shall send

His power into the recesses of the lake, where His knowledge sees, as

clearly as our eyes see the men that stand beside us, and obedient to

an unconscious impulse from Him, the dumb creature that had swallowed,

as it sunk, the shining stater that had dropped out of the girdle of

some fisherman, shall rise first to the hook; in token that not only in

His Father's house does He rule as a Son over His own house, but that

He doeth as He hath pleased, in all deep places,' and that in Him the

ancient hope is fulfilled of a Son of Man who hath dominion over the

fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea.'

The miracle was for a trivial end in appearance, but it was a

demonstration, though to one man only at first, yet through him to all

the world, that this Christ, in His lowliness, is the Everlasting Son

of the Father.

IV. And so, lastly, we have here also the lesson of the sufficiency for

us all of what He provides.

That take, and give unto them for Me and for thee. He does not say For

us.' He and Peter do not stand on the game level. He has chosen to

submit Himself to the obligations, Peter was necessarily under them.

That which is found by miracle in the fish's mouth is precisely the

amount required for both the one and the other. It is rendered, as the

original has it, Instead of thee and Me,' putting emphasis upon the

characteristic of the tribute as being ransom, or payment, for a man's

soul.

And so, although this thought is not part of the original purpose of

the miracle, and, therefore, is different from those which I have

already been dwelling on, which are part of that purpose, I think we

may fairly see here this great truth,--that that which Christ brings to

us by supernatural act, far greater than the miracle here, is enough

for all the claims and obligations that God, or man, or law, or

conscience have upon any of us. His perfect obedience and stainless

life discharged for Himself all the obligations to law and

righteousness under which He came as a Man; His perfect life and His

mighty death are for us the full discharge of all that can be brought

against us.

There are many and solemn claims and claimants upon each of us. Law and

duty, that awful ought' which should rule our lives and which we have

broken thousands of times, come to each of us in many an hour of clear

vision, and take us by the throat, and say, Pay us what thou owest!'

And there is a Judgment Day before all of us; which is no mere bugbear

to frighten children, but will be a fact of experience in our case.

Friend! how are you going to meet your obligations? You owe God all

your love, all your heart, will, strength, service. What an awful score

of unpaid debts, with accumulated interest, there stands against each

of our names! Think of some bankrupt sitting in his counting-house with

a balance-sheet before him that shows his hopeless insolvency. He sits

and broods, and broods, and does not know what in the world he is going

to do. The door opens--a messenger enters and gives him an envelope. He

tears it open, and there flutters out a cheque that more than pays it

all. The illustration is a very low one; it does not cover the whole

ground of Christ's work for you. It puts a possibly commercial aspect

into it, which we have to take care of lest it become the exclusive

one; but it is true for all that. You are the bankrupt. What have you

to pay? Oh, behold that precious treasure of gold tried in the fire,

which is Christ's righteousness and Christ's death; and by faith in

Him, that take and give' and all the debt will be discharged, and you

will be set free and made a son by that Son who has taken upon Himself

all our bonds, and so has broken them; who has taken upon Himself all

our debts, and so has cancelled them every one.

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EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

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

ST. MATTHEW

Chaps. XVIII to XXVIII

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THE LAW OF PRECEDENCE IN THE KINGDOM

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the

greatest in the kingdom of heaven? 2. And Jesus called a little child

unto Him, and set him in the midst of them, 3. And said, Verily I say

unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye

shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. 4. Whosoever therefore

shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the

kingdom of heaven. 5. And whoso shall receive one such little child in

My name receiveth Me. 6. But whoso shall offend one of these little

ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were

hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the

sea. 7. Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be

that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! 8.

Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast

them from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life halt or

maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into

everlasting fire. 9. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and

cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one

eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. 10. Take

heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you,

That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father

which is in heaven. 11. For the Son of Man is come to save that which

was lost. 12. How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of

them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth

into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? 13. And if

so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that

sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. 14. Even so

it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these

little ones should perish.' --MATT. xviii. 1-14.

Mark tells us that the disciples, as they journeyed, had been

squabbling about pre-eminence in the kingdom, and that this

conversation was brought on by our Lord's question as to the subject of

their dispute. It seems at first sight to argue singular insensibility

that the first effect of His reiterated announcement of His sufferings

should have been their quarrelling for the lead; but their behaviour is

intelligible if we suppose that they regarded the half-understood

prophecies of His passion as indicating the commencement of the short

conflict which was to end in His Messianic reign. So it was time for

them to be getting ready and settling precedence. The form of their

question, in Matthew, connects it with the miracle of the coin in the

fish's mouth, in which there was a very plain assertion of Christ's

royal dignity, and a distinguishing honour given to Peter. Probably the

then' of the question means, Since Peter is thus selected, are we to

look to him as foremost? Their conception of the kingdom and of rank in

it is frankly and entirely earthly. There are to be graded dignities,

and these are to depend on His mere will. Our Lord not only answers the

letter of their question, but cuts at the root of the temper which

inspired it.

I. He shows the conditions of entrance into and eminence in His kingdom

by a living example. There were always children at hand round Him, when

He wanted them. Their quick instinct for pure and loving souls drew

them to Him; and this little one was not afraid to be taken by the

hand, and to be afterwards caught up in His arms, and pressed to His

heart. One does not wonder that the legend that he was Ignatius the

martyr should have been current; for surely the remembrance of that

tender clasping arm and gentle breast would not fade nor be fruitless.

The disciples had made very sure that they were to be in the kingdom,

and that the only question concerning them was how high up in it they

were each to be. Christ's answer is like a dash of cold water to that

confidence. It is, in effect, Greatest in the kingdom! Make sure that

you go in at all, first; which you will never do, so long as you keep

your present ambitious minds.'

Verse 3 lays down the condition of entrance into the kingdom, from

which necessarily follows the condition of supremacy in it. What a

child is naturally, and without effort or merit, by reason of age and

position, we must become, if we are to pass the narrow portal which

admits into the large room. That becoming' is impossible without a

revolution in us. Be converted' is corrected, in the Revised Version,

into turn,' and rightly; for there is in the word a distinct reference

to the temper of the disciples as displayed by their question. As long

as they cherished it they could not even get inside, to say nothing of

winning promotion to dignities in the kingdom. Their very question

condemned them as incapable of entrance. So there must be a radical

change, not unaccompanied, of course, with repentance, but mainly

consisting in the substitution of the child's temper for theirs. What

is the temper thus enjoined? We are to see here neither the entirely

modern and shallow sentimental way of looking at childhood, in which

popular writers indulge, nor the doctrine of its innocence. It is not

Christ's teaching, either that children are innocent, or that men enter

the kingdom by making themselves so. But the child is, by its very

position, lowly and modest, and makes no claims, and lives by

instinctive confidence, and does not care about honours, and has these

qualities which in us are virtues, and is not puffed up by possessing

them. That is the ideal which is realised more generally in the child

than analogous ideals are in mature manhood. Such simplicity, modesty,

humility, must be ours. We must be made small ere we can enter that

door. And as is the requirement for entrance, so is it for eminence.

The child does not humble himself, but is humble by nature; but we must

humble ourselves if we would be great.

Christ implies that there are degrees in the kingdom. It has a

nobility, but of such a kind that there may be many greatest; for the

principle of rank there is lowliness. We rise by sinking. The deeper

our consciousness of our own unworthiness and weakness, the more

capable are we of receiving the divine gifts, and therefore the more

fully shall we receive them. Rivers run in the hollows; the

mountain-tops are dry. God works with broken reeds, and the princes in

His realm are beggars taken from the dunghill. A lowliness which made

itself lowly for the sake of eminence would miss its aim, for it would

not be lowliness. The desire to be foremost must be cast out, in order

that it may be fulfilled.

II. The question has been answered, and our Lord passes to other

thoughts rising out of His answer. Verses 5 and 6 set forth

antithetically our duties to His little ones. He is not now speaking of

the child who served as a living parable to answer the question, but of

men who have made themselves like the child, as is plain from the

emphatic one such child,' and from verse 6 (which believe on Me').

The subject, then, of these verses is the blessedness of recognising

and welcoming Christlike lowly believers, and the fatal effect of the

opposite conduct. To receive one such little child in My name' is just

to have a sympathetic appreciation of, and to be ready to welcome to

heart and home, those who are lowly in their own and in the world's

estimate, but princes of Christ's court and kingdom. Such welcome and

furtherance will only be given by one who himself has the same type of

character in some degree. He who honours and admires a certain kind of

excellence has the roots of it in himself. A possible artist lies in

him who thrills at the sight or hearing of fair things painted or sung.

Our admiration is an index of our aspiration, and our aspiration is a

prophecy of our attainment. So it will be a little one's heart which

will welcome the little ones, and a lover of Christ who receives them

in His name. The reception includes all forms of sympathy and aid. In

My name' is equivalent to for the sake of My revealed character,' and

refers both to the receiver and to the received. The blessedness of

such reception, so far as the receiver is concerned, is not merely that

he thereby comes into happy relations with Christ's foremost servants,

but that he gets Christ Himself into his heart. If with true

appreciation of the beauty of such a childlike disposition, I open my

heart or my hand to its possessor, I do thereby enlarge my capacity for

my own possession of Christ, who dwells in His child, and who comes

with him where He is welcomed. There is no surer way of securing Him

for our own than the loving reception of His children. Whoso lodges the

King's favourites will not be left unvisited by the King. To recognise

and reverence the greatest in the kingdom is to be oneself a member of

their company, and a sharer in their prerogatives.

On the other hand, the antithesis of receiving' is causing to stumble,'

by which is meant giving occasion for moral fall. That would be done by

contests about pre-eminence, by arrogance, by non-recognition. The

atmosphere of carnality and selfishness in which the disciples were

moving, as their question showed, would stifle the tender life of any

lowly believer who found himself in it; and they were not only injuring

themselves, but becoming stumbling-blocks to others, by their ambition.

How much of the present life of average Christians is condemned on the

same ground! It is a good test of our Christian character to ask--would

it help or hinder a lowly believer to live beside us? How many

professing Christians are really, though unconsciously, doing their

utmost to pull down their more Christlike brethren to their own low

level! The worldliness and selfish ambitions of the Church are

responsible for the stumbling of many who would else have been of

Christ's little ones.' But perhaps we are rather to think of deliberate

and consciously laid stumbling-blocks. Knowingly to try to make a good

man fall, or to stain a more than usually pure Christian character, is

surely the very height of malice, and presupposes such a deadly hatred

of goodness and of Christ that no fate can be worse than the possession

of such a temper. To be flung into the sea, like a dog, with a stone

round his neck, would be better for a man than to live to do such a

thing. The deed itself, apart from any other future retribution, is its

own punishment; yet our Lord's solemn words not only point to such a

future retribution, which is infinitely more terrible than the

miserable fate described would be for the body, but to the consequences

of the act, as so bad in its blind hatred of the highest type of

character, and in its conscious preference of evil, as well as so fatal

in its consequences, that it were better to die drowned than to live

so.

III. Verses 10-14 set forth the honour and dignity of Christ's little

ones.' Clearly the application of the designation in these closing

verses is exclusively to His lowly followers. The warning not to

despise them is needed at all times, and, perhaps, seldom more, even by

Christians, than now, when so many causes induce a far too high

estimate of the world's great ones, and modest, humble godliness looks

as dull and sober as some russet-coated little bird among gorgeous

cockatoos and birds of paradise. The world's standard is only too

current in the Church; and it needs a spirit kept in harmony with

Christ's spirit, and some degree of the child-nature in ourselves, to

preserve us from overlooking the delicate hidden beauties and unworldly

greatness of His truest disciples.

The exhortation is enforced by two considerations,--a glimpse into

heaven, and a parable. Fair interpretation can scarcely deny that

Christ here teaches that His children are under angel-guardianship. We

should neither busy ourselves in curious inferences from His reticent

words, nor try to blink their plain meaning, but rather mark their

connection and purpose here. He has been teaching that pre-eminence

belongs to the childlike spirit. He here opens a door into the court of

the heavenly King, and shows us that, as the little ones are foremost

in the kingdom of heaven, so the angels who watch over them are nearest

the throne in heaven itself. The representation is moulded on the

usages of Eastern courts, and similar language in the Old Testament

describes the principal courtiers as the men who see the King's face

continually.' So high is the honour in which the little ones are held,

that the highest angels are set to guard them, and whatever may be

thought of them on earth, the loftiest of creatures are glad to serve

and keep them.

Following the Revised Version we omit verse 11. If it were genuine, the

connection would be that such despising contradicted the purpose of

Christ's mission; and the for' would refer back to the injunction, not

to the glimpse into heaven which enforced it.

The exhortation is further confirmed by the parable of the ninety and

nine, which is found, slightly modified in form and in another

connection, in Luke xv. Its point here is to show the importance of the

little ones as the objects of the seeking love of God, and as so

precious to Him that their recovery rejoices His heart. Of course, if

verse 11 be genuine, the Shepherd is Christ; but, if we omit it, the

application of the parable in verse 14 as illustrating the loving will

of God becomes more direct. In that case God is the owner of the sheep.

Christ does not emphasise His own love or share in the work, reference

to which was not relevant to His purpose, but, leaving that in shadow,

casts all the light on the loving divine will, which counts the little

ones as so precious that, if even one of them wanders, all heaven's

powers are sent forth to find and recover it. The reference does not

seem to be so much to the one great act by which, in Christ's

incarnation and sacrifice, a sinful world has been sought and redeemed,

as to the numberless acts by which God, in His providence and grace,

restores the souls of those humble ones if ever they go astray. For the

connection requires that the wandering sheep here should, when it

wanders, be one of these little ones'; and the parable is introduced to

illustrate the truth that, because they belong to that number, the

least of them is too precious to God to be allowed to wander away and

be lost. They have for their keepers the angels of the presence; they

have God Himself, in His yearning love and manifold methods of

restoration, to look for them, if ever they are lost, and to bring them

back to the fold. Therefore, see that ye despise not one of these

little ones,' each of whom is held by the divine will in the grasp of

an individualising love which nothing can loosen.

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SELF-MUTILATION FOR SELF-PRESERVATION

If thy hand or thy foot causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast

it from thee.'--MATT. xviii. 8, R.V.

No person or thing can do our characters as much harm as we ourselves

can do. Indeed, none can do them any harm but ourselves. For men may

put stumbling-blocks in our way, but it is we who make them

stumbling-blocks. The obstacle in the path would do us no hurt if it

were not for the erring foot, nor the attractive prize if it were not

for the hand that itched to lay hold of it, nor the glittering bauble

if it were not for the eye that kindled at the sight of it. So our Lord

here, having been speaking of the men that put stumbling-blocks in the

way of His little ones, draws the net closer and bids us look at home.

A solemn woe of divine judgment is denounced on those who cause His

followers to stumble; let us leave God to execute that, and be sure

that we have no share in their guilt, but let us ourselves be the

executioners of the judgment upon the things in ourselves which alone

give the stumbling-blocks, which others put before us, their fatal

power.

There is extraordinary energy in these words. Solemnly they are

repeated twice here, verbatim; solemnly they are repeated verbatim

three times in Mark's edition. The urgent stringency of the command,

the terrible plainness of the alternative put forth by the lips that

could say nothing harsh, and the fact that the very same injunction

appears in a wholly different connection in the Sermon on the Mount,

show us how profoundly important our Lord felt the principle to be

which He was here laying down.

We mark these three points. First, the case supposed, If thy hand or

thy foot cause thee to stumble.' Then the sharp, prompt remedy

enjoined, Cut them off and cast them from thee.' Then the solemn motive

by which it is enforced, It is better for thee to enter into life

maimed than, being a whole man, to be cast into hell-fire.'

I. First, then, as to the case supposed.

Hand and foot and eye are, of course, regarded as organs of the inward

self, and symbols of its tastes and capacities. We may perhaps see in

them the familiar distinction between the practical and the

theoretical:--hand and foot being instruments of action, and the eye

the organ of perception. Our Lord takes an extreme case. If members of

the body are to be amputated and plucked out should they cause us to

stumble, much more are associations to be abandoned and occupations to

be relinquished and pleasures to be forsaken, if these draw us away.

But it is to be noticed that the whole stringency of the commandment

rests upon that if. If they cause thee to stumble,' then, and not else,

amputate. The powers are natural, the operation of them is perfectly

innocent, but a man may be ruined by innocent things. And, says Christ,

if that process is begun, then, and only then, does My exhortation come

into force.

Now, all that solemn thought of a possible injurious issue of innocent

occupations, rests upon the principles that our nature has an ideal

order, so as that some parts of it are to be suppressed and some are to

rule, and that there are degrees of importance in men's pursuits, and

that where the lower interfere and clog the operations of the higher,

there they are harmful. And so the only wisdom is to excise and cut

them off.

We see illustrations in abundance every day. There are many people who

are being ruined in regard to the highest purposes of their lives,

simply by an over-indulgence in lower occupations which in themselves

may be perfectly right. Here is a young woman that spends so much of

her day in reading novels that she has no time to look after the house

and help her mother. Here is a young man so given to athletics that his

studies are neglected--and so you may go all round the circle, and find

instances of the way in which innocent things, and the excessive or

unwise exercise of natural faculties, are destroying men. And much more

is that the case in regard to religion, which is the highest object of

pursuit, and in regard to those capacities and powers by which we lay

hold of God. These are to be ministered to by the rest, and if there be

in my nature or in the order of my life something which is drawing away

to itself the energy that ought to go in that other direction, then,

howsoever innocent it may be, per se, it is harming me. It is a wen

that is sucking all the vital force into itself, and turning it into

poison. And there is only one cure for it, and that is the knife.

Then there is another point to be observed in this case supposed, and

that is that the whole matter is left to the determination of personal

experience. No one else has the right to decide for you what it is safe

and wise for you to do in regard to things which are not in themselves

wrong. If they are wrong in themselves, of course the consideration of

consequences is out of place altogether; but if they be not wrong in

themselves, then it is you that must settle whether they are legitimate

for you or not. Do not let your Christian liberty be interfered with by

other people's dictation in regard to this matter. How often you hear

people say, I could not do it'; meaning thereby, therefore he ought not

to do it!' But that inference is altogether illegitimate. True, there

are limitations of our Christian liberty in regard to things

indifferent and innocent. Paul lays down the most important of these in

three sentences. All things are lawful for me, but all things are not

expedient.' All things are lawful for me, but all things edify

not';--you must think of your brethren as well as of yourself. All

things are lawful for me, yet will I not be brought under the power of

any'; keep master of them, and rather abstain altogether than become

their slave. But these three limitations being observed, then, in

regard to all such matters, nobody else can prescribe for you or me. To

his own Master he standeth or falleth.'

But, on the other hand, do not you be led away into things that damage

you, because some other man does them, as he supposes, without injury.

Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he

alloweth.' There are some Christian people who are simply very

unscrupulous and think themselves very strong; and whose consciences

are not more enlightened, but less sensitive, than those of the

narrow-minded brethren' upon whom they look askance.

And so, dear friend, you ought to take the world--to inhale it, if I

may so say, as patients do chloroform; only you must be your own doctor

and keep your own fingers on your pulse, and watch the first sign of

failure there, and take no more. When the safety lamps begin to burn

blue you may be quite sure there is choke-damp about; and when

Christian men and women begin to find prayer wearisome, and religious

thoughts dull, and the remembrance of God an effort or a pain, then,

whatever anybody else may do, it is time for them to pull up. If thy

hand offend thee,' never mind though your brother's hand is not

offending him, do the necessary thing for your health, cut it off and

cast it from you.'

But of course there must be caution and common-sense in the application

of such a principle. It does not mean that we are to abandon all things

that are susceptible of abuse, for everything is so; and if we are to

regulate our conduct by such a rule, it is not the amputation of a hand

that will be sufficient. We may as well cut off our heads at once, and

go out of the world altogether; for everything is capable of being thus

abused.

Nor does the injunction mean that unconditionally we are to abandon all

occupations in which there is danger. It can never be a duty to shirk a

duty because it is dangerous. And sometimes it is as much a Christian

man's duty to go into, and to stand in, positions that are full of

temptation and danger, as it is a fireman's business to go into a

burning house at the risk of suffocation. There were saints in Caesar's

household, flowers that grew on a dunghill, and they were not bidden to

abandon their place because it was full of possible danger to their

souls. Sometimes Christ sets His sentinels in places where the bullets

fly very thick; and if we are posted in such a place--and we all are so

some time or other in our lives--the only course for us is to stand our

ground until the relieving guard comes, and to trust that He said a

truth that was always to be true, when He sent out His servants to

their dangerous work, with the assurance that if they drank any deadly

thing it should not hurt them.

II. So much, then, for the first of the points here. Now a word, in the

second place, as to the sharp remedy enjoined.

Cut it off and cast it from thee.' Entire excision is the only safety.

I myself am to be the operator in that surgery. I am to lay my hand

upon the block, and with the other hand to grasp the axe and strike.

That is to say, we are to suppress capacities, to abandon pursuits, to

break with associates, when we find that they are damaging our

spiritual life and hindering our likeness to Jesus Christ.

That is plain common-sense. In regard to physical intoxication, it is a

great deal easier to abstain altogether than to take a very little and

then stop. The very fumes of alcohol will sometimes drive a reclaimed

drunkard into a bout of dissipation that will last for weeks;

therefore, the only safety is in entire abstinence. The rule holds in

regard to everyday life. Every man has to give up a great many things

if he means to succeed in one, and has to be a man of one pursuit if

anything worth doing is to be done. Christian men especially have to

adopt that principle, and shear off a great deal that is perfectly

legitimate, in order that they may keep a reserve of strength for the

highest things.

True, all forms of life are capable of being made Christian service and

Christian discipline, but in practice we shall find that if we are

earnestly seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness, not only

shall we lose our taste for a great deal that is innocent, but we shall

have, whether we lose our taste for them or not--and more imperatively

if we have not lost our taste for them than if we have--to give up

allowable things in order that with all our heart, and soul, and

strength, and mind, we may love and serve our Master. There are no

half-measures to be kept; the only thing to do with the viper is to

shake it off into the fire and let it burn there. We have to empty our

hands of earth's trivialities if we would grasp Christ with them. We

have to turn away our eyes from earth if we would behold the Master,

and rigidly to apply this principle of excision in order that we may

advance in the divine life. It is the only way to ensure progress.

There is no such certain method of securing an adequate flow of sap up

the trunk as to cut off all the suckers. If you wish to have a current

going down the main bed of the stream, sufficient to keep it clear, you

must dam up all the side channels.

But it is not to be forgotten that this commandment, stringent and

necessary as it is, is second best. The man is maimed, although it was

for Christ's sake that he cut off his hand, or put out his eye. His

hand was given him that with it he might serve God, and the highest

thing would have been that in hand and foot and eye he should have been

anointed, like the priests of old, for the service of his Master. But

until he is strong enough to use the faculty for God, the wisest thing

is not to use it at all. Abandon the outworks to keep the citadel. And

just as men pull down the pretty houses on the outskirts of a fortified

city when a siege is impending, in order that they may afford no cover

to the enemy, so we have to sweep away a great deal in our lives that

is innocent and fair, in order that the foes of our spirit may find no

lodgment there. It is second best, but for all that it is absolutely

needful. We must lay aside every weight,' as well as the sin which so

easily besets us.' We must run lightly if we would run well. We must

cast aside all burdens, even though they be burdens of treasure and

delights, if we would run with patience the race that is set before

us.' If thy foot offend thee,' do not hesitate, do not adopt

half-measures, do not try moderation, do not seek to sanctify the use

of the peccant member; all these may be possible and right in time, but

for the present there is only one thing to do--down with it on the

block, and off with it! Cut it off and cast it from thee.'

III. And now, lastly, a word as to the solemn exhortation by which this

injunction is enforced.

Christ rests His command of self-denial and self-mutilation upon the

highest ground of self-interest. It is better for thee.' We are told

nowadays that this is a very low motive to appeal to, that Christianity

is a religion of selfishness, because it says to men, Your life or your

death depends upon your faith and your conduct.' Well, I think it will

be time for us to listen to fantastic objections of this sort when the

men that urge them refuse to turn down another street, if they are

warned that in the road on which they are going they will meet their

death. As long as they admit that it is a wise and a kind thing to say

to a man, Do not go that way or your life will be endangered,' I think

we may listen to our Master saying to us, Do not do that lest thou

perish; do this, that thou may'st enter into life.'

And then, notice that a maimed man may enter into life, and a complete

man may perish. The first may be a very poor creature, very ignorant,

with a limited nature, undeveloped capacities, intellect and the like

all but dormant in him, artistic sensibilities quite atrophied, and yet

he may have got hold of Jesus Christ and His love, and be trying to

love Him back again and serve Him, and so be entering into life even

here, and be sure of a life more perfect yonder. And the complete man,

cultured all round, with all his faculties polished and exercised to

the full, may have one side of his nature undeveloped--that which

connects him with God in Christ. And so he may be like some fair tree

that stands out there in the open, on all sides extending its equal

beauty, with its stem symmetrical, cylindrical, perfect in its green

cloud of foliage, yet there may be a worm at the root of it, and it may

be given up to rottenness and destruction. Cultivated men may perish,

and uncultured men may have the life. The maimed man may touch Christ

with his stump, and so receive life, and the complete man may lay hold

of the world and the flesh and the devil with his hands, and so share

in their destruction.

Ay! and in that case the maimed man has the best of it. It is a very

plain axiom of the rudest common-sense, this of my text: It is better

for thee to enter into life maimed, than to go into hell-fire with both

thy hands.' That is to say, it is better to live maimed than to die

whole. A man comes into a hospital with gangrene in his leg; the doctor

says it must come off; the man says, It shall not,' and he is dead

to-morrow. Who is the fool--the man that says, Here, then, cut away;

better life than limb,' or the man that says, I will keep it and I will

die'?

Better to enter into life maimed,' because you will not always be

maimed. The life will overcome the maiming. There is a wonderful

restoration of capacities and powers that have been sacrificed for

Christ's sake, a restoration even here. As crustaceans will develop a

new claw in place of one that they have thrown off in their peril to

save their lives, so we, if we have for Christ's sake maimed ourselves,

will find that in a large measure the suppression will be recompensed

even here on earth.

And hereafter, as the Rabbis used to say, No man will rise from the

grave a cripple.' All the limitations which we have imposed upon

ourselves, for Christ's sake, will be removed then. Then shall the eyes

of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf be unstopped; then

shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall

sing.' Verily I say unto thee, there is no man that hath left any' of

his possessions, affections, tastes, capacities, for My sake but he

shall receive a hundredfold more in this life, and in the world to

come, life everlasting.' No man is a loser by giving up anything for

Jesus Christ.

And, on the other hand, the complete man, complete in everything except

his spiritual nature, is a fragment in all his completeness; and

yonder, there will for him be a solemn process of stripping. Take it

from him, and give it to him that hath ten talents.' Ah! how much of

that for which some of you are flinging away Jesus Christ will fade

from you when you go yonder. His glory shall not descend after him'; as

he came, so shall he go.' Tongues, they shall cease; knowledge, it

shall vanish away'; gifts will fail, capacities will disappear when the

opportunities for the exercise of them in a material world are at an

end, and there will be little left to the man who would carry hands and

feet and eyes all into the fire and forgot the one thing needful,' but

a thin thread, if I may so say, of personality quivering with the sense

of responsibility, and preyed upon by the gnawing worm of a too-late

remorse.

My brother, the lips of Incarnate Love spoke those solemn words of my

text, which it becomes not me to repeat to you as if they were mine;

but I ask you to weigh this, His urgent commandment, and to listen to

His solemn assurance, by which He enforces the wisdom of the

self-suppression: It is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than

having two hands, to be cast into hell-fire.'

Give your hearts to Jesus Christ, and set the following in His

footsteps and the keeping of His commandments high above all other

aims. You will have to suppress much and give up much, but such

suppression is the shortest road to becoming perfect men, complete in

Him, and such surrender is the surest way to possess all things. He

that loseth his life'--which is more than hand or eye--for Christ's

sake,' the same shall find it.'

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THE LOST SHEEP AND THE SEEKING SHEPHERD

If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he

not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth Into the mountains, and

seeketh that which is gone astray!--MATT. xviii. 12.

We find this simple parable, or germ of a parable, in a somewhat more

expanded form, as the first of the incomparable three in the fifteenth

chapter of Luke's Gospel. Perhaps our Lord repeated the parable more

than once. It is an unveiling of His inmost heart, and therein a

revelation of the very heart of God. It touches the deepest things in

His relation to men, and sets forth thoughts of Him, such as man never

dared to dream. It does all this by the homeliest image and by an

appeal to the simplest instincts. The most prosaic shepherd looks for

lost sheep, and everybody has peculiar joy over lost things found. They

may not be nearly so valuable as things that were not lost. The

unstrayed may he many, and the strayed be but one. Still there is a

keener joy in the recovery of the one than in the unbroken possession

of the ninety-and-nine. That feeling in a man may be only selfishness,

but homely as it is--when the loser is God, and the lost are men, it

becomes the means of uttering and illustrating that truth concerning

God which no religion but that of the Cross has ever been bold enough

to proclaim, that He cares most for the wanderers, and rejoices over

the return of the one that went astray more than over the

ninety-and-nine who never wandered.

There are some significant differences between this edition of the

parable and the form which it assumes in the Gospel according to Luke.

There it is spoken in vindication of Christ's consorting with publicans

and sinners; here it is spoken in order to point the lesson of not

despising the least and most insignificant of the sons of men. There

the seeking Shepherd is obviously Christ; here the seeking Shepherd is

rather the Divine Father; as appears by the words of the next verse:

For it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of

these little ones should perish.' There the sheep is lost; here the

sheep goes astray. There the Shepherd seeks till He find, here the

Shepherd, perhaps, fails to find; for our Lord says, If so be that he

find it.'

But I am not about to venture on all the thoughts which this parable

suggests, nor even to deal with the main lesson which it teaches. I

wish merely to look at the two figures--the wanderer and the seeker.

I. First, then, let us look at that figure of the one wanderer.

Of course I need scarcely remind you that in the immediate application

of the parable in Luke's Gospel, the ninety-and-nine were the

respectable people who thought the publicans and harlots altogether too

dirty to touch, and regarded it as very doubtful conduct on the part of

this young Rabbi from Nazareth to be mixed up with persons whom no one

with a proper regard for whited sepulchres would have anything to do

with. To them He answers, in effect--I am a shepherd; that is my

vindication. Of course a shepherd goes after and cares for the lost

sheep. He does not ask about its worth, or anything else. He simply

follows the lost because it is lost. It may be a poor little creature

after all, but it is lost, and that is enough. And so He vindicates

Himself to the ninety-and-nine: You do not need Me, you are found. I

take you on your own estimation of yourselves, and tell you that My

mission is to the wanderers.'

I do not suppose, however, that any of us have need to be reminded that

upon a closer and deeper examination of the facts of the case, every

hoof of the ninety-and-nine belonged to a stray sheep too; and that in

the wider application of the parable all men are wanderers.

Remembering, then, this universal application, I would point out two or

three things about the condition of these strayed sheep, which include

the whole race. The ninety-and-nine may shadow for us a number of

beings, in unfallen worlds, immensely greater than even the multitudes

of wandering souls that have lived here through weary ages of sin and

tears, but that does not concern us now.

The first thought I gather from the parable is that all men are

Christ's sheep. That sounds a strange thing to say. What? all these men

and women who, having run away from Him, are plunged in sin, like sheep

mired in a black bog, the scoundrels and the profligates, the scum and

the outcasts of great cities; people with narrow foreheads, and

blighted, blasted lives, the despair of our modern civilisation--are

they all His? And in those great wide-lying heathen lands where men

know nothing of His name and of His love, are they all His too? Let Him

answer, Other sheep I have'--though they look like goats to-day--which

are not of this fold, them also must I bring, and they shall hear My

voice.' All men are Christ's, because He has been the Agent of divine

creation, and the grand words of the hundredth Psalm are true about

Him. It is He that hath made us, and we are His. We are His people and

the sheep of His pasture.' They are His, because His sacrifice has

bought them for His. Erring, straying, lost, they still belong to the

Shepherd.

Notice next, the picture of the sheep as wandering. The word is,

literally, which goeth astray,' not which is gone astray.' It pictures

the process of wandering, not the result as accomplished. We see the

sheep, poor, silly creature, not going anywhere in particular, only

there is a sweet tuft of grass here, and it crops that; and here is a

bit of ground where there is soft walking, and it goes there; and so,

step by step, not meaning anything, not knowing where it is going, or

that it is going anywhere; it goes, and goes, and goes, and at last it

finds out that it is away from its beat on the hillside--for sheep keep

to one bit of hillside generally, as any shepherd will tell you--and

then it begins to bleat, and most helpless of creatures, fluttering and

excited, rushes about amongst the thorns and brambles, or gets mired in

some quag or other, and it will never find its way back of itself until

some one comes for it.

So,' says Christ to us, there are a great many of you who do not mean

to go wrong; you are not going anywhere in particular, you do not start

on your course with any intentions either way, of doing right or wrong,

of keeping near God, or going away from Him, but you simply go where

the grass is sweetest, or the walking easiest. But look at the end of

it; where you have got to. You have got away from Him.'

Now, if you take that series of parables in Luke xv., and note the

metaphors there, you will see three different sides given of the

process by which men's hearts stray away from God. There is the sheep

that wanders. That is partly conscious, and voluntary, but in a large

measure simply yielding to inclination and temptation. Then there is

the coin that trundles away under some piece of furniture, and is

lost--that is a picture of the manner in which a man, without volition,

almost mechanically sometimes, slides into sins and disappears as it

were, and gets covered over with the dust of evil. And then there is

the worst of all, the lad that had full knowledge of what he was doing.

I am going into a far-off country; I cannot stand this any longer--all

restraint and no liberty, and no power of doing what I like with my

own; and always obliged to obey and be dependent on my father for my

pocket-money! Give me what belongs to me, for good and all, and let me

go!' That is the picture of the worst kind of wandering, when a man

knows what he is about, and looks at the merciful restraint of the law

of God, and says: No! I had rather be far away; and my own master, and

not always be "cribbed, cabined, and confined" with these limitations.'

The straying of the half-conscious sheep may seem more innocent, but it

carries the poor creature away from the shepherd as completely as if it

had been wholly intelligent and voluntary. Let us learn the lesson. In

a world like this, if a man does not know very clearly where he is

going, he is sure to go wrong. If you do not exercise a distinct

determination to do God's will, and to follow in His footsteps who has

set us an example; and if your main purpose is to get succulent grass

to eat and soft places to walk in, you are certain before long to

wander tragically from all that is right and noble and pure. It is no

excuse for you to say: I never meant it'; I did not intend any harm, I

only followed my own inclinations.' More mischief is wrought'--to the

man himself, as well as to other people--from want of thought than is

wrought by' an evil will. And the sheep has strayed as effectually,

though, when it set out on its journey, it never thought of straying.

Young men and women beginning life, remember! and take this lesson.

But then there is another point that I must touch for a moment. In the

Revised Version you will find a very tiny alteration in the words of my

text, which, yet, makes a large difference in the sense. The last

clause of my text, as it stands in our Bible, is, And seeketh that

which is gone astray'; the Revised Version more correctly reads, And

seeketh that which is going astray.' Now, look at the difference in

these two renderings. In the former the process is represented as

finished, in the correct rendering it is represented as going on. And

that is what I would press on you, the awful, solemn, necessarily

progressive character of our wanderings from God. A man never gets to

the end of the distance that separates between him and the Father, if

his face is turned away from God. Every moment the separation is

increasing. Two lines start from each other at the acutest angle and

diverge more the further they are produced, until at last the one may

be away up by the side of God's throne, and the other away down in the

deepest depths of hell. So accordingly my text carries with solemn

pathos, in a syllable, the tremendous lesson: The sheep is not gone,

but going astray.' Ah! there are some of my hearers who are daily and

hourly increasing the distance between themselves and their merciful

Father.

Now the last thing here in this picture is the contrast between the

description given of the wandering sheep in our text, and that in St.

Luke. Here it is represented as wandering, there it is represented as

lost. That is very beautiful and has a meaning often not noticed by

hasty readers. Who is it that has lost it? We talk about the lost soul

and the lost man, as if it were the man that had lost himself, and that

is true, and a dreadful truth it is. But that is not the truth that is

taught in this parable, and meant by us to be gathered from it. Who is

it that has lost it? He to whom it belonged.

That is to say, wherever a heart gets ensnared and entangled with the

love of the treasures and pleasures of this life, and so departs in

allegiance and confidence and friendship from the living God, there God

the Father regards Himself as the poorer by the loss of one of His

children, by the loss of one of His sheep. He does not care to possess

you by the hold of mere creation and supremacy and rule. He desires you

to love Him, and then He deems that He has you. And if you do not love

Him, He deems that He has lost you. There is something in the divine

heart that goes out after His lost property. We touch here upon deep

things that we cannot speak of intelligently; only remember this, that

what looks like self-regard in man is the purest love in God, and that

there is nothing in the whole revelation which Christianity makes of

the character of God more wonderful than this, that He judges that He

has lost His child when His child has forgotten to love Him.

II. So much, then, for one of the great pictures in this text. I can

spare but a sentence or two for the other--the picture of the Seeker.

I said that in the one form of the parable it was more distinctly the

Father, and in the other more distinctly the Son, who is represented as

seeking the sheep. But these two do still coincide in substance,

inasmuch as God's chief way of seeking us poor wandering sheep is

through the work of His dear Son Jesus, and the coming of Christ is the

Father's searching for His sheep in the cloudy and dark day.'

According to my text God leaves the ninety-and-nine and goes into the

mountains where the wanderer is, and seeks him. And this, couched in

veiled form, is the great mystery of the divine love, the incarnation

and sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Lord. Here is the answer by

anticipation to the sarcasm that is often levelled at evangelical

Christianity: You must think a good deal of human nature, and must have

a very arrogant notion of the inhabitant of this little speck that

floats in the great sea of the heavens, if you suppose that with all

these millions of orbs he is so important that the divine Nature came

down upon this little tiny molehill, and took his nature and died.'

Yes!' says Christ, not because man was so great, not because man was so

valuable in comparison with the rest of creation--he was but one

amongst ninety-nine unfallen and unsinful--but because he was so

wretched, because he was so small, because he had gone so far away from

God; therefore, the seeking love came after him, and would draw him to

itself.' That, I think, is answer enough to the cavil.

And then, there is a difference between these two versions of the

Parable in respect to their representation of the end of the seeking.

The one says seeks until He finds.' Oh! the patient, incredible

inexhaustibleness of the divine love. God's long-suffering, if I may

take such a metaphor, like a sleuth-hound, will follow the object of

its search through all its windings and doublings, until it comes up to

it. So that great seeking Shepherd follows us through all the devious

courses of our wayward, wandering footsteps doubling back upon

themselves, until He finds us. Though the sheep may increase its

distance, the Shepherd follows. The further away we get the more tender

His appeal; the more we stop our ears the louder the voice with which

He calls. You cannot wear out Jesus Christ, you cannot exhaust the

resources of His bounteousness, of His tenderness. However we may have

been going wrong, however far we may have been wandering, however

vehemently we may be increasing, at every moment, our distance from

Him, He is coming after us, serene, loving, long-suffering, and will

not be put away.

Dear friend! would you only believe that a loving, living Person is

really seeking you, seeking you by my poor words now, seeking you by

many a providence, seeking you by His Gospel, by His Spirit; and will

never be satisfied till He has found you in your finding Him and

turning your soul to Him!

But, I beseech you, do not forget the solemn lesson drawn from the

other form of the parable which is given in my text: If so be that He

find it. There is a possibility of failure. What an awful power you

have of burying yourself in the sepulchre, as it were, of your own

self-will, and hiding yourself in the darkness of your own unbelief!

You can frustrate the seeking love of God. Some of you have done

so--some of you have done so all your lives. Some of you, perhaps at

this moment, are trying to do so, and consciously endeavouring to steel

your hearts against some softening that may have been creeping over

them whilst I have been speaking. Are you yielding to His seeking love,

or wandering further and further from Him? He has come to find you. Let

Him not seek in vain, but let the Good Shepherd draw you to Himself,

where, lifted on the Cross, He giveth His life for the sheep.' He will

restore your soul and carry you back on His strong shoulder, or in His

bosom near His loving heart, to the green pastures and the safe fold.

There will be joy in His heart, more than over those who have never

wandered; and there will be joy in the heart of the returning wanderer,

such as they who had not strayed and learned the misery could never

know, for, as the profound Jewish saying has it, In the place where the

penitents stand, the perfectly righteous cannot stand.'

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PERSISTENCE OF THWARTED LOVE

If so be that he find it.'--MATT. xviii. 13.

Until he find it.'--LUKE xv. 4.

Like other teachers, Jesus seems to have had favourite points of view

and utterances which came naturally to His lips. There are several

instances in the gospels of His repeating the same sayings in entirely

different connections and with different applications. One of these

habitual points of view seems to have been the thought of men as

wandering sheep, and of Himself as the Shepherd. The metaphor has

become so familiar that we need a moment's reflection to grasp the

mingled tenderness, sadness, and majesty of it. He thought habitually

of all humanity as a flock of lost sheep, and of Himself as high above

them, unparticipant of their evil, and having one errand--to bring them

back.

And not only does He frequently refer to this symbol, but we have the

two editions, from which my texts are respectively taken, of the

Parable of the Lost Sheep. I say two editions, because it seems to me a

great deal more probable that Jesus should have repeated Himself than

that either of the Evangelists should have ventured to take this gem

and set it in an alien setting. The two versions differ slightly in

some unimportant expressions, and Matthew's is the more condensed of

the two. But the most important variation is the one which is brought

to light by the two fragments which I have ventured to isolate as

texts. If He find' implies the possible failure of the Shepherd's

search; till He find' implies His unwearied persistence in the teeth of

all failure. And, taken in conjunction, they suggest some very blessed

and solemn considerations, which I pray for strength to lay upon your

minds and hearts now.

I. But first let me say a word or two upon the more general thought

brought out in both these clauses--of the Shepherd's search.

Now, beautiful and heart-touching as that picture is, of the Shepherd

away amongst the barren mountains searching minutely in every ravine

and thicket, it wants a little explanation in order to be brought into

correspondence with the fact which it expresses. For His search for His

lost property is not in ignorance of where it is, and His finding of it

is not His discovery of His sheep, but its discovery of its Shepherd.

We have to remember wherein consists the loss before we can understand

wherein consists the search.

Now, if we ask ourselves that question first, we get a flood of light

on the whole matter. The great hundredth Psalm, according to its true

rendering, says, It is He that hath made us, and we are His; . . . we

are . . . the sheep of His pasture.' But God's true possession of man

is not simply the possession inherent in the act of creation. For there

is only one way in which spirit can own spirit, or heart can possess

heart, and that is through the voluntary yielding and love of the one

to the other. So Jesus Christ, who, in all His seeking after us men, is

the voice and hand of Almighty Love, does not count that He has found a

man until the man has learned to love Him. For He loses us when we are

alienated from Him, when we cease to trust Him, when we refuse to obey

Him, when we will not yield to Him, but put Him far away from us.

Therefore the search which, as being Christ's is God's in Christ, is

for our love, our trust, our obedience; and in reality it consists of

all the energies by which Jesus Christ, as God's embodiment and

representative, seeks to woo and win you and me back to Himself, that

He may truly possess us.

If the Shepherd's seeking is but a tender metaphor for the whole

aggregate of the ways by which the love that is divine and human in

Jesus Christ moves round about our closed hearts, as water may feel

round some hermetically sealed vessel, seeking for an entrance, then

surely the first and chiefest of them, which makes its appeal to each

of us as directly as to any man that ever lived, is that great mystery

that Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God, left the ninety-and-nine

that were safe on the high pastures of the mountains of God, and came

down among us, out into the wilderness, to seek and to save that which

was lost.'

And, brother, that method of winning--I was going to say, of

earning--our love comes straight in its appeal to every single soul on

the face of the earth. Do not say that thou wert not in Christ's heart

and mind when He willed to be born and willed to die. Thou, and thou,

and thou, and every single unit of humanity were there clear before Him

in their individuality; and He died for thee, and for me, and for every

man. And, in one aspect, that is more than to say that He died for all

men. There was a specific intention in regard to each of us in the

mission of Jesus Christ; and when He went to the Cross the Shepherd was

not giving His life for a confused flock of which He knew not the

units, but for sheep the face of each of whom He knows, and each of

whom He loves. There was His first seeking; there is His chief seeking.

There is the seeking which ought to appeal to every soul of man, and

which, ever since you were children, has been making its appeal to you.

Has it done so in vain? Dear friend, let not your heart still be hard.

He seeks us by every record of that mighty love that died for us, even

when it is being spoken as poorly, and with as many limitations and

imperfections, as I am speaking it now. As though God did beseech you

by us, pray you in Christ's stead.' It is not arrogance, God forbid! it

is simple truth when I say, Never mind about me; but my word, in so far

as it is true and tender, is Christ's word to you. And here, in our

midst, that unseen Form is passing along these pews and speaking to

these hearts, and the Shepherd is seeking His sheep.

He seeks each of us by the inner voices and emotions in our hearts and

minds, by those strange whisperings which sometimes we hear, by the

suddenly upstarting convictions of duty and truth which sometimes,

without manifest occasion, flash across our hearts. These voices are

Christ's voice, for, in a far deeper sense than most men superficially

believe, He is the true Light that lighteth every man coming into the

world.'

He is seeking us by our unrest, by our yearnings after we know not

what, by our dim dissatisfaction which insists upon making itself felt

in the midst of joys and delights, and which the world fails to satisfy

as much as it fails to interpret. There is a cry in every heart, little

as the bearer of the heart translates it into its true meaning--a cry

after God, even the living God. And by all your unrests, your

disappointments, your hopes unfulfilled, your hopes fulfilled and

blasted in the fulfilment, your desires that perish unfruited; by all

the mystic movements of the spirit that yearns for something beyond the

material and the visible, Jesus Christ is seeking His sheep.

He seeks us by the discipline of life, for I believe that Christ is the

active Providence of God, and that the hands that were pierced on the

Cross do move the wheels of the history of the world, and mould the

destinies of individual spirits.

The deepest meaning of all life is that we should be won to seek Him

who in it all is seeking us, and led to venture our hopes, and fling

the anchor of our faith beyond the bounds of the visible, that it may

fasten in the Eternal, even in Christ Himself, the same yesterday and

to-day and for ever' when earth and its training are done with.

Brethren, it is a blessed thing to live, when we interpret life's

smallnesses aright as the voice of the Master, who, by them all--our

sadness and our gladness, the unrest of our hearts and the yearnings

and longings of our spirits, by the ministry of His word, by the record

of His sufferings--is echoing the invitation of the Cross itself, Come

unto Me, all ye . . . and I will give you rest!' So much for the

Shepherd's search.

II. And now, in the second place, a word as to the possible thwarting

of the search.

If so be that He find.' That is an awful if, when we think of what lies

below it. The thing seems an absurdity when it is spoken, and yet it is

a grim fact in many a life--viz. that Christ's effort can fail and be

thwarted. Not that His search is perfunctory or careless, but that we

shroud ourselves in darkness through which that love can find no way.

It is we, not He, that are at fault when He fails to find that which He

seeks. There is nothing more certain than that God, and Christ the

image of God, desire the rescue of every man, woman, and child of the

human race. Let no teaching blur that sunlight fact. There is nothing

more certain than that Jesus Christ has done, and is doing, all that He

can do to secure that purpose. If He could make every man love Him, and

so find every man, be sure that He would do it. But He cannot. For here

is the central mystery of creation, which if we could solve there would

be few knots that would resist our fingers, that a finite will like

yours or mine can lift itself up against God, and that, having the

capacity, it has the desire. He says, Come!' We say, I will not.' That

door of the heart opens from within, and He never breaks it open. He

stands at the door and knocks. And then the same solemn if comes--If

any man opens, I will come in'; if any man keeps it shut, and holds on

to prevent its being opened, I will stop out.

Brethren, I seek to press upon you now the one plain truth, that if you

are not saved men and women, there is no person in heaven or earth or

hell that has any blame in the matter but yourself alone. God appeals

to us, and says, What more could have been done to My vineyard that I

have not done unto it?' His hands are clean, and the infinite love of

Christ is free from all blame, and all the blame lies at our own doors.

I must not dwell upon the various reasons which lead so many men among

us--as, alas! the utmost charity cannot but see that there are--to turn

away from Christ's appeals, and to be unwilling to have this Man'

either to reign over' them or to save them. There are many such, I am

sure, in my audience now; and I would fain, if I could, draw them to

that Lord in whom alone they have life, and rest, and holiness, and

heaven.

One great reason is because you do not believe that you need Him. There

is an awful inadequacy in most men's conceptions--and still more in

their feelings--as to their sin. Oh dear friends, if you would only

submit your consciences for one meditative half-hour to the light of

God's highest law, I think you would find out something more than many

of you know, as to what you are and what your sin is. Many of us do not

much believe that we are in any danger. I have seen a sheep comfortably

cropping the short grass on a down over the sea, with one foot out in

the air, and a precipice of five hundred feet below it, and at the

bottom the crawling water. It did not know that there was any danger of

going over. That is like some of us. If you believed what is true--that

sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death,' and understood what

death' meant, you would feel the mercy of the Shepherd seeking you.

Some of us think we are in the flock when we are not. Some of us do not

like submission. Some of us have no inclination for the sweet pastures

that He provides, and would rather stay where we are, and have the fare

that is going there.

We do not need to do anything to put Him away. I have no doubt that

some of us, as soon as my voice ceases, will plunge again into worldly

talk and thoughts before they are down the chapel steps, and so blot

out, as well as they can, any vagrant and superficial impression that

may have been made. Dear brethren, it is a very easy matter to turn

away from the Shepherd's voice. I called, and ye refused. I stretched

out My hands, and no man regarded.' That is all! That is what you do,

and that is enough.

III. So, lastly, the thwarted search prolonged.

Till He find'--that is a wonderful and a merciful word. It indicates

the infinitude of Christ's patient forgiveness and perseverance. We

tire of searching. Can a mother forget' or abandon her seeking after a

lost child? Yes! if it has gone on for so long as to show that further

search is hopeless, she will go home and nurse her sorrow in her heart.

Or, perhaps, like some poor mothers and wives, it will turn her brain,

and one sign of her madness will be that, long years after grief should

have been calm because hope was dead, she will still be looking for the

little one so long lost. But Jesus Christ stands at the closed door, as

a great modern picture shows, though it has been so long undisturbedly

closed that the hinges are brown with rust, and weeds grow high against

it. He stands there in the night, with the dew on His hair, unheeded or

repelled, like some stranger in a hostile village seeking for a night's

shelter. He will not be put away; but, after all refusals, still with

gracious finger, knocks upon the door, and speaks into the heart. Some

of you have refused Him all your lives, and perhaps you have grey hairs

upon you now. And He is speaking to you still. He suffereth long, is

not easily provoked, is not soon angry; hopeth all things,' even of the

obstinate rejecters.

For that is another truth that this word till' preaches to us--viz. the

possibility of bringing back those that have gone furthest away and

have been longest away. The world has a great deal to say about

incurable cases of moral obliquity and deformity. Christ knows nothing

about incurable cases.' If there is a worst man in the world--and

perhaps there is--there is nothing but his own disinclination to

prevent his being brought back, and made as pure as an angel.

But do not let us deal with generalities; let us bring the truths to

ourselves. Dear brethren, I know nothing about the most of you. I

should not know you again if I met you five minutes after we part now.

I have never spoken to many of you, and probably never shall, except in

this public way; but I know that you need Christ, and that Christ wants

you. And I know that, however far you have gone, you have not gone so

far but that His love feels out through the remoteness to grasp you,

and would fain draw you to itself.

I dare say you have seen upon some dreary moor, or at the foot of some

scaur' on the hillside, the bleached bones of a sheep, lying white and

grim among the purple heather. It strayed, unthinking of danger,

tempted by the sweet herbage; it fell; it vainly bleated; it died. But

what if it had heard the shepherd's call, and had preferred to lie

where it fell, and to die where it lay? We talk about silly sheep.' Are

there any of them so foolish as men and women listening to me now, who

will not answer the Shepherd's voice when they hear it, with, Lord,

here am I, come and help me out of this miry clay, and bring me back.'

He is saying to each of you, Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?' May He

not have to say at last of any of us, Ye would not come to Me, that ye

might have life!'

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FORGIVEN AND UNFORGIVING

Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but,

Until seventy times seven.' --MATT. xviii. 22.

The disciples had been squabbling about pre-eminence in the kingdom

which they thought was presently to appear. They had ventured to refer

their selfish and ambitious dispute to Christ's arbitrament. He

answered by telling them the qualifications of the greatest in the

kingdom'--that they are to be humble like little children; that they

are to be placable; that they are to use all means to reclaim

offenders; and that, even if the offence is against themselves, they

are to ignore the personal element, and to regard the offender, not so

much as having done them harm, as having harmed himself by his

evil-doing.

Peter evidently feels that that is a very hard commandment for a man of

his temperament, and so he goes to Jesus Christ for a little further

direction, and proposes a question as to the limits of this

disposition: How often shall my brother sin?' The very question betrays

that he does not understand what forgiveness means; for it is not real,

if the forgiven' sin is stowed away safely in the memory. I can

forgive, but I cannot forget,' generally means, I do not quite

forgive.' We are not to take the pardoned offence, and carry it to a

kind of suspense account,' to be revived if another is committed, but

we are to blot it out altogether. Peter thought that he had given a

very wide allowance when he said seven times.' Christ's answer lifts

the whole subject out of the realm of hard and fast lines and limits,

for He takes the two perfect numbers ten' and seven,' and multiplies

them together, and then He multiplies that by seven' once more; and the

product is not four hundred and ninety, but is innumerableness. He does

not mean that the four hundred and ninety-first offence is outside the

pale, but He suggests indefiniteness, endlessness. So, as I say, He

lifts the question out of the region in which Peter was keeping it,

thereby betraying that he did not understand what he was talking about,

and tells us that there are no limits to the obligation.

The parable which follows, and follows with a therefore,' does not deal

so much with Peter's question as to the limits of the disposition, but

sets forth its grounds and the nature of its manifestations. If we

understand why we ought to forgive, and what forgiveness is, we shall

not say, How often?' The question will have answered itself.

I turn to the parable rather than the words which I have read as our

starting-point, to seek to bring out the lessons which it contains in

regard to our relations to God, and to one another. There are three

sections in it: the king and his debtor; the forgiven debtor and his

debtor; and the forgiven debtor unforgiven because unforgiving. And if

we look at these three points I think we shall get the lessons

intended.

I. The king and his debtor.

A certain king has servants, whom he gathers together to give in their

reckoning. And one of them is brought that owes him ten thousand

talents. Now, it is to be noticed at the very outset that the analogy

between debt and sin, though real, is extremely imperfect. No metaphor

of that sort goes on all fours, and there has been a great deal of harm

done to theology and to evangelical religion by carrying out too

completely the analogy between money debts and our sins against God.

But although the analogy is imperfect, it is very real. The first point

that is to be brought out in this first part of the parable is the

immense magnitude of every man's transgressions against God.

Numismatists and arithmeticians may jangle about the precise amount

represented by the thousand talents. It differs according to the talent

which is taken as the basis of the calculation. There were several

talents in use in the currency of ancient days. But the very point of

the expression is not the specification of an exact amount, but the use

of a round number which is to suggest an undefined magnitude. Ten

thousand talents,' according to one estimate, is some two millions and

a quarter of pounds sterling.

But I would point out that the amount is stated in terms of talents,

and any talent is a large sum; and there are ten thousand of these; and

the reason why the account is made out in terms of talents, the largest

denomination in the currency of the period, is because every sin

against God is a great sin. He being what He is, and we being what we

are, and sin being what it is, every sin is large, although the deed

which embodies it may be, when measured by the world's foot-rule, very

small. For the essence of sin is rebellion against God and the

enthroning of self as His victorious rival; and all rebellion is

rebellion, whether it is found in arms in the field, or whether it is

simply sulkily refusing obedience and cherishing thoughts of treason.

We are always apt to go wrong in our estimate of the great and small in

human actions, and, although the terms of magnitude do not apply

properly to moral questions at all, there is no more conspicuous misuse

of language than when we speak of anything which has in it the virus of

rebellion against God, and the breach of His law, as being a small sin.

It may be a small act; it is a great sin. Little rattlesnakes are

snakes; they have rattles and poison fangs as really as the most

monstrous of the brood that coils and hisses in some cave. So the

account is made out in terms of talents, because every sin is a great

one. I need not dwell upon the numerousness that is suggested. Ten

thousand' is the natural current expression for a number that is not

innumerable, but is only known to be very great. The psalmist says:

They are more than the hairs of my head.' How many hairs had you in

your head, David? Do you know? No!' And how many sins have you

committed? Do you know? No!' The number is beyond count by us, though

it may be counted by Him against whom they are done. Do you believe

that about yourself, my friend, that the debit side of your account has

filled all the page and has to be carried forward on to another? Do we

any of us realise, as we all of us ought to do, the infinite number,

and the transcendent greatness, of our transgressions against the

Father?

But the next point to be noticed is the stern legal right of the

creditor. It sounds harsh, cruel, almost brutal, that the man and his

wife and his children should be sold into slavery, and all that he had

should be taken from him, in order to go some little way towards the

reduction of the enormous debt that he owed. Christ puts in that harsh

and apparently cruel conduct in the story, not to suggest that it was

harsh and cruel, but because it was according to the law of the time. A

recognised legal right was exercised by the creditor when he said, Take

him; sell him for a slave, and bring me what he fetches in the open

markets.' So that we have here suggested the solemn thought of the

right that divine justice, acting according to strict retributive law,

has over each of us. Our own consciences attest it as perfectly within

the scope of the divine retributive justice that our enormous sin

should bring down a tremendous punishment.

I said that the analogy between sin and debt was a very imperfect one.

It is imperfect in regard to one point--viz. the implication of other

people in the consequences of the man's evil; for although it is quite

true that the evil that men do lives after them, and spreads far beyond

their sight, and involves many people, no other is amenable to divine

justice for the sinner's debt. It is quite true that, when we do an

evil action, we never can tell how far its wind-borne seeds may be

carried, or where they may alight, or what sort of unwholesome fruit

they may bear, or who may be poisoned by them; but, on the other hand,

we, and we only, are responsible for our individual transgressions

against God. If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; and if

thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.'

The same imperfection in the analogy applies to the next point in the

parable--viz. the bankrupt debtor's prayer, Have patience with me, and

I will pay thee all.' Easy to promise! I wonder how long it would have

taken a penniless bankrupt to scrape together two and a quarter

millions of pounds? He said a great deal more than he could make good.

But the language of his prayer is by no means the language that becomes

a penitent at God's throne. We have not to offer to make future

satisfaction. No! that is impossible. What I have written I have

written,' and the page, with all its smudges and blots and misshapen

letters, cannot be made other than it is by any future pages fairly

written. No future righteousness has any power to affect the guilt of

past sin. There is one thing that does discharge the writing from the

page. Do you remember Paul's words, blotting out the handwriting that

was against us--nailing it to His Cross'? You sometimes dip your pens

into red ink, and run a couple of lines across the page of an account

that is done with. Jesus Christ does the same across our account, and

the debt is non-existent, because He has died.

But the prayer is the expression, if not of penitence yet of petition,

and all the stern rigour of the law's requirement at once melts away,

and the king who, in the former words, seemed so harsh, now is almost

incredibly merciful. For he not only cancels the debt, but sets the man

free. Thy ways are not as our ways; . . . as the heavens are higher

than the earth, so great is His mercy toward' the sinful soul.

II. So much, then, for the first part of this parable. Now a word as to

the second, the forgiven debtor and his debt.

Our Lord uses in the 27th and 28th verses of our text the same

expression very significantly and emphatically. The lord of that

servant was moved with compassion.' And then again, in the 28th verse,

But that servant went out and found one of his fellow-servants.' The

repetition of the same phrase hooks the two halves together, emphasises

the identity of the man, and the difference of his demeanour, on the

two occasions.

The conduct described is almost impossibly disgusting and truculent. He

found his fellow-servant, who owed him a hundred pence'--some three

pounds, ten shillings--and with the hands that a minute before had been

wrung in agony, and extended in entreaty, he throttled him; and with

the voice that had been plaintively pleading for mercy a minute before,

he gruffly growled, Pay me that thou owest.' He had just come through

an agony of experience that might have made him tender. He had just

received a blessing that might have made his heart glow. But even the

repetition of his own petition does not touch him, and when the poor

fellow-servant, with his paltry debt, says, Have patience with me, and

I will pay thee all,' it avails nothing. He durst not sell his

fellow-servant. God's rights over a man are more than any man's over

another. But he does what he can. He will not do much towards recouping

himself of his loan by flinging the poor debtor into prison, but if he

cannot get his ducats he will gloat over his pound of flesh.' So he

hurries him off to gaol.

Could a man have done like that? Ah! brethren, the things that would be

monstrous in our relations to one another are common in our relations

to God. Every day we see, and, alas! do, the very same thing, in our

measure and degree. Do you never treasure up somebody's slights? Do you

never put away in a pigeon-hole for safe-keeping, endorsed with the

doer's name on the back of it, the record of some trivial offence

against you? It is but as a penny against a talent, for the worst that

any of us can do to another is nothing as compared with what many of us

have been doing all our lives toward God. I dare say that some of us

will go out from this place, and the next man that we meet that rubs us

the wrong way,' or does us any harm, we shall score down his act

against him with as implacable and unmerciful an unforgivingness as

that of this servant in the parable. Do not believe that he was a

monster of iniquity. He was just like us. We all of us have one human

heart, and this man's crime is but too natural to us all. The essence

of it was that having been forgiven, he did not forgive.

So, then, our Lord here implies the principle that God's mercy to us is

to set the example to which our dealings with others is to be

conformed. Even as I had mercy on thee' plainly proposes that miracle

of divine forgiveness as our pattern as well as our hope. The world's

morality recognises the duty of forgiveness. Christ shows us God's

forgiveness as at once the model which is the perfect realisation of

the idea in its completeness and inexhaustibleness, and also the motive

which, brought into our experience, inclines and enables us to forgive.

III. And now I come to the last point of the text--the debtor who had

been forgiven falling back into the ranks of the unforgiven, because he

does not forgive.

The fellow-servants were very much disgusted, no doubt. Our consciences

work a great deal more rapidly, and rigidly, about other people's

faults than they do about our own. And nine out of ten of these

fellow-servants that were very sorry, and ran and told the king, would

have done exactly the same thing themselves. The king, for the first

time, is wroth. We do not read that he was so before, when the debt

only was in question; but such unforgiving harshness, after the

experience of such merciful forgiveness, rouses his righteous

indignation. The unmercifulness of Christian people is a worse sin than

many a deed that goes by very ugly names amongst men. And so the

judgment that falls upon this evil-doer, who, by his truculence to his

fellow-servant, had betrayed the baseness of his nature and the

ingratitude of his heart, is, Put him back where he was! Tie the two

and a quarter millions round his neck again! Let us see what he will do

by way of discharging it now!' Now, do not let any theological systems

prevent you from recognising the solemn truth that underlies that

representation, that there may be things in the hearts and conduct of

forgiven Christians which may cancel the cancelling of their debt, and

bring it all back again. No man can cherish the malicious disposition

that treasures up offences against himself, and at the same moment feel

that the divine love is wrapping him round in its warm folds. If we are

to retain our consciousness of having been forgiven by God, and

received into the amplitude of His heart, we must, in our measure and

degree, imitate that on which we trust, and be mirrors of the divine

mercy which we say has saved us.

Our parable lays equal stress on two things. First, that the foundation

of all real mercifulness in men is the reception of forgiving mercy

from God. We must have experienced it before we can exercise it. And,

second, we must exercise it, if we desire to continue to experience it.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.' That applies to

Christian people. But behind that there lies the other truth, that in

order to be merciful we must first of all have received the initial

mercy of cancelled transgression.

So, dear friends, here are the two lessons for every one of us. First,

to recognise our debt, and go to Him in whom God is well pleased, for

its abolishment and forgiveness; and then to go out into the world, and

live like Him, and show to others love kindled by and kindred to that

to which we trust for our own salvation. Be ye therefore imitators of

God, as beloved children, and walk in love, as God also hath loved us.'

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THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE KING

And, behold, one came and said unto Him, Good Master, what good thing

shall I do, that I may have eternal life? 17. And He said unto him, Why

callest thou Me good? there is none good but One, that is, God: but if

thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. 18. He saith unto

Him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit

adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, 19.

Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as

thyself. 20. The young man saith unto Him, All these things have I kept

from my youth up: what lack I yet? 21. Jesus said unto him, If thou

wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and

thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow Me. 22. But

when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he

had great possessions. 23. Then said Jesus unto His disciples, Verily I

say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of

heaven. 24. And again I say unto you, 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. 25. When His disciples heard it, they were exceedingly

amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? 26. But Jesus beheld them, and

said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things

are possible.'--MATT. xix. 16-26.

We have here one of the saddest stories in the gospels. It is a true

soul's tragedy. The young man is in earnest, but his earnestness has

not volume and force enough to float him over the bar. He wishes to

have some great thing bidden him to do, but he recoils from the sharp

test which Christ imposes. He truly wants the prize, but the cost is

too great; and yet he wishes it so much that he goes away without it in

deep sorrow, which perhaps, at another day, ripened into the resolve

which then was too high for him. There is a certain severity in our

Lord's tone, an absence of recognition of the much good in the young

man, and a naked stringency in His demand from him, which sound almost

harsh, but which are set in their true light by Mark's note, that Jesus

loved him,' and therefore treated him thus. The truest way to draw

ingenuous souls is not to flatter, nor to make entrance easy by

dropping the standard or hiding the requirements, but to call out all

their energy by setting before them the lofty ideal. Easy-going

disciples are easily made--and lost. Thorough-going ones are most

surely won by calling for entire surrender.

I. We may gather together the earlier part of the conversation, as

introductory to the Lord's requirement (vs. 16-20), in which we have

the picture of a real though imperfect moral earnestness, and may note

how Christ deals with it. Matthew tells us that the questioner was

young and rich. Luke adds that he was a ruler'--a synagogue official,

that is--which was unusual for a young man, and indicates that his

legal blamelessness was recognised. Mark adds one of his touches, which

are not only picturesque, but character-revealing, by the information

that he came running' to Jesus in the way, so eager was he, and fell at

His feet, so reverential was he. His first question is singularly

compacted of good and error. The fact that he came to Christ for a

purely religious purpose, not seeking personal advantage for himself or

for others, like the crowds who followed for loaves and cures, nor

laying traps for Him with puzzles which might entangle Him with the

authorities, nor asking theological questions for curiosity, but

honestly and earnestly desiring to be helped to lay hold of eternal

life, is to be put down to his credit. He is right in counting it the

highest blessing.

Where had he got hold of the thought of eternal life'? It was miles

above the dusty speculations and casuistries of the rabbis. Probably

from Christ Himself. He was right in recognising that the conditions of

possessing it were moral, but his conception of good' was superficial,

and he thought more of doing good than of being good, and of the

desired life as payment for meritorious actions. In a word, he stood at

the point of view of the old dispensation. This do, and thou shalt

live,' was his belief; and what he wished was further instruction as to

what this' was. He was to be praised in that he docilely brought his

question to Jesus, even though, as Christ's answer shows, there was

error mingling in his docility. Such is the character--a young man,

rich, influential, touched with real longings for the highest life,

ready, so far as he knows himself, to do whatever he is bidden, in

order to secure it.

We might have expected Christ, who opened His arms wide for publicans

and harlots, to have welcomed this fair, ingenuous seeker with some

kindly word. But He has none for him. We adopt the reading of the

Revised Version, in which our Lord's first word is repellent. It is in

effect--There is no need for your question, which answers itself. There

is one good Being, the source and type of every good thing, and

therefore the good, which you ask about, can only be conformity to His

will. You need not come to Me to know what you are to do.' He relegates

the questioner, not to his own conscience, but to the authoritative

revealed will of God in the law. Modern views of Christ's work, which

put all its stress on the perfection of His moral character, and His

office as a pattern of righteousness, may well be rebuked by the fact

that He expressly disclaimed this character, and declared that, if He

was only to be regarded as republishing the law of human conduct, His

work was needless. Men have enough knowledge of what they must do to

enter into life, without Jesus Christ. No doubt, Christ's moral

teaching transcends that given of old; but His special work was not to

tell men what to do, but to make it possible for them to do it; to

give, not the law, but the power, both the motive and the impulse,

which will fulfil the law. On another occasion He answered a similar

question in a different manner. When the Jews asked Him, What must we

do, that we may work the works of God?' He replied by the plain

evangelical statement: This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him

whom He hath sent.' Why did He not answer the young ruler thus? Only

because He knew that he needed to be led to that thought by having his

own self-complacency shattered, and the clinging of his soul to earth

laid bare. The whole treatment of him here is meant to bring him to the

apprehension of faith as preceding all truly good work.

The young man's second question says a great deal in its one word. It

indicates astonishment at being remanded to these old, well-worn

precepts, and might be rendered, What sort of commandments?' as if

taking it for granted that they must be new and peculiar. It is the

same spirit as that which in all ages has led men who with partial

insight longed after eternal life, to seek it by fantastic and unusual

roads of extraordinary sacrifices or services--the spirit which filled

monasteries, and invented hair shirts, and fastings, and swinging with

hooks in your back at Hindoo festivals. The craving for more than

ordinary good works' shows a profound mistake in the estimate of the

ordinary, and a fatal blunder as to the relation between goodness' and

eternal life.'

So Christ answers the question by quoting the second half of the

Decalogue, which deals with the homeliest duties, and appending to it

the summary of the law, which requires love to our neighbour as to

ourselves. Why does He omit the earlier half? Probably because He would

meet the error of the question, by presenting only the plainest, most

familiar commandments, and because He desired to excite the

consciousness of deficiency, which could be most easily done in

connection with these.

There is a touch of impatience in the rejoinder, All these have I

kept,' and more than a touch of self-satisfaction. The law has failed

to accomplish one of its chief purposes in the young man, in that it

has not taught him his sinfulness. No doubt he had a right to say that

his outward life had been free from breaches of such very elementary

morality which any old woman could have taught him. He had never gone

below the surface of the commandments, nor below the surface of his

acts, or he would not have answered so jauntily. He had yet to learn

that the height of goodness' is reached, not by adding some strange new

performances to the threadbare precepts of everyday duty, but by

digging deep into these, and bottoming the fabric of our lives on their

inmost spirit. He had yet to learn that whoever says, All these have I

kept,' thereby convicts himself of understanding neither them nor

himself.

Still he was not at rest, although he had, as he fancied, kept them

all. His last question is a plaintive, honest acknowledgment of the

hungry void within, which no round of outward obediences can ever fill.

He knows that he has not the inner fountain springing up into eternal

life. He is dimly aware of something wanting, whether in his obedience

or no, at all events in his peace; and he is right in believing that

the reason for that conscious void is something wanting in his conduct.

But he will not learn what Christ has been trying to teach him, that he

needs no new commandment, but a deeper understanding and keeping of the

old. Hence his question, half a wail of a hungry heart, half petulant

impatience with Christ's reiteration of obvious duties. There are

multitudes of this kind in all ages, honestly wishing to lay hold of

eternal life, able to point to virtuous conduct, anxious to know and do

anything lacking, and yet painfully certain that something is wanting

somewhere.

II. Now comes the sharp-pointed test, which pricks the brilliant

bubble. Mark tells us that Jesus accompanied His word with one of those

looks which searched a soul, and bore His love into it. If thou

wouldest be perfect,' takes up the confession of something lacking,'

and shows what that is. It is unnecessary to remark that this

commandment to sell all and give to the poor is intended only for the

individual case. No other would-be disciple was called upon to do so.

It cannot be meant for others; for, if all were sellers, where would

the buyers be? Nor need we do more than point out that the command of

renunciation is only half of Christ's answer, the other being, Come,

follow Me.' But we are not to slide easily over the precept with the

comfortable thought that it was special treatment for a special case.

The principle involved in it is medicine for all, and the only way of

healing for any. This man was tied to earth by the cords of his wealth.

They did not hinder him from keeping the commandments, for he had no

temptations to murder, or adultery, or theft, or neglect of parents.

But they did hinder him from giving his whole self up, and from

regarding eternal life as the most precious of all things. Therefore

for him there was no safety short of entire outward denuding himself of

them; and, if he was in earnest out and out in his questions, here was

a new thing for him to do. Others are hindered by other things, and

they are called to abandon these. The one thing needful for entrance

into life is at bottom self-surrender, and the casting away of all else

for its sovereign sake. I do count them but dung' must be the language

of every one who will win Christ. The hands must be emptied of

treasures, and the heart swept clear of lesser loves, if He is to be

grasped by our hands, and to dwell in our hearts. More of us than we

are willing to believe are kept from entire surrender to Jesus Christ,

by money and worldly possessions; and many professing Christians are

kept shrivelled and weak and joyless because they love their wealth

more than their Lord, and would think it madness to do as this man was

bidden to do. When ballast is thrown out, the balloon shoots up. A

general unlading of the thick clay' which weighs down the Christian

life of England, would let thousands soar to heights which they will

never reach as long as they love money and what it buys as much as they

do. The letter of this commandment may be only applicable in a special

case (though, perhaps, this one young man was not the only human being

that ever needed this treatment), but the spirit is of universal

application. No man enters into life who does not count all things but

loss, and does not die to them all, that he may follow Christ.

III. Then comes the collapse of all the enthusiasm. The questioner's

earnestness chills at the touch of the test. What has become of the

eagerness which brought him running to Jesus, and of the willingness to

do any hard task to which he was set? It was real, but shallow. It

deceived himself. But Christ's words cut down to the inner man, and

laid bare for his own inspection the hard core of selfish worldliness

which lay beneath. How many radiant enthusiasms, which cheat their

subjects quite as much as their beholders, disappear like tinted mist

when the hard facts of self-sacrifice strike against them! How much

sheer worldliness disguises itself from itself and from others in

glistering garments of noble sentiments, which fall at a touch when

real giving up is called for, and show the ugly thing below! How much

religion' goes about the world, and gets made a ruler' of the synagogue

in recognition of its excellence, which needs but this Ithuriel's spear

to start up in its own shape! The completeness and immediateness of the

collapse are noticeable. The young man seems to speak no word, and to

take no time for reflection. He stands for a moment as if stunned, and

then silently turns away. What a moment! his fate hung on it. Once more

we see the awful mystery enacted before our eyes, of a soul gathering

up its power to put away life. Who will say that the decision of a

moment, which is the outcome of all the past, may not fix the whole

future? This man had never before been consciously brought to the fork

in the road; but now the two ways are before him, and, knowingly, he

chooses the worse. Christ did not desire him to do so; but He did

desire that he should choose, and should know that he did. It was the

truest kindness to tear away the veil of surface goodness which hid him

from himself, and to force him to a conscious decision.

One sign of grace he does give, in that he went away sorrowful.' He is

not angry nor careless. He cannot see the fair prospect of the eternal

life, which he had in some real fashion desired, fade away, without a

pang. If he goes back to the world, he goes back feeling more acutely

than ever that it cannot satisfy him. He loves it too well to give it

up, but not enough to feel that it is enough. Surely, in coming days,

that godly sorrow would work a change of the foolish choice, and we may

hope that he found no rest till he cast away all else to make Christ

his own. A soul which has travelled as far on the road to life eternal

as this man had done, can scarcely thereafter walk the broad road of

selfishness and death with entire satisfaction.

IV. The section closes with Christ's comment on the sad incident. He

speaks no word of condemnation, but passes at once from the individual

to the general lesson of the difficulty which rich men (or, as He

explains it in Mark, men who trust in riches') have in entering the

kingdom. The reflection breathes a tone of pity, and is not so much

blame as a merciful recognition of special temptations which affect His

judgment, and should modify ours. A camel with its great body, long

neck, and hump, struggling to get through a needle's eye, is their

emblem. It is a new thing to pity rich men, or to think of their wealth

as disqualifying them for anything. The disciples, with childish na�vt�

wonder. We may wonder that they wondered. They could not understand

what sort of a kingdom it was into which capitalists would find

entrance difficult. All doors fly open for them to-day, as then. They

do not find much difficulty in getting into the church, however hard it

may be to get into the kingdom. But it still remains true that the man

who has wealth has a hindrance to his religious character, which, like

all hindrances, may be made a help by the use he makes of it; and that

the man who trusts in riches, which he who possesses them is wofully

likely to do, has made the hindrance into a barrier which he cannot

pass.

That is a lesson which commercial nations, like England, have need to

lay to heart, not as a worn-out saying of the Bible, which means very

little for us, but as heavy with significance, and pointing to the

special dangers which beset Christian perfection.

So real is the peril of riches, that Christ would have His disciples

regard the victory over it as beyond our human power, and beckons us

away from the effort to overcome the love of the world in our strength,

pointing us to God, in whose mighty grace, breathed into our feeble

wills and treacherous hearts, is the only force which can overcome the

attraction of perishable riches, and make any of us willing or able to

renounce them all that we may win Christ. The young ruler had just

shown that with men this is impossible.' Perhaps he still lingered near

enough to catch the assurance that the surrender, which had been too

much for him to achieve, might yet be joyfully made, since with God all

things are possible.'

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NEAREST TO CHRIST

To sit on My right hand, and on My left, is not Mine to give, but it

shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of My Father.'--MATT.

xx. 23.

You will observe that an unusually long supplement is inserted by our

translators in this verse. That supplement is quite unnecessary, and,

as is sometimes the case, is even worse than unnecessary. It positively

obscures the true meaning of the words before us.

As they stand in our Bibles, the impression that they leave upon one's

mind is that Christ in them abjures the power of giving to His

disciples their places in the kingdom of heaven, and declares that it

belongs not to His function, but relegates it, to His own exclusion, to

the Father; whereas what He says is the very opposite of this. He does

not put aside the granting of places at His right hand or His left as

not being within His province, but He states the principles and

conditions on which He does make such a grant, and so is really

claiming it as in His province. All that would have been a great deal

clearer if our translators had been contented to render the words that

they found before them in the Book, without addition, and to read, To

sit on My right hand, and on My left, is not Mine to give, but to them

for whom it is prepared of My Father.'

Another introductory remark may be made, to the effect that our Lord

does not put aside this prayer of His apostles as if they were seeking

an impossible thing. It is never safe, I know, to argue from the

silence of Scripture. There may be many reasons for that silence beyond

our ken in any given case; but still it does strike one as noteworthy

that, when this fond mother and her ambitious sons came with their

prayer for pre-eminence in His kingdom, our Lord did not answer what

would have been so obvious to answer if it had been true, You are

asking a thing which cannot be granted to anybody, for they are all

upon one level in that kingdom of the heavens.' He says by implication

the very opposite. Not only does His silence confirm their belief that

when He came in His glory, some would be closer to His side than

others; but the plain statement of the text is that, in the depth of

the eternal counsels, and by the preparation of divine grace, there

were thrones nearest to His own which some men should fill. He does not

say, You are asking what cannot be.' He does say, There are men for

whom it is prepared of My Father.'

And then, still further, Jesus does not condemn the prayer as

indicating a wrong state of mind on the part of James and John, though

good and bad were strangely mingled in it. We are told nowadays that it

is a very selfish thing, far below the lofty height to which our

transcendental teachers have attained, to be heartened and encouraged,

strengthened and quickened, by the prospect of the crown and the rest

that remain for the people of God. If so, Christ ought to have turned

round to these men, and have rebuked the passion for reward, which,

according to this new light, is so unworthy and so low. But, instead of

that, He confines Himself to explaining the conditions on which the

fulfilment of the desire is possible, and by implication permits and

approves the desire. You want to sit on My right hand and on My left,

do you? Then be it so. You may do so if you like. Are you ready to

accept the conditions? It is well that you should want it,--not for the

sake of being above your brethren, but for the sake of being nearest to

Me. Hearken! Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of?'

They say unto Him (and I do not know that there are anywhere grander

words than the calm, swift, unhesitating, modest, and yet confident

answer of these two men), We are able.' You shall have your desire if

you fulfil the conditions. It is given to them for whom it is prepared

of My Father.'

I. So, then, if we rightly understand these words, and take them

without the unfortunate comment which our translators have inserted,

they contain, first, the principle that some will be nearer Christ than

others in that heavenly kingdom.

As I have said, the words of our Lord do not merely imply, by the

absence of all hint that these disciples' petition was impossible, the

existence of degrees among the subjects of His heavenly kingdom, but

articulately affirm that such variety is provided for by the

preparation of the Father. Probably the two brothers thought that they

were only asking for preeminence in an earthly kingdom, and had no idea

that their prayer pointed beyond the grave; but that confusion of

thought could not be cured in their then stage of growth, and our Lord

therefore leaves it untouched. But the other error, if it were an

error, was of a different kind, and might, for aught that one sees,

have been set right in a moment. Instead of which the answer adopts it,

and seems to set Christ's own confirmation on it, as being no Jewish

dream, but a truth.

They were asking for earth. He answers--for heaven. He leaves them to

learn in after days--when the one was slain with the sword, first

martyr among the apostles, and the other lived to see them all pass to

their thrones, while he remained the companion in tribulation' of the

second generation of the Church--how far off was the fulfilment which

they fancied so near.

We need not he surprised that so large a truth should be spoken by

Christ so quietly, and as it were incidentally. For that is in keeping

with His whole tone when speaking of the unseen world. One knows not

whether to wonder more at the decisive authority with which He tells us

of that mysterious region, or at the small space which such revelations

occupy in His words. There is an air of simplicity and unconsciousness,

and withal of authority, and withal of divine reticence about them all,

which are in full harmony with the belief that Christ speaking of

heaven speaks of that He knows, and testifies that He hath seen.

That truth to which, as we think, our Lord's words here inevitably

lead, is distinctly taught in many other places of Scripture. We should

have had less difficulty about it, and should have felt more what a

solemn and stimulating thought it is, if we had tried a little more

than most of us do to keep clear before us what really is the essential

of that future life, what is the lustre of its light, the heaven of

heaven, the glory of the glory. Men talk about physical theories of

another life. I suppose they are possible. They seem to me infinitely

unimportant. Warm imaginations, working by sense, write books about a

future state which wonderfully succeed in making it real by making it

earthly. Some of them read more like a book of travels in this world

than forecastings of the next. They may be true or not. It does not

matter one whit. I believe that heaven is a place. I believe that the

corporeity of our future life is essential to the perfection of it. I

believe that Christ wears, and will wear for ever, a glorified human

body. I believe that that involves locality, circumstance, external

occupations; and I say, all that being so, and in its own place very

important, yet if we stop there, we have no vision of the real light

that makes the lustre, no true idea of the glory that makes the

blessedness.

For what is heaven? Likeness to God, love, purity, fellowship with Him;

the condition of the spirit and the relation of the soul to Him. The

noblest truth about the future world flows from the words of our

Master--This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and

Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.' Not this brings'; not this will lead

up to'; not this will draw after it'; but this is'; and whosoever

possesses that eternal life hath already in him the germ of all the

glories that are round the throne, and the blessedness that fills the

hearts of perfected spirits.

If so, if already eternal life in the bud standeth in the knowledge of

God in Christ, what makes its fruitage and completeness? Surely, not

physical changes or the circumstances of heaven, at least not these

primarily, however much such changes and circumstances may subserve our

blessedness there, and the anticipation of them may help our

sense-bound hopes here. But the completeness of heaven is the

completion of our knowledge of God and Christ, with all the perfecting

of spirit which that implies and produces. The faith, and love, and

happy obedience, and consecration which is calm, that partially

occupied and ruled the soul here, are to be thought of as enlarged,

perfected, delivered from the interruption of opposing thoughts, of

sensuous desires, of selfish purposes, of earthly and sinful

occupations. And that perfect knowledge and perfect union and perfect

likeness are perfect bliss. And that bliss is heaven. And if, whilst

heaven is a place, the heaven of heaven be a state, then no more words

are needed to show that, then, heaven can be no dead level, nor can all

stand at the same stage of attainments, though all be perfect; but that

in that solemn company of the blessed, the spirits of just men made

perfect,' there are indefinitely numerous degrees of approximation to

the unattainable Perfection, which stretches above them all, and draws

them all to itself. We have not to think of that future life as

oppressed, if I may so say, with the unbroken monotony of perfect

identity in character and attainments. All indeed are like one another,

because all are like Jesus, but that basis of similarity does not

exclude infinite variety. The same glory belongs to each, but it is

reflected at differing angles and received in divers measures. Perfect

blessedness will belong to each, but the capacity to receive it will

differ. There will be the same crown on each head, the same song on

each lip, the same fulness of joy filling each heart; but star

differeth from star, and the great condition of happy intercourse on

earth will not be wanting in heaven--a deep-seated similarity and a

superficial diversity.

Does not the very idea of an endless progress in that kingdom involve

such variety? We do not think of men passing into the heavens, and

being perfected by a bound so as that there shall be no growth. We

think of them indeed as being perfected up to the height of their then

capacity, from the beginning of that celestial life, so as that there

shall be no sin, nor any conscious incompleteness, but not so as that

there shall be no progress. And, if they each grow through all the

ages, and are ever coming nearer and nearer to Christ, that seems

necessarily to lead to the thought that this endless progress, carried

on in every spirit, will place them at different points of

approximation to the one centre. As in the heavens there are planets

that roll nearer the central sun, and others that circle farther out

from its rays, yet each keeps its course, and makes music as it moves,

as well as planets whose broader disc can receive and reflect more of

the light than smaller sister spheres, and yet each blazes over its

whole surface and is full to its very rim with white light; so round

that throne the spirits of the just made perfect shall move in order

and peace--every one blessed, every one perfect, every one like Christ

at first, and becoming liker through every moment of the eternities.

Each perfected soul looking on his brother shall see there another

phase of the one perfectness that blesses and adorns him too, and all

taken together shall make up, in so far as finite creatures can make

up, the reflection and manifestation of the fulness of Christ. Having

then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us' is the

law for the incompleteness of earth. Having then gifts differing

according to the glory that is given to us' will be the law for the

perfection of the heavens. There are those for whom it is prepared of

His Father, that they shall sit in special nearness to Him.

II. Still further, these words rightly understood assert that truth

which, at first sight, our Authorised Version's rendering seems to make

them contradict, viz. that Christ is the giver to each of these various

degrees of glory and blessedness. It is not Mine to give, save to them

for whom it is prepared.' Then it is Thine to give it to them. To deny

or to doubt that Christ is the giver of the blessedness, whatsoever the

blessedness may be, that fills the hearts and souls of the redeemed, is

to destroy His whole work, to destroy all the relations upon which our

hopes rest, and to introduce confusion and contradiction into the whole

matter.

For Scripture teaches us that He is God's unspeakable gift; that in Him

is given to us everything; that He is the bestower of all which we

need; that out of His fulness,' as one of those two disciples long

afterwards said, all we have received, and grace for grace.' There is

nothing within the compass of God's love to bestow of which Christ is

not the giver. There is nothing divine that is done in the heavens and

the earth, as I believe, of which Christ is not the doer. The

representation of Scripture is uniformly that He is the medium of the

activity of the divine nature; that he is the energy of the divine

will; that He is, to use the metaphor of the Old Testament, the arm of

the Lord'--the forthputting of God's power; that He is, to use the

profound expression of the New Testament, the Word of the Lord, cognate

with, and the utterance of, the eternal nature, the light that streams

from the central brightness, the river that flows from the else sealed

fountain. As the arm is to the body, and as is the word to the soul, so

is Christ to God--the eternal divine utterance and manifestation of the

divine nature. And, therefore, to speak of anything that a man can need

and anything that God can give as not being given by Christ, is to

strike at the very foundation, not only of our hopes, but at the whole

scheme of revealed truth. He is the giver of heaven and everything else

which the soul requires.

And then, again, let me remind you that on this matter we are not left

to such general considerations as those that I have been suggesting,

but that the plain statements of Scripture do confirm the assertion

that Christ is the determiner and the bestower of all the differing

grades of glory and blessedness yonder. For do we not read of Him that

He is the Judge of the whole earth? Do we not read of Him that His word

is acquittal and His frown condemnation--that to be accepted of Him' is

the highest aim and end of the Christian life? Do we not read that it

is He who says, Come, ye blessed of My Father, enter into the kingdom

prepared for you'? Do we not read that the apostle, dying, solaced

himself with the thought that there was laid up for him a crown of

glory, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, would give him at that

day'? And do we not read in the very last book of Scripture, written by

one of those two brothers, and containing almost verbal reference to

the words of my text, the promise seven times spoken from the immortal

lips of the glorified Son of Man, walking in the midst of the

candlesticks, To him that overcometh will I give'? The fruit of the

tree of life is plucked by His hands for the wearied conquerors. The

crown of life is set by Him on the faithful witnesses' brows. The

hidden manna and the new name are bestowed by Him on those who hold

fast His name. It is He who gives the victors kingly power over the

nations. He clothes in white garments those who have not defiled their

robes. His hand writes upon the triumphant foreheads the name of God.

And highest of all, beyond which there is no bliss conceivable, To him

that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne.'

Christ is the bestower of the royalties of the heavens as of the

redemptions of earth, and it is His to give that which we crave at His

hands, when we ask pardon here and glory hereafter. To him that is

athirst will He give of the water of life freely,' and to him that

overcometh will He give the crown of glory.

III. These words lead us, in the third place, to the further thought,

that these glorious places are not given to mere wishing, nor by mere

arbitrary will.

You would sit on My right hand and on My left? You think of that

pre-eminence as conferred because you chose to ask it--as given by a

piece of favouritism. Not so. I cannot make a man foremost in my

kingdom in that fashion. There are conditions which must precede such

an elevation.'

And there are people who think thus still, as if the mere desire,

without anything more, were enough--or as if the felicities of the

heavenly world were dependent solely on Christ's arbitrary will, and

could be bestowed by an exercise of mere power, as an Eastern prince

may make this man his vizier and that other one his water-carrier. The

same principles which we have already applied to the elucidation of the

idea of varieties and stages of nearness to Christ in His heavenly

kingdom have a bearing on this matter. If we rightly understand that

the essential blessedness of heaven is likeness to Christ, we shall

feel that mere wishing carries no man thither, and that mere sovereign

will and power do not avail to set us there. There are conditions

indispensable, from the very nature of the case, and unless they are

realised it is as impossible for us to receive, as for Him to give, a

place at His side. If, indeed, the future blessedness consisted in mere

external circumstances and happier conditions of life, it might be so

bestowed. But if place and surroundings, and a more exquisite and

ethereal frame, are but subordinate sources of it, and its real

fountain is union with Jesus and assimilation to Him, then something

else than idle desires must wing the soul that soars thither, and His

transforming grace, not His arbitrary will, must set us at His own

right hand in the heavenly places.'

Of all the profitless occupations with which men waste their lives,

none are more utterly useless than wishing without acting. Our wishes

are meant to impel us to the appropriate forms of energy by which they

can be realised. When a pauper becomes a millionaire by sitting and

vehemently wishing that he were rich, when ignorance becomes learning

by standing in a library and wishing that the contents of all these

books were in its head, there will be some hope that the gates of

heaven will fly open to your desire. But till then, many, I say unto

you, shall seek to enter in and not be able.' Many shall seek; you must

strive. For wishing is one thing, and willing is another, and doing is

yet another. And in regard to entrance into Christ's kingdom, our

doing' is trusting in Him who has done all for us. This is the work of

God, that ye should believe on Him whom He hath sent.' Does our wish

lead us to the acceptance of the condition? Then it will be fulfilled.

If not, it will remain fruitless, will die into apathy, or will live as

a pang and a curse.

You wish, or fancy you wish, to pass into heaven when you die, I

suppose. Some of its characteristics attract you. You believe in

punishment for sin, and you would willingly escape that. You believe in

a place of rest after toil, of happiness after sorrow, where nipping

frosts of disappointment, and wild blasts of calamity, and slow,

gnawing decay no more harm and kill your joys--and you would like that.

But do you wish to be pure and stainless, to have your hearts fixed on

God alone, to have your whole being filled with Him, and emptied of

self and sense and sin? The peace of heaven attracts you--but its

praise repels, does it not? Its happiness draws your wishes--does its

holiness seem inviting? It would be joyful to be far away from

punishment--would it be as joyful to be near Christ? Ah! no; the wishes

lead to no resolve, and therefore to no result, for this among other

reasons, because they are only kindled by a part of the whole, and are

exchanged for positive aversion when the real heaven of heaven is

presented to your thoughts. Many a man who, by the set of his whole

life, is drifting daily nearer and nearer to that region of outer

darkness, is conscious of an idle wish for peace and joy beyond the

grave. In common matters a man may be devoured by vain desires all his

lifetime, because he will not pass beyond wishing to acting

accordingly. The desire of the slothful killeth him; because his hands

refused to labour, he coveteth greedily all the day long.' And with

like but infinitely more tragical issues do these vain wishes for a

place in that calm world, where nothing but holiness enters, gnaw at

many a soul. Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end

be like his,' was the aspiration of that Gentile prophet, whose love of

the world obscured even the prophetic illumination which he

possessed--and his epitaph is a stern comment on the uselessness of

such empty wishes, Balaam, the son of Beor, they slew with the sword.'

It needs more than a wish to set us at Christ's right hand in His

kingdom.

Nor can such a place be given by mere arbitrary will. Christ could not,

if He would, set a man at His right hand whose heart was not the home

of simple trust and thankful love, whose nature and desires were

unprepared for that blessed world. It would be like taking one of those

creatures--if there be such--that live on the planet whose orbit is

farthest from the sun, accustomed to cold, organised for darkness, and

carrying it to that great central blaze, with all its fierce flames and

tongues of fiery gas that shoot up a thousand miles in a moment. It

would crumble and disappear before its blackness could be seen against

the blaze.

His loving will embraces us all, and is the foundation of all our

hopes. But it had to reach its purpose by a bitter road which He did

not shrink from travelling. He desires to save us, and to realise the

desire He had to die. It became Him for whom are all things, in

bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation

perfect through suffering.' What He had to do, we have to accept.

Unless we accept the mercy of God in Christ, no wish on our parts, nor

any exercise of power on His, will carry us to the heaven which He has

died to open, and of which He is at once the giver and the gift.

IV. These glorious places are given as the result of a divine

preparation.

To them for whom it is prepared of My Father.' We have seen that Christ

is not to be regarded as abjuring the office, with which His disciples'

confidence led them to invest Him--that of allotting to His servants

their place in His kingdom. He neither refers it to the Father without

Himself, nor claims it for Himself without the Father. The living unity

of will and work which subsists between the Father and the Son forbids

such a separation and distribution of office. And that unity is set

forth on both its sides in His own deep words, The Son can do nothing

of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for whatsoever things He

doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.'

So, then, while the gift of thrones at His side is His act and the

Father's, in like manner the preparation of the royal seats for their

occupants, and of the kings for their thrones, is the Father's act and

His.

Our text does not tell us directly what that preparation is, any more

than it tells us directly what the principles are on which entrance

into and pre-eminence in the kingdom are granted. But we know enough in

regard to both, for our practical guidance, for the vigour of our hope,

and the grasp of our faith.

There is a twofold divine preparation of the heavens for men. One is

from of old. The kingdom is prepared for you before the foundation of

the world.' That preparation is in the eternal counsel of the divine

love, which calleth the things that are not as though they were, and

before which all that is evolved in the generations of men and the

epochs of time, lies on one plane, equally near to dim from whose

throne diverge far beneath the triple streams of past, present, and

future.

And beside that preparation, the counsel of pardoning mercy and

redeeming grace, there is the other preparation--the realisation of

that eternal purpose in time through the work of Jesus Christ our Lord.

His consolation to His disciples in the parting hour was, I go to

prepare a place for you.' How much was included in these words we shall

never know till we, like Him, see of the travail of His soul, and like

Him are satisfied. But we can dimly see that on the one hand His death,

and on the other hand His entrance into that holiest of all, make ready

for us the many mansions of the Father's house. He was crucified for

our offences, He was raised again for our justification, He is passed

through the heavens to stand our Forerunner in the presence of God--and

by all these mighty acts He prepares the heavenly places for us. As the

sun behind a cloud, which hides it from us, is still pouring out its

rays on far-off lands, so He, veiled in dark, sunset clouds of Calvary,

sent the energy of His passion and cross into the unseen world and made

it possible that we should enter there. When Thou didst overcome the

sharpness of death, Thou didst open the gates of the kingdom of heaven

to all believers.' As one who precedes a mighty host provides and

prepares rest for their weariness, and food for their hunger, in some

city on their line of march, and having made all things ready, is at

the gates to welcome their travel-stained ranks when they arrive, and

guide them to their repose; so He has gone before, our Forerunner, to

order all things for us there. It may be that unless Christ were in

heaven, our brother as well as our Lord, it were no place for mortals.

It may be that we need to have His glorified bodily presence in order

that it should be possible for human spirits to bear the light, and be

at home with God. Be that as it may, this we know, that the Father

prepares a place for us by the eternal counsel of His love, and by the

all-sufficient work of Christ, by whom we have access to the Father.

And as His work is the Father's preparation of the place for us by the

Son, the issue of His work is the Father's preparation of us for the

place, through the Son, by the Spirit. He that hath wrought us for the

self-same thing is God.'

If so, then what follows? This, among other things, that wishes are

vain, for heaven is no gift of arbitrary favouritism, but that faith in

Christ, and faith alone, leads us to His right hand--and the measure of

our faith and growing Christlikeness here, will be the measure of our

glory hereafter, and of our nearness to Him. It is possible to be

saved, yet so as by fire.' It is possible to have an entrance

ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord

and Saviour Jesus Christ.' If we would be near Him then, we must be

near Him now. If we would share His throne, we must bear His cross. If

we would be found in the likeness of His resurrection, we must be

conformable unto His death.' Then such desires as these true-hearted,

and yet mistaken, disciples expressed will not be the voice of selfish

ambition, but of dependent love. They will not be vain wishes, but be

fulfilled by Him, who, stooping from amid the royalties of heaven, with

love upon His face and pity in His heart, will give more than we ask.

Seekest thou a place at My right hand? Nay, I give thee a more wondrous

dignity. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My

throne.'

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THE SERVANT-LORD AND HIS SERVANTS

Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to

minister.'--MATT. xx. 28.

It seems at first sight strangely unsympathetic and irrelevant that the

ambitious request of James and John and their foolish mother, that they

should sit at Christ's right hand and His left in His kingdom, should

have been occasioned by, and have followed immediately upon, our Lord's

solemn and pathetic announcement of His sufferings. But the connection

is not difficult to trace. The disciples believed that, in some

inexplicable way, the sufferings which our Lord was shadowing forth

were to be the immediate precursors of His assuming His regal dignity.

And so they took time by the forelock, as they thought, and made haste

to ensure their places in the kingdom, which they believed was now

ready to burst upon them. Other occasions in the Gospels in which we

find similar quarrelling among the disciples as to pre-eminence are

similarly associated with references made by our Lord to His

approaching crucifixion. On a former occasion He cured these misplaced

ambitions by setting a child in the midst of them. On this He cures

them by a still more pathetic and wonderful example, His own; and He

says, I, in My lowliness and service, am to be your Pattern. In Me see

the basis of all true greatness, and the right use of all influence and

authority. The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to

minister.'

I. So, then, let us look first at the perfect life of service of the

Servant-Lord.

Now, in order to appreciate the significance of that life of service,

we must take into account the introductory words, The Son of Man came.'

They declare His pre-existence, His voluntary entrance into the

conditions of humanity, and His denuding Himself of the glory which He

had with the Father before the world was.' We shall never understand

the Servant-Christ until we understand that He is the Eternal Son of

the Father. His service began long before any of His acts of

sympathetic and self-forgetting lowliness rendered help to the

miserable here upon earth. His service began when He laid aside, not

the garments of earth, but the vesture of the heavens, and girded

Himself, not with the cincture woven in man's looms, but with the flesh

of our humanity, and being found in fashion as a man,' bowed Himself to

enter into the conditions of earth. This was the first, the chiefest of

all His acts of service, and the sanctity and awfulness of it run

through the list of all His deeds and make them unspeakably great. It

was much that His hands should heal, that His lips should comfort, that

His heart should bleed with sympathy for sorrow. But, oh! it was more

that He had hands to touch, lips to speak to human hearts, and the

heart of a man and a brother to feel with as well as for us. The Son of

Man came'--there is the transcendent example of the true use of

greatness; there is the conspicuous instance of the true basis of

authority and rule. For it was because He was found in fashion as a

Man' that He has won a name that is above every name,' and that there

have accrued to Him the many crowns' which He wears at the Father's

side.

But then, passing beyond this, we may dwell, though all imperfectly,

upon the features, familiar as they are, of that wonderful life of

self-oblivious and self-sacrificing ministration to others. Think of

the purity of the source from all which these wonders and blessednesses

of service for man flowed. The life of Jesus Christ is self-forgetting

love made visible. Scientists tell us that, by the arrangement of

particles of sand upon plates of glass, there can be made, as it were,

perceptible to the eye, the sweetness of musical sounds; and each note

when struck will fling the particles into varying forms of beauty. The

life of Jesus Christ presents in shapes of loveliness and symmetry the

else invisible music of a divine love. He lets us see the rhythm of the

Father's heart. The source from which His ministrations have flowed is

the pure source of a perfect love. Ancient legends consolidated the

sunbeams into the bright figure of the far-darting god of light. And so

the sunbeams of the divine love have, as it were, drawn themselves

together and shaped themselves into the human form of the Son of Man

who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.'

No taint of bye-ends was in that service; no sidelong glances at

possible advantages of influence or reputation or the like, which so

often deform men's philanthropies and services to one another. No more

than the sunbeam shines for the sake of collateral issues which may

benefit itself, did Jesus Christ seek His own advantage in ministering

to men. There was no speck of black in that lustrous white robe, but

all was perfectly unselfish love. Like the clear sea, weedless and

stainless, that laves the marble steps of the palaces of Venice, the

deep ocean of Christ's service to man was pure to the depths

throughout.

That perfect ministry of the Servant-Lord was rendered with strange

spontaneity and cheerfulness. One of the evangelists says, in a very

striking and beautiful phrase, that He healed them that had need of

healing,' as if the presence of the necessity evoked the supply, by the

instinctive action of a perfect love. There was never in Him one trace

of reluctance to have leisure broken in upon, repose disturbed, or even

communion with God abbreviated. All men could come always; they never

came inopportunely. We often cheerfully take up a burden of service,

but find it very hard to continue bearing it. But He was willing to

come down from the mountain of Transfiguration because there was a

demoniac boy in the plain; and therefore He put aside the

temptation--Let us build here three tabernacles.' He was willing to

abandon His desert seclusion because the multitude sought Him.

Interrupted in His communion with the Father by His disciples, He had

no impatient word to say, but Let us go into other cities also, for

therefore am I sent.' When He stepped from the fishing-boat on the

other side of the lake to which He had fled for a moment of repose, He

was glad when He saw the multitude who had pertinaciously outrun Him,

and were waiting for Him on the beach. On His Cross He had leisure to

turn from His own physical sufferings and the weight of a world's sin,

which lay upon Him, to look at that penitent by His side, and He ended

His life in the ministry of mercy to a brigand. And thus cheerfully,

and always without a thought of self, He came to minister.'

Think, too, of the sweep of His ministrations. They took in all men;

they were equally open to enemies and to friends, to mockers and to

sympathisers. Think of the variety of the gifts which He brought in His

ministry--caring for body and for soul; alleviating sorrow, binding up

wounds, purifying hearts; dealing with sin, the fountain, and with

miseries, its waters, with equal helpfulness and equal love.

And think of how that ministering was always ministration by the LORD.'

For there is nothing to me more remarkable in the Gospel narrative than

the way in which, side by side, there lie in Christ's life the two

elements, so difficult to harmonise in fact, and so impossible to have

been harmonised in a legend, the consciousness of authority and the

humility of a servant. The paradox with which John introduces his sweet

pathetic story of our Lord's washing the disciples' feet is true of,

and is illustrated by, every instance of more than ordinary lowliness

and self-oblivion which the Gospel contains. Jesus, knowing that He had

come from God, and went to God, and that the Father had given all

things into His hand'--did what? Laid aside His garments and took a

towel and girded Himself.' The two things ever go together. And thus,

in His lowliest abasement, as in a star entangled in a cloud, there

shine out, all the more broad and conspicuous for the environment which

wraps them, the beams of His uncreated lustre.

That ministration was a service that never shrank from stern rebuke.

His service was no mere soft and pliant, sympathetic helpfulness, but

it could smite and stab, and be severe, and knit its brow, and speak

stern words, as all true service must. For it is not service but

cruelty to sympathise with the sinner, and say nothing in condemnation

of his sin. And yet no sternness is blessed which is not plainly

prompted by desire to help.

Now, I know far better than you do how wretchedly inadequate all these

poor words of mine have been to the great theme that I have been trying

to speak of, but they may at least--like a little water poured into a

pump--have set your minds working upon the theme, and, I hope, to

better purpose. The Son of Man came . . . to minister.'

II. Now, secondly, note the service that should be modelled on His.

Oh! brethren, if we, however imperfectly, have taken into mind and

heart that picture of Him who was and is amongst us as One that

serveth,' how sharp a test, and how stringent, and, as it seems to us

sometimes, impossible, a commandment are involved in the even as' of my

text. When we think of our grudging services; when we think of how much

more apt we are to insist upon what men owe to us than of what we owe

to them; how ready we are to demand, how slow we are to give; how we

flame up in what we think is warranted indignation if we do not get the

observance, or the sympathy, or the attention that we require, and yet

how little we give of these, we may well say, Thou hast set a pattern

that can only drive us to despair.' If we would read our Gospels more

than we do with the feeling, as we trace that Master through each of

His phases of sympathy and self-oblivion and self-sacrifice and

service, that is what I should be,' what a different book the New

Testament would be to us, and what different people you and I would be!

There is no ground on which we can rest greatness or superiority in

Christ's kingdom except this ground of service. And there is no use

that we can make either of money or of talents, of acquirements or

opportunities, except the use of helping our fellows with them, which

will stand the test of this model and example. It is more blessed to

give than to receive.' The servant who serves for love is highest in

the hierarchy of Heaven. God, who is supreme, has stooped lower than

any that are beneath Him, and His true rule follows, not because He is

infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, or any of those other

pompous Latin words which describe what men call His attributes, but

because He loves best, and does most for the most. And that is what you

and I ought to be. We may well take the lesson to ourselves. I have no

space, and, I hope, no need to enlarge upon it; but be sure of this,

that if we are ever to be near the right and the left of the Master in

His kingdom, there is one way, and only one way, to come thither, and

that is to make self abdicate its authority as the centre of our lives,

and to enthrone there Christ, and for His sake all our brethren. Be

ambitious to be first, but remember, Noblesse oblige. He that is first

must become last. He that is Servant of all is Master of all. That is

the only mastery that is worth anything, the devotion of hearts that

circle round the source from which they draw light and warmth. What is

it that makes a mother the queen of her children? Simply that all her

life she has been their servant, and never thought about herself, but

always about them.

Now much might be said as to the application of these threadbare

principles in the Church and in society, but I do not enlarge on that;

only let me say in a word--that here is the one law on which

preeminence in the Church is to be allocated.

What becomes of sacerdotal hierarchies, what becomes of the lords over

God's heritage,' if the one ground of pre-eminence is service? I know,

of course, that there may be different forms embodying one principle,

but it seems to me that that form of Church polity is nearest the mind

of Christ in which the only dignity is dignity of service, and the only

use of place is the privilege of stooping and helping.

This fruitful principle will one day shape civil as well as

ecclesiastical societies. For the present, our Lord draws a contrast

between the worldly and the Christian notions of rank and dignity. It

shall not be so among you,' says He. And the nobler conception of

eminence and service set forth in His disciples, if they are true to

their Lord and their duty, will leaven, and we may hope finally

transform society, sweeping away all vulgar notions of greatness as

depending on birth, or wealth, or ruder forms of powers, and

marshalling men according to Christ's order of precedence, in which

helpfulness is preeminence and service is supremacy, while conversely

pre-eminence is used to help and superiority stoops to serve.

One remark will close my sermon. You have to take the last words of

this verse if you are ever going to put in practice its first words.

Even as the Son of Man came, not to be ministered unto, but to

minister,'--if Jesus Christ had stopped there He would only have been

one more of the long roll of ineffectual preachers and prophets who

show men the better way, and leave them struggling in the mire. But He

did not stop there: Even as the Son of Man came . . . to give His life

a ransom for many.'

Ah! the Cross, with its burden of the sacrifice for the world's sin, is

the only power which will supply us with a sufficient motive for the

loftiness of Christlike service. I know that there is plenty of

entirely irreligious and Christless beneficence in the world. And God

forbid that I should say a word to seem to depreciate that. But sure I

am that for the noblest, purest, most widely diffused and blessedly

operative kinds of service of man, there is no motive and spring

anywhere except He loved me, and gave Himself for me.' And, bought by

that service and that blood, it will be possible, and it is obligatory

upon all of us, to do unto others,' as He Himself said, as I have done

to you.' The servant is not greater than his Lord.'

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WHAT THE HISTORIC CHRIST TAUGHT ABOUT HIS DEATH

The Son of Man came. . . to give His life a ransom for many.'--MATT.

xx. 28.

We hear a great deal at present about going back to the Christ of the

Gospels.' In so far as that phrase and the movement of thought which it

describes are a protest against the substitution of doctrines for the

Person whom the doctrines represent, I, for one, rejoice in it. But I

believe that the antithesis suggested by the phrase, and by some of its

advocates avowed, between the Christ of the Gospels and the Christ of

the Epistles, is false. The Christ of the Gospels is the Christ of the

Epistles, as I humbly venture to believe. And I cannot but see that

there is a possibility of a movement which, carried out legitimately,

should command the fullest sympathy of every Christian heart,

degenerating into the rejection of all the supernatural elements in the

nature and work of our Lord, and leaving us with a meagre human Christ,

shrunken and impotent. The Christ of the Gospels, by all means; but let

it be the whole Christ of all the Gospels, the Christ over whose cradle

angels sang, by whose empty grave angels watched, whose ascending form

angels beheld and proclaimed that He should come again to be our Judge.

Go back to that Christ, and all will be well.

Now it seems to me that one direction in which there is a possibility

of such movement as I have referred to being one-sided and harmful is

in reference to the conception which we form of the death of Jesus

Christ. And therefore I ask you to listen for a few moments to me at

this time whilst I try to bring out what is plain in the words before

us; and is, as I humbly believe, interwoven in the whole texture of all

the Gospels--viz., the conception which Jesus Christ Himself formed of

the meaning of His death.

I. The first thing that I notice is that the Christ of the Gospels

thought and taught that His death was to be His own act.

I do not think that it is an undue or pedantic pressing of the

significance of the words before us, if I ask you to notice two of the

significant expressions in this text. The Son of Man came,' and came to

give His life.' The one word refers to the act of entrance into, the

other to the act of departure from, this earthly life. They correspond

in so far as that both bring into prominence Christ's own consent,

volition, and action in the very two things about which men are least

consulted, their being born and their dying.

The Son of Man came.' Now if that expression occurred but once it might

be minimised as being only a synonym for birth, having no special

force. But if you will notice that it is our Lord's habitual word about

Himself, only varied occasionally by another one equally significant

when he says that He was sent'; and if you will further notice that all

through the Gospels He never but once speaks of Himself as being born,'

I think you will admit that I am not making too much of a word when I

say that when Christ, out of the depths of His consciousness, said the

Son of Man came,' He was teaching us that He lived before He was born,

and that behind the natural fact of birth there lay the supernatural

fact of His choosing to be incarnated for man's redemption. The one

instance in which He does speak of Himself as being born' is most

instructive in this connection. For it was before the Roman governor;

and He accompanied the clause in which He said, To this end was I

born'--which was adapted to Pilate's level of intelligence--with

another one which seemed to be inserted to satisfy His own sense of

fitness, rather than for any light that it would give to its first

hearer, And for this cause came I into the world.' The two things were

not synonymous; but before the birth there was the coming, and Jesus

was born because the Eternal Word willed to come. So says the Christ of

the Gospels; and the Christ of the Epistles is represented as taking

upon Him the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man.'

Do you accept that as true of the historic Christ'?

With precise correspondence, if we turn to the other end of His life,

we find the equally significant expression in my text which asserts for

it, too, that the other necessity to which men necessarily and without

their own volition bow was to Christ a matter of choice. The Son of Man

came to give.' No man taketh it from Me,' as He said on another

occasion. I lay it down of Myself.' The Good Shepherd giveth His life

for the sheep.' My flesh . . . I give for the world's life.' Now,

brethren, we are not to regard these words as mere vague expressions

for a willing surrender to the necessity of death, but as expressing

what I believe is taught us all through Scripture, and is fundamental

to any real grasp of the real Christ, that He died because He chose,

and chose because He loved. What meant that loud voice' with which He

said It is finished,' but that there was no physical exhaustion, such

as was usually the immediate occasion of death by crucifixion? What

meant that surprising rapidity with which the last moment came in His

case, to the astonishment of the stolid bystanders? They meant the same

thing as I believe that the Evangelists meant when they, with one

consent, employed expressions to describe Christ's death, which may

indeed be only euphemisms, but are apparently declarations of its

voluntary character. He gave up the ghost.' He yielded His Spirit.' He

breathed forth His life, and so He died.

As one of the old fathers said, Who is this that thus falls asleep when

He wills? To die is weakness, but thus to die is power.' The weakness

of God is stronger than man.' The desperate king of Israel bade his

slave kill him, and when the menial shrunk from such sacrilege he fell

upon his own sword. Christ bade His servant Death, Do this,' and he did

it; and dying, our Lord and Master declared Himself the Lord and Master

of Death. This is a part of the history of the historic Christ. Do you

believe it?

II. Then, secondly, the Christ of the Gospels thought and taught that

His death was one chief aim of His coming.

I have omitted words from my text which intervene between its first and

its last ones; not because I regard them as unimportant, but because

they would lead us into too wide a field to cover in one sermon. But I

would pray you to observe how the re-insertion of them throws immense

light upon the significance of the words which I have chosen. The Son

of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.' That covers

the whole ground of His gracious and gentle dealings here on earth, His

tenderness, self-abnegation, sympathy, healing, and helpfulness. Then,

side by side with that, and as the crowning manifestation of His work

of service, without which His life--gracious, radiant, sweet as it

is--would still want something of its power, He sets His death.

Surely that is an altogether unexampled phenomenon; altogether a unique

and unparalleled thing, that a man should regard that which for all

workers, thinkers, speakers, poets, philanthropists, is the sad term of

their activity, as being a part of His work; and not only a part, but

so conspicuous a part that it was a purpose which He had in view from

the very beginning, and before the beginning, of His earthly life. So

Calvary was to Jesus Christ no interruption, tragic and premature, of

His life's activities. His death was no mere alternative set before

Him, which He chose rather than be unfaithful or dumb. He did not die

because He was hounded by hostile priests, but He came on purpose that

He might so end His career.

I need not remind you of, and space would not permit me to dwell upon,

other instances in the Gospels in which our Lord speaks the same

language. At the very beginning of His public ministry He told the

inquiring rabbi, who came to Him with the notion that He would be

somewhat flattered by His recognition by one of the authoritative and

wise pundits of the nation, that the Son of Man must be lifted up.' The

necessity was before Him, but it was no unwelcome necessity, for it

sprung from His own love. It was the very aim of His coming, to live a

Servant and to die a Ransom.

Dear brethren, let me press upon you this plain truth, that no

conception of Christ's death which looks upon it merely as the close,

by pathetic sufferings, of a life to the activities of which it adds

nothing but pathos, approaches the signification of it which inheres in

the thought that this was the aim and purpose with which Jesus Christ

was incarnate, that He should live indeed the pure and sweet life which

He lived, but equally that He should die the painful and bitter death

which He died. He was not merely a martyr, though the first of them,

but something far more, as we shall see presently. If to you the death

of Jesus Christ is the same in kind, however superior in degree, as

those of patriots and reformers and witnesses for the truth and martyrs

for righteousness, then I humbly venture to represent that, instead of

going back to, you have gone away from, the Christ of the Gospels, who

said, The Son of Man came . . . to give His life'; and that such a

Christ is not a historic but an imaginary one.

III. So, thirdly, notice that the Christ of the Gospels thought and

taught that His death was a ransom.

A ransom is a price paid in exchange for captives that they may be

liberated; or for culprits that they may be set free. And that was

Christ's thought of what He had to die for. There lay the must.'

I do not dwell upon the conception of our condition involved in that

word. We are all bound and held by the chain of our sins. We all stand

guilty before God, and, as I believe, there is a necessity in that

loving divine nature whereby it is impossible that without a ransom

there can be, in the interests of mankind and in the interests of

righteousness, forgiveness of sins. I do not mean that in the words

before us there is a developed theory of atonement, but I do mean that

no man, dealing with them fairly, can strike out of them the notion of

vicarious suffering in exchange for, or instead of, the many.' This is

no occasion for theological discussion, nor am I careful now to set

forth a fully developed doctrine; but I am declaring, as God helps me,

what is to me, and I pray may be to you, the central thought about that

Cross of Calvary, that on it there is made the sacrifice for the

world's sins.

And, dear brethren, I beseech you to consider, how can we save the

character of Jesus Christ, accepting these Gospels, which on the

hypothesis about which I am now speaking are valid sources of

knowledge, without recognising that He deliberately led His disciples

to believe that He died for--that is, instead of--them that put their

trust in Him? For remember that not only such words as these of my text

are to be taken into account. Remember that it was the Christ of the

Gospels who established that last rite of the Lord's Supper, in which

the broken bread, and the separation between the bread and the wine,

both indicated a violent death, and who said about both the one and the

other of the double symbols, For you.' I do not understand how any body

of professing believers, rejecting Christ's death as the sacrifice for

sin, can find a place in their beliefs or in their practice for that

institution of the Lord's Supper, or can rightly interpret the sacred

words then spoken. This is why the Cross was Christ's aim. This is why

He said, with His dying breath, It is finished.' This truth is the

explanation of His words, The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the

sheep.'

And this truth of a ransom-price lies at the basis of all vigorous

Christianity. A Christianity without a dying Christ is a dying

Christianity. And history shows us that the expansiveness and elevating

power of the Gospel depend on the prominence given to the sacrifice on

the Cross. An old fable says that the only thing that melts adamant is

the blood of a lamb. The Gospel reveals the precious blood of Jesus

Christ, His death for us as a ransom, as the one power which subdues

hostility and binds hearts to Him. The Christ of the Gospels is the

Christ who taught that He died for us.

IV. Lastly, the Christ of the Gospels thought and taught that His death

had world-wide power.

He says here, A ransom for many.' Now that word is not used in this

instance in contradistinction to all,' nor in contradistinction to

few.' It is distinctly employed as emphasising the contrast between the

single death and the wide extent of its benefits; and in terms which,

rigidly taken, simply express indefiniteness, it expresses

universality. That that is so seems to me to be plain enough, if we

notice other places of Scripture to which, at this stage of my sermon,

I can but allude. For instance, in Romans v. the two expressions, the

many' and the all,' alternate in reference to the extent of the power

of Christ's sacrifice for men. And the Apostle in another place, where

probably there may be an allusion to the words of the text, so varies

them as that he declares that Jesus Christ in His death was the ransom

instead of all.' But I do not need to dwell upon these. Many' is a

vague word, and in it we see dim crowds stretching away beyond our

vision, for whom that death was to be the means of salvation. I take it

that the words of our text have an allusion to those in the great

prophecy in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, in which we read, By His

knowledge shall My righteous Servant' (mark the allusion in our text,

Who came to minister' ) justify many, for He shall bear their

iniquities.'

So, brethren, I believe that I am not guilty of unduly widening out our

Lord's thought when I say that the indefinite many' is practically

all.' And, brother, if all,' then you; if all, then me; if all, then

each. Think of a man, nineteen centuries ago, away in a little

insignificant corner of the world, standing up and saying, My death is

the price paid in exchange for the world!' That is meekness and

lowliness of heart, is it? That is humility, so beautiful in a teacher,

is it? How any man can accept the veracity of these narratives, believe

that Jesus Christ said anything the least like this, not believe that

He was the Divine Son of the Father, the Sacrifice for the world's sin,

and yet profess--and honestly profess, I doubt not, in many cases--to

retain reverence and admiration, all but adoration, for Him, I confess

that I, for my poor part, cannot understand.

But I ask you, what you are going to do with these thoughts and

teachings of the Christ of the Gospels. Are you going to take them for

true? Are, you going to trust your salvation to Him? Are you going to

accept the ransom and say, O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; Thou hast

loosed my bonds'? Brethren, the Christ of the Gospels, by all means;

but the Christ that said, The Son of Man came to . . . give His life a

ransom for many.' My Christ, and your Christ, and the world's Christ is

the Christ that died; yea, rather, that is risen again; who is even at

the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.'

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THE COMING OF THE KING TO HIS PALACE

And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage,

unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, 2. Saying unto

them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall

find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto

Me. 3. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath

need of them; and straightway he will send them. 4. All this was done,

that it might he fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, 5.

Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek,

and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. 6. And the

disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, 7. And brought the

ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set Him

thereon. 8. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the

way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the

way. 9. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried,

saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the

name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. 10. And when He was come into

Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? 11. And the

multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee. 12.

And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold

and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the

moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, 13. And said unto

them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but

ye have made it a den of thieves. 14. And the blind and the lame came

to Him in the temple; and He healed them. 15. And when the chief

priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the

children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David,

they were sore displeased, 16. And said unto Him, Hearest Thou what

these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of

the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise?' --MATT.

xxi. 1-16.

Jesus spent His last Sabbath in the quiet home at Bethany with Lazarus

and his sisters. Some sense of His approaching death tinged the modest

festivities of that evening with sadness, and spoke in Mary's anointing

of His body for the burying.' The pause was brief, and, with the dawn

of Sunday, He set Himself again to tread the road to the cross. Who can

doubt that He felt the relief of that momentary relaxation of the

strain on His spirit, and the corresponding pressure of its renewed

tightening? This passage shows Him putting out from the quiet haven and

facing the storm again. It is in two main sections, dealing

respectively with the royal procession, and the acts of the King in the

temple.

I. The procession of the King. The first noteworthy point is that our

Lord initiates the whole incident, and deliberately sets Himself to

evoke the popular enthusiasm, by a distinct voluntary fulfilment of a

Messianic prophecy. The allusion to the prophecy, in His sending for

the colt and mounting it, may have escaped the disciples and the crowds

of pilgrims; but they rightly caught His intention to make a solemn

triumphal entry into the city, and responded with a burst of

enthusiasm, which He expected and wished. The poor garments flung

hastily on the animals, the travel-stained cloaks cast on the rocky

path, the branches of olive and palm waved in the hands, and the tumult

of acclaim, which shrilly echoed the words of the psalm, and proclaimed

Him to be the Son of David, are all tokens that the crowds hailed Him

as their King, and were all permitted and welcomed by Him. All this is

in absolute opposition to His usual action, which had been one long

effort to damp down inflammable and unspiritual Messianic hopes, and to

avoid the very enthusiasm which now surges round Him unchecked.

Certainly that calm figure, sitting on the slow-pacing ass, with the

noisy multitude pressing round Him, is strangely unlike Him, who hid

Himself among the hills when they sought to make Him a King. His action

is the more remarkable, if it be remembered that the roads were alive

with pilgrims, most of whom passing through Bethany would be Galileans;

that they had seen Lazarus walking about the village, and knew who had

raised him; that the Passover festival was the time in all the year

when popular tumults were to be expected; and that the crowds going to

Jerusalem were met by a crowd coming from it, bent on seeing the doer

and the subject of the great miracle. Into this heap of combustibles

our Lord puts a light. He must have meant that it should blaze as it

did.

What is the reason for this contrast? The need for the former reticence

no longer existed. There was no fear now of His teaching and ministry

being interrupted by popular outburst. He knew that it was finished,

and that His hour had come. Therefore, the same motive of filial

obedience which had led Him to avoid what would prevent His discharging

His Father's commission, now impelled Him to draw the attention of the

nation and its rulers to the full extent of His claims, and to put the

plain issue of their acceptance or rejection in the most unmistakable

manner. A certain divine decorum, if we may so call it, required that

once He should enter the city as its King. Some among the shouting

crowds might have their enthusiasm purified and spiritualised, if once

it were directed to Him. It was for us, no less than for them, that

this one interruption of His ordinary method was adopted by Him, that

we too might ponder the fact that He laid His hand on that magnificent

prophecy, and said, It is mine. I am the King.'

The royal procession is also a revelation of the character of the King

and the nature of His kingdom. A strange King this, indeed, who has not

even an ass of His own, and for followers, peasants with palm branches

instead of swords! What would a Roman soldier or one of Herod's men

have thought of that rustic procession of a pauper prince on an ass,

and a hundred or two of weaponless, penniless men? Christ's one moment

of royal pomp is as eloquent of His humiliation as the long stretch of

His lowly life is. And yet, as is always the case, side by side with

the lowliness there gleams the veiled splendour. He had to borrow the

colt, and the message in which He asks for it is a strange paradox. The

Lord hath need of him'--so great was the poverty of so great a King.

But it spoke, too, of a more than human knowledge, and of an authority

which had only to require in order to receive. Some farming villager,

no doubt, who was a disciple but secretly, gladly yielded his beasts.

The prophecy which Matthew quotes, with the omission of some words,

from Zechariah, and the addition of the first clause from Isaiah, is

symbolic, and would have been amply fulfilled in the mission and

character of Christ, though this event had never taken place. But just

as it is symbolic, so this external fulfilment, which is intended to

point to the real fulfilment, is also symbolic. The chariot and the

horse are the emblems of conquerors. It is fitting that the Prince of

Peace should make His state entry on a colt, unridden before, and

saddled only with a garment. Zechariah meant that Zion's King should

not reign by the right of the strongest, and that all His triumphs

should be won by lowly meekness. Christ meant the same by His

remarkable act. And has not the picture of Him, throned thus, stamped

for ever on the imagination of the world a profounder sense of the

inmost nature of His kingdom than many words would have done? Have we

learned the lesson of the gentleness which belongs to His kingdom, and

of the unchristian character of war and violence? Do we understand what

the Psalmist meant when he sang, In thy majesty ride on prosperously,

because of . . . meekness'? Let us not forget the other picture,

Behold, a white horse, and He that sat thereon, called Faithful and

True; and in righteousness He doth judge and make war.'

The entry may remind us also of the worthlessness of mere enthusiastic

feeling in reference to Jesus Christ. The day was the Sunday. How many

of that crowd were shouting as loudly, Crucify Him!' and Not this man,

but Barabbas!' on the Friday? The palm-branches had not faded, where

they had been tossed, before the fickle crowd had swung round to the

opposite mood. Perhaps the very exuberance of feeling at the beginning,

had something to do with the bitterness of the execrations at the end,

of the week. He had not answered their expectations, but, instead of

heading a revolt, had simply taught in the temple, and meekly let

Himself be laid hold of. Nothing succeeds like success, and no idol is

so quickly forsaken as the idol of a popular rising. All were eager to

disclaim connection with Him, and to efface the remembrance of their

Sunday's hosannas by their groans round His gibbet. But there is a

wider lesson here. No enthusiasm can be too intense which is based upon

a true sense of our need of Christ, and of His work for us; but it is

easy to excite apparently religious emotion by partial presentations of

Him, and such excitement foams itself away by its very violence, like

some Eastern river that in winter time dashes down the wady with

irresistible force, and in summer is bone dry. Unless we know Christ to

be the Saviour of our souls and the Lamb of God, we shall soon tire of

singing hosannas in His train, and want a king with more pretensions;

but if we have learned who and what He is to us, then let us open our

mouths wide, and not be afraid of letting the world hear our shout of

praise.

II. The coming of the King in the temple. The discussion of the

accuracy of Matthew's arrangement of events here is unnecessary. He has

evidently grouped, as usual, incidents which have a common bearing, and

wishes to put these three, of the cleansing, the healing, and the

pleasure in the children's praise, as the characteristic acts of the

King in the temple. We can scarcely avoid seeing in the first of the

three a reference to Malachi's prophecy, The Lord, whom ye seek, shall

suddenly come to His temple . . . And He shall purify the sons of

Levi.' His first act, when in manhood He visited the temple, had been

to cleanse. His first act when He enters it as its Lord is the same.

The abuse had grown again apace. Much could be said in its vindication,

as convenient and harmless, and it was too profitable to be lightly

abandoned. But the altar of Mammon so near the altar of God was

sacrilege in His eyes, and though He had passed the traders unmolested

many times since that first driving out, now that He solemnly comes to

claim His rights, He cannot but repeat it. It is perhaps significant

that His words now have both a more sovereign and a more severe tone

than before. Then He had spoken of My Father's house,' now it is My

house,' which are a part of His quotation indeed, but not therefore

necessarily void of reference to Himself. He is exercising the

authority of a son over His own house, and bears Himself as Lord of the

temple. Before, He charged them with making it a house of merchandise';

now, with turning it into a robber's cave. Evil rebuked and done again

is worse than before. Trafficking in things pertaining to the altar is

even more likely than other trading to cross the not always very well

defined line which separates trade from trickery and commerce from

theft. That lesson needs to be laid to heart in many quarters now.

There is always a fringe of moneyed interests round Christ's Church,

seeking gain out of religious institutions; and their stands have a

wonderful tendency to creep inwards from the court of the Gentiles to

holier places. The parasite grows very quickly, and Christ had to deal

with it more than once to keep down its growth. The sellers of doves

and changers of money into the sacred shekel were venial offenders

compared with many in the Church, and the race is not extinct. If

Christ were to come to His house to-day, in bodily form, who doubts

that He would begin, as He did before, by driving the traders out of

His temple? How many most respectable' usages and people would have to

go, if He did!

The second characteristic, or we might say symbolical, act is the

healing of the blind and lame. Royal state and cleansing severity are

wonderfully blended with tender pity and the gentle hand of sovereign

virtue to heal. The very manifestation of the former drew the needy to

Him; and the blind, though they could not see, and the lame, though

they could not walk, managed to grope and hobble their way to Him, not

afraid of His severity, nor daunted by His royalty. No doubt they

haunted the temple precincts as beggars, with perhaps as little sense

of its sacredness as the money-changers; but their misery kindled a

flicker of confidence and desire, to which He who tends the dimmest

wick till it breaks into clear flame could not but respond. Though in

His house He casts out the traders, He will heal the cripples and the

blind, who know their need, and faintly trust His heart and power. Such

a trait could not be wanting in this typical representation of the acts

of the King.

Finally, He encourages and casts the shield of His approval round the

children's praises. How natural it is that the children, pleased with

the stir and not yet drilled into conventionalism, should have kept up

their glad shouts, even inside the temple enclosure! How their fresh

treble voices ring yet through all these centuries! The priests had, no

doubt, been nursing their wrath at all that had been going on, but they

had not dared to interfere with the cleansing, nor, for very shame,

with the healings; but now they see their opportunity. This is a clear

breach of all propriety, and that is the crime of crimes in the eyes of

such people. They had kept quite cool and serenely contemptuous, amid

the stir of the glad procession, and they did not much care though He

healed some beggars; but to have this unseemly noise, though it was

praise, was more than they could stand. Ecclesiastical martinets, and

men whose religion is mostly ceremony, are, of course, more moved with

indignation' at any breach of ceremonial regulations than at holes made

in graver laws. Nothing makes men more insensitive to the ring of real

worship than being accustomed to the dull decorum of formal worship.

Christ answers their hearest thou?' with a did ye never read?' and

shuts their mouths with words so apposite in their plainest meaning

that even they are silenced. To Him these young ringing hosannas are

perfect praise,' and worth any quantity of rabbis' preachments. In

their deeper sense, His words declare that the ears of God and of His

Son, the Lord of the temple, are more gladly filled with the praises of

the little ones,' who know their weakness, and hymn His goodness with

simple tongue, than with heartless eloquence of words or pomp of

worship. The psalm from which the words are taken declares man's

superiority over the highest works of God's hands, and the perfecting

of the divine praise from his lips. We are but as the little children

of creation, but because we know sin and redemption, we lead the chorus

of heaven. As St. Bernard says, Something is wanting to the praise of

heaven, if those be wanting who can say, "We went through fire and

through water; and Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place."' In

like manner, those praise Him most acceptably among men who know their

feebleness, and with stammering lips humbly try to breathe their love,

their need, and their trust.

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A NEW KIND OF KING

All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the

prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh

unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass.'--MATT. xxi. 4, 5.

Our Lord's entrance into Jerusalem is one of the comparatively few

events which are recorded in all the four Gospels. Its singular

unlikeness to the rest of His life, and its powerful influence in

bringing about the Crucifixion, may account for its prominence in the

narratives. It took place probably on the Sunday of Passion Week.

Before the palm branches were withered the enthusiasm had died away,

and the shouting crowd had found out that this was not the sort of king

that they wanted. They might have found that out, even by the very

circumstances of the entrance, for they were profoundly significant;

though their meaning, like so much of the rest of Christ's life, was

less clear to the partakers and spectators than it is to us. These

things understood not the disciples at the first,' says John in closing

his narrative of the entrance, but when Jesus was glorified, then they

remembered that they had done these things unto Him.'

My object in this sermon is not at all to attempt a pictorial treatment

of this narrative, for these Gospels tell it us a great deal better

than any of us can tell it after them; but to seek to bring out, if it

may be, two or three aspects of its significance.

I. First, then, I ask you to consider its significance as an altogether

exceptional fact in Christ's life.

Throughout the whole of the preceding period, He had had two aims

distinctly in view. One was to shun publicity; and the other was to

damp down the heated, vulgar anticipations of the multitude, who

expected a temporal king. And now here He deliberately, and of set

purpose, takes a step which is like flinging a spark into a powder

barrel. The nation was assembled in crowds, full of the unwholesome

excitement which attended their meeting for the annual feast. All were

in a quiver of expectation; and knowing that, Jesus Christ originates

this scene by His act of sending the two disciples into the village

over against them, to bring the ass, and the colt the foal of an ass.'

The reasons for a course so entirely opposed to all the preceding must

have been strong. Let us try to see what they were.

First, He did it in order to precipitate the conflict which was to end

in His death. Now, had He any right to do that? Knowing as He did the

ferment of expectation into which He was thrusting this new element of

disturbance, and foreseeing, as He must have done, that it would

sharpen the hostility of the rulers of the people to a murderous

degree, how can He be acquitted of one of two things--either singular

shortsightedness or rash foolhardiness in taking such a step? Was He

justified, or was He not?

If we are to look at His conduct from ordinary points of view, the

answer must certainly be that He was not. And we can only understand

this, and all the rest of His actions during the fateful three or four

days that followed it, if we recognise in them the fixed resolve of One

who knew that His mission was not only to live and to teach by word and

life, but to die, and by death to deliver the world. I take it that it

is very hard to save the character of Jesus Christ for our reverence if

we refuse to regard His death as for our redemption. But if He came,

and knew that He came, not only to minister' but to give His life a

ransom for many,' then we can understand how He hastened to the Cross,

and deliberately set a light to the train which was to end in that

great explosion. On any other hypothesis it seems to me immensely hard

to account for His act here.

Then, still further, looking at this distinctly exceptional fact in our

Lord's life, we see in it a very emphatic claim to very singular

prerogative and position. He not only thereby presented Himself before

the nation in their collective capacity as being the King of Israel,

but He also did a very strange thing. He dressed Himself, so to speak,

in order to fulfil a prophecy. He posed before the world as being the

Person who was meant by sacred old words. And His Entrance upon the

slow-pacing colt was His voluntary and solemn assertion that He was the

Person of whom the whole stream and current of divinely sent

premonitions and forecasts had been witnessing from the beginning. He

claimed thereby to be the King of Israel and the Fulfiller of the

divine promises that were of old.

Now again, I have to ask the question, Was He right, or was He wrong?

If He was right, then He is a great deal more than a wise Teacher, and

a perfect Example of excellence. If He was wrong, He is a great deal

less. There is no escape from that alternative, as it seems to me, but

by the desperate expedient of denying that He ever did this thing which

this narrative tells us that He did. At all events I beseech you all,

dear friends, to take fairly into your account of the character of

Jesus Christ, this fact, that He, the meek, the gentle, said that He

was meek, and everybody has believed Him; and that once, in the very

crisis of His life, and in circumstances which make the act most

conspicuous, He who always shunned publicity, nor caused His voice to

be heard in the streets,' and steadfastly put away from Himself the

vulgar homage that would have degraded Him into a mere temporal

monarch, did assert that He was the King of Israel and the Fulfiller of

prophecy. Ask yourselves, What does that fact mean?

And then, still further, looking at the act as exceptional in our

Lord's life, note that it was done in order to make one final, solemn

appeal and offer to the men who beheld Him. It was the last bolt in His

quiver. All else had failed, perhaps this might succeed. We know not

the depths of the mysteries of that divine foreknowledge which, even

though it foresees failure, ceases not to plead and to woo obstinate

hearts. But this we may thankfully learn, that, just as with despairing

hope, but with unremitting energy, Jesus Christ, often rejected,

offered Himself once more if perchance He might win men to repentance,

so the loving patience and long-suffering of our God cease not to plead

ever with us. Last of all He sent unto them His Son, saying, They will

reverence My Son when they see Him'; and yet the expectation was

disappointed, and the Son was slain. We touch deep mysteries, but the

persistence of the pleading and rejected love and pity of our God shine

through this strange fact.

II. And now, secondly, let me ask you to note its significance as a

symbol.

The prophecy which two out of the four evangelists--viz., Matthew and

John--regard as having been, in some sense, fulfilled by the Entrance

into Jerusalem, would have been fulfilled quite as truly if there had

been no Entrance. For the mere detail of the prophecy is but a

picturesque way of setting forth its central and essential point--viz.,

the meekness of the King. So our Lord's fulfilment is only an external,

altogether subsidiary, accomplishment of the prophecy; and in fact,

like some other of the external correspondences between His life and

the outward details of Old Testament prophecy, is intended for little

more than a picture or a signpost which may direct our thoughts to the

inward correspondence, which is the true fulfilment.

So then, the deed, like the prophecy after which it is moulded, is

wholly and entirely of importance in its symbolical aspect.

The symbolism is clear enough. This is a new kind of King. He comes,

not mounted on a warhorse, or thundering across the battlefield in a

scythe-armed chariot, like the Pharaohs and the Assyrian monarchs, who

have left us their vainglorious monuments, but mounted on the emblem of

meekness, patience, gentleness, and peace. And He is a pauper King, for

He has to borrow the beast on which He rides, and His throne is draped

with the poor, perhaps ragged, robes of a handful of fishermen. And His

attendants are not warriors bearing spears, but peasants with palm

branches. And the salutation of His royalty is not the blare of

trumpets, but the Hosanna!' from a thousand throats. That is not the

sort of King that the world calls a King. The Roman soldiers might well

have thought they were perpetrating an exquisite jest when they thrust

the reed into His unresisting hand, and crushed down the crown of

thorns on His bleeding brows.

But the symbol discloses the very secret of His Kingdom, the innermost

mysteries of His own character and of the forces to which He intrusts

the further progress of His word. Gentleness is royal and omnipotent;

force and violence are feeble. The Lord is in the still, small voice,

not in the earthquake, nor the fire, nor the mighty wind. The dove's

light pinion will fly further than the wings of Rome's eagles, with

their strong talons and blood-dyed beaks. And the kingdom that is

established in meekness, and rules by gentleness and for gentleness,

and has for its only weapons the power of love and the omnipotence of

patience, that is the kingdom which shall be eternal and universal.

Now all that is a great deal more than pretty sentiment; it has the

closest practical bearing upon our lives. How slow God's Church has

been to believe that the strength of Christ's kingdom is meekness!

Professing Christian men have sought to win the world to their side,

and by wealth or force or persecution, or this, that, or the other of

the weapons out of the world's armoury, to promote the kingdom of

Christ. But it has all been in vain. There is only one power that

conquers hate, and that is meek love. There is only one way by which

Christ's kingdom can stand firm, and that is its unworldly contrast to

all the manner of human dominion. Wheresoever God's Church has allied

itself with secular sovereignties, and trusted in the arm of flesh,

there has the fine gold become dimmed. Endurance wears out persecution,

patient submission paralyses hostile violence, for you cannot keep on

striking down unresisting crowds with the sword. The Church of Christ

is an anvil that has been beaten upon by many hammers, and it has worn

them all out. Meekness is victorious, and the kingdom of Christ can

only be advanced by the faithful proclamation of His gentle love, from

lips that are moved by hearts which themselves are conformed to His

patient image.

Then, still further, let me remind you that this symbol carries in it,

as it seems to me, the lesson of the radical incompatibility of war

with Christ's kingdom and dominion. It has taken the world all these

centuries to begin to learn that lesson. But slowly men are coming to

it, and the day will dawn when all the pomp of warfare, and the hell of

evil passions from which it comes, and which it stimulates, will be

felt to be as utterly incompatible with the spirit of Christianity as

slavery is felt to-day. The prophecy which underlies our symbol is very

significant in this respect. Immediately upon that vision of the meek

King throned on the colt the foal of an ass, follows this: And I will

cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horses from Jerusalem; and

the battle bow shall be cut off, and He shall speak peace unto the

heathen.'

Let me beseech you, Christian men and women, to lay to heart the duty

of Christ's followers in reference to the influence and leavening of

public opinion upon this matter, and to see to it that, in so far as we

can help, we set ourselves steadfastly against that devilish spirit

which still oppresses with an incubus almost intolerable, the nations

of so-called Christendom. Lift up your voices be not afraid, but cry,

We are the followers of the Prince of Peace, and we war against the war

that is blasphemy against His dominion.'

And so, still further, note the practical force of this symbol as

influencing our own conduct. We are the followers of the meek Christ.

It becomes us to walk in all meekness and gentleness. Spirited conduct'

is the world's euphemism for unchristian conduct, in ninety-nine cases

out of the hundred. The perspective of virtue has altered since Jesus

Christ taught us how to love. The old heathen virtues of magnanimity,

fortitude, and the like have with shame to take a lower room.' There is

something better than these. The saint has all the virtues of the old

heathen hero, and some more besides, which are higher than these, and

those which he has in common, he has in different proportion. The

flaunting tulips and peonies of the garden of the world seem to

outshine the white snowdrops and the glowing, modest little violets

below their leaves, but the former are vulgar, and they drop very soon,

and the latter, if paler and more delicate, are refined in their

celestial beauty. The slow-pacing steed on which Jesus Christ rides

will out-travel the fiery warhorse, and will pursue its patient,

steadfast path till He bring forth righteousness unto judgment,' and

all the upright in heart shall follow Him.'

III. Lastly, notice the significance of this fact as a prophecy. It

was, as I have pointed out, the last solemn appeal to the nation, and

in a very real sense it was Christ's coming to judgment. It is

impossible to look at it without seeing, besides all its other

meanings, gleaming dimly through it, the anticipations of that other

coming, when the Lord Himself shall descend with a shout, with the

voice of the Archangel, and the trump of God.'

Let me bring into connection with the scene of my text three others,

gathered from various parts of Scripture. In the forty-fifth Psalm we

find, side by side with the great words, Ride on prosperously because

of truth and meekness and righteousness,' the others, Thine arrows are

sharp in the hearts of the king's enemies; the people shall fall under

Thee.' Now, though it is possible that that later warlike figure may be

merely the carrying out of the thought which is more gently put before

us in the former words, still it looks as if there were two sides to

the conquering manifestation of the king--one being in meekness and

truth and righteousness,' and the other in some sense destructive and

punitive.

But, however that may be, my second scene is drawn from the last book

of Scripture, where we read that, when the first seal was opened, there

rode forth a Figure, crowned, mounted upon a white steed, bearing bow

and arrow, conquering and to conquer.' And, though that again may be

but an image of the victorious progress of the gentle Gospel of Jesus

Christ throughout the whole earth, still it comes as one in a series of

judgments, and may rather be taken to express the punitive effects

which follow its proclamation even here and now.

But there can be no doubt with regard to the third of the scenes which

I connect with the incident of which we are discoursing: And I saw

heaven opened, and beheld a white horse; and He that sat upon Him was

called Faithful and True, and in righteousness doth He judge and make

war. . .. And out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He

should smite the nations; and He shall rule them with a rod of iron;

and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty

God.' That is the Christ who came into Jerusalem on the colt the foal

of an ass. That is the Christ who is meek and long-suffering. There is

a reserve of punitive and destructive power in the meek King. And oh I

what can be so terrible as the anger of meekness, the wrath of infinite

gentleness? In the triumphal entry, we find that, when the procession

turned the rocky shoulder of Olivet, and the long line of the white

city walls, with the gilding of the Temple glittering in the sunshine,

burst upon their view, the multitude lifted up their voices in

gladness. But Christ sat there, and as He looked across the valley, and

beheld, with His divine prescience, the city, now so joyous and full of

stir, sitting solitary and desolate, He lifted up His voice in loud

wailing. The Christ wept because He must punish, but He punished though

He wept.

Our Judge is the gentle Jesus, therefore we can hope. The gentle Jesus

is our Judge, therefore let us not presume. I beseech you, brethren,

lay, as these poor people did their garments, your lusts and proud

wills in His way, and join the welcoming shout that hails the King,

meek and having salvation.' And then, when He comes forth to judge and

to destroy, you will not be amongst the ranks of the enemies, whom He

will ride down and scatter, but amongst the armies that follow Him,

. . . clothed in fine linen, clean and pure.'

Kiss the Son lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way when His

wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their

trust in Him.'

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THE VINEYARD AND ITS KEEPERS

Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a

vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and

built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far

country: 34. And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his

servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.

35. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed

another, and stoned another. 36. Again, he sent other servants more

than the first: and they did unto them likewise. 37. But last of all he

sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. 38. But

when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is

the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.

39. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew

him. 40. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh what will he do

unto those husbandmen? 41. They say unto him, He will miserably destroy

those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen,

which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. 42. Jesus saith

unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the

builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is

the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? 43. Therefore say I

unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a

nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. 44. And whosoever shall fall

on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will

grind him to powder. 45. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had

heard His parables, they perceived that He spake of them. 46. But when

they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitude, because

they took Him for a prophet.'--MATT. xxi. 33-46.

This parable was apparently spoken on the Tuesday of the Passion Week.

It was a day of hand-to-hand conflict with the Jewish authorities and

of exhausting toil, as the bare enumeration of its incidents shows. It

included all that Matthew records between verse 20 of this chapter and

the end of the twenty-fifth chapter--the answer to the deputation from

the Sanhedrin; the three parables occasioned by it, namely, those of

the two sons, this one, and that of the marriage of the king's son; the

three answers to the traps of the Pharisees and Herodians about the

tribute, of the Sadducees about the resurrection, and of the ruler

about the chief commandment; Christ's question to His questioners about

the Son and Lord of David; the stern woes hurled at the unmasked

hypocrites; to which must be added, from other gospels, the sweet

eulogium on the widow's mite, and the deep saying to the Greeks about

the corn of wheat, with, possibly, the incident of the woman taken in

adultery; and then, following all these, the solemn prophecies of the

end contained in Matthew xxiv. and xxv., spoken on the way to Bethany,

as the evening shadows were falling. What a day! What a fountain of

wisdom and love which poured out such streams! The pungent severity of

this parable, with its transparent veil of narrative, is only

appreciated by keeping clearly in view the circumstances and the

listeners. They had struck at Jesus with their question as to His

authority, and He parries the blow. Now it is His turn, and the sharp

point goes home.

I. The first stage is the preparation of the vineyard, in which three

steps are marked. It is planted and furnished with all appliances

needful for making wine, which is its great end. The direct divine

origin of the religious ideas and observances of Judaism' is thus

asserted by Christ. The only explanation of them is that God enclosed

that bit of the wilderness, and with His own hands set growing there

these exotics. Neither the theology nor the ritual is of man's

establishing. We need not seek for special meanings for wall,

wine-press, and tower. They simply express the completeness of the

equipment of the vineyard, as in Isaiah's song, which lies at the

foundation of the parable, and suggest his question, What could have

been done more?' Thus furnished, the vineyard is next handed over to

the husbandmen, who, in Matthew, are exclusively the rulers, while in

Luke they are the people. No doubt it was like people, like priest.'

The strange dominion of the Pharisees rested entirely on popular

consent, and their temper accurately indexed that of the nation. The

Sanhedrin was the chief object at which Christ aimed the parable. But

it only gave form and voice to the national spirit, and the people

loved to have it so.' National responsibilities are not to be slipped

out of by being shifted on to the broad shoulders of governments or

influential men. Who lets them be governments and influential?

Guv'ment ain't to answer for it,

God will send the bill to you.'

Christ here teaches both rulers and ruled the ground and purpose of

their privileges. They prided themselves on these as their own, but

they were only tenants. They made their boast of the law'; but they

forgot that fruit was the end of the divine planting and equipment.

Holiness and glad obedience were what God sought, and when He found

them, He was refreshed as with grapes in the wilderness.'

Having installed the husbandmen, the owner goes into another country.

The cluster of miracles which inaugurate an epoch of revelation are not

continued beyond its beginning. Centuries of comparative divine silence

followed the planting of the vineyard. Having given us our charge, God,

as it were, steps aside to leave us room to work as we will, and so to

display what we are made of. He is absent in so far as conspicuous

oversight and retribution are concerned. He is present to help, love,

and bless. The faithful husbandman has Him always near, a joy and a

strength, else no fruit would grow; but the sin and misery of the

unfaithful are that they think of Him as far off.

II. Then comes the habitual ill-treatment of the messengers. These are,

of course, the prophets, whose office was not only to foretell, but to

plead for obedience and trust, the fruits sought by God. The whole

history of the nation is summed up in this dark picture. Generation

after generation of princes, priests, and people had done the same

thing. There is no more remarkable historical fact than that of the

uniform hostility of the Jews to the prophets. That a nation of such a

sort as always to hate and generally to murder them should have had

them in long succession, throughout its history, is surely inexplicable

on any naturalistic hypothesis. Such men were not the natural product

of the race, nor of its circumstances, as their fate shows. How did

they spring up? No philosophy of Jewish history' explains the anomaly

except the one stated here,--He sent His servants.' We are told

nowadays that the Jews had a natural genius for religion, just as the

Greeks for art and thought, and the Romans for law and order, and that

that explains the origin of the prophets. Does it explain their

treatment?

The hostility of the husbandmen grows with indulgence. From beating

they go on to killing, and stoning is a specially savage form of

killing. The opposition which began, as the former parable tells us,

with polite hypocrisy and lip obedience, changed, under the stimulus of

prophetic appeals, to honest refusal, and from that to violence which

did not hesitate to slay. The more God pleads with men, the more

self-conscious and bitter becomes their hatred; and the more bitter

their hatred, the more does He plead, sending other messengers, more

perhaps in number, or possibly of more weight, with larger commission

and clearer light. Thus both the antagonistic forces grow, and the

worse men become, the louder and more beseeching is the call of God to

them. That is always true; and it is also ever true that he who begins

with I go, sir, and goes not, is in a fair way to end with stoning the

prophets.

Christ treats the whole long series of violent rejections as the acts

of the same set of husbandmen. The class or nation was one, as a stream

is one, though all its particles are different; and the Pharisees and

scribes, who stood with frowning hatred before Him as He spoke, were

the living embodiment of the spirit which had animated all the past. In

so far as they inherited their taint, and repeated their conduct, the

guilt of all the former generations was laid at their door. They

declared themselves their predecessors' heirs; and as they reproduced

their actions, they would have to bear the accumulated weight of the

consequences.

III. Verses 37-39 tell of the mission of the Son and of its fatal

issue. Three points are prominent in them. The first is the unique

position which Christ here claims, with unwonted openness and

decisiveness, as apart from and far above all the prophets. They

constitute one order, but He stands alone, sustaining a closer relation

to God. They were faithful as servants,' but He as a Son,' or, as Mark

has it, the only and beloved Son.' The listeners understood Him well

enough. The assertion, which seemed audacious blasphemy to them, fitted

in with all His acts in that last week, which was not only the crisis

of His life, but of the nation's fate. Rulers and people must decide

whether they will own or reject their King, and they must do it with

their eyes open. Jesus claimed to fill a unique position. Was He right

or wrong in His claim? If He was wrong, what becomes of His wisdom, His

meekness, His religion? Is a religious teacher, who made the mistake of

thinking that He was the Son of God in a sense in which no other man is

so, worthy of admiration? If He was right, what becomes of a

Christianity which sees in Him only the foremost of the prophets?

The next point marked is the owner's vain hope, in sending his Son. He

thought that He would be welcomed, and He was disappointed. It was His

last attempt. Christ knew Himself to be God's last appeal, as He is to

all men, as well as to that generation. He is the last arrow in God's

quiver. When it has shot that bolt, the resources even of divine love

are exhausted, and no more can be done for the vineyard than He has

done for it. We need not wonder at unfulfilled hopes being here

ascribed to God. The startling thought only puts into language the

great mystery which besets all His pleadings with men, which are

carried on, though they often fail, and which must, therefore, in view

of His foreknowledge, be regarded as carried on with the knowledge that

they will fail. That is the long-suffering patience of God. The

difficulty is common to the words of the parable and to the facts of

God's unwearied pleading with impenitent men. Its surface is a

difficulty, its heart is an abyss of all-hoping charity.

The last point is the vain calculation of the husbandmen. Christ puts

hidden motives into plain words, and reveals to these rulers what they

scarcely knew of their own hearts. Did they, in their secret conclaves,

look each other in the face, and confess that He was the Heir? Did He

not Himself ground His prayer for their pardon on their ignorance? But

their ignorance was not entire, else they had had no sin; neither was

their knowledge complete, else they had had no pardon. Beneath many an

obstinate denial of Him lies a secret confession, or misgiving, which

more truly speaks the man than does the loud negation. And such strange

contradictions are men, that the secret conviction is often the very

thing which gives bitterness and eagerness to the hostility. So it was

with some of those whose hidden suspicions are here set in the light.

How was the rulers' or the people's wish to seize on His inheritance'

their motive for killing Jesus? Their great sin was their desire to

have their national prerogatives, and yet to give no true obedience.

The ruling class clung to their privileges and forgot their

responsibilities, while the people were proud of their standing as

Jews, and careless of God's service. Neither wished to be reminded of

their debt to the Lord of the vineyard, and their hostility to Jesus

was mainly because He would call on them for fruits. If they could get

this unwelcome and persistent voice silenced, they could go on in the

comfortable old fashion of lip-service and real selfishness. It is an

account, in vividly parabolic language, not only of their hostility,

but of that of many men who are against Him. They wish to possess life

and its good, without being for ever pestered with reminders of the

terms on which they hold it, and of God's desire for their love and

obedience. They have a secret feeling that Christ has the right to ask

for their hearts, and so they often turn from Him angrily, and

sometimes hate Him.

With what sad calmness does Jesus tell the fate of the son, so certain

that it is already as good as done! It was done in their counsels, and

yet He does not cease to plead, if perchance some hearts may be touched

and withdraw themselves from the confederacy of murder.

IV. We have next the self-condemnation from unwilling lips. Our Lord

turns to the rulers with startling and dramatic suddenness, which may

have thrown them off their guard, so that their answer leaped out

before they had time to think whom it hit. His solemn earnestness laid

a spell on them, which drew their own condemnation from them, though

they had penetrated the thin veil of the parable, and knew full well

who the husbandmen were. Nor could they refuse to answer a question

about legal punishments for dishonesty, which was put to them, the

fountains of law, without incurring a second time the humiliation just

inflicted when He had forced them to acknowledge that they, the

fountains of knowledge, did not know where John came from. So from all

these motives, and perhaps from a mingling of audacity, which would

brazen it out and pretend not to see the bearing of the question, they

answer. Like Caiaphas in his counsel, and Pilate with his writing on

the Cross, and many another, they spoke deeper things than they knew,

and confessed beforehand how just the judgments were, which followed

the very lines marked out by their own words.

V. Then come the solemn application and naked truth of the parable. We

have no need to dwell on the cycle of prophecies concerning the

corner-stone, nor on the original application of the psalm. We must be

content with remarking that our Lord, in this last portion of His

address, throws away even the thin veil of parable, and speaks the

sternest truth in the nakedest words. He puts His own claim in the

plainest fashion, as the corner-stone on which the true kingdom of God

was to be built. He brands the men who stood before Him as incompetent

builders, who did not know the stone needed for their edifice when they

saw it. He declares, with triumphant confidence, the futility of

opposition to Himself--even though it kill Him. He is sure that God

will build on Him, and that His place in the building, which shall rise

through the ages, will be, to even careless eyes, the crown of the

manifest wonders of God's hand. Strange words from a Man who knew that

in three days He would be crucified! Stranger still that they have come

true! He is the foundation of the best part of the best men; the basis

of thought, the motive for action, the pattern of life, the ground of

hope, for countless individuals; and on Him stands firm the society of

His Church, and is hung all the glory of His Father's house.

Christ confirms the sentence just spoken by the rulers on themselves,

but with the inversion of its clauses. All disguise is at an end. The

fatal you' is pronounced. The husbandmen's calculation had been that

killing the heir would make them lords of the vineyard; the grim fact

was that they cast themselves out when they cast him out. He is the

heir. If we desire the inheritance, we must get it through Him, and not

kill or reject, but trust and obey Him. The sentence declares the two

truths, that possession of the vineyard depends on honouring the Son,

and on bringing forth the fruits. The kingdom has been taken from the

churches of Asia Minor, Africa, and Syria, because they bore no fruit.

It is not held by us on other conditions. Who can venture to speak of

the awful doom set forth in the last words here? It has two stages: one

a lesser misery, which is the lot of him who stumbles against the

stone, while it lies passive to be built on; one more dreadful, when it

has acquired motion and comes down with irresistible impetus. To

stumble at Christ, or to refuse His grace, and not to base our lives

and hopes on Him is maiming and damage, in many ways, here and now. But

suppose the stone endowed with motion, what can stand against it? And

suppose that the Christ, who is now offered for the rock on which we

may pile our hopes and never be confounded, comes to judge, will He not

crush the mightiest opponent as the dust of the summer threshing-floor?

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THE STONE OF STUMBLING

Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever

it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.'--MATT. xxi. 44.

As Christ's ministry drew to its close, its severity and its gentleness

both increased; its severity to the class to whom it was always severe,

and its gentleness to the class from whom it never turned away. Side by

side, through all His manifestation of Himself, there were the two

aspects: He showed Himself froward' (if I may quote the word) to the

self-righteous and the Pharisee; and He bent with more than a woman's

tenderness of yearning love over the darkness and sinfulness, which in

its great darkness dimly knew itself blind, and in its sinfulness

stretched out a lame hand of faith, and groped after a divine

deliverer. Here, in my text, there are only words of severity and awful

foreboding. Christ has been telling those Pharisees and priests that

the kingdom is to be taken from them, and given to a nation that brings

forth the fruits thereof. He interprets for them an Old Testament

figure, often recurring, which we read in the 118th Psalm (and I may

just say, in passing, that we get here His interpretation of that

psalm, and the vindication of our application of it, and other similar

ones, to Him and His office); The stone which the builders rejected,'

said He, is become the head of the corner'; and then, falling back on

other Old Testament uses of the same figure, He weaves into one the

whole of them--that in Isaiah about the sure foundation,' and that in

Daniel about the stone cut out without hands, which became a great

mountain,' crushing down all opposition,--and centres them all in

Himself; as fulfilled in Himself, in His person and His work.

The two clauses of my text figuratively point to two different classes

of operation on the rejecters of the Gospel. What are these two

classes? Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on

whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.' In the one

case, the stone is represented as passive, lying quiet; in the other,

it has acquired motion. In the one case, the man stumbles and hurts

himself; a remediable injury, a self-inflicted injury, a natural

injury, without the active operation of Christ to produce it at all; in

the other case the injury is worse than remediable, it is utter,

absolute, grinding destruction, and it comes from the active operation

of the stone of stumbling.' That is to say, the one class represents

the present hurts and harms which, by the natural operation of things,

without the action of Christ judicially at all, every man receives in

the very act of rejecting the Gospel; and the other represents the

ultimate issue of that rejection, which rejection is darkened into

opposition and fixed hostility, when the stone that was laid for a

foundation' has got wings (if I may so say), and comes down in

judgment, crushing and destroying the antagonist utterly. Whosoever

falls on this stone is broken,' here and now; and on whomsoever it

shall fall, it will grind him to powder,' hereafter and yonder.

Taking, then, into account the weaving together in this passage of the

three figures from the Old Testament to which I have already

referred,--the rejected stone, the foundation, and the mountain-stone

of Daniel, and looking in the light of these, at the twofold issues,

one present and one future, which the text distinctly brings before

us,--we have just three points to which I ask your attention now.

First, Every man has some kind of contact with Christ. Secondly,

Rejection of Him, here and now, is harm and maiming. And, lastly,

Rejection of Him, hereafter and yonder, is hopeless, endless, utter

destruction.

I. In the first place, every man has some kind of connection with

Christ.

I am not going to enter at all now upon any question about the

condition of the dark places of the earth' where the Gospel has not

come as a well-known preached message; we have nothing to do with that;

the principles on which they are judged is not the question before us

now. I am speaking exclusively about persons who have heard the word of

salvation, and are dwelling in the midst of what we call a Christian

land. Christ is offered to each of us, in good faith on God's part, as

a means of salvation, a foundation on which we may build. A man is free

to accept or to reject that offer. If he reject it, he has not thereby

cut himself off from all contact and connection with that rejected

Saviour, but he still sustains a relation to Him; and the message that

he has refused to believe, is exercising an influence upon his

character and his destiny.

Christ comes, I say, offered to us all in good faith on the part of

God, as a foundation upon which we may build. And then comes in that

strange mystery, that a man, consciously free, turns away from the

offered mercy, and makes Him that was intended to be the basis of his

life, the foundation of his hope, the rock on which, steadfast and

serene, he should build up a temple-home for his soul to dwell

in,--makes Him a stumbling-stone against which, by rejection and

unbelief, he breaks himself!

My friend, will you let me lay this one thing upon your heart,--you

cannot hinder the Gospel from influencing you somehow. Taking it in its

lowest aspects, it is one of the forces of modern society, an element

in our present civilisation. It is everywhere, it obtrudes itself on

you at every turn, the air is saturated with its influence. To be

unaffected by such an all-pervading phenomenon is impossible. To no

individual member of the great whole of a nation is it given to isolate

himself utterly from the community. Whether he oppose or whether he

acquiesce in current opinions, to denude himself of the possessions

which belong in common to his age and state of society is in either

case impracticable. That which cometh into your mind,' said one of the

prophets to the Jews who were trying to cut themselves loose from their

national faith and their ancestral prerogatives, That which cometh into

your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen,

as the families of the countries to serve wood and stone.' Vain dream!

You can no more say, I will pass the Gospel by, and it shall be nothing

to me, I will simply let it alone, than you can say, I will shut myself

up from other influences proper to my time and nation. You cannot go

back to the old naked barbarism, and you cannot reduce the influence of

Christianity, even considered merely as one of the characteristics of

the times, to zero. You may fancy you are letting it alone, but it does

not let you alone; it is here, and you cannot shut yourself off from

it.

But it is not merely as a subtle and diffused influence that the Gospel

exercises a permanent effect upon us. It is presented to each of us

here individually, in the definite form of an actual offer of salvation

for each, and of an actual demand of trust from each. The words pass

into our souls, and thenceforward we can never be the same as if they

had not been there. The smallest ray of light falling on a sensitive

plate produces a chemical change that can never be undone again, and

the light of Christ's love, once brought to the knowledge and presented

for the acceptance of a soul, stamps on it an ineffaceable sign of its

having been there. The Gospel once heard, is always the Gospel which

has been heard. Nothing can alter that. Once heard, it is henceforward

a perpetual element in the whole condition, character, and destiny of

the hearer.

Christ does something to every one of us. His Gospel will tell upon

you, it is telling upon you. If you disbelieve it, you are not the same

as if you had never heard it. Never is the box of ointment opened

without some savour from it abiding in every nostril to which its odour

is wafted. Only the alternative, the awful either, or,' is open for

each--the savour of life unto life, or the savour of death unto death.'

To come back to the illustration of the text, Christ is something, and

does something to every one of us. He is either the rock on which I

build, poor, weak, sinful creature as I am, getting security, and

sanctity, and strength from Him, I being a living stone' built upon the

living stone,' and partaking of the vitality of the foundation; or else

He is the other thing, a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to

them which stumble at the word.' Christ stands for ever in some kind of

relation to, and exercises for ever some kind of influence on, every

man who has heard the Gospel.

II. The immediate issue of rejection of Him is loss and maiming.

Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken.' Just think for a

moment, by way of illustrating this principle, first of all, of the

positive harm which you do to yourself in the act of turning away from

the mercy offered you in Christ; and then think for a moment of the

negative loss which you sustain by the same act.

Note the positive harm. Am I uncharitable when I say that no man ever

yet passively neglected the message of love in God's Son; but that

always this is the rude outline of the experience of people who know

what it is to have a Saviour offered to them, and know what it is to

put Him away,--that there is a feeble and transitory movement of heart

and will; that Conscience says, Thou oughtest'; that Will says, I

would'; that the heart is touched by some sense of that great and

gentle vision of light and love which passes before the eye; that the

man, as it were, like some fever-ridden patient, lifts himself up for

an instant from the bed on which he is lying, and puts out a hand, and

then falls back again, the vacillating, fevered, paralysed will

recoiling from the resolution, and the conscience having power to say,

Thou oughtest,' but no power to enforce the execution of its decrees,

and the heart turning away from the salvation that it would have found

in the love of love, to the loss that it finds in the love of self and

earth? Or in other words, is it not true that every man who rejects

Christ does in simple verity reject Him, and not merely neglect Him;

that there is always an effort, that there is a struggle, feeble,

perhaps, but real, which ends in the turning away? It is not that you

stand there, and simply let Him go past. That were bad enough; but the

fact is worse than that. It is that you turn your back upon Him. It is

not that His hand is laid on yours, and yours remains dead and cold,

and does not open to clasp it; but it is that His hand being laid on

yours, you clench yours the tighter, and will not have it. And so every

man (I believe) who rejects Christ does these things thereby--wounds

his own conscience, hardens his own heart, makes himself a worse man,

just because he has had a glimpse, and has willingly, and almost

consciously, loved darkness rather than light.' Oh, brethren, the

message of love can never come into a human soul, and pass away from it

unreceived, without leaving that spirit worse, with all its lowest

characteristics strengthened, and all its best ones depressed, by the

fact of rejection. I have nothing to do now with pursuing that process

to its end; but the natural result--if there were no future Judgment at

all, if there were no movement ever given to the stone that you ought

to build on--the natural result of the simple rejection of the Gospel

is that, bit by bit, all the lingering remains of nobleness that hover

about the man, like scent about a broken vase, pass away; and that,

step by step, through the simple process of saying, I will not have

Christ to rule over me,' the whole being degenerates, until manhood

becomes devil-hood, and the soul is lost by its own want of faith.

Unbelief is its own judgment; unbelief is its own condemnation;

unbelief, as sin, is punished, like all other sins, by the perpetuation

of deeper and darker forms of itself. Every time that you stifle a

conviction, fight down a conviction, or drive away a conviction; and

every time that you feebly move towards the decision, I will trust Him,

and love Him, and be His,' yet fail to realise it, you have harmed your

soul, you have made yourself a worse man, you have lowered the tone of

your conscience, you have enfeebled your will, you have made your heart

harder against love, you have drawn another horny scale over the eye,

that will prevent you from seeing the light that is yonder; you have,

as much as in you is, withdrawn from God, and approximated to the other

pole of the universe (if I may say that), to the dark and deadly

antagonist of mercy, and goodness, and truth, and grace. Whosoever

falls on this stone,' by the natural result of his unbelief, shall be

broken' and maimed, and shall mar his own nature.

I need not dwell on the negative evil results of unbelief; the loss of

that which is the only guide for a man, the taking away, or rather the

failing to possess, that great love above us, that divine Spirit in us,

by which only we are ever made what we ought to be. This only I would

leave with you, in this part of my subject, Whoever is not in Christ is

maimed. Only he that is a man in Christ' has come to the measure of the

stature of a perfect man.' There, and there alone, do we get the power

which will make us full-grown. There alone is the soul planted in that

good soil in which, growing, it becomes as a rounded, perfect tree,

with leaves and fruits in their season. All other men are half-men,

quarter-men, fragments of men, parts of humanity exaggerated and

contorted and distorted from the reconciling whole which the Christian

ought to be, and in proportion to his Christianity is on the road to

be, and one day will assuredly and actually be, a complete and entire

man, wanting nothing'; nothing maimed, nothing broken, the realisation

of the ideal of humanity, the renewed copy of the second Adam, the Lord

from heaven.'

There is another consideration closely connected with this second part

of my subject, that I just mention and pass on. Not only by the act of

rejection of Christ do we harm and maim ourselves, but also all

attempts at opposition--formal opposition--to the Gospel as a system,

stand self-convicted and self-condemned to speedy decay. What a

commentary upon that word, Whosoever falls on this stone shall be

broken,' is the whole history of the heresies of the Church and the

assaults of unbelief! Man after man, rich in gifts, endowed often with

far larger and nobler faculties than the people who oppose him, with

indomitable perseverance, a martyr to his error, sets himself up

against the truth that is sphered in Jesus Christ; and the great divine

message simply goes on its way, and all the babblement and noise are

like so many bats flying against a light, or like the sea-birds that

come sweeping up in the tempest and the night, to the hospitable Pharos

that is upon the rock, and smite themselves dead against it. Sceptics

well known in their generation, who made people's hearts tremble for

the ark of God, what has become of them? Their books lie dusty and

undisturbed on the top shelf of libraries; whilst there the Bible

stands, with all the scribblings wiped off the page, as though they had

never been! Opponents fire their small shot against the great Rock of

Ages, and the little pellets fall flattened, and only scale off a bit

of the moss that has gathered there! My brother, let the history of the

past teach you and me, with other deeper thoughts, a very calm and

triumphant confidence about all that opponents say nowadays; for all

the modern opposition to this Gospel will go as all the past has done,

and the newest systems which cut and carve at Christianity, will go to

the tomb where all the rest have gone; and dead old infidelities will

rise up from their thrones, and say to the bran-new ones of this

generation, when their day is worked out, Are ye also become weak as

we? art thou also become like one of us?' Whosoever shall fall on this

stone shall be broken': personally, he will be harmed; and his

opinions, and his books, and his talk, and all his argumentation, will

come to nothing, like the waves that break into impotent foam against

the rocky cliffs.

III. Last of all, the issue, the ultimate issue, of unbelief is

irremediable destruction when Christ begins to move.

The former clause has spoken about the harm that naturally follows

unbelief whilst the Gospel is being preached; the latter clause speaks

about the active agency of Christ when the end shall have come, and the

preaching of the Gospel shall have merged into the act of judgment. I

do not mean to dwell, brethren, upon that thought; it seems to me far

too awful a one to be handled by my hands, at any rate. Let us leave it

in the vagueness and dreadfulness of the words of Him who never spoke

exaggerated words, and who, when He said, It shall grind him to

powder,' meant (as it seems to me) nothing less than a destruction

which, contrasted with the former remediable wounding and breaking, was

a destruction utter, and hopeless, and everlasting, and without remedy.

Ground--ground to powder! Any life left in that? any gathering up of

that, and making a man of it again? All the humanity battered out of

it, and the life clean gone from it! Does not that sound very much like

everlasting destruction from the presence of God and from the glory of

His power'? Christ, silent now, will begin to speak; passive now, will

begin to act. The stone comes down, and the fall of it will be awful. I

remember, away up in a lonely Highland valley, where beneath a tall

black cliff, all weather-worn, and cracked, and seamed, there lies at

the foot, resting on the greensward that creeps round its base, a huge

rock, that has fallen from the face of the precipice. A shepherd was

passing beneath it; and suddenly, when the finger of God's will touched

it, and rent it from its ancient bed in the everlasting rock, it came

down, leaping and bounding from pinnacle to pinnacle--and it fell; and

the man that was beneath it is there now! Ground to powder.' Ah, my

brethren, that is not my illustration--that is Christ's. Therefore I

say to you, since all that stand against Him shall become as the chaff

of the summer threshing-floor,' and be swept utterly away, make Him the

foundation on which you build; and when the storm sweeps away every

refuge of lies,' you will be safe and serene, builded upon the Rock of

Ages.

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TWO WAYS OF DESPISING GOD'S FEAST

And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, 2.

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a

marriage for his son, 3. And sent forth his servants to call them that

were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. 4. Again, he sent

forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I

have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all

things are ready: come unto the marriage. 6. But they made light of it,

and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise; 6.

And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and

slew them. 7. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he

sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up

their city. & Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but

they which were bidden were not worthy. 9. Go ye therefore into the

highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. 10. So

those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as

many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished

with guests. 11. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw

there a man which had not on a wedding-garment: 12. And he saith unto

him, Friend, how earnest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment?

And he was speechless. 13. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him

hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness;

there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 14. For many are called,

but few are chosen.'--MATT. xxii. 1-14.

This parable, and the preceding one of the vine-dressers, make a pair.

They are closely connected in time, as well as subject. Jesus

answered.' What? Obviously, the unspoken murderous hate, restrained by

fear, which had been raised in the rulers' minds, and flashed in their

eyes, and moved in their gestures. Christ answers it by repeating His

blow; for the present parable is, in outline, identical with the

preceding, though differing in colouring, and carrying its thoughts

farther. That stopped with the transference of the kingdom to the

Gentiles; this passes on to speak also of the development among the

Gentiles, and ends with the law many called, few chosen,' which is

exemplified in Jew and Gentile. There are, then, two parts in it:

verses 1-9 covering the same ground as the former; verses 10-14 adding

new matter.

I. The judgment on those who refuse the offered joys of the kingdom. In

the previous parable, the kingdom was presented on the side of duty and

service. The call was to render obedience. The vineyard was a sphere

for toil. The owner had given it indeed, but, having given, he

required. That is only half the truth, and the least joyful half. So

this parable dismisses all ideas of work, duty, service, requirement,

and instead gives the emblem of a marriage feast as the picture of the

kingdom. It therein unites two familiar prophetic images for the

Messianic times--those of a festival and of a marriage. As Luther says,

He calls it a marriage feast, not a time of toil or a time of sorrow,

but a time of holiday and a time of joy; in which we make ourselves

fine, sing, play, dance, eat, drink, are glad, and have a good time;

else it would not be a wedding feast, if people were to be working,

mourning, or crying. Therefore, Christ calls His Christianity and

gospel by the name of the highest joy on earth; namely, by the name of

a marriage feast.' How pathetic this designation of His kingdom is on

Christ's lips, when we remember how near His bitter agony He stood, and

that He tasted its bitterness already! It is not the whole truth any

more than the vineyard emblem is. Both must be united in our idea of

the kingdom, as both may be in experience. It is possible to be at once

toiling among the vines in the hot sunshine, and feasting at the table.

The Christian life is not all grinding at heavy tasks, nor all

enjoyment of spiritual refreshment; but our work may be so done as to

be our meat'--as it was His--and our glad repose may be unbroken even

in the midst of toil. We are, at one and the same time, labourers in

the king's vineyard, and guests at the king's table; and the same

duality will, in some unknown fashion, continue in the perfect kingdom,

where there will be both work and feasting, and all the life shall be

both in one.

The second point to be noticed is the invitations of the king. There

had been an invitation before the point at which the parable begins,

for the servants are sent to summon those who had already been called.'

That calling, which lies beyond the horizon of our parable, is the

whole series of agencies in Old Testament times. So this parable begins

almost where the former leaves off. They only slightly overlap. The

first servants here are Christ Himself, and His followers in their

ministry during His life; and the second set are the apostles and

preachers of the gospel during the period between the completion of the

preparation of the feast (that is, the death of Christ) and the

destruction of Jerusalem. The characteristic difference of their

message from that of the servants in the former parable, embodies the

whole difference between the preaching of the prophets, as messengers

demanding the fruit of righteousness, and the glad tidings of a gospel

of free grace which does not demand, but offers, and does not say obey'

until it has said eat, and be glad.' The reiterated invitations not

only correspond to the actual facts, but, like the facts, set the

miracle of God's patience in a still brighter light than the former

story did; for while it is wonderful that the lord of the vineyard

should stoop to ask so often for fruit, it is far more wonderful that

the founder of the feast, who is king too, should stoop to offer over

and over again the refused abundance of his table.

Mark, further, the refusal of the invitations: They would not (or "did

not wish to") come.' That is Christ's gentle way of describing the

unbelief of His generation. It is the second set of refusers who are

painted in darker colours. We are accustomed to think that the sin of

His contemporaries was great beyond parallel, but he seems here to hint

that the sin of those who reject Him after the Cross and the

Resurrection, is blacker than theirs. At any rate, it clearly is so.

But note that the parable speaks as if the refusers were the same

persons throughout, thus taking the same point of view as the former

one did, and regarding the generations of the Jews as one whole. There

is a real unity, though the individuals be different, if the spirit

actuating successive generations be the same.

Note the two classes of rejecters. The first simply pay no attention,

because their heads are full of business. They do not even speak more

or less lame excuses, as the refusers in Luke's similar parable had the

decency to do. The king's messenger addresses a group, who pause on

their road for a moment, to listen listlessly to what he has to say,

and, when he has done, disperse without a word, each man going on his

road, as if nothing had happened. The ground of their indifference lies

in their absorption with this world's good, and their belief that it is

best. His own farm,' as the original puts it emphatically, holds one

man by the solid delight of possessing acres that he can walk over and

till; his merchandise draws another, by the excitement of speculation

and the lust of acquiring. It is not only the hurry and fever of a

great commercial city, but the quiet and leisure of country life, which

shut out taste for God's feast. Strange preference of toil and risk of

loss to abundance, repose, and joy! Savages barter gold for glass

beads. We choose lives of weary work and hunting after uncertain

riches, rather than listen to His call, despising the open-handed

housekeeping of our Father's house, and trying to fill our hunger with

the swine's husks. The suicidal madness of refusing the kingdom is set

in a vivid light in these quiet words.

But stranger still is the conduct of the rest. Why should they kill men

whose only fault was bringing them a hospitable invitation? The

incongruity of the representation has given offence to some

interpreters, who are not slow to point out how Christ could have

improved His parable. But the reality is more incongruous still, and

the unmotived outburst of wrath against the innocent bearers of a

kindly invitation is only too true to life. Mark the distinction drawn

by our Lord between the bulk of the people who simply neglected, and

the few who violently opposed. He does not charge the guilt on all. The

murderers of Him and of His first followers were not the mass of the

nation, who, left to themselves, would not have so acted, but the few

who stirred up the many. But, though He does not lay the guilt at the

doors of all, yet the punishment falls on all, and, when the city is

burned, the houses of the negligent and of the slayers are equally

consumed; for simple refusal of the message and slaying the messengers

were but the positive and superlative degrees of the same

crime--rebellion against the king, whose invitation was a command.

The fatal issue is presented, as in the former parable, in two parts:

the destruction of the rebels, and the passing over of the kingdom to

others. But the differences are noteworthy. Here we read that the king

was wroth.' Insult to a king is worse than dishonesty to a landlord.

The refusal of God's proffered grace is even more certain to awake that

awful reality, the wrath of God, than the failure to render the fruits

of the good possessed. Love repelled and thrown back on itself cannot

but become wrath. That refusal, which is rebellion, is fittingly

described as punished by force of arms and the burning of the city. We

can scarcely help seeing that our Lord here, in a very striking and

unusual way, mingles prose prediction with parabolic imagery. Some

commentators object to this, and take the armies and the burning to be

only part of the imagery, but it is difficult to believe that. Note the

forcible pronouns, His armies,' and their city.' The terrible Roman

legions were His soldiers for the time being, the axe which He laid to

the root of the tree. The city had ceased to be His, just as the temple

ceased to be My house,' and became, by their sin, your house.' The

legend told that, before their destruction, a mighty voice was heard

saying, Let us depart,' and, with the sound of rushing wings, His

presence left sanctuary and city. When He was no longer the glory in

the midst,' He was no longer a wall of fire round about,' and the Roman

torches worked their will on the city which was no longer the city of

our God.'

The command to gather in others to fill the vacant places follows on

the destruction of the city. This may seem to be opposed to the facts

of the transference of the kingdom to the Gentiles, which certainly was

begun long before Jerusalem fell. But its fall was the final and

complete severance of Christianity from Judaism, and not till then had

the messengers to give up the summons to Israel as hopeless. Perhaps

Paul had this parable floating in his memory when he said to the

howling blasphemers at Antioch in Pisidia, Seeing ye . . . judge

yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For

so hath the Lord commanded us.' They which were bidden were not

worthy,' and their unworthiness consisted not in any other moral

demerit, but solely in this, that they had refused the proffered

blessings. That is the only thing which makes any of us unworthy. And

that will make the best of us unworthy.

II. Verses 10-14 carry us beyond the preceding parable, and show us the

judgment on the unworthy accepters of the invitation. There are two

ways of sinning against God's merciful gift: the one is refusing to

accept it; the other is taking it in outward seeming, but continuing in

sin. The former was the sin of the Jews; the latter is the sin of

nominal Christians. We may briefly note the points of this appendix to

the parable. The first is the indiscriminate invitation, which is more

emphatically marked as being so, by the mention of the bad' before the

good among the guests. God's offer is for all, and, in a very real

sense, is specially sent to the worst, just as the doctor goes first to

the most severely wounded. So the motley crew, without the least

attempt at discrimination, are seated at the table. If the Church

understands its business, it will have nothing to do in its message

with distinctions of character any more than of class, but, if it makes

any difference, will give the outcast and disreputable the first place

in its efforts. Is that what it does?

The next point is the king's inspection. The word rendered behold'

implies a fixed and minute observation. When does that scrutiny take

place? Obviously, from the sequel, the final judgment is referred to,

and it is remarkable that here there is no mention of the king's son as

the judge. No parable can shadow forth all truth, and though the Father

has committed all judgment to the Son,' the Son's judgment is the

Father's, and the exigencies of the parable required that the son as

bridegroom should not be brought into view as judge. Note that there is

only one guest without the dress needed. That may be an instance of the

lenity of Christ's charity, which hopeth all things; or it may rather

be intended to suggest the keenness of the king's glance, which, in all

the crowded tables, picks out the one ragged losel who had found his

way there--so individual is his knowledge, so impossible for us to hide

in the crowd.

Mark that the feast has not begun, though the guests are seated. The

judgment stands at the threshold of the heavenly kingdom. The king

speaks with a certain coldness, very unlike the welcome fit for a

guest; and his question is one of astonishment at the rude boldness of

the man who came there, knowing that he had not the proper dress. (That

knowledge is implied in the form of the sentence in the Greek.) What,

then, is the wedding garment? It can be nothing else than

righteousness, moral purity, which fits for sitting at His table in His

kingdom. And the man who has it not, is the nominal Christian, who says

that he has accepted God's invitation, and lives in sin, not putting

off the old man with his deeds,' nor putting on the new man, which is

created in righteousness.' How that garment was to be obtained is no

part of this parable. We know that it is only to be received by faith

in Jesus Christ, and that if we are to pass the scrutiny of the king,

it must be as not having our own righteousness,' but His made ours by

faith which makes us righteous, and then by all holy effort, and toil

in His strength, we must clothe our souls in the dress which befits the

banqueting hall; for only they who are washed and clothed in fine

linen, clean and white, shall sit there. But Christ's purpose here was

not to explain how the robe was to be procured, but to insist that it

must be worn.

He was speechless,'--or, as the word means, muzzled.' The man is

self-condemned, and, having nothing to say in extenuation, the solemn

promise is pronounced of ejection from the lighted hall, with limbs

bound so that he cannot struggle, and consignment to the blackness

outside, of which our Lord adds, in words not put into the king's

mouth, but which we have heard from Him before, There shall be the

[well-known and terrible] weeping and gnashing of teeth--awful though

figurative expressions for despair and passion.

Both parts of the parable come under one law, and exemplify one

principle of the kingdom, that its invitations extend more widely than

the real possession of its gifts. The unbelieving Jew, in one

direction, and the unrighteous Christian in another, are instances of

this.

This is not the place to discuss that wide and well-worn question of

the ground of God's choice. That does not enter into the scope of the

parable. For it, the choice is proved by the actual participation in

the feast. They who do not choose to receive the invitation, or to put

on the wedding garment, do, in different ways, show that they are not

chosen' though called.' The lesson is, not of interminable and

insoluble questionings about God's secrets, but of earnest heed to His

gracious call, and earnest, believing effort to make the fair garment

our very own, if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.'

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THE TABLES TURNED: THE QUESTIONERS QUESTIONED

But when the Pharisees had heard that He had put the Sadducees to

silence, they were gathered together. 35. Then one of them, which was a

lawyer, asked Him a question, tempting Him, and saying, 36. Master,

which is the great commandment in the law? 37. Jesus said unto him,

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy

soul, and with all thy mind. 38. This is the first and great

commandment. 39. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy

neighbour as thyself. 40. On these two commandments hang all the law

and the prophets. 41. While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus

asked them, 42. Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose Son is He? They

say unto Him, The son of David. 43. He saith unto them, How then doth

David in spirit call Him Lord, saying, 44. The Lord said unto my Lord,

Sit Thou on My right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool? 45.

If David then call Him Lord, how is He his son? 46. And no man was able

to answer Him a word; neither durst any man, from that day forth, ask

Him any more questions.'--MATT.xxii. 34-46.

Herodians, Sadducees, Pharisees, who were at daggers drawn with each

other, patched up an alliance against Jesus, whom they all hated. Their

questions were cunningly contrived to entangle Him in the cobwebs of

casuistry and theological hair-splitting, but He walked through the

fine-spun snares as a lion might stalk away with the nooses set for him

dangling behind him. The last of the three questions put to Jesus, and

the one question with which He turned the tables and silenced His

questioners, are our subject. In the former, Jesus declares the essence

of the law or of religion; in the latter, He brings to light the

essential loftiness of the Messiah.

I. The two preceding questions are represented to have been asked by

deputations; this is specially noted as emanating from an individual.

The lawyer' seems to have anticipated his colleagues, and possibly his

question was not that which they had meant to put. His motive in asking

it was that of tempting' Jesus, but we must not give that word too

hostile a sense, for it may mean no more than testing' or trying. The

legal expert wished to find out the attainments and standpoint of this

would-be teacher, and so he proposed a question which would bring out

the whereabouts of Jesus, and give opportunity for a theological

wrangle. He did not ask the question for guidance, but as an inquisitor

cross-examining a suspected heretic. Probably the question was a

stereotyped one, and there are traces in the Gospels that the answer

recognised as orthodox was that which Jesus gave (Luke x. 27). The two

commandments are quoted from Deuteronomy vi. 5 and Leviticus xix. 18

respectively. The lawyer probably only desired to raise a discussion as

to the relative worth of isolated precepts. Jesus goes deep down below

isolated precepts, and unifies, as well as transforms, the law. Supreme

and undivided love to God is not only the great, but also the first,

commandment. In more modern phrase, it is the sum of man's duty and the

germ of all goodness. Note that Jesus shifts the centre from conduct to

character, from deeds to affections. As a man thinketh in his heart, so

is he,' said the sage of old; Christ says, As a man loves, so is he.'

Two loves we have,--either the dark love of self and sense, or the

white love of God, and all character and conduct are determined by

which of these sways us. Note, further, that love to God must needs be

undivided. God is one and all; man is one and finite. To love such an

object with half a heart is not to love. True, our weakness leads

astray, but the only real love corresponding to the natures of the

lover and the loved is whole-hearted, whole-souled, whole-minded. It

must be all in all, or not at all.'

A second is like unto it,'--love to man is the under side, as it were,

of love to God. The two commandments are alike, for both call for love,

and the second is second because it is a consequence of the first. Each

sets up a lofty standard; with all thy heart' and as thyself' sound

equally impossible, but both result necessarily from the nature of the

case. Religion is the parent of all morality, and especially of

benevolent love to men. Innate self-regard will yield to no force but

that of love to God. It is vain to try to create brotherhood among men

unless the sense of God's fatherhood is its foundation. Love of

neighbours is the second commandment, and to make it the first, as some

do now, is to end all hope of fulfilling it. Still further, Jesus hangs

law and prophets on these two precepts, which, at bottom, are one. Not

only will all other duties be done in doing these, since love is the

fulfilling of the law,' but all other precepts, and all the prophets'

appeals and exhortations, are but deductions from, or helps to the

attainment of, these. All our forms of worship, creeds, and the like,

are of worth in so far as they are outcomes of love to God, or aid us

in loving Him and our neighbours. Without love, they are as sounding

brass, or a tinkling cymbal.'

II. The Pharisees remained gathered together,' and may have been

preparing another question, but Jesus had been long enough

interrogated. It was not fitting that He should be catechised only. His

questions teach. He does not seek to entangle' the Pharisees in their

speech,' nor to make them contradict themselves, but brings them full

up against a difficulty, that they may open their eyes to the great

truth which is its only solution. His first question, What think ye of

the Christ?' is simply preparatory to the second. The answer which He

anticipated was given,--as, of course, it would be, for the Davidic

descent of the Messiah was a commonplace universally accepted. One can

fancy that the Pharisees smiled complacently at the attempt to puzzle

them with such an elementary question, but the smile vanished when the

next one came. They interpreted Psalm 110 as Messianic, and David in it

called Messiah my Lord.' How can He be both? Jesus' question is in two

forms,--If He is son, how does David call Him Lord?' or, if He is Lord,

how then is He his son?' Take either designation, and the other lands

you in inextricable difficulties.

Now what was our Lord's purpose in thus driving the Pharisees into a

corner? Not merely to muzzle' them, as the word in verse 34, rendered

put to silence,' literally means, but to bring to light the inadequate

conceptions of the Messiah and of the nature of His kingdom, to which

exclusive recognition of his Davidic descent necessarily led. David's

son would be but a king after the type of the Herods and C泡rs, and

his kingdom as carnal' as the wildest zealot expected, but David's

Lord, sitting at God's right hand, and having His foes made His

footstool by Jehovah Himself,--what sort of a Messiah King would that

be? The majestic image, that shapes itself dimly here, was a revelation

that took the Pharisees' breath away, and made them dumb. Nor are the

words without a half-disclosed claim on Christ's part to be that which

He was so soon to avow Himself before the high priest as being. The

first hearers of them probably caught that meaning partly, and were

horrified; we hear it clearly in the words, and answer, Thou art the

King of glory, O Christ! Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.'

Jesus here says that Psalm 110 is Messianic, that David was the author,

and that he wrote it by divine inspiration. The present writer cannot

see how our Lord's argument can be saved from collapse if the psalm is

not David's.

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THE KING'S FAREWELL

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto

whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are

within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. 28. Even so ye

also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of

hypocrisy and iniquity. 29. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees,

hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the

sepulchres of the righteous, 30. And say, If we had been in the days of

our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of

the prophets. 31. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye

are the children of them which killed the prophets. 32. Fill ye up then

the measure of your fathers. 33. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers,

how can ye escape the damnation of hell! 34. Wherefore, behold, I send

unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall

kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues,

and persecute them from city to city; 35. That upon you may come all

the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous

Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between

the temple and the altar. 36. Verily I say unto you, All these things

shall come upon this generation. 37. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that

killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how

often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen

gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! 38. Behold,

your house is left unto you desolate. 39. For I say unto you, Ye shall

not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in

the name of the Lord.'--MATT. xxiii. 27-39.

If, with the majority of authorities, we exclude verse 14 from the

text, there are, in this chapter, seven woes, like seven thunders,

launched against the rulers. They are scathing exposures, but, as the

very word implies, full of sorrow as well as severity. They are not

denunciations, but prophecies warning that the end of such tempers must

be mournful. The wailing of an infinite compassion, rather than the

accents of anger, sounds in them; and it alone is heard in the outburst

of lamenting in which Christ's heart runs over, as in a passion of

tears, at the close. The blending of sternness and pity, each perfect,

is the characteristic of this wonderful climax of our Lord's appeals to

His nation. Could such tones of love and righteous anger joined have

been sent echoing through the ages in this Gospel, if they had not been

heard?

I. The woe of the whited sepulchres.' The first four woes are directed

mainly to the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees; the last three to

their characters. The two first of these fasten on the same sin, of

hypocritical holiness. There is, however, a difference between the

representation of hypocrites under the metaphor of the clean outside of

the cup and platter, and that of the whited sepulchre. In the former,

the hidden sin is extortion and excess'; that is, sensual enjoyment

wrongly procured, of which the emblems of cup and plate suggest that

good eating and drinking are a chief part. In the latter, it is

iniquity'--a more general and darker name for sin. In the former, the

Pharisee is blind,' self-deceived in part or altogether; in the latter,

stress is rather laid on his appearance unto men.' The repetition of

the same charge in the two woes teaches us Christ's estimate of the

gravity and frequency of the sin.

The whitened tombs of Mohammedan saints still gleam in the strong

sunlight on many a knoll in Palestine. If the Talmudical practice is as

old as our Lord's time, the annual whitewashing was lately over. Its

purpose was not to adorn the tombs, but to make them conspicuous, so

that they might be avoided for fear of defilement. So He would say,

with terrible irony, that the apparent holiness of the rulers was

really a sign of corruption, and a warning to keep away from them. What

a blow at their self-complacency! And how profoundly true it is that

the more punctiliously white the hypocrite's outside, the more foul is

he within, and the wider berth will all discerning people give him! The

terrible force of the figure needs no dwelling on. In Christ's

estimate, such a soul was the very dwelling-place of death; and foul

odours and worms and corruption filled its sickening recesses. Terrible

words to come from His lips into which grace was poured, and bold words

to be flashed at listeners who held the life of the Speaker in their

hands! There are two sorts of hypocrites, the conscious and the

unconscious; and there are ten of the latter for one of the former, and

each ten times more dangerous. Established religion breeds them, and

they are specially likely to be found among those whose business is to

study the documents in which it is embodied. These woes are not like

thunder-peals rolling above our heads, while the lightning strikes the

earth miles away. A religion which is mostly whitewash is as common

among us as ever it was in Jerusalem; and its foul accompaniments of

corruption becoming more rotten every year, as the whitewash is laid on

thicker, may be smelt among us, and its fatal end is as sure.

II. The woe of the sepulchre builders (vs. 29-36). In these verses we

have, first, the specification of another form of hypocrisy, consisting

in building the prophets' tombs, and disavowing the fathers' murder of

them. Honouring dead prophets was right; but honouring dead ones and

killing living ones was conscious or unconscious hypocrisy. The temper

of mind which leads to glorifying the dead witnesses, also leads to

supposing that all truth was given by them; and hence that the living

teachers, who carry their message farther, are false prophets. A

generation which was ready to kill Jesus in honour of Moses, would have

killed Moses in honour of Abraham, and would not have had the faintest

apprehension of the message of either.

It is a great deal easier to build tombs than to accept teachings, and

a good deal of the posthumous honour paid to God's messengers means,

It's a good thing they are dead, and that we have nothing to do but to

put up a monument.' Bi-centenaries and ter-centenaries and jubilees do

not always imply either the understanding or the acceptance of the

principles supposed to be glorified thereby. But the magnifiers of the

past are often quite unconscious of the hollowness of their admiration,

and honest in their horror of their fathers' acts; and we all need the

probe of such words as Christ's to pierce the skin of our lazy

reverence for our fathers' prophets, and let out the foul matter

below--namely, our own blindness to God's messengers of to-day.

The statement of the hypocrisy is followed, in verses 31-33, with its

unmasking and condemnation. The words glow with righteous wrath at

white heat, and end in a burst of indignation, most unfamiliar to His

lips. Three sentences, like triple lightning flash from His pained

heart. With almost scornful subtlety He lays hold of the words which He

puts into the Pharisees' mouths, to convict them of kindred with those

whose deeds they would disown. Our fathers, say you? Then you do belong

to the same family, after all. You confess that you have their blood in

your veins; and, in the very act of denying sympathy with their

conduct, you own kindred. And, for all your protestations, spiritual

kindred goes with bodily descent.' Christ here recognises that children

probably take after their parents,' or, in modern scientific terms,

that heredity' is the law, and that it works more surely in the

transmission of evil than of good.

Then come the awful words bidding that generation fill up the measure

of the fathers.' They are like the other command to Judas to do his

work quickly. They are more than permission, they are command; but such

a command as, by its laying bare of the true character of the deed in

view, is love's last effort at prevention. Mark the growing emotion of

the language. Mark the conception of a nation's sins as one through

successive generations, and the other, of these as having a definite

measure, which being filled, judgment can no longer tarry. Generation

after generation pours its contributions into the vessel, and when the

last black drop which it can hold has been added, then comes the

catastrophe. Mark the fatal necessity by which inherited sin becomes

darker sin. The fathers' crimes are less than the sons'. This

inheritance increases by each transmission. The cloak strikes one more

at each revolution of the hands.

It is hard to recognise Christ in the terrible words that follow. We

have heard part of them from John the Baptist; and it sounded natural

for him to call men serpents and the children of serpents, but it is

somewhat of a shock to hear Jesus hurling such names at even the most

sinful. But let us remember that He who sees hearts, has a right to

tell harsh truths, and that it is truest kindness to strip off masks

which hide from men their own real character, and that the revelation

of the divine love in Jesus would be a partial and impotent revelation

if it did not show us the righteous love which is wrath. There is

nothing so terrible as the anger of gentle compassion, and the fiercest

and most destructive wrath is the wrath of the Lamb.' Seldom, indeed,

did He show that side of His character; but it is there, and the other

side would not be so blessed as it is, unless that were there too.

The woe ends with the double prophecy that that generation would repeat

and surpass the fathers' guilt, and that on it would fall the

accumulated penalties of past bloodshed. Note that solemn therefore,'

which looks back to the whole preceding context, and forward to the

whole subsequent. Because the rulers professed abhorrence of their

fathers' deeds, and yet inherited their spirit, they too would have

their prophets, and would slay them. God goes on sending His

messengers, because we reject them; and the more deaf men are, the more

does He peal His words into their ears. That is mercy and compassion,

that all men may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth; but

it is judgment too, and its foreseen effect must be regarded as part of

the divine purpose in it. Christ's desire is one thing, His purpose

another. His desire is that all should find in His gospel the savour of

life'; but His purpose is that, if it be not that to any, it shall be

to them the savour of death. Mark, too, the authority with which He, in

the face of these scowling Pharisees, assumes the distinct divine

prerogative of sending forth inspired men, who, as His messengers,

shall stand on a level with the prophets of old. Mark His silence as to

His own fate, which is only obscurely hinted at in the command to fill

up the measure of the fathers. Observe the detailed enumeration of His

messengers' gifts,--prophets' under direct inspiration, like those of

old, which may especially refer to the apostles; wise men,' like a

Stephen or an Apollos; scribes,' such as Mark and Luke and many a

faithful servant since, whose pen has loved to write the name above

every name. Note the detailed prophecy of their treatment, which begins

with slaying and goes down to the less severe scourging, and thence to

the milder persecution. Do the three punishments belong to the three

classes of messengers, the severest falling to the lot of the most

highly endowed, and even the quiet penman being hunted from city to

city?

We need not wriggle and twist to try to avoid admitting that the

calling of the martyred Zacharias, the son of Barachias,' is an error

of some one who confused the author of the prophetic book with the

person whose murder is narrated in 2 Chronicles xxiv. We do not know

who made the mistake, or how it appears in our text, but it is not

honest to try to slur it over. The punishment of long ages of sin,

carried on from father to son, does in the course of that history of

the world, which is a part of the judgment of the world, fall upon one

generation. It takes long for the mass of heaped-up sin to become

top-heavy; but when it is so, it buries one generation of those who

have worked at piling it up, beneath its down-rushing avalanche.

The mills of God grind slowly,

But they grind exceeding small.'

The catastrophes of national histories are prepared for by continuous

centuries. The generation that laid the first powder-hornful of the

train is dead and buried, long before the explosion which sends

constituted order and institutions sky-high. The misery is that often

the generation which has to pay the penalty has begun to awake to the

sin, and would be glad to mend it, if it could. England in the

seventeenth century, France in the eighteenth, America in the

nineteenth, had to reap harvests from sins sown long before. Such is

the law of the judgment wrought out by God's providence in history. But

there is another judgment, begun here and perfected hereafter, in which

fathers and sons shall each bear their own burden, and reap accurately

the fruit of what they have sown. The soul that sinneth, it shall die.'

III. The parting wail of rejected love. The lightning flashes of the

sevenfold woes end in a rain of pity and tears. His full heart

overflows in that sad cry of lamentation over the long-continued

foiling of the efforts of a love that would fain have fondled and

defended. What intensity of feeling is in the redoubled naming of the

city! How yearningly and wistfully He calls, as if He might still win

the faithless one, and how lingeringly unwilling He is to give up hope!

How mournfully, rather than accusingly, He reiterates the acts which

had run through the whole history, using a form of the verbs which

suggests continuance. Mark, too, the matter-of-course way in which

Christ assumes that He sent all the prophets whom, through the

generations, Jerusalem had stoned.

So the lament passes into the solemn final leave-taking, with which our

Lord closes His ministry among the Jews, and departs from the temple.

As, in the parable of the marriage-feast, the city was emphatically

called their city,' so here the Temple, in whose courts He was

standing, and which in a moment He was to quit for ever, is called your

house,' because His departure is the withdrawing of the true Shechinah.

It had been the house of God: now He casts it off, and leaves it to

them to do as they will with it. The saddest punishment of

long-continued rejection of His pleading love, is that it ceases at

last to plead. The bitterest woe for those who refuse to render to Him

the fruits of the vineyard, is to get the vineyard for their own,

undisturbed. Christ's utmost retribution for obstinate blindness is to

withdraw from our sight. All the woes that were yet to fall, in long,

dreary succession on that nation, so long continued in its sin, so long

continued in its misery, were hidden in that solemn departure of Christ

from the henceforward empty temple. Let us fear lest our unfaithfulness

meet the like penalty! But even the departure does not end His

yearnings, nor close the long story of the conflict between God's

beseeching love and their unbelief. The time shall come when the nation

shall once more lift up, with deeper, truer adoration, the hosannas of

the triumphal entry. And then a believing Israel shall see their King,

and serve Him. Christ never takes final leave of any man in this world.

It is ever possible that dumb lips may be opened to welcome Him, though

long rejected; and His withdrawals are His efforts to bring about that

opening. When it takes place, how gladly does He return to the heart

which is now His temple, and unveil His beauty to the long-darkened

eyes!

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TWO FORMS OF ONE SAYING

He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.' --MATT. xxiv.

13, R.V.

In your patience possess ye your souls.'--Luke xxi. 19.

These two sayings, different as they sound in our Version, are probably

divergent representations of one original. The reasons for so supposing

are manifold and obvious on a little consideration. In the first place,

the two sayings occur in the Evangelists' reports of the same prophecy

and at the same point therein. In the second place, the verbal

resemblance is much greater than appears in our Authorised Version,

because the word rendered patience' in Luke is derived from that

translated endureth' in Matthew; and the true connection between the

two versions of the saying would have been more obvious if we had had a

similar word in both, reading in the one he that endureth,' and in the

other in your endurance.' In the third place, the difference between

these two sayings presented in our Version, in that the one is a

promise and the other a command, is due to an incorrect reading of St.

Luke's words. The Revised Version substitutes for the imperative

possess' the promise ye shall possess,' and with that variation the two

sayings are brought a good deal nearer each other. In both endurance is

laid down as the condition, which in both is followed by a promise.

Then, finally, there need be no difficulty in seeing that possessing,'

or, more literally, gaining your souls,' is an exact equivalent of the

other expression, ye shall be saved.' One cannot but remember our

Lord's solemn antithetical phrase about a man losing his own soul.' To

win one's soul' is to be saved; to be saved is to win one's soul.

So I think I have made out my thesis that the two sayings are

substantially one. They carry a great weight of warning, of

exhortation, and of encouragement to us all. Let us try now to reap

some of that harvest.

I. First, then, notice the view of our condition which underlies these

sayings.

It is a sad and a somewhat stern one, but it is one to which, I think,

most men's hearts will respond, if they give themselves leisure to

think; and if they see life steadily, and see it whole.' For howsoever

many days are bright, and howsoever all days are good, yet, on the

whole, man is a soldier, and life is a fight.' For some of us it is

simple endurance; for all of us it has sometimes been agony; for all of

us, always, it presents resistance to every kind of high and noble

career, and especially to the Christian one. Easy-going optimists try

to skim over these facts, but they are not to be so lightly set aside.

You have only to look at the faces that you meet in the street to be

very sure that it is always a grave and sometimes a bitter thing to

live. And so our two texts presuppose that life on the whole demands

endurance, whatever may be included in that great word.

Think of the inward resistance and outward hindrances to every lofty

life. The scholar, the man of culture, the philanthropist--all who

would live for anything else than the present, the low, and the

sensual--find that there is a banded conspiracy, as it were, against

them, and that they have to fight their way by continual antagonism, by

continual persistence, as well as by continual endurance. Within,

weakness, torpor, weariness, levity, inconstant wills, bright purposes

clouding over, and all the cowardice and animalism of our nature war

continually against the better, higher self. And without, there is a

down-dragging, as persistent as the force of gravity, coming from the

whole assemblage of external things that solicit, and would fain seduce

us. The old legends used to tell us how, whensoever a knight set out

upon any great and lofty quest, his path was beset on either side by

voices, sometimes whispering seductions, and sometimes shrieking

maledictions, but always seeking to withdraw him from his resolute

march onwards to his goal. And every one of us, if we have taken on us

the orders of any lofty chivalry, and especially if we have sworn

ourselves knights of the Cross, have to meet the same antagonism. Then,

too, there are golden apples rolled upon our path, seeking to draw us

away from our steadfast endurance.

Besides the hindrances in every noble path, the hindrances within and

the hindrances without, the weight of self and the drawing of earth,

there come to us all--in various degrees no doubt, and in various

shapes--but to all of us there come the burdens of sorrows and cares,

and anxieties and trials. Wherever two or three are gathered together,

even if they gather for a feast, there will be some of them who carry a

sorrow which they know well will never be lifted off their shoulders

and their hearts, until they lay down all their burdens at the grave's

mouth; and it is weary work to plod on the path of life with a weight

that cannot be shifted, with a wound that can never be stanched.

Oh, brethren, rosy-coloured optimism is all a dream. The recognition of

the good that is in the evil is the devout man's talisman, but there is

always need for the resistance and endurance which my texts prescribe.

And the youngest of us, the gladdest of us, the least experienced of

us, the most frivolous of us, if we will question our own hearts, will

hear their Amen to the stern, sad view of the facts of earthly life

which underlies this text.

Though it has many other aspects, the world seems to me sometimes to be

like that pool at Jerusalem in the five porches of which lay, groaning

under various diseases, but none of them without an ache, a great

multitude of impotent folk, halt and blind. Astronomers tell us that

one, at any rate, of the planets rolls on its orbit swathed in clouds

and moisture. The world moves wrapped in a mist of tears. God only

knows them all, but each heart knows its own bitterness and responds to

the words, Ye have need of patience.'

II. Now, secondly, mark the victorious temper.

That is referred to in the one saying by he that endureth,' and in the

other in your endurance.' Now, it is very necessary for the

understanding of many places in Scripture to remember that the notion

either of patience or of endurance by no means exhausts the power of

this noble Christian word. For these are passive virtues, and however

excellent and needful they may be, they by no means sum up our duty in

regard to the hindrances and sorrows, the burdens and weights, of which

I have been trying to speak. For you know it is only what cannot be

cured' that must be endured,' and even incurable things are not merely

to be endured, but they ought to be utilised. It is not enough that we

should build up a dam to keep the floods of sorrow and trial from

overflowing our fields; we must turn the turbid waters into our

sluices, and get them to drive our mills. It is not enough that we

should screw ourselves up to lie unresistingly under the surgeon's

knife; though God knows that it is as much as we can manage sometimes,

and we have to do as convicts under the lash do, get a bit of lead or a

bullet into our mouths, and bite at it to keep ourselves from crying

out. But that is not all our duty in regard to our trials and

difficulties. There is required something more than passive endurance.

This noble word of my texts does mean a great deal more than that. It

means active persistence as well as patient submission. It is not

enough that we should stand and bear the pelting of the pitiless storm,

unmurmuring and unbowed by it; but we are bound to go on our course,

bearing up and steering right onwards. Persistent perseverance in the

path that is marked out for us is especially the virtue that our Lord

here enjoins. It is well to sit still unmurmuring; it is better to

march on undiverted and unchecked. And when we are able to keep

straight on in the path which is marked out for us, and especially in

the path that leads us to God, notwithstanding all opposing voices, and

all inward hindrances and reluctances; when we are able to go to our

tasks of whatever sort they are and to do them, though our hearts are

beating like sledge-hammers; when we say to ourselves, It does not

matter a bit whether I am sad or glad, fresh or wearied, helped or

hindered by circumstances, this one thing I do,' then we have come to

understand and to practise the grace that our Master here enjoins. The

endurance which wins the soul, and leads to salvation, is no mere

passive submission, excellent and hard to attain as that often is; but

it is brave perseverance in the face of all difficulties, and in spite

of all enemies.

Mark how emphatically our Lord here makes the space within which that

virtue has to be exercised conterminous with the whole duration of our

lives. I need not discuss what the end' was in the original application

of the words; that would take us too far afield. But this I desire to

insist upon, that right on to the very close of life we are to expect

the necessity of putting forth the exercise of the very same

persistence by which the earlier stages of any noble career must

necessarily be marked. In other departments of life there may be

relaxation, as a man goes on through the years; but in the culture of

our characters, and in the deepening of our faith, and in the drawing

near to our God, there must be no cessation or diminution of

earnestness and of effort right up to the close.

There are plenty of people, and I dare say that I address some of them

now, who began their Christian career full of vigour and with a heat

that was too hot to last. But, alas, in a year or two all the fervency

was past, and they settled down into the average, easygoing,

unprogressive Christian, who is a wet blanket to the devotion and work

of a Christian church. I wonder how many of us would scarcely know our

own former selves if we could see them. Christian people, to how many

of us should the word be rung in our ears: Ye did run well; what did

hinder you'? The answer is--Myself.

But may I say that this emphatic to the end' has a special lesson for

us older people, who, as natural strength abates and enthusiasm cools

down, are apt to be but the shadows of our old selves in many things?

But there should be fire within the mountain, though there may be snow

on its crest. Many a ship has been lost on the harbour bar; and there

is no excuse for the captain leaving the bridge, or the engineer coming

up from the engine-room, stormy as the one position and stifling as the

other may be, until the anchor is down, and the vessel is moored and

quiet in the desired haven. The desert, with its wild beasts and its

Bedouin, reaches right up to the city gates, and until we are within

these we need to keep our hands on our sword-hilts and be ready for

conflict. He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.'

III. Lastly, note the crown which endurance wins.

Now, I need not spend or waste your time in mere verbal criticism, but

I wish to point out that that word soul' in one of our two texts means

both the soul and the life of which it is the seat; and also to remark

that the being saved and the winning of the life or the soul has

distinct application, in our Lord's words, primarily to corporeal

safety and preservation in the midst of dangers; and, still further, to

note the emphatic in your patience,' as suggesting not only a future

but a present acquisition of one's own soul, or life, as the result of

such persevering endurance and enduring perseverance. All which things

being kept in view, I may expand the great promise that lies in my

text, as follows:-- First, by such persevering persistence in the

Christian path, we gain ourselves. Self-surrender is self-possession.

We never own ourselves till we have given up owning ourselves, and

yielded ourselves to that Lord who gives us back saints to ourselves.

Self-control is self-possession. We do not own ourselves as long as it

is possible for any weakness in flesh, sense, or spirit to gain

dominion over us and hinder us from doing what we know to be right. We

are not our own masters then. Whilst they promise them liberty, they

themselves are the bond-slaves of corruption.' It is only when we have

the bit well into the jaws of the brutes, and the reins tight in our

hands, so that a finger-touch can check or divert the course, that we

are truly lords of the chariot in which we ride and of the animals that

impel it.

And such self-control which is the winning of ourselves is, as I

believe, thoroughly realised only when, by self-surrender of ourselves

to Jesus Christ, we get His help to govern ourselves and so become

lords of ourselves. Some little petty Rajah, up in the hills, in a

quasi-independent State in India, is troubled by mutineers whom he

cannot subdue; what does he do? He sends a message down to Lahore or

Calcutta, and up come English troops that consolidate his dominion, and

he rules securely, when he has consented to become a feudatory, and

recognise his overlord. And so you and I, by continual repetition, in

the face of self and sin, of our acts of self-surrender, bring Christ

into the field; and then, when we have said, Lord, take me; I live, yet

not I, but Christ liveth in me'; and when we daily, in spite of

hindrances, stand to the surrender and repeat the consecration, then in

our perseverance we acquire our souls.'

Again, such persistence wins even the bodily life, whether it preserves

it or loses it. I have said that the words of our texts have an

application to bodily preservation in the midst of the dreadful dangers

of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. But so regarded they are a

paradox. For hear how the Master introduces them: Some of you shall

they cause to be put to death, but there shall not a hair of your heads

perish. In your perseverance ye shall win your lives.' Some of you they

will put to death,' but ye shall win your lives,'--a paradox which can

only be solved by experience. Whether this bodily life be preserved or

lost, it is gained when it is used as a means of attaining the higher

life of union with God. Many a martyr had the promise, Not a hair of

your head shall perish,' fulfilled at the very moment when the falling

axe shore his locks in twain, and severed his head from his body.

Finally, full salvation, the true possession of himself, and the

acquisition of the life which really is life, comes to a man who

perseveres to the end, and thus passes to the land where he will

receive the recompense of the reward. The one moment the runner, with

flushed cheek and forward swaying body, hot, with panting breath, and

every muscle strained, is straining to the winning-post; and the next

moment, in utter calm, he is wearing the crown.

To the end,' and what a contrast the next moment will be! Brethren, may

it be true of you and of me that we are not of them that draw back unto

perdition, but of them that believe to the winning of their souls!'

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THE CARRION AND THE VULTURES

Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered

together.'--MATT. xxiv. 28.

This grim parable has, of course, a strong Eastern colouring. It is

best appreciated by dwellers in those lands. They tell us that no

sooner is some sickly animal dead, or some piece of carrion thrown out

by the way, than the vultures--for the eagle does not prey upon

carrion--appear. There may not have been one visible a moment before in

the hot blue sky, but, taught by scent or by sight that their banquet

is prepared, they come flocking from all corners of the heavens, a

hideous crowd round their hideous meal, fighting with flapping wings

and tearing it with their strong talons. And so, says Christ, wherever

there is a rotting, dead society, a carcase hopelessly corrupt and

evil, down upon it, as if drawn by some unerring attraction, will come

the angels, the vultures of the divine judgment.

The words of my text were spoken, according to the version of them in

Luke's Gospel, in answer to a question from the disciples. Our Lord had

been discoursing, in very solemn words, which, starting from the

historical event of the impending fall of Jerusalem, had gradually

passed into a description of the greater event of His second coming.

And all these solemn warnings had stirred nothing deeper in the bosoms

of the disciples than a tepid and idle curiosity which expressed itself

in the one almost irrelevant question, Where, Lord?' He answers--Not

here, not there, but everywhere where there is a carcase. The great

event which is referred to in our Lord's solemn words is a future

judgment, which is to be universal. But the words are not exhausted in

their reference to that event. There have been many comings of the

Lord,' many days of the Lord,' which on a smaller scale have embodied

the same principles as are to be displayed in world-wide splendour and

awfulness at the last.

I. The first thing, then, in these most true and solemn words is this,

that they are to us a revelation of a law which operates with unerring

certainty through all the course of the world's history.

We cannot tell, but God can, when evil has become incurable; or when,

in the language of my text, the mass of any community has become a

carcase. There may be flickerings of life, all unseen by our eyes, or

there may be death, all unsuspected by our shallow vision. So long as

there is a possibility of amendment, 'sentence against an evil work is

not executed speedily'; and God dams back, as it were, the flow of His

retributive judgment, not willing that any should perish, but that all

should come to the knowledge of the truth.' But when He sees that all

is vain, that no longer is restoration or recovery possible, then He

lets loose the flood; or, in the language of my text, when the thing

has become a carcase, then the vultures, God's scavengers, come and

clear it away from off the face of the earth.

Now that is the law that has been working from the beginning, working

as well in regard to the long delays as in regard to the swift

execution. There is another metaphor, in the Old Testament, that puts

the same idea in a very striking form. It speaks about God's

awakening,' as if His judgment slumbered. All round that dial the hand

goes creeping, creeping, creeping slowly, but when it comes to the

appointed line, then the bell strikes. And so years and centuries go

by, all chance of recovery departs, and then the crash! The ice palace,

built upon the frozen blocks, stands for a while, but when the spring

thaws come, it breaks up.

Let me remind you of some instances and illustrations. Take that story

which people stumble over in the early part of the Old Testament

revelation--the sweeping away of those Canaanitish nations whose

hideous immoralities had turned the land into a perfect sty of

abominations. There they had been wallowing, and God's Spirit, which

strives with men ever and always, had been striving with them, we know

not for how long, but when the time came at which, according to the

grim metaphor of the Old Testament, the measure of their iniquity was

full,' then He hurled upon them the fierce hosts out of the desert, and

in a whirlwind of fire and sword swept them off the face of the earth.

Take another illustration. These very people, who had been the

executioners of divine judgment, settled in the land, fell into the

snare--and you know the story. The captivities of Israel and Judah were

other illustrations of the same thing. The fall of Jerusalem, to which

our Lord pointed in the solemn context of these words, was another. For

millenniums God had been pleading with them, sending His prophets,

rising early and sending, saying, Oh, do not do this abominable thing

which I hate!' And last of all He sent His Son.' Christ being rejected,

God had shot His last bolt. He had no more that He could do. Christ

being refused, the nation's doom was fixed and sealed, and down came

the eagles of Rome, again God's scavengers, to sweep away the nation on

which had been lavished such wealth of divine love, but which had now

come to be a rotting abomination, and to this day remains in a living

death, a miraculously preserved monument of God's Judgments.

Take another illustration how, once more, the executants of the law

fall under its power. That nation which crushed the feeble resources of

Judaea, as a giant might crush a mosquito in his grasp, in its turn

became honeycombed with abominations and immoralities; and then down

from the frozen north came the fierce Gothic tribes over the Roman

territory. One of their captains called himself the 'Scourge of God,'

and he was right. Another swooping down of the vultures flashed from

the blue heavens, and the carrion was torn to fragments by their strong

beaks.

Take one more illustration--that French Revolution at the end of the

eighteenth century. The fathers sowed the wind, and the children reaped

the whirlwind. Generations of heartless luxury, selfishness,

carelessness of the cry of the poor, immoral separation of class from

class, and all the sins which a ruling caste could commit against a

subject people, had prepared for the convulsion. Then, in a carnival of

blood and deluges of fire and sulphur, the rotten thing was swept off

the face of the earth, and the world breathed more freely for its

destruction.

Take another illustration, through which many of us have lived. The

bitter legacy of negro slavery that England gave to her giant son

across the Atlantic, which blasted and sucked the strength out of that

great republic, went down amidst universal execration. It took

centuries for the corpse to be ready, but when the vultures came they

made quick work of it.

And so, as I say, all over the world, and from the beginning of time,

with delays according to the possibilities of restoration and recovery

which the divine eye discerns, this law is working. Verily there is a

God that judgeth in the earth. The wheels of God grind slowly, but they

grind exceeding small.' Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the

eagles be gathered together.'

And has the law exhausted its force? Are there going to be no more

applications of it? Are there no European societies at this day that in

their godlessness and social iniquities are hurrying fast to the

condition of carrion? Look around us--drunkenness, sensual immorality,

commercial dishonesty, senseless luxury amongst the rich, heartless

indifference to the wail of the poor, godlessness over all classes and

ranks of the community. Surely, surely, if the body politic be not

dead, it is sick nigh unto death. And I, for my part, have little

hesitation in saying that as far as one can see, European society is

driving as fast as it can, with its godlessness and immorality, to such

another day of the Lord' as these words of my text suggest. Let us see

to it that we do our little part to be the 'salt of the earth' which

shall keep it from rotting, and so drive away the vultures of judgment.

II. But let me turn to another point. We have here a law which is to

have a far more tremendous accomplishment in the future.

There have been many comings of the Lord, many days of the Lord, when,

as Isaiah says in his magnificent vision of one such, the loftiness of

man has been bowed down, and the haughtiness of man made low, and the

Lord alone exalted in that day when He arises to shake terribly the

earth. And all these days of the Lord' are prophecies, and distinctly

point to a future day' when the same principles which have been

disclosed as working on a small scale in them, shall be manifested in

full embodiment. These days of the Lord' proclaim the day of the Lord.'

In the prophecies both of the Old and New Testaments that universal

future judgment is seen glimmering through the descriptions of the

nearer partial judgments. So interpreters are puzzled to say at what

point in a prophecy the transition is made from the smaller to the

greater. The prophecies are like the diagrams in treatises on

perspective, in which diverging lines are drawn from the eye, enclosing

a square or other figure, and which, as they recede further from the

point of view, enclose a figure, the same in shape but of greater

dimensions. There is a historical event foretold, the fall of

Jerusalem. It is close up to the eyes of the disciples, and is

comparatively small. Carry out the lines that touch its corners and

define its shape, and upon the far distant curtain of the dim future

there is thrown a like figure immensely larger, the coming of Jesus

Christ to judge the world. All these little premonitions and foretastes

and anticipatory specimens point onwards to the assured termination of

the world's history in that great and solemn day, when all men shall be

gathered before Christ's throne, and He shall judge all nations--judge

you and me amongst the rest. That future judgment is distinctly a part

of the Christian revelation. Jesus Christ is to come in bodily form as

He went away. All men are to be judged by Him. That judgment is to be

the destruction of opposing forces, the sweeping away of the carrion of

moral evil.

It is therefore distinctly a part of the message that is to be preached

by us, under penalty of the awful condemnation pronounced on the

watchman who seeth the sword coming and gives no warning. It is not

becoming to make such a solemn message the opportunity for pictorial

rhetoric, which vulgarises its greatness and weakens its power. But it

is worse than an offence against taste; it is unfaithfulness to the

preaching which God bids us, treason to our King, and cruelty to our

hearers, to suppress the warning--The day of the Lord cometh.' There

are many temptations to put it in the background. Many of you do not

want that kind of preaching. You want the gentle side of divine

revelation. You say to us in fact, though not in words. Prophesy to us

smooth things. Tell us about the infinite love which wraps all mankind

in its embrace. Speak to us of the Father God, who "hateth nothing that

He hath made." Magnify the mercy and gentleness and tenderness of

Christ. Do not say anything about that other side. It is not in

accordance with the tendencies of modern thought.'

So much the worse, then, for the tendencies of modern thought. I yield

to no man in the ardour of my belief that the centre of all revelation

is the revelation of a God of infinite love, but I cannot forget that

there is such a thing as the terror of the Lord,' and I dare not

disguise my conviction that no preaching sounds every string in the

manifold harp of God's truth, which does not strike that solemn note of

warning of judgment to come.

Such suppression is unfaithfulness. Surely, if we preachers believe

that tremendous truth, we are bound to speak. It is cruel kindness to

be silent. If a traveller is about to plunge into some gloomy jungle

infested by wild beasts, he is a friend who sits by the wayside to warn

him of his danger. Surely you would not call a signalman unfeeling

because he held out a red lamp when he knew that just round the curve

beyond his cabin the rails were up, and that any train that reached the

place would go over in horrid ruin. Surely that preaching is not justly

charged with harshness which rings out the wholesome proclamation of a

day of judgment, when we shall each give account of ourselves to the

divine-human Judge.

Such suppression weakens the power of the Gospel, which is the

proclamation of deliverance, not only from the power, but also from the

future retribution of sin. In such a maimed gospel there is but an

enfeebled meaning given to that idea of deliverance. And though the

thing that breaks the heart and draws men to God is not terror, but

love, the terror must often be evoked in order to lead to love. It is

only judgment to come' which will make Felix tremble, and though his

trembling may pass away, and he be none the nearer the kingdom, there

will never any good be done to him unless he does tremble. So, for all

these reasons, all faithful preaching of Christ's Gospel must include

the proclamation of Christ as Judge.

But, if I should be unfaithful, if I did not preach this truth, what

shall we call you if you turn away from it? You would not think it a

wise thing of the engine-driver to shut his eyes if the red lamp were

shown, and to go along at full speed and to pay no heed to that? Do you

think it would be right for a Christian minister to lock his lips and

never say, There is a judgment to come'? And do you think it is wise of

you not to think of that, and to shape your conduct accordingly?

Oh, dear friends! I do not doubt that the centre of all divine

revelation is the love of God, nor do I doubt that incomparably the

highest representation of the power of Christ's Gospel is that it draws

men away from the love and the practice of evil, and makes them pure

and holy. But that is not all. There is not only the practice and the

power of sin to be fought against, but there is the penalty of sin to

be taken into account; and as sure as you are living, and as sure as

there is a God above us, so sure is it that there is a Day of Judgment,

when He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He hath

ordained.' The believing of that is not salvation, but the belief of

that seems to me to be indispensable for any vigorous grasp of the

delivering love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

III. And so the last thing that I have to say is that this is a law

which need never touch you, nor you know anything about but by the

hearing of the ear.

It is told us that we may escape it. When Paul reasoned of

righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to come, his hearer

trembled as he listened, but there was an end. But the true effect of

this message is the effect that Paul himself attached to it when he

said in the hearing of Athenian wisdom, God hath commanded all men

everywhere to repent, because He hath appointed a day in the which He

will judge the world in righteousness.' Judgment faithfully preached is

the preparation for preaching that there is no condemnation to them

which are in Christ Jesus.' If we trust in that great Saviour, we shall

be quickened from the death of sin, and so shall not be food for the

vultures of judgment. Can these corpses live? Can this eating

putrescence, which burrows its foul way through our souls, be

sweetened? Is there any antiseptic for it? Yes, blessed be God, and the

hand whose touch healed the leper will heal us, and our flesh will come

again as the flesh of a little child.' Christ has bared His breast to

the divine judgments against sin, and if by faith we shelter ourselves

in Him, we shall never know the terrors of that awful day.

Be sure that judgment to come is no mere figure dressed up to frighten

children, nor the product of blind superstition, but that it is the

inevitable issue of the righteousness of the All-ruling God. You and I

and all the sons of men have to face it. Herein is our love made

perfect, that we may have boldness before Him in the Day of Judgment.'

Betake yourselves, as poor sinful creatures who know something of the

corruption of your own hearts, to that dear Christ who has died on the

Cross for you, and all that is obnoxious to the divine judgments will,

by His transforming life breathed into you, be taken out of your

hearts; and when that day of the Lord' shall dawn, you, trusting in the

sacrifice of Him who is your Judge, will have a song as when a holy

solemnity is kept.' Take Christ for your Saviour, and then, when the

vultures of judgment, with their mighty black pinions, are wheeling and

circling in the sky, ready to pounce upon their prey, He will gather

you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings,' and beneath their

shadow you will be safe.

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WATCHING FOR THE KING

Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. 43. But

know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the

thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered

his house to be broken up. 44. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such

an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh. 45. Who then is a

faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his

household, to give them meat in due season! 46. Blessed is that

servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. 47. Verily I

say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. 48. But

and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his

coming; 49. And shall begin to smite his fellow- servants, and to eat

and drink with the drunken; 50. The lord of that servant shall come in

a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware

of, 51. And shall out him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the

hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'--MATT. xxiv.

42-51.

The long day's work was nearly done. Christ had left the temple, never

to return. He took His way across the Mount of Olives to Bethany, and

was stayed by the disciples' question as to the date of the destruction

of the temple, which He had foretold, and of the end of the world,'

which they attached to it. They could not fancy the world lasting

without the temple! We often make a like mistake. So there, on the

hillside, looking across to the city lying in the sad, fading evening

light, He spoke the prophecies of this chapter, which begin with the

destruction of Jerusalem, and insensibly merge into the final coming of

the Son of Man, of which that was a prelude and a type. The difficulty

of accurately apportioning the details of this prophecy to the future

events which fulfil them is common to it with all prophecy, of which it

is a characteristic to blend events which, in the fulfilment, are far

apart. From the mountain top, the eye travels over great stretches of

country, but does not see the gorges, separating points which seem

close together, foreshortened by distance.

There are many comings of the Son of Man before His final coming for

final judgment, and the nearer and smaller ones are themselves

prophecies. So, we do not need to settle the chronology of unfulfilled

prophecy in order to get the full benefit of Christ's teachings here.

In its moral and spiritual effect on us, the uncertainty of the time of

our going to Christ is nearly identical with the uncertainty of the

time of His coming to us.

I. The command of watchfulness enforced by our ignorance of the time of

His coming (vs. 42-44). The two commands at the beginning and end of

the paragraph are not quite the same. Be ye ready' is the consequence

of watchfulness. Nor are the two appended reasons the same; for the

first command is grounded on His coming at a day when ye know not,' and

the second on His coming in an hour that ye think not,' that is to say,

it not only is uncertain, but unexpected and surprising. There may also

be a difference worth noting in the different designations of Christ as

your Lord,' standing in a special relation to you, and as the Son of

Man,' of kindred with all men, and their Judge. What is this

watchfulness'? It is literally wakefulness. We are beset by perpetual

temptations to sleep, to spiritual drowsiness and torpor. An opium sky

rains down soporifics.' And without continual effort, our perception of

the unseen realities and our alertness for service will be lulled to

sleep. The religion of multitudes is a sleepy religion. Further, it is

a vivid and ever-present conviction of His certain coming, and

consequently a habitual realising of the transience of the existing

order of things, and of the fast-approaching realities of the future.

Further, it is the keeping of our minds in an attitude of expectation

and desire, our eyes ever travelling to the dim distance to mark the

far-off shining of His coming. What a miserable contrast to this is the

temper of professing Christendom as a whole! It is swallowed up in the

present, wide awake to interests and hopes belonging to this bank and

shoal of time,' but sunk in slumber as to that great future, or, if

ever the thought of it intrudes, shrinking, rather than desire,

accompanies it, and it is soon hustled out of mind.

Christ bases His command on our ignorance of the time of His coming. It

was no part of His purpose in this prophecy to remove that ignorance,

and no calculations of the chronology of unfulfilled predictions have

pierced the darkness. It was His purpose that from generation to

generation His servants should be kept in the attitude of expectation,

as of an event that may come at any time and must come at some time.

The parallel uncertainty of the time of death, though not what is meant

here, serves the same moral end if rightly used, and the fact of death

is exposed to the same danger of being neglected because of the very

uncertainty, which ought to be one chief reason for keeping it ever in

view. Any future event, which combines these two things, absolute

certainty that it will happen, and utter uncertainty when it will

happen, ought to have power to insist on being remembered, at least,

till it was prepared for, and would have it, if men were not such

fools. Christ's coming would be oftener contemplated if it were more

welcome. But what sort of a servant is he, who has no glow of gladness

at the thought of meeting his lord? True Christians are all them that

have loved His appearing.'

The illustrative example which separates these two commands is

remarkable. The householder's ignorance of the time when the thief

would come is the reason why he does not watch. He cannot keep awake

all night, and every night, to be ready for him; so he has to go to

sleep, and is robbed. But our ignorance is a reason for wakefulness,

because we can keep awake all the night of life. The householder

watches to prevent, but we to share in, that for which the watch is

kept. The figure of the thief is chosen to illustrate the one point of

the unexpected stealthy approach. But is there not deep truth in it, to

the effect that Christ's coming is like that of a robber to those who

are asleep, depriving them of earthly treasures? The word rendered

broken up' means literally dug through,' and points to a clay or mud

house, common in the East, which is entered, not by bursting open doors

or windows, but by digging through the wall. Death comes to men sunk in

spiritual slumber, to strip them of good which they would fain keep,

and makes his entrance by a breach in the earthly house of this

tabernacle. So St. Paul, in his earliest Epistle, refers to this saying

(a proof of the early diffusion of the gospel narrative), and says, Ye,

brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a

thief.'

II. The picture and reward of watchfulness. The general exhortation to

watch is followed by a pair of contrasted parable portraits, primarily

applicable to the apostles and to those set over His household.' But if

we remember what Christ taught as the condition of pre-eminence in His

kingdom, we shall not confine their application to an order.

The least flower with a brimming cup may stand,

And share its dew-drop with another near,'

and the most slenderly endowed Christian has some crumb of the bread of

life intrusted to him to dispense. It is to be observed that

watchfulness is not mentioned in this portraiture of the faithful

servant. It is presupposed as the basis and motive of his service. So

we learn the double lesson that the attitude of continual outlook for

the Lord is needed, if we are to discharge the tasks which He has set

us, and that the true effect of watchfulness is to harness us to the

car of duty. Many other motives actuate Christian faithfulness, but all

are reinforced by this, and where it is feeble they are more or less

inoperative. We cannot afford to lose its influence. A Church or a soul

which has ceased to be looking for Him will have let all its tasks drop

from its drowsy hands, and will feel the power of other constraining

motives of Christian service but faintly, as in a half-dream.

On the other hand, true waiting for Him is best expressed in the quiet

discharge of accustomed and appointed tasks. The right place for the

servant to be found, when the Lord comes, is so doing' as He commands,

however secular the task may be. That was a wise judge who, when sudden

darkness came on, and people thought the end of the world was at hand,

said, Bring lights, and let us go on with the case. We cannot be better

employed, if the end has come, than in doing our duty.' Flighty

impatience of common tasks is not watching for the King, as Paul had to

teach the Thessalonians, who were shaken' in mind by the thought of the

day of the Lord; but the proper attitude of the watchers is that ye

study to be quiet, and to do your own business.'

Observe, further, the interrogative form of the parable. The question

is the sharp point which gives penetrating power, and suggests Christ's

high estimate of the worth and difficulty of such conduct, and sets us

to ask for ourselves, Lord, is it I?' The servant is faithful' inasmuch

as he does his Lord's will, and rightly uses the goods intrusted to

him, and wise' inasmuch as he is faithful.' For a single-hearted

devotion to Christ is the parent of insight into duty, and the best

guide to conduct; and whoever seeks only to be true to his Lord in the

use of his gifts and possessions, will not lack prudence to guide him

in giving to each his food, and that in due season. The two

characteristics are connected in another way also; for, if the outcome

of faithfulness be taken into account, its wisdom is plain, and he who

has been faithful even unto death will be seen to have been wise though

he gave up all, when the crown of eternal life sparkles on his

forehead. Such faithfulness and wisdom (which are at bottom but two

names for one course of conduct) find their motive in that

watchfulness, which works as ever in the great Taskmaster's eye, and as

ever keeping in view His coming, and the rendering of account to Him.

The reward of the faithful servant is stated in language similar to

that of the parable of the talents. Faithfulness in a narrower sphere

leads to a wider. The reward for true work is more work, of nobler sort

and on a grander scale. That is true for earth and for heaven. If we do

His will here, we shall one day exchange the subordinate place of the

steward for the authority of the ruler, and the toil of the servant for

the joy of the Lord.' The soul that is joined to Christ and is one in

will with Him has all things for its servants; and he who uses all

things for his own and his brethren's highest good is lord of them all,

while he walks amid the shadows of time, and will be lifted to loftier

dominion over a grander world when he passes hence.

III. The picture and doom of the unwatchful servant. This portrait

presupposes that a long period will elapse before Christ comes. The

secret thought of the evil servant is the thought of a time far down

the ages from the moment of our Lord's speaking. It would take

centuries for such a temper to be developed in the Church. What is the

temper? A secret dismissal of the anticipation of the Lord's return,

and that not merely because He has been long in coming, but as thinking

that He has broken His word, and has not come when He said that He

would. This unspoken dimming over of the expectation and unconfessed

doubt of the firmness of the promise, is the natural product of the

long time of apparent delay which the Church has had to encounter. It

will cloud and depress the religion of later ages, unless there be

constant effort to resist the tendency and to keep awake. The first

generations were all aflame with the glad hope Maranatha'--The Lord is

at hand.' Their successors gradually lost that keenness of expectation,

and at most cried, Will not He come soon?' Their successors saw the

starry hope through thickening mists of years; and now it scarcely

shines for many, or at least is but a dim point, when it should blaze

as a sun.

He was an evil' servant who said so in his heart. He was evil because

he said it, and he said it because he was evil; for the yielding to sin

and the withdrawal of love from Jesus dim the desire for His coming,

and make the whisper that He delays, a hope; while, on the other hand,

the hope that He delays helps to open the sluices, and let sin flood

the life. So an outburst of cruel masterfulness and of riotous

sensuality is the consequence of the dimmed expectation. There would

have been no usurpation of authority over Christ's heritage by priest

or pope, or any other, if that hope had not become faint. If professing

Christians lived with the great white throne and the heavens and earth

fleeing away before Him that sits on it, ever burning before their

inward eye, how could they wallow amid the mire of animal indulgence?

The corruptions of the Church, especially of its official members, are

traced with sad and prescient hand in these foreboding words, which are

none the less a prophecy because cast by His forbearing gentleness into

the milder form of a supposition.

The dreadful doom of the unwatchful servant is couched in terms of

awful severity. The cruel punishment of sawing asunder, which,

tradition says, was suffered by Isaiah and was not unfamiliar in old

times, is his. What concealed terror of retribution it signifies we do

not know. Perhaps it points to a fate in which a man shall be, as it

were, parted into two, each at enmity with the other. Perhaps it

implies a retribution in kind for his sin, which consisted, as the next

clause implies, in hypocrisy, which is the sundering in twain of inward

conviction and practice, and is to be avenged by a like but worse

rending apart of conscience and will. At all events, it shadows a

fearful retribution, which is not extinction, inasmuch as, in the next

clause, we read that his portion--his lot, or that condition which

belongs to him by virtue of his character--is with the hypocrites.' He

was one of them, because, while he said my lord,' he had ceased to love

and obey, having ceased to desire and expect; and therefore whatever is

their fate shall be his, even to the dividing asunder of soul and

spirit,' and setting eternal discord among the thoughts and intents of

the heart. That is not the punishment of unwatchfulness, but of what

unwatchfulness leads to, if unawakened. Let these words of the King

ring an alarum for us all, and rouse our sleepy souls to watch, as

becomes the children of the day.

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THE WAITING MAIDENS

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which

took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. 2. And five of

them were wise, and five were foolish. 3. They that were foolish took

their lamps, and took no oil with them: 4. But the wise took oil in

their vessels with their lamps. 5. While the bridegroom tarried, they

all slumbered and slept. 6. And at midnight there was a cry made,

Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. 7. Then all those

virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. 8. And the foolish said unto

the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. 9. But the

wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you:

but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. 10. And

while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready

went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. 11 Afterward

came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. 12. But he

answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. 13. Watch

therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of

Man cometh.'--MATT. xxv. 1-13.

We shall best understand this beautiful but difficult parable if we

look on to its close. Our Lord appends to it the refrain of all this

context, the exhortation to watch, based upon our ignorance of the time

of His coming. But as in the former little parable of the wise servant

it was his faithful, wise dispensing of his lord's goods, and not his

watchfulness, which was the point of the eulogium passed on him, so

here it is the readiness of the wise virgins to take their places in

the wedding march which is commended. That readiness consists in their

having their lamps burning and their oil in store. This, then, is the

main thing in the parable. It is an exhibition, under another aspect,

of what constitutes fitness for entrance into the festal chamber of the

bridegroom, which had just been set forth as consisting in faithful

stewardship. Here it is presented as being the possession of lamp and

oil.

I. The first consideration, then, must be, What is the meaning of these

emblems? A great deal of fine-spun ingenuity has been expended on

subordinate points in the parable, such as the significance of the

number of maidens, the conclusions from the equal division into wise

and foolish, the place from which they came to meet the bridegroom, the

point in the marriage procession where they are supposed to join it,

whether it was at going to fetch the bride, or at coming back with her;

whether the feast is held in her house, or in his, and so on. But all

these are unimportant questions, and as Christ has left them in the

background, we only destroy the perspective by dragging them into the

front. In no parable is it more important than in this to restrain the

temptation to run out analogies into their last results. The

remembrance that the virgins, as the emblem of the whole body of the

visible Church, are the same as the bride, who does not appear in the

parable, might warn against such an error. They were ten, as being the

usual number for such a company, or as being the round number naturally

employed when definiteness was not sought. They were divided equally,

not because our Lord desired to tell, but because He wished to leave

unnoticed, the numerical proportion of the two classes. One set are

wise' and the other foolish,' because He wishes to show not only the

sin, but the absurdity, of unreadiness, and to teach us that true

wisdom is not of the head only, but far more of the heart. The conduct

of the two groups of maidens is looked at from the prudent and

common-sense standpoint, and the provident action of the one sets in

relief the reckless stupidity of the other.

There have been many opinions as to the meaning of the lamps and the

oil, which it is needless to repeat. Surely the analogy of scriptural

symbolism is our best guide. If we follow it, we get a meaning which

perfectly suits the emblems and the whole parable. In the Sermon on the

Mount, our Lord uses the same figure of the lamp, and explains it: Let

your light shine before men, that they may see your good works.'

II. Note the sleep of all the virgins. No blame is hinted on account of

it. It is not inconsistent with the wisdom of the wise, nor does it

interfere with their readiness to meet the bridegroom. It is, then,

such a sleep as is compatible with watching. Our Lord's introduction of

this point is an example of His merciful allowance for our weakness.

There must be a certain slackening of the tension of expectation when

the bridegroom tarries. Centuries of delay cannot but modify the

attitude of the waiting Church, and Jesus here implies that there will

be a long stretch of time before His advent, during which all His

people will feel the natural effect of the deferring of hope. But the

sleep which He permits, unblamed, is light, and such as one takes by

snatches when waiting to be called. He does not ask us always to be on

tiptoe of expectation, nor to refuse the teaching of experience; but

counts that we have watched aright, if we wake from our light slumbers

when the cry is heard, and have our lamps lit, ready for the

procession.

III. Then comes the midnight cry and the waking of the maidens. The

hour, of night's black arch the keystone,' suggests the unexpectedness

of His coming; the loudness of the cry, its all-awaking effect; the

broken words of the true reading, Behold the bridegroom!' the closeness

on the heels of the heralds with which the procession flashes through

the darkness. The virgins had gone forth to meet him' at the beginning

of the parable, but the going forth to which they are now summoned is

not the same. The Christian soul goes forth once when, at the beginning

of its Christian life, it forsakes the world to wait for and on Christ,

and again, when it leaves the world to pass with Him into the banquet.

Life is the slumber from which some are awaked by the voice of death,

and some who remain' shall be awaked by the trumpet of judgment. There

is no interval between the cry and the appearance of the bridegroom;

only a moment to rouse themselves, to look to their lamps, and to speak

the hurried words of the foolish and the answer of the wise, and then

the procession is upon them. It is all done as in a flash, in a moment,

in the twinkling of an eye.' This impression of swiftness, which leaves

no time for delayed preparation, is the uniform impression conveyed by

all the Scripture references to the coming of the Lord. The swoop of

the eagle, the fierce blaze of lightning from one side of the sky to

the other, the bursting of the flood, that morning's work at Sodom, not

begun till dawn and finished before the sun was risen on the earth,'

are its types. Foolish indeed to postpone preparation till that moment

when cry and coming are simultaneous, like lightning and thunder right

overhead!

The foolish virgins' imploring request and its answer are not to be

pressed, as if they meant more than to set forth the hopelessness of

then attempting to procure the wanting oil, and especially the

hopelessness of attempting to get it from one's fellows. There is a

world of suppressed terror and surprise in that cry, Our lamps are

going out.' Note that they burned till the bridegroom came, and then,

like the magic lamps in old legends, at his approach shivered into

darkness. Is not that true of the formal, outward religion, which

survives everything but contact with His all-seeing eye and perfect

judgment? These foolish maidens were as much astonished as alarmed at

seeing their lights flicker down to extinction; and it is possible for

professing Christians to live a lifetime, and never to be found out

either by themselves or by anybody else. But if there has been no oil

in the lamp, it will be quenched when He appears. The atmosphere that

surrounds His throne acts like oxygen on the oil-fed flame, and like

carbonic acid gas on the other.

The answer of the wise is not selfishness. It is not from our fellows,

however bright their lamps, that we can ever get that inward grace.

None of them has more than suffices for his own needs, nor can any give

it to another. It may be bought, on the same terms as the pearl of

great price was bought, without money'; but the market is closed, as on

a holiday, on the day of the king's son's marriage. That is not touched

upon here, except in so far as it is hinted at in the absence of the

foolish when he enters the banqueting chamber, and in their fruitless

prayer. They had no time to get the oil before he came, and they had

not got it when they returned. The lesson is plain. We can only get the

new life of the Spirit, which will make our lives a light, from God;

and we can get it now, not then.

IV. We see the wise virgins within and the foolish without. They are,

indeed, no longer designated by these adjectives, but as ready' and the

others'; for preparedness is fitness, and they who are found of Him in

possession of the outward righteousness and of its inward source, His

own divine life in them, are prepared. To such the gates of the festal

chamber fly open. In that day, place is the outcome of character, and

it is equally impossible for the ready' to be shut out, and for the

others' to go in.

When the bridegroom with his feastful friends passes to bliss at the

mid hour of night,' they who have filled their odorous lamps with deeds

of light' have surely gained their entrance.' There is silence as to

the unspeakable joys of the wedding feast. Some faint sounds of music

and dancing, some gleams from the lighted windows, find their way out;

but the closed door keeps its secret, and only the guests know the

gladness.

That closed door means security, perpetuity, untold blessedness, but it

means exclusion too. The piteous reiterated call of the shut-out

maidens, roused too late, and so suddenly, from songs and laughter to

vain cries, evokes a stern answer, through which shines the awful

reality veiled in the parable. We do not need to regard the prayer for

entrance, and its refusal, as conveying more than the fruitlessness of

wishes for entrance then, when unaccompanied with fitness to enter.

Such desire as is expressed in this passionate beating at the closed

door, with hoarse entreaties, is not fitness. If it were, the door

would open; and the reason why it does not lies in the bridegroom's

awful answer, I know you not.' The absence of the qualification

prevents his recognising them as his. Surely the unalleviated darkness

of a hopeless exclusion settles down on these sad five, standing,

huddled together, at the door, with the extinguished lamps hanging in

their despairing hands. Too late, too late, ye cannot enter now.' The

wedding bell has become a funeral knell. They were not the enemies of

the bridegroom, they thought themselves his friends. They let life ebb

without securing the one thing needful, and the neglect was

irremediable. There is a tragedy underlying many a life of outward

religiousness and inward emptiness, and a dreadful discovery will flare

in upon such, when they have to say to themselves,

This might have been once,

And we missed it, lost it for ever.'

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DYING LAMPS

Our lamps are gone out.'--MATT. xxv. 8.

This is one of the many cases in which the Revised Version, by accuracy

of rendering the tense of a verb, gives a much more striking as well as

correct reproduction of the original than the Authorised Version does.

The former reads going out,' instead of gone out,' a rendering which

the Old Version has, unfortunately, relegated to the margin. It is

clearly to be preferred, not only because it more correctly represents

the Greek, but because it sets before us a more solemn and impressive

picture of the precise time at which the terrible discovery was made by

the foolish five. They woke from their sleep, and hastily trimmed their

lamps. These burned brightly for a moment, and then began to flicker

and die down. The extinction of their light was not the act of a

moment, but was a gradual process, which had advanced in some degree

before it attracted the attention of the bearers of the lamps. At last

it roused the half-sleeping five into startled, wide-awake

consciousness. There is a tone of alarm and fear in their sudden

exclamation, Our lamps are going out.' They see now the catastrophe

that threatens, and understand that the only means of averting it is to

replenish the empty oil-vessels before the flame has quite expired. But

their knowledge and their dread were alike too late, and, as they went

on their hopeless search for some one to give them what they once might

have had in abundance, the last faint flicker ceased, and they had to

grope their way in the dark, with their lightless lamps hanging useless

in their slack hands, while far off the torches of the bridal

procession, in which they might have had a part, flashed through the

night. We have nothing to do with the tragical issue of the process of

extinction; but solemn lessons of universal application gather round

the picture of that process, as represented in our text, and to these

we turn now.

I. We must settle the meaning of the oil and the lamps.

The Old Testament symbolism is our best guide as to the significance of

the oil. Throughout it, oil symbolises the divine influences that come

down on men appointed by God to their several functions, and which are

there traced to the Spirit of the Lord. So the priests were set apart

by unction with the holy oil; so Samuel poured oil on the black locks

of Saul. So, too, the very name Messiah means anointed,' and the great

prophecy, which Jesus claimed for His own in His first sermon in the

synagogue at Nazareth, put into the Messiah's lips the declaration, The

Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me.' But there

are Old Testament symbols which bear still more closely on the emblems

of our text. Zechariah saw in vision a golden lamp-stand with seven

lamps, and on either side of it an olive tree, from which oil flowed

through golden pipes to feed the flame. The interpretation of the

vision was given by the angel that talked with' the prophet as being,

not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord.'

So, then, we follow the plainly marked road and Scripture use of a

symbol when we take the oil in this parable to be that which every

listener to Jesus, who was instructed in the old things which he was

bringing forth with new emphasis from the ancient treasure-house of the

word of God, would take it to be--namely, the sum of the influences

from Heaven which were bestowed through the Spirit of the Lord.

Such being the meaning of the oil, what was meant by the lamp? We have

no intention of discussing here the many varying interpretations which

have been given to the symbol. To do so would lead us too far afield.

We can only say that the interpretation of the oil as the influence of

the Holy Spirit necessarily involves the explanation of the lamp which

is fed by it, as being the spiritual life of the individual, which is

nourished and made visible to the world as light, by the continual

communication from God of these hallowing influences. Turning again to

the Old Testament, I need only remind you of the great seven-branched

lamp which stood in the Tabernacle, and afterwards in the Temple. It

was the symbol of the collective Israel, as recipient of divine

influences, and thereby made the light of a dark world. Its rays

streamed out over the desert first, and afterwards shone from the

mountain of the Lord's house, beaming illumination and invitation to

those who sat in darkness to behold the great light, and to walk in the

light of the Lord. Zechariah's emblem was based on the Temple lamp. In

accordance with the greater prominence given by the Old Testament to

national than to individual religion, both of these represented the

people as a whole. In accordance with the more advanced individualism

of the New Testament, our text so far varies the application of the

emblem, that each of the ten virgins who, as a whole, stand for the

collective professing Church, has her own lamp. But that is the only

difference between the Old and the New Testament uses of the symbol.

I need not remind you how the same metaphor recurs frequently in the

teachings of our Lord and of the Apostles. Sometimes the Old Testament

collective point of view is maintained, as in our Lord's saying in the

Sermon on the Mount, Ye are the light of the world,' but more

frequently, the characteristic individualising of the figure prevails,

and we read of Christians shining as lights in the world,' and each

holding forth, as a lamp does its light, the word of life.' Nor must we

forget the climax of the uses of this emblem, in the vision of the

Apocalypse, where John once more saw the Lord, on whose bosom his head

had so often peacefully lain, walking in the midst of the seven golden

candlesticks.' There, again, the collective rather than the individual

bearing of the figure is prominent, but with significant differences

from the older use of it. In Judaism there was a formal, outward unity,

represented by the one lamp with its manifold lights, all welded

together on the golden stem; but the churches of Asia Minor were

distinct organisations, and their oneness came, not from outward union

of a mechanical kind, but from the presence in their midst of the Son

of God.

The sum of all this course of thought is that the lamp is the Christian

life of the individual sustained by the communication of the influences

of God's Holy Spirit.

II. We note next the gradual dying out of the light. Our lamps are

going out.'

All spiritual emotions and vitality, like every other kind of emotion

and vitality, die unless nourished. Let no theological difficulties

about the final perseverance of the saints,' or the indefeasibleness of

grace,' and the impossibility of slaying the divine life that has once

been given to a man, come in the way of letting this parable have its

full, solemn weight. These foolish virgins had oil and had light, the

oil failed by their fault, and so the light went out, and they were

startled, when they awoke from their slumber, to see how, instead of

brilliant flame, there was smoking wick.

Dear brethren, let us take the lesson. There is nothing in our

religious emotions which has any guarantee of perpetuity in it, except

upon certain conditions. We may live, and our life may ebb. We may

trust, and our trust may tremble into unbelief. We may obey, and our

obedience may be broken by the mutinous risings of self-will. We may

walk in the paths of righteousness,' and our feet may falter and turn

aside. There is certainty of the dying out of all communicated life,

unless the channel of communication with the life from which it was

first kindled, be kept constantly clear. The lamp may be a burning and

a shining light,' or, more accurately translating the phrase of our

Lord, a light kindled and' (therefore) shining,' but it will be light

for a season' only, unless it is fed from that from which it was first

set alight; and that is from God Himself.

Our lamps are going out,'--a slow process that! The flame does not all

die into darkness in a minute. There are stages in its death. The white

portion of the flame becomes smaller and the blue part extends; then

the flame flickers, and finally shudders itself, as it were, off the

wick; then nothing remains but a charred red line along the top; then

that line breaks up into little points, and one after another these

twinkle out, and then all is black, and the lamp is gone out. And so,

slowly, like the ebbing away of the tide, like the reluctant,

long-protracted dying of summer days, like the dropping of the blood

from some fatal wound, by degrees the process of extinction creeps,

creeps, creeps on, and the lamp that was going is finally gone out.

III. Again, we note that extinction is brought about simply by doing

nothing.

These five foolish virgins did not stray away into any forbidden paths.

No positive sin is alleged against them. They were simply asleep. The

other five were asleep too. I do not need to enter, here and now, into

the whole interpretation of the parable, or there might be much to say

about the difference between these two kinds of sleep. But what I wish

to notice is that it was nothing except negligence darkening into

drowsiness, which caused the dying out of the light.

It was not of set purpose that the foolish five took no oil with them.

They merely neglected to do so, not having the wit to look ahead and

provide against the contingency of a long time of waiting for the

bridegroom. Their negligence was the result, not of deliberate wish to

let their lights go out, but of their heedlessness; and because of that

negligence they earned the name of foolish.' If we do not look forward,

and prepare for possible drains on our powers, we shall deserve the

same adjective. If we do not lay in stores for future use, we may be

sent to school to the harvesting ant and the bee. That lesson applies

to all departments of life; but it is eminently applicable to the

spiritual life, which is sustained only by communications from the

Spirit of God. For these communications will be imperceptibly lessened,

and may be altogether intercepted, unless diligent attention is given

to keep open the channels by which they enter the spirit. If the pipes

are not looked to, they will be choked by masses of matted trifles,

through which the rivers of living water,' which Christ took as a

symbol of the Spirit's influences, cannot force a way.

The thing that makes shipwreck of the faith of most professing

Christians that do come to grief is no positive wickedness, no conduct

which would be branded as sin by the Christian conscience or even by

ordinary people, but simply torpor. If the water in a pond is never

stirred, it is sure to stagnate, and green scum to spread over it, and

a foul smell to rise from it. A Christian man has only to do what I am

afraid a good many of us are in great danger of doing--that is,

nothing--in order to ensure that his lamp shall go out.

Do you try to keep yours alight? There is only one way to do it--that

is to go to Christ and get Him to pour His sweetness and His power into

our open hearts. When one of the old patriarchs had committed a great

sin, and had unbelievingly twitched his hand out of God's hand, and

gone away down into Egypt to help himself instead of trusting to God,

he was commanded, on his return to Palestine, to go to the place where

he dwelt at the first, and begin again, at the point where he began

when he first entered the land. Which being translated is just

this--the only way to keep our spirits vital and quick is by having

recourse, again and again, to the same power which first imparted life

to them, and this is done by the first means, the means of simple

reliance upon Christ in the consciousness of our own deep need, and of

believingly waiting upon Him for the repeated communication of the

gifts which we, alas! have so often misimproved. Negligence is enough

to slay. Doing nothing is the sure way to quench the Holy Spirit.

And, on the other hand, keeping close to Him is the sure way to secure

that He will never leave us. You can choke a lamp with oil, but you

cannot have in your hearts too much of that divine grace. And you

receive all that you need if you choose to go and ask it from Him.

Remember the old story about Elisha and the poor woman. The cruse of

oil began to run. She brought all the vessels that she could rake

together, big and little, pots and cups, of all shapes and sizes, and

set them, one after the other, under the jet of oil. They were all

filled; and when she brought no more vessels the oil stayed. If you do

not take your empty hearts to God, and say, Here, Lord, fill this cup

too; poor as it is, fill it with Thine own gracious influences,' be

very sure that no such influences will come to you. But if you do go,

be as sure of this, that so long as you hold out your emptiness to Him,

He will flood it with His fulness, and the light that seemed to be

sputtering to its death will flame up again. He will not quench the

smoking wick, if only we carry it to Him; but as the priests in the

Temple walked all through the night to trim the golden lamps, so He who

walks amidst the seven candlesticks will see to each.

IV. And now one last word. That process of gradual extinction may be

going on, and may have been going on for a long while, and the virgin

that carries the lamp be quite unaware of it.

How could a sleeping woman know whether her lamp was burning or not?

How can a drowsy Christian tell whether his spiritual life is bright or

not? To be unconscious of our approximation to this condition is, I am

afraid, one of the surest signs that we are in it. I suppose that a

paralysed limb is quite comfortable. At any rate, paralysis of the

spirit may be going on without our knowing anything about it. So, dear

friends, do not put these poor words of mine away from you and say, Oh!

they do not apply to me.'

I am quite sure that the people to whom they do apply will be the last

people to take them to themselves. And while I quite believe, thank

God! that there are many of us who may feel and know that our lamps are

not going out, sure I am that there are some of us whom everybody but

themselves knows to be carrying a lamp that is so far gone out that it

is smoking and stinking in the eyes and noses of the people that stand

by. Be sure that nobody was more surprised than were the five foolish

women when they opened their witless, sleepy eyes, and saw the state of

things. So, dear friends, let your loins be girt about, and your lamps

burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord.'

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THEY THAT WERE READY'

They that were ready went in with him to the marriage.' --MATT. xxv.

10.

It is interesting to notice the variety of aspects in which, in this

long discourse, Jesus sets forth His Second Coming. It is like the

flood that swept away a world. It is like a thief stealing through the

dark, and breaking up a house. It is like a master reckoning with his

servants. These three metaphors suggest solemn, one might almost say

alarming, images. But then this parable comes in and tells how that

coming is like that of a bridegroom to the bride's house, with joy and

music. I am afraid that the average Christian, when he thinks at all of

Christ's coming, takes these three first aspects rather than the last

one, and so loses what is meant to be a bright hope and a great

stimulus. It is not in human nature to think much about a terrible

future. It is not in human nature to avoid thinking a great deal about

a blessed future. And although one does not wish to preach

carelessness, or the ignoring of the solemn side of that coming, sure I

am that our Christian lives would be stronger and purer, brighter and

better able to front the solemn side, if the blessed side of it were

more often the object of our contemplation.

Turning to the words of my text, which seem to me to be the very centre

and heart of this parable, I ask:--

I. What makes readiness?

There have been many answers given to that question. One has been that

to be ready means to be perpetually having before us the thought of the

coming of the Lord, and that has been taken to be the meaning of the

watchfulness which is enjoined in the context. But the parable itself

points in an altogether different direction. Who, according to it, were

ready? The five who had lamps and oil. To have these was readiness.

It is beautiful to notice how these five who were ready when the Master

came had slumbered and slept' like the other five. Ah! that touch in

the picture shows that He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are

dust.' It is not in human nature to keep up permanently a tension of

expectation for a far-off good; and in profound knowledge of the

weakness of humanity, our Lord, in this parable, says: While the

Bridegroom tarried they all slumbered'--and yet the five were ready

when the Bridegroom came. In like manner, Christian men and women who

have no expectation at all that the Second Coming of the Lord will

occur during their lifetimes, may nevertheless be ready, if they have

the burning lamps and the store of oil. The question then comes to be,

What is meant by these?

Perhaps harm has been done by insisting upon too minute and specific

interpretation. But, at the same time, we must not forget that, from

the very beginning of the Jewish Revelation, from the time when the

seven-branched candlestick was appointed for the Tabernacle, right down

to the day when the Apocalyptic Seer saw in Patmos the Son of Man

walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, the metaphor has

had one meaning. The aggregate of God's people are intended to be, as

Jesus told us immediately after He had drawn the character of a true

disciple, in the wonderful outlines of the Beatitudes, the light of the

world,' and they will be so in the measure in which the gentle radiance

of that character shines through their lives, as the light of a lamp

through frosted glass. But the aggregate is made up of units, and

individual Christians are to shine as lights in the world,' and their

separate brightnesses are to coalesce in the clustered light of the

whole Church. What makes an individual Christian a light is a

Christ-like life, derived from that Life which was the Light of men.'

The lamp which the five wise virgins bear is the same as the light

which the consistent Christian is. The inner self illuminated from

Christ, the source of all our illumination, lights up the outward life,

which each of us may be conceived as carrying in our hands. It is not

ourselves, and yet it is ourselves made visible. It is not ourselves,

but Christ in us; and so we shine as lights in the world, only by

holding forth the word of life.'

That modification of the figure by Paul is profoundly true and

important, for after all we are not so much lights as candelabra, and

only as we bear aloft the flashing light of Christ shall we shine in a

naughty world.' Our lamps, then, are Christ-like characters derived

from Christ, and to have and bear these is the first element in being

ready for the Bridegroom.

Dear friends, remember that this whole parable is spoken to professing

Christians and real members of Christ's Church; and that there is no

meaning in it unless it is possible to quench the light of the lamp.

Remember that our Lord said once, Let your loins be girt,' and put that

as the necessary condition of lamps burning. Let your loins be girt'

with resolved effort of faith and dependence, and make sure that you

have the provision for the continuance of the light. So, and only so,

shall any man be of the happy company of them that were ready.

II. Note that this readiness is the condition of entrance.

They that were ready went in with Him to the marriage.' Now faith alone

unites a man to Jesus Christ, and makes him an heir of salvation. But

faith alone, if that were possible, would not admit a man to the

marriage-feast. Of course the supposed case is an impossible case, for

as James has taught us in his plain moral way, faith which is alone

dies, or perhaps never lived. But what our Lord tells us here is that

moral character, which is of such a sort as to shine in the world's

darkness, is the condition of entrance. People say that salvation is by

faith. Yes, that is true; but salvation is by works also, only that the

works are made possible through faith. In the very necessity and nature

of things nothing but the readiness which consists in continued

Christ-like character will ever allow a man to pass the threshold. Now

do you believe that? Or are you saying, I trust to Jesus Christ, and so

I am sure I shall go to Heaven.' No, you will not, unless your faith is

making you heavenly, in your temper and conduct. For to talk about the

next world as a place of retribution is but an imperfect statement of

the case. It is not a place of retribution so much as of outcome, and

the apostle gives a completer view when he says, Whatsoever a man

soweth, that shall he also reap.' That future life is not the reward of

goodness so much as the necessary consequence of holiness. Holiness and

blessedness are, in some measure, separated here; there they are two

names for the one condition. No man shall see the Lord,' without that

holiness. They that were ready went in.' Of course they did. Am I

ready? That question means, Am I, by my faith in Jesus Christ,

receiving into my heart the anointing which that great anointed One

gives us? Am I living a life that is a light in the world? If so, and

not else, my entrance is sure.

We have seen what this readiness consists in, and how it is the

condition of entrance. There is one last thought--

III. To delay preparation is madness.

There is nothing in all Christ's parables more tragical, more pathetic,

than this picture of the hapless five when they woke up to find their

lamps going out. They heard the procession coming, the sound of feet

drawing nearer, and the music borne every moment more loudly on the

midnight air. And there were they, with dying lamps and empty oil-cans.

Their shock, their alarm, their bewilderment, are all expressed in that

preposterous request of theirs, Give us of your oil.'

The answer of the wise virgins has been said to be cold and unfeeling.

It is not that; it is simply a plain statement of facts. The oil that

belongs to me cannot be given to you. That is the first lesson taught

us by the request of the foolish and the answer of the wise. If thou be

wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; and if thou scornest, thou alone

shalt bear it.' Every man shall bear his own burden.' There is no

possible transference of moral character or spiritual gifts in that

fashion. The awful individuality of each soul, and its unshareable

personal responsibility, come solemnly to view in the words which

superficial readers pass by: Not so, lest there be not enough for us

and you.' You cannot share your brother's oil. You may share many of

his possessions; not this.

Go to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.' The question of whether

there was time to buy was not for the five wise to answer. There was

not much chance that the would-be buyers would find a shop open and

anybody waiting to sell them oil at twelve o'clock at night. But they

risked it; and when they came back they were too late.

Now, dear friends, all the lessons of this parable may be taken by us,

though we do not believe, and think we have good reason for not

believing, that the literal return of Jesus Christ is to take place in

our time. It does not matter very much, in so far as the teaching of

this parable is concerned, whether the Bridegroom comes to us, or

whether we go to the Bridegroom. I do not for a moment say that there

is no such thing as coming to Jesus Christ in the last hours of life,

and becoming ready to enter even then, but I do say that it is a very

rare case, and that there is a terrible risk in delaying till then. But

I pray you to remember that our parable is addressed to, and

contemplates the case of, not people who are away from Jesus Christ,

but Christians, and that it is to them that its message is chiefly

brought. It is they whom it warns not to put off making sure that they

have provision for the continuance of the Christ-life. We have, day by

day, to go to Him that sells and buy for ourselves.' And we know, what

it did not fall within our Lord's purpose to say in this parable, that

the price of the oil is the surrender of ourselves, and the opening of

our hearts to the entrance of that divine Spirit. Then there will be no

fear but that the lamp will hold out to burn, and no fear but that when

the Bridegroom, with His feastful friends, passes to bliss, at the

mid-hour of night,' we shall gain our entrance.

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TRADERS FOR THE MASTER

For the kingdom of heaven la as a man travelling into a far country,

who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. 15. And

unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to

every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his

journey. 16. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded

with the same, and made them other five talents. 17. And likewise he

that had received two, he also gained other two. 18. But he that had

received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

19. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth

with them. 20. And so he that had received five talents came and

brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five

talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. 21. His

lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou

hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many

things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. 22. He also that had

received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two

talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. 23. His

lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast

been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many

things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. 24. Then to which had

received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art

an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou

hast not strawed: 25. And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in

the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. 26. His lord answered and

said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I

reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: 27. Thou

oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at

my coming I should have received mine own with usury. 28. Take

therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten

talents. 29. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall

have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even

that which he hath. 30. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer

darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' --MATT. xxv.

14-30.

The parable of the Ten Virgins said nothing about their working whilst

they waited. This one sets forth that side of the duties of the

servants in their master's absence, and so completes the former. It is

clearly in its true historical connection here, and is closely knit to

both the preceding and following context. It is a strange instance of

superficial reading that it should ever have been supposed to be but

another version of Luke's parable of the pounds. The very resemblances

of the two are meant to give force to their differences, which are

fundamental. They are the converse of each other. That of the pounds

teaches that men who have the same gifts intrusted to them may make a

widely different use of these, and will be rewarded differently, in

strictly graduated proportion to their unlike diligence. The lesson of

the parable before us, on the other hand, is that men with dissimilar

gifts may employ them with equal diligence; and that, if they do, their

reward shall be the same, however great the endowments of one, and

slender those of another. A reader who has missed that distinction must

be very shortsighted, or sworn to make out a case against the Gospels.

I. We may consider the lent capital and the business done with it.

Masters nowadays do not give servants their money to trade with, when

they leave home; but the incident is true to the old-world relations of

master and slave. Our Lord's consciousness of His near departure, which

throbs in all this context, comes out emphatically here. He is

preparing His disciples for the time when they will have to work

without Him, like the managers of some branch house of business whose

principal has gone abroad. What are the talents' with which He will

start them on their own account? We have taken the word into common

language, however little we remember the teaching of the parable as to

the hand that gives men of talent' their endowments. But the natural

powers usually called by the name are not what Christ means here,

though the principles of the parable may be extended to include them.

For these powers are the ability' according to which the talents are

given. But the talents themselves are the spiritual knowledge and

endowments which are properly the gifts of the ascended Lord to His

Church. Two important lessons as to these are conveyed. First, that

they are distributed in varying measure, and that not arbitrarily, by

the mere will of the giver, but according to his discernment of what

each servant can profitably administer. The ability' which settles

their amount is not more closely defined. It may include natural

faculty, for Christ's gifts usually follow the line of that; and the

larger the nature, the more of Him it can contain. But it also includes

spiritual receptiveness and faithfulness, which increase the absorbing

power. The capacity to receive will also be the capacity to administer,

and it will be fully filled.

The second lesson taught is that spiritual gifts are given for trading

with. In other words, they are here considered not so much as blessings

to the possessor as his stock-in-trade, which he can employ for the

Master's enrichment. We are all tempted to think of them mostly as

given us for our own blessing and joy; and the reminder is never

unseasonable that a Christian receives nothing for himself alone. God

hath shined into our hearts, that we may give to others the light of

the knowledge which has flashed glad day into our darkness. The Master

intrusts us with a portion of His wealth, not for expending on

ourselves, but for trading with.

A third principle here is that the right use of His gifts increases

them in our hands. Money makes money.' The five talents grow to ten,

the two to four. The surest way to increase our possession of Christ's

grace is to try to impart it. There is no better way of strengthening

our own faith than to seek to make others share in it. Christian

convictions, spoken, are confirmed, but muffled in silence are

weakened. There is that scattereth and yet increaseth.' Seed heaped and

locked up in a granary breeds weevils and moths; flung broadcast over

the furrows, it multiplies into seed that can be sown again, and bread

that feeds the sower. So we have in this part of the parable almost the

complete summary of the principles on which, the purposes for which,

and the results to faithful use with which, Christ gives His gifts.

The conduct of the slenderly endowed servant who hides his talent will

be considered farther on.

II. We note the faithful servants' balance-sheet and reward.

Our Lord again sounds the note of delay--After a long time'--an

indefinite phrase which we know carries centuries in its folds, how

many more we know not nor are intended to know. The two faithful

servants present their balance-sheet in identical words, and receive

the same commendation and reward. Their speech is in sharp contrast

with the idle one's excuse, inasmuch as it puts a glad acknowledgment

of the lord's giving in the forefront, as if to teach that the thankful

recognition of his liberality underlies all joyful and successful

service, and deepens while it makes glad the sense of responsibility.

The cords of love are silken; and he who begins with setting before

himself the largeness of Christ's gifts to him, will not fail in using

these so as to increase them. In the light of that day, the servant

sees more clearly than when he was at work the results of his work. We

do not know what the year's profits have been till stock-taking and

balancing-time comes. Here we often say, I have laboured in vain.'

There we shall say, I have gained five talents.'

The verbatim repetition of the same words to both servants teaches the

great lesson of this parable as contrasted with that of the pounds,

that where there has been the same faithful work, with different

amounts of capital, there will be the same reward. Our Master does not

care about quantity, but about quality and motive. The slave with a few

shillings, enough to stock meagrely a little stall, may show as much

business capacity, diligence, and fidelity, as if he had millions to

work with. Christ rewards not actions, but the graces which are made

visible in actions; and these can be as well seen in the tiniest as in

the largest deeds. The light that streams through a pin-prick is the

same that pours through the widest window. The crystals of a salt

present the same facets, flashing back the sun at the same angles,

whether they be large or microscopically small. Therefore the judgment

of Christ, which is simply the utterance of fact, takes no heed of the

extent but only of the kind of service, and puts on the same level of

recompense all who, with however widely varying powers, were one in

spirit, in diligence, and devotion. The eulogium on the servants is not

successful' or brilliant,' but faithful,' and both alike get it.

The words of the lord fall into three parts. First comes his generous

and hearty praise,--the brief and emphatic monosyllable Well,' and the

characterisation of the servants as good and faithful.' Praise from

Christ's lips is praise indeed; and here He pours it out in no grudging

or scanty measure, but with warmth and evident delight. His heart glows

with pleasure, and His commendation is musical with the utterance of

His own joy in His servants. He rejoices over them with singing'; and

more gladly than a fond mother speaks honeyed words of approval to her

darling, of whose goodness she is proud, does He praise these two. When

we are tempted to disparage our slender powers as compared with those

of His more conspicuous servants, and to suppose that all which we do

is nought, let us think of this merciful and loving estimate of our

poor service. For such words from such lips, life itself were wisely

flung away; but such words from such lips will be spoken in recognition

of many a piece of service less high and heroic than a martyr's. Good

and faithful' refers not to the more general notion of goodness, but to

the special excellence of a servant, and the latter word seems to

define the former. Fidelity is the grace which He praises,--manifested

in the recognition that the capital was a loan, given to be traded with

for Him, and to be brought back increased to Him. He is faithful who

ever keeps in view, and acts on, the conditions on which, and the

purposes for which, he has received his spiritual wealth; and he who is

faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much.'

The second part of the lord's words is the appointment to higher

office, as the reward of faithfulness. Here on earth, the tools come,

in the long run, to the hands that can use them, and the best reward of

faithfulness in a narrower sphere is to be lifted to a wider. Promotion

means more to do; and if the world were rightly organised, the road to

advancement would be diligence; and the higher a man climbed, the wider

would be the horizon of his labour. It is so in Christ's kingdom, and

should be so in His visible Church. It will be so in heaven. Clearly

this saying implies the active theory of the future life, and the

continuance in some ministry of love, unknown to us, of the energies

which were trained in the small transactions of earth. If five talents

are "a few things," how great the "many things" will be!' In the

parable of the pounds, the servant is made a ruler; here being set

over' seems rather still to point to the place of a steward or servant.

The sphere is enlarged, but the office is unaltered. The manager who

conducted a small trade rightly will be advanced to the superintendence

of a larger business.

We doubt not that for one so true

There must be other, nobler work to do,'

and that in that work the same law will continue to operate, and

faithfulness be crowned with ever-growing capacities and tasks through

a dateless eternity.

The last words of the lord pass beyond our poor attempts at commenting.

No eye can look undazzled at the sun. When Christ was near the Cross,

He left His disciples a strange bequest at such a moment,--His joy; and

that is their brightest portion here, even though it be shaded with

many sorrows. The enthroned Christ welcomes all who have known the

fellowship of His sufferings' into the fulness of His heavenly joy,

unshaded, unbroken, unspeakable; and they pass into it as into an

encompassing atmosphere, or some broad land of peace and abundance.

Sympathy with His purposes leads to such oneness with Him that His joy

is ours, both in its occasions and in its rapture. Thou makest them

drink of the river of Thy pleasures,' and the lord and the servant

drink from the same cup.

III. The excuse and punishment of the indolent servant.

His excuse is his reason. He did think hardly of his lord, and, even

though he had His gift in his hand to confute him, he slandered Him in

his heart as harsh and exacting. To many men the requirements of

religion are more prominent than its gifts, and God is thought of as

demanding rather than as the giving God.' Such thoughts paralyse

action. Fear is barren, love is fruitful. Nothing grows on the mountain

of curses, which frowns black over against the sunny slopes of the

mountain of blessing with its blushing grapes. The indolence was

illogical, for, if the master was such as was thought, the more reason

for diligence; but fear is a bad reasoner, and the absurd gap between

the premises and the conclusion is matched by one of the very same

width in every life that thinks of God as rigidly requiring obedience,

which, therefore, it does not give! Still another error is in the

indolent servant's words. He flings down the hoarded talent with Lo,

thou hast thine own.' He was mistaken. Talents hid are not, when dug

up, as heavy as they were when buried. This gold does rust, and a life

not devoted to God is never carried back to Him unspoiled.

The lord's answer again falls into three parts, corresponding to that

to the faithful servants. First comes the stern characterisation of the

man. As with the others' goodness, his badness is defined by the second

epithet. It is slothfulness. Is that all? Yes; it does not need active

opposition to pull down destruction on one's head. Simple indolence is

enough, the negative sin of not doing or being what we ought. Ungirt

loins, unlit lamps, unused talents, sink a man like lead. Doing nothing

is enough for ruin.

The remarkable answer to the servant's charge seems to teach us that

timid souls, conscious of slender endowments, and pressed by the heavy

sense of responsibility, and shrinking from Christian enterprises, for

fear of incurring heavier condemnation, may yet find means of using

their little capital. The bankers, who invest the collective

contributions of small capitalists to advantage, may, or may not, be

intended to be translated into the Church; but, at any rate, the

principle of united service is here recommended to those who feel too

weak for independent action. Slim houses in a row hold each other up;

and, if we cannot strike out a path for ourselves, let us seek strength

and safety in numbers.

The fate of the indolent servant has a double horror. It is loss and

suffering. The talent is taken from the slack hands and coward heart

that would not use it, and given to the man who had shown he could and

would. Gifts unemployed for Christ are stripped off a soul yonder. How

much will go from many a richly endowed spirit, which here flashed with

unconsecrated genius and force! We do not need to wait for eternity to

see that true possession, which is use, increases powers, and that

disuse, which is equivalent to not possessing, robs of them. The

blacksmith's arm, the scout's eye, the craftsman's delicate finger, the

student's intellect, the sensualist's passions, all illustrate the law

on its one side; and the dying out of faculties and tastes, and even of

intuitions and conscience, by reason of simple disuse, are melancholy

instances of it on the other. But the solemn words of this condemnation

seem to point to a far more awful energy in its working in the future,

when everything that has not been consecrated by employment for Jesus

shall be taken away, and the soul, stripped of its garb, shall be found

naked.' How far that process of divesting may affect faculties, without

touching the life, who can tell? Enough to see with awe that a spirit

may be cut, as it were, to the quick, and still exist.

But loss is not all the indolent servant's doom. Once more, like the

slow toll of a funeral bell, we hear the dread sentence of ejection to

the mirk midnight' without, where are tears undried and passion

unavailing. There is something very awful in the monotonous repetition

of that sentence so often in these last discourses of Christ's. The

most loving lips that ever spoke, in love, shaped this form of words,

so heart-touching in its wailing, but decisive, proclamation of

blackness, homelessness, and sorrow, and cannot but toll them over and

over again into our ears, in sad knowledge of our forgetfulness and

unbelief,--if perchance we may listen and be warned, and, having heard

the sound thereof, may never know the reality of that death in life

which is the sure end of the indolent who were blind to His gifts, and

therefore would not listen to His requirements.

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WHY THE TALENT WAS BURIED

Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew

thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and

gathering where thou hast not strawed: 25. And I was afraid, and went

and hid thy talent in the earth.'--MATT. xxv. 24, 25.

That was a strangely insolent excuse for indolence. To charge an angry

master to his face with grasping greed and injustice was certainly not

the way to conciliate him. Such language is quite unnatural and

incongruous until we remember the reality which the parable was meant

to shadow--viz., the answers for their deeds which men will give at

Christ's judgment bar. Then we can understand how, by some irresistible

necessity, this man was compelled, even at the risk of increasing the

indignation of the master, to turn himself inside out, and to put into

harsh, ugly words the half-conscious thoughts which had guided his life

and caused his unfaithfulness. Every one of us shall give account of

himself to God.' The unabashed impudence of such an excuse for idleness

as this is but putting into vivid and impressive form this truth, that

then a man's actions in their true character, and the ugly motives that

underlie them, and which he did not always honestly confess to himself,

will be clear before him. It will be as much of a surprise to the men

themselves, in many cases, as it could be to listeners. Thus it becomes

us to look well to the under side of our lives, the unspoken

convictions and the unformulated motives which work all the more

mightily upon us because, for the most part, they work in the dark.

This is Christ's explanation of one very operative and fruitful cause

of the refusal to serve Him.

I. I ask you, then, to consider, first, the slander here and the truth

that contradicts it.

I knew thee that thou art an hard man,' says he, reaping where them

hast not sown' (and he was standing with the unused talent in his hand

all the while), and gathering where thou hast not strawed.' That is to

say, deep down in many a heart that has never said as much to itself,

there lies this black drop of gall--a conception of the divine

character rather as demanding than as giving, a thought of Him as

exacting. What He requires is more considered than what He bestows. So

religion is thought to be mainly a matter of doing certain things and

rendering up certain sacrifices, instead of being regarded, as it

really is, as mainly a matter of receiving from God. Christ's authority

makes me bold to say that this error underlies the lives of an immense

number of nominal Christians, of people who think themselves very good

and religious, as well as the lives of thousands who stand apart from

religion altogether. And I want, not to drag down any curtain by my own

hand, but to ask you to lift away the veil which hides the ugly thing

in your hearts, and to put your own consciousness to the bar of your

own conscience, and say whether it is not true that the uppermost

thought about God, when you think about Him at all, is, Thou art an

hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown.'

It is not difficult to understand why such a thought of God should rise

in a heart which has no delight in Him nor in His service. There is a

side of the truth as to God's relations to man which gives a colour of

plausibility to the slander. Grave and stringent requirements are made

by the divine law upon each of us; and our consciences tell us that

they have not been kept. Therefore we seek to persuade ourselves that

they are too severe. Then, further, we are, by reason of our own

selfishness, almost incapable of rising to the conception of God's

pure, perfect, disinterested love; and we are far too blind to the

benefits that He pours upon us all every day of our lives. And so from

all these reasons taken together, and some more besides, it comes about

that, for some of us, the blessed sun in the heavens, the God of all

mercy and love, has been darkened into a lurid orb shorn of all its

beneficent beams, and hangs threatening there in our misty sky. I knew

Thee that Thou art an hard man.' Ah! I am sure that if we would go down

into the deep places of our own hearts, and ask ourselves what our real

thought of God is, many of us would acknowledge that it is something

like that.

Now turn to the other side. What is the truth that smites this slander

to death? That God is perfect, pure, unmingled, infinite love. And what

is love? The infinite desire to impart itself. His nature and property'

is to be merciful, and you can no more stop God from giving than you

can shut up the rays of the sun within itself. To be and to bestow are

for Him one and the same thing. His love is an infinite longing to

give, which passes over into perpetual acts of beneficence. He never

reaps where He has not sown. Is there any place where He has not sown?

Is there any heart on which there have been no seeds of goodness

scattered from His rich hand? The calumniator in the text was speaking

his slanders with that in his hand which should have stopped his mouth.

He who complained that the hard master was asking for fruit of what He

had not given would have had nothing at all, if he had not obtained the

one talent from His hand. And there is no place in the whole wide

universe of God where His love has not scattered its beneficent gifts.

There are no fallow fields out of cultivation and unsown, in His great

farm. He never asks where He has not given.

He never asks until after He has given. He begins with bestowing, and

it is only after the vineyard has been planted on the very fruitful

hill, and the hedge built round about it, and the winepress digged, and

the tower erected, and miracles of long-suffering mercy and skilful

patience have been lavished upon it, that then He looks that it should

bring forth grapes. God's gifts precede His requirements. He ever sows

before He reaps. More than that, He gives what He asks, helping us to

render to Him the hearts that He desires. He, by His own merciful

communications, makes it possible that we should lay at His feet the

tribute of loving thanks. Just as a parent will give a child some money

in order that the child may go and buy the giver a birthday present, so

God gives to us hearts, and enriches them with many bestowments. He

scatters round about us good from His hand, like drops of a fragrant

perfume from a blazing torch, in order that we may catch them up and

have some portion of the joy which is especially His own--the joy of

giving. It would be a poor affair if our sole relation to God were that

of receiving. It would be a tyrannous affair if our sole relation to

God were that of rendering up. But both relations are united, and if it

be more blessed to give than to receive,' the Giver of all good does

not leave us without the opportunity of entering in even to that

superlative blessing. We have to come to Him and say, when we lay the

gifts, either of our faculties or of our trust, of our riches or of our

virtues, at His feet, All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we

given Thee.'

He asks for our sakes, and not for His own. If I were hungry I would

not tell thee, for the cattle upon a thousand hills are Mine. Offer

unto God praise, and pay thy vows unto the Most High.' It is blessed to

us to render. He is none the richer for all our giving, as He is none

the poorer for all His. Yet His giving to us is real, and our giving is

real and a joy to Him. That is the truth lifted up against the slander

of the natural heart. God is love, pure giving, unlimited and perpetual

disposition to bestow. He gives all things before He asks for anything,

and when He asks for anything it is that we may be blessed.

But you say, That is all very well--where do you learn all that about

God?' My answer is a very simple one. I learn it, and I believe there

is no other place to learn it, at the Cross of Jesus Christ. If that be

the very apex of the divine love and self-revelation; if, looking upon

it, we understand God better than by any other means, then there can be

no question but that instead of gathering where He has not strawed, and

reaping where He has not sown, God is only, and always, and utterly,

and to every man, infinite love that bestows itself. My heart says to

me many a time, God's laws are hard, God's judgment is strict. God

requires what you cannot give. Crouch before Him, and be afraid.' And

my faith says, Get thee behind me, Satan!' He that spared not His own

Son, . . . how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?'

The Cross of Christ is the answer to the slander, and the revelation of

the giving God.

II. Secondly, mark here the fear that dogs such a thought, and the love

that casts out the fear.

I was afraid.' Yes, of course. If a man is not a fool, his emotions

follow his thoughts, and his thoughts ought to shape his emotions. And

wherever there is the twilight of uncertainty upon the great lesson

that the Cross of Jesus Christ has taught us, there there will be,

however masked and however modified by other thoughts, deep in the

human heart, a perhaps unspoken, but not therefore ineffectual, dread

of God. Just as the misconception of the divine character does

influence many a life in which it has never been spoken articulately,

and needs some steady observation of ourselves to be detected, so is it

with this dread of Him. Carry the task of self-examination a little

further, and ask yourselves whether there does not lie coiled in many

of your hearts this dread of God, like a sleeping snake which only

needs a little warmth to be awakened to sting. There are all the signs

of it. There are many of you who have a distinct indisposition to be

brought close up to the thought of Him. There are many of you who have

a distinct sense of discomfort when you are pressed against the

realities of the Christian religion. There are many of you who, though

you cover it over with a shallow confidence, or endeavour to persuade

yourselves into speculative doubts about the divine nature, or hide it

from yourselves by indifference, yet know that all that is very thin

ice, and that there is a great black pool down below--a dread at the

heart, of a righteous Judge somewhere, with whom you have somewhat to

do, that you cannot shake off. I do not want to appeal to fear, but it

goes to one's heart to see the hundreds and thousands of people round

about us who, just because they are afraid of God, will not think about

Him, put away angrily and impatiently solemn words like these that I am

trying to speak, and seek to surround themselves with some kind of a

fool's paradise of indifference, and to shut their eyes to facts and

realities. You do not confess it to yourselves. What kind of a thought

must that be about your relation to God which you are afraid to speak?

Some of you remember the awful words in one of Shakespeare's plays: Now

I, to comfort him, bid him he should not think of God. I hoped there

was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet.' What does

that teach us? I knew Thee that Thou art an hard man; and I was

afraid.'

Dear friend, there are two religions in this world: there is the

religion of fear, and there is the religion of love; and if you have

not the one, you must have the other, if you have any at all. The only

way to get perfect love that casts out fear is to be quite sure of the

Father-love in heaven that begets it. And the only way to be sure of

the infinite love in the heavens that kindles some little spark of love

in our hearts here, is to go to Christ and learn the lesson that He

reveals to us at His Cross. Love will annihilate the fear; or rather,

if I may take such a figure, will set a light to the wreathing smoke

that rises, and flash it all up into a ruddy flame. For the perfect

love that casts out fear sublimes it into reverence and changes it into

trust. Have you got that love, and did you get it at Christ's Cross?

III. Lastly, mark the torpor of fear and the activity of love. I was

afraid, and I went and hid thy talent in the earth.'

Fear paralyses service, cuts the nerve of activity, makes a man refuse

obedience to God. It was a very illogical thing of that indolent

servant to say, I knew that you were so hard in exacting what was due

to you that therefore I determined not to give it to you.' Is it more

illogical and more absurd than what hundreds of men and women round

about us do to-day, when they say, God's requirements are so great that

I do not attempt to fulfil them'? One would have thought that he would

have reasoned the other way, and said, Because I knew that Thy

requirements were so great and severe, therefore I put myself with all

my powers to my work.' Not so. Logical or illogical, the result

remains, that that thought of God, that black drop of gall, in many a

heart, stops the action of the hand. Fear is barren, or if it produces

anything it is nothing to the purpose, and it brings gifts that not

even God's love can accept, for there is no love in them. Fear is

barren; Love is fruitful--like the two mountains of Samaria, from one

of which the rolling burden of the curses of the Law was thundered, and

from the other of which the sweet words of promise and of blessing were

chanted in musical response. On the one side are black rocks, without a

blade of grass on them, the Mount of Cursing; on the other side are

blushing grapes and vineyards, the Mount of Blessing. Love moves to

action, fear paralyses into indolence. And the reason why such hosts of

you do nothing for God is because your hearts have never been touched

with the thorough conviction that He has done everything for you, and

asks you but to love Him back again, and bring Him your hearts. These

dark thoughts are like the frost which binds the ground in iron

fetters, making all the little flowers that were beginning to push

their heads into the light shrink back again. And love, when it comes,

will come like the west wind and the sunshine of the Spring; and before

its emancipating fingers the earth's fetters will be cast aside, and

the white snowdrops and the yellow crocuses will show themselves above

the ground. If you want your hearts to bear any fruit of noble living,

and holy consecration, and pure deeds, then here is the process--Begin

with the knowledge and belief of the love which God hath to us'; learn

that at the Cross, and let it silence your doubts, and send them back

to their kennels, silenced. Then take the next step, and love Him back

again. We love Him because He first loved us.' That love will be the

productive principle of all glad obedience, and you will keep His

commandments, and here upon earth find, as the faithful servant found,

that talents used increase; and yonder will receive the eulogium from

His lips whom to please is blessedness, by whom to be praised is

heaven's glory, Well done! good and faithful servant.'

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THE KING ON HIS JUDGMENT THRONE

When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels

with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: 32. And

before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them

one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: 33.

And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the

left. 34. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye

blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the

foundation of the world: 35. For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat:

I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me

in: 36. Naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was

in prison, and ye came unto Me. 37. Then shall the righteous answer

Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed Thee? or

thirsty, and gave Thee drink? 38. When saw we Thee a stranger, and took

Thee in! or naked, and clothed Thee! 39. Or when saw we Thee sick, or

in prison, and came unto Thee? 10. And the King shall answer and say

unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one

of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me. 41. Then

shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye

cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

42. For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye

gave Me no drink: 43. I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in: naked,

and ye clothed Me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me not. 44.

Then shall they also answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an

hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison,

and did not minister unto Thee? 45. Then shall He answer them, saying,

Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of

these, ye did it not to Me. 46. And these shall go away into

everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.'--MATT.

xxv. 31-46.

The teachings of that wonderful last day of Christ's ministry, which

have occupied so many of our pages, are closed with this tremendous

picture of universal judgment. It is one to be gazed upon with silent

awe, rather than to be commented on. There is fear lest, in occupying

the mind in the study of the details, and trying to pierce the mystery

it partly unfolds, we should forget our own individual share in it.

Better to burn in on our hearts the thought, I shall be there,' than to

lose the solemn impression in efforts to unravel the difficulties of

the passage. Difficulties there are, as is to be expected in even

Christ's revelation of so unparalleled a scene. Many questions are

raised by it which will never be solved till we stand there. Who can

tell how much of the parabolic element enters into the description? We,

at all events, do not venture to say of one part, This is merely

drapery, the sensuous representation of spiritual reality,' and of

another, That is essential truth.' The curtain is the picture, and

before we can separate the elements of it in that fashion, we must have

lived through it. Let us try to grasp the main lessons, and not lose

the spirit in studying the letter.

I. The first broad teaching is that Christ is the Judge of all the

earth. Sitting there, a wearied man on the Mount of Olives, with the

valley of Jehoshaphat at His feet, which the Jew regarded as the scene

of the final judgment, Jesus declared Himself to be the Judge of the

world, in language so unlimited in its claims that the speaker must be

either a madman or a god. Calvary was less than three days off, when He

spoke thus. The contrast between the vision of the future and the

reality of the present is overwhelming. The Son of Man has come in

weakness and shame; He will come in His glory, that flashing light of

the self-revealing God, of which the symbol was the glory' which shone

between the cherubim, and which Jesus Christ here asserts to belong to

Him as His glory.' Then, heaven will be emptied of its angels, who

shall gather round the enthroned Judge as His handful of sorrowing

followers were clustered round Him as He spoke, or as the peasants had

surrounded the meek state of His entry yesterday. Then, He will take

the place of Judge, and sit,' in token of repose, supremacy, and

judgment, on the throne of His glory,' as He now sat on the rocks of

Olivet. Then, mankind shall be massed at His feet, and His glance shall

part the infinite multitudes, and discern the character of each item in

the crowd as easily and swiftly as the shepherd's eye picks out the

black goats from among the white sheep. Observe the difference in the

representation from those in the previous parables. There, the parting

of kinds was either self-acting, as in the case of the foolish maidens;

or men gave account of themselves, as in the case of the servants with

the talents. Here, the separation is the work of the Judge, and is

completed before a word is spoken. All these representations must be

included in the complete truth as to the final judgment. It is the

effect of men's actions; it is the result of their compelled disclosing

of the deepest motives of their lives; it is the act of the perfect

discernment of the Judge. Their deeds will judge them; they will judge

themselves; Christ will judge.

Singularly enough, every possible interpretation of the extent of the

expression all nations' has found advocates. It has been taken in its

widest and plainest meaning, as equivalent to the whole race; it has

been confined to mankind exclusive of Christians, and it has been

confined to Christians exclusive of heathens. There are difficulties in

all these explanations, but probably the least are found in the first.

It is most natural to suppose that all nations' means all nations,

unless that meaning be impossible. The absence of the limitation to the

kingdom of heaven,' which distinguishes this section from the preceding

ones having reference to judgment, and the position of the present

section as the solemn close of Christ's teachings, which would

naturally widen out into the declaration of the universal judgment,

which forms the only appropriate climax and end to the foregoing

teachings, seem to point to the widest meaning of the phrase. His

office of universal Judge is unmistakably taught throughout the New

Testament, and it seems in the highest degree unnatural to suppose that

He did not speak of it in these final words of prophetic warning. We

may therefore, with some confidence, see in the magnificent and awful

picture here drawn the vision of universal judgment. Parabolic elements

there no doubt are in the picture; but we have no governing revelation,

free from these, by which we can check them, and be sure of how much is

form and how much substance. This is clear, that we must all appear

before the judgment-seat of Christ'; and this is clear, that Jesus

Christ put forth, when at the very lowest point of His earthly

humiliation, these tremendous claims, and asserted His authority as

Judge over every soul of man. We are apt to lose ourselves in the

crowd. Let us pause and think that all' includes me.'

II. Note the principles of Christ's universal judgment. It is important

to remember that this section closes a series of descriptions of the

judgment, and must not be taken as if, when isolated, it set forth all

the truth. It is often harped upon by persons who are unfriendly to

evangelical teaching, as if it were Christ's only word about judgment,

and interpreted as if it meant that, no matter what else a man was, if

only he is charitable and benevolent, he will find mercy. But this is

to forget all the rest of our Lord's teaching in the context, and to

fly in the face of the whole tenor of New Testament doctrine. We have

here to do with the principles of judgment which apply equally to those

who have, and to those who have not, heard the gospel. The subjects of

the kingdom are shown the principles more immediately applicable to

them, in the previous parables, and here they are reminded that there

is a standard of judgment absolutely universal. All men, whether

Christians or not, are judged by the things done in the body, whether

they be good or bad.' So Christ teaches in His closing words of the

Sermon on the Mount, and in many another place. Every tree that

bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.'

The productive source of good works is not in question here; stress is

laid on the fruits, rather than on the root. The gospel is as

imperative in its requirements of righteousness as the law is, and its

conception of the righteousness which it requires is far deeper and

wider. The subjects of the kingdom ever need to be reminded of the

solemn truth that they have not only, like the wise maidens, to have

their lights burning and their oil vessels filled, nor only, like the

wise servants, to be using the gifts of the kingdom for their lord,

but, as members of the great family of man, have to cultivate the

common moralities which all men, heathen and Christian, recognise as

binding on all, without which no man shall see the Lord. The special

form of righteousness which is selected as the test is charity.

Obviously it is chosen as representative of all the virtues of the

second table of the law. Taken in its bare literality, this would mean

that men's relations to God had no effect in the judgment, mid that no

other virtues but this of charity came into the account. Such a

conclusion is so plainly repugnant to all Christ's teaching, that we

must suppose that love to one's neighbour is here singled out, just as

it is in His summary of the law and the prophets,' as the crown and

flower of all relative duties, and as, in a very real sense, being the

fulfilling of the law.' The omission of any reference to the love of

God sufficiently shows that the view here is rigidly limited to acts,

and that all the grounds of judgment are not meant to be set forth.

But the benevolence here spoken of is not the mere natural sentiment,

which often exists in great energy in men whose moral nature is, in

other respects, so utterly un-Christlike that their entrance into the

kingdom prepared for the righteous is inconceivable. Many a man has a

hundred vices and yet a soft heart. It is very much a matter of

temperament. Does Christ so contradict all the rest of His teaching as

to say that such a man is of the sheep,' and blessed of the Father'?

Surely not. Is every piece of kindliness to the distressed, from

whatever motive, and by whatsoever kind of person done, regarded by Him

as done to Himself? To say so, would be to confound moral distinctions,

and to dissolve all righteousness into a sentimental syrup. The deeds

which He regards as done to Himself, are done to His brethren.' That

expression carries us into the region of motive, and runs parallel with

His other words about receiving a prophet,' and giving a cup of cold

water to one of these little ones,' because they are His. Seeing that

all nations are at the bar, the expression, My brethren,' cannot be

confined to the disciples, for many of those who are being judged have

never come in contact with Christians, nor can it be reasonably

supposed to include all men, for, however true it is that Christ is

every man's brother, the recognition of kindred here must surely be

confined to those at the right hand. Whatever be included under the

righteous,' that is included under the brethren.' We seem, then, led to

recognise in the expression a reference to the motive of the

beneficence, and to be brought to the conclusion that what the Judge

accepts as done to Himself is such kindly help and sympathy as is

extended to these His kindred, with some recognition of their

character, and desire after it. To receive a prophet' implies that

there is some spiritual affinity with him in the receiver. To give help

to His brethren, because they are so, implies some affinity with Him or

feeling after likeness to Him and them. Now, if we hold fast by the

universality of the judgment here depicted, we shall see that this

recognition must necessarily have different degrees in those who have

heard of Christ and in those who have not. In the former, it will be

equivalent to that faith which is the root of all goodness, and grasps

the Christ revealed in the gospel. In the latter, it can be no more

than a feeling after Him who is the light that lighteneth every man

that cometh into the world.' Surely there are souls amid the darkness

of heathenism yearning toward the light, like plants grown in the dark.

By ways of His own, Christ can reach such hearts, as the river of the

water of life may percolate through underground channels to many a tree

which grows far from its banks.

III. Note the surprises of the judgment. The astonishment of the

righteous is not modesty disclaiming praise, but real wonder at the

undreamed-of significance of their deeds. In the parable of the

talents, the servants unveiled their inmost hearts, and accurately

described their lives. Here, the other side of the truth is brought

into prominence, that, at that day, we shall be surprised when we hear

from His lips what we have really done. True Christian beneficence has

consciously for its motive the pleasing of Christ; but still he who

most earnestly strove, while here, to do all as unto Jesus, will be

full of thankful wonder at the grace which accepts his poor service,

and will learn, with fresh marvelling, how closely He associates

Himself with His humblest servant. There is an element of mystery

hidden from ourselves in all our deeds. Our love to Christ's followers

never goes out so plainly to Him that, while here, we can venture to be

sure that He takes it as done for Him. We cannot here follow the flight

of the arrow, nor know what meaning He will attach to, or what large

issues He will evolve from, our poor doings. So heaven will be full of

blessed surprises, as we reap the fruit growing in power' of what we

sowed in weakness,' and as doleful will be the astonishment which will

seize those who see, for the first time, in the lurid light of that

day, the true character of their lives, as one long neglect of plain

duties, which was all a defrauding the Saviour of His due. Mere doing

nothing is enough to condemn, and its victims will be shudderingly

amazed at the fatal wound it has inflicted on them.

IV. The irrevocableness of the judgment. That is an awful contrast

between the Come! ye blessed,' and Depart! ye cursed.' That is a more

awful parallel between eternal punishment' and eternal life.' It is

futile to attempt to alleviate the awfulness by emptying the word

eternal' of reference to duration. It no doubt connotes quality, but

its first meaning is ever-during. There is nothing here to suggest that

the one condition is more terminable than the other. Rather, the

emphatic repetition of the word brings the unending continuance of each

into prominence, as the point in which these two states, so wofully

unlike, are the same. In whatever other passages the doctrine of

universal restoration may seem to find a foothold, there is not an inch

of standing-room for it here. Reverently accepting Christ's words as

those of perfect and infallible love, the present writer feels so

strongly the difficulty of bringing all the New Testament declarations

on this dread question into a harmonious whole, that he abjures for

himself dogmatic certainty, and dreads lest, in the eagerness of

discussing the duration (which will never be beyond the reach of

discussion), the solemn reality of the fact of future retribution

should be dimmed, and men should argue about the terror of the Lord'

till they cease to feel it.

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THE DEFENCE OF UNCALCULATING LOVE

Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, 7.

There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious

ointment, and poured it on His head, as He sat at meat. 8. But when His

disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this

waste? 9. For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to

the poor. 10. When Jesus understood it, He said unto them, Why trouble

ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon Me. 11. For ye have

the poor always with you; but Me ye have not always. 12. For in that

she hath poured this ointment on My body, she did it for My burial. 13.

Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the

whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told

for a memorial of her. 14. Then one of the twelve, called Judas

Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, 15. And said unto them, What

will ye give me, and I will deliver Him unto you? And they covenanted

with him for thirty pieces of silver. 16. And from that time he sought

opportunity to betray Him.'--MATT. xxvi. 6-16.

John tells us that the woman' was Mary, and the objector Judas. Both

the deed and the cavil are better understood by knowing whence they

came. Lazarus was a guest, and as his sister saw him sitting there by

Jesus her heart overflowed, and she could not but catch up her most

precious possession, and lavish it on His head and feet. Love's

impulses appear absurd to selfishness. How could Judas understand Mary?

Detracting comments find ready ears. One sneer will cool down to

contempt and blame the feelings of a company. People are always eager

to pick holes in conduct which they uneasily feel to be above their own

reach. Poor Mary! she had but yielded to the uncalculating impulse of

her great love, and she finds herself charged with imprudence, waste,

and unfeeling neglect of the poor. No wonder that her gentle heart was

troubled.' But Jesus threw the shield of His approval over her, and

that was enough. Never mind how Judas and better men than he may find

fault, if Jesus smiles acceptance.

His great words set forth, first, the vindication of the act, because

of its motive. Anything done with no regard to any end but Himself is,

in His eyes, good.' The perfection of conduct is that it shall all be

referred to Jesus. That altar' sanctifies gift and giver. Conversely,

whatever has no reference to Him lacks the highest beauty of goodness.

A pebble in the bed of a sunlit stream has its veins of colour brought

out; lift it out, and, as it dries, it dulls. So our deeds plunged into

that great river are heightened in loveliness. Everything which has For

Christ's sake' stamped on it is thereby hallowed. That is the unfailing

recipe for making a life fair. Mary was thinking only of Jesus and of

her love to Him, therefore what she did was sweet to Him. The greater

part of a deed is its motive, and the perfect motive is love to Jesus.

But, further, Christ defends the side of Mary's deed which the critics

fastened on. They posed as being more practical and benevolent than she

was. They were utilitarians, she was wasteful. Their objection sounds

sensible, but it belongs to the low levels of life. One flash of lofty

love would have killed it. Christ's reply to it draws a contrast

between constant duties and special, transient moments. It is coloured,

too, by His consciousness of His near end, and has an undertone of

sadness in that Me ye have not always.' There are high tides of

Christian emotion, when the question of what good this thing will do is

submerged, and the only question is, What best thing shall I render to

the Lord?' The critics were not more beneficent, but less inflamed with

love to Jesus, and the leader of them only wished that the proceeds of

the ointment had come into his hands, where some of it would have

stuck. We hear the same sort of taunt today,--What is the sense of all

this money being spent on missions and religious objects? How much more

useful it would be if expended on better dwellings for the poor or

hospitals or technical schools! But there is a place in Christ's

treasury for useless deeds, if they are the pure expression of love to

Him, and Mary's alabaster box, which did no good at all, lies beside

the cups that held cold water which slaked some thirsty lips.

Uncalculating impulse, which only knows that it would fain give all to

the Lover of souls, is not merely excused, but praised, by Jesus.

Lovers on earth do not concern themselves about the usefulness of their

gifts, and the divine Lover rejoices over what cold-blooded spectators,

who do not in the least understand the ways of loving hearts, find

useless waste.' The world would put all the emotions of Christian

hearts, and all the heroisms of Christian martyrs, and all the

sacrifices of Christian workers, into the same class. Jesus accepts

them all.

Again, He breathes a meaning into the gift beyond what the giver meant.

Mary did not regard her anointing as preparatory to His burial, but He

had His thoughts fixed on it, and He sought to prepare the disciples

for the coming storm. How far away from the simple festivities in

Simon's house were His thoughts! What a gulf between the other guests

and Him! But Jesus always puts significance into the service which He

accepts, and surprises the givers by the far-reaching issues of their

gifts. We know not what He may make our poor deeds mean. Results are

beyond our vision. Therefore let us make sure of what is within our

horizon--namely, motives. If we do anything for His sake, He will take

care of what it comes to. That is true even on earth, and still more

true in heaven. Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed Thee?' What

surprises will wait Christ's humble servants in heaven, when they see

what was the true nature and the widespread consequences of their

humble deeds! Thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain,

. . . but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him.'

Again, Mark gives an additional clause in Christ's words, which brings

out the principle that the measure of acceptable service is ability.

She hath done what she could' is an apology, or rather a vindication,

for the shape of the gift. Mary was not practical, and could not serve'

like Martha; she probably had no other precious thing that she could

give, but she could love, and she could bestow her best on Jesus. But

the saying implies a stringent demand, as well as a gracious defence.

Nothing less than the full measure of ability is the measure of

Christian obligation. Power to its last particle is duty. Jesus does

not ask how much His servants do or give, but He does ask that they

should do and give all that they can. He wishes us to be ourselves in

serving Him, and to shape our methods according to character and

capabilities, but He also wishes us to give Him our whole selves. If

anything is kept back, all that is given is marred.

Jesus' last word gives perpetuity to the service which He accepts. Mary

is promised immortality for her deed, and the promise has been

fulfilled, and here are we, all these centuries after, looking at her

as she breaks the box and pours it on His head. Jesus is not

unrighteous to forget any work of love done for Him. The fragrance of

the ointment soon passed away, and the shreds of the broken cruse were

swept into the dust-bin, with the other relics of the feast; but all

the world knows of that act of all-surrendering love, and it smells

sweet and blossoms for evermore.

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THE NEW PASSOVER

Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came

to Jesus, saying unto Him, Where wilt Thou that we prepare for Thee to

eat the passover? 18. And He said, Go into the city to such a man, and

say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the

passover at thy house with My disciples. 19. And the disciples did as

Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover. 20. Now

when the even was come, He sat down with the twelve. 21. And as they

did eat, He said, Verily I say unto you, That one of you shall betray

Me. 22. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them

to say unto Him, Lord, is it I? 23. And He answered and said, He that

dippeth his hand with Me in the dish, the same shall betray Me. 21. The

Son of Man goeth as it is written of Him; but woe unto that man by whom

the Son of Man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not

been born. 25. Then Judas, which betrayed Him, answered and said,

Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said 26. And as they were

eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to

the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body. 27. And He took

the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of

it; 28. For this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for

many for the remission of sins. 29. But I say unto you, I will not

drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink

it new with you in My Father's kingdom. 30. And when they had sung an

hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives.'--MATT. xxvi. 17-30.

The Tuesday of Passion Week was occupied by the wonderful discourses

which have furnished so many of our meditations. At its close Jesus

sought retirement in Bethany, not only to soothe and prepare His spirit

but to hide Himself' from the Sanhedrin. There He spent the Wednesday.

Who can imagine His thoughts? While He was calmly reposing in Mary's

quiet home, the rulers determined on His arrest, but were at a loss how

to effect it without a riot. Judas comes to them opportunely, and they

leave it to him to give the signal. Possibly we may account for the

peculiar secrecy observed as to the place for the last supper, by our

Lord's knowledge that His steps were watched, and by His earnest wish

to eat the Passover with the disciples before He suffered. The change

between the courting of publicity and almost inviting of arrest at the

beginning of the week, and the evident desire to postpone the crisis

till the fitting moment which marks the close of it, is remarkable, and

most naturally explained by the supposition that He wished the time of

His death to be that very hour when, according to law, the paschal lamb

was slain. On the Thursday, then, he sent Peter and John into the city

to prepare the Passover; the others being in ignorance of the place

till they were there, and Judas being thus prevented from carrying out

his purpose till after the celebration.

The precautions taken to ensure this have left their mark on Matthew's

narrative, in the peculiar designation of the host,--'Such a man!' It

is a kind of echo of the mystery which he so well remembered as round

the errand of the two. He does not seem to have heard of the token by

which they knew the house, viz., the man with the pitcher whom they

were to meet. But he does know that Peter and John got secret

instructions, and that he and the others wondered where they were to

go. Had there been a previous arrangement with this unnamed such an

one,' or were the token and the message alike instances of Christ's

supernatural knowledge and authority? It is difficult to say. I incline

to the former supposition, which would be in accordance with the

distinct effort after secrecy which marks these days; but the

narratives do not decide the question. At all events, the host was a

disciple, as appears from the authoritative the Master saith'; and,

whether he had known beforehand that this day' incarnate salvation

would come to his house' or no, he eagerly accepts the peril and the

honour. His message is royal in its tone. The Lord does not ask

permission, but issues His commands. But He is a pauper King, not

having where to lay His head, and needing another man's house in which

to gather His own household together for the family feast of the

Passover. What profound truths are wrapped up in that My time is come'!

It speaks of the voluntariness of His surrender, the consciousness that

His Cross was the centre point of His work, His superiority to all

external influences as determining the hour of His death, and His

submission to the supreme appointment of the Father. Obedience and

freedom, choice and necessity, are wonderfully blended in it.

So, late on that Thursday evening, the little band left Bethany for the

last time, in a fashion very unlike the joyous stir of the triumphal

entry. As the evening is falling, they thread their way through the

noisy streets, all astir with the festal crowds, and reach the upper

room, Judas vainly watching for an opportunity to slip away on his

black errand. The chamber, prepared by unknown hands, has vanished, and

the hands are dust; but both are immortal. How many of the living acts

of His servants in like manner seem to perish, and the doers of them to

be forgotten or unknown! But He knows the name of such an one,' and

does not forget that he opened his door for Him to enter in and sup.

The fact that Jesus put aside the Passover and founded the Lord's

Supper in its place, tells much both about His authority and its

meaning. What must He have conceived of Himself, who bade Jew and

Gentile turn away from that God-appointed festival, and think not of

Moses, but of Him? What did He mean by setting the Lord's Supper in the

place of the Passover, if He did not mean that He was the true Paschal

Lamb, that His death was a true sacrifice, that in His sprinkled blood

was safety, that His death inaugurated the better deliverance of the

true Israel from a darker prison-house and a sorer bondage, that His

followers were a family, and that the children's bread' was the

sacrifice which He had made? There are many reasons for the doubling of

the commemorative emblem, but this is obviously one of the chief--that,

by the separation of the two in the rite, we are carried back to the

separation in fact; that is to say, to the violent death of Christ. Not

His flesh alone, in the sense of Incarnation, but His body broken and

His blood shed, are what He wills should be for ever remembered. His

own estimate of the centre point of His work is unmistakably pronounced

in His institution of this rite.

But we may consider the force of each emblem separately. In many

important points they mean the same things, but they have each their

own significance as well. Matthew's condensed version of the words of

institution omits all reference to the breaking of the body and to the

memorial character of the observance, but both are implied. He

emphasises the reception, the participation, and the significance of

the bread. As to the latter, This is My body' is to be understood in

the same way as the field is the world,' and many other sayings. To

speak in the language of grammarians, the copula is that of symbolic

relationship, not that of existence; or, to speak in the language of

the street, is' here means, as it often does, represents.' How could it

mean anything else, when Christ sat there in His body, and His blood

was in His veins? What, then, is the teaching of this symbol? It is not

merely that He in His humanity is the bread of life, but that He in His

death is the nourishment of our true life. In that great discourse in

John's Gospel, which embodies in words the lessons which the Lord's

Supper teaches by symbols, He advances from the general statement, I am

the Bread of Life,' to the yet more mysterious and profound teaching

that His flesh, which at some then future point He will give for the

life of the world,' is the bread; thus distinctly foreshadowing His

death, and asserting that by that death we live, and by partaking of it

are nourished. The participation in the benefits of Christ's death,

which is symbolised by Take, eat,' is effected by living faith. We feed

on Christ when our minds are occupied with His truth, and our hearts

nourished by His love, when it is the meat' of our wills to do His

will, and when our whole inward man fastens on Him as its true object,

and draws from Him its best being. But the act of reception teaches the

great lesson that Christ must be in us, if He is to do us any good. He

is not for us' in any real sense, unless He be in us.' The word

rendered in John's Gospel eateth' is that used for the ruminating of

cattle, and wonderfully indicates the calm, continual, patient

meditation by which alone we can receive Christ into our hearts, and

nourish our lives on Him. Bread eaten is assimilated to the body, but

this bread eaten assimilates the eater to itself, and he who feeds on

Christ becomes Christ-like, as the silk-worm takes the hue of the

leaves on which it browses. Bread eaten to-day will not nourish us

to-morrow, neither will past experiences of Christ's sweetness sustain

the soul. He must be our daily bread' if we are not to pine with

hunger.

The wine carries its own special teaching, which clearly appears in

Matthew's version of the words of institution. It is My blood,' and by

its being presented in a form separate from the bread which is His body

suggests a violent death. It is covenant blood,' the seal of that

better covenant' than the old, which God makes now with all mankind,

wherein are given renewed hearts which carry the divine law within

themselves; the reciprocal and mutually blessed possession of God by

men and of men by God, the universally diffused knowledge of God, which

is more than head knowledge, being the consciousness of possessing Him;

and, finally, the oblivion of all sins. These promises are fulfilled,

and the covenant made sure, by the shed blood of Christ. So, finally,

it is shed for many, for the remission of sins.' The end of Christ's

death is pardon which can only be extended on the ground of His death.

We are told that Christ did not teach the doctrine of atonement. Did He

establish the Lord's Supper? If He did (and nobody denies that), what

did He mean by it, if He did not mean the setting forth by symbol of

the very same truth which, stated in words, is the doctrine of His

atoning death? This rite does not, indeed, explain the rationale of the

doctrine; but it is a piece of unmeaning mummery, unless it preaches

plainly the fact that Christ's death is the ground of our forgiveness.

Bread is the staff of life,' but blood is the life. So this cup'

teaches that the life' of Jesus Christ must pass into His people's

veins, and that the secret of the Christian life is I live; yet not I,

but Christ liveth in me.' Wine is joy, and the Christian life is not

only to be a feeding of the soul on Christ as its nourishment, but a

glad partaking, as at a feast, of His life and therein of His joy.

Gladness of heart is a Christian duty, the joy of the Lord is your

strength' and should be our joy; and though here we eat with loins

girt, and go out, some of us to deny, some of us to flee, all of us to

toil and suffer, yet we may have His joy fulfilled in ourselves, even

whilst we sorrow.

The Lord's Supper is predominantly a memorial, but it is also a

prophecy, and is marked as such by the mysterious last words of Jesus,

about drinking the new wine in the Father's kingdom. They point the

thoughts of the saddened eleven, on whom the dark shadow of parting lay

heavily, to an eternal reunion, in a land where all things are become

new,' and where the festal cup shall be filled with a draught that has

power to gladden and to inspire beyond any experience here. The joys of

heaven will be so far analogous to the Christian joys of earth that the

same name may be applied to both; but they will be so unlike that the

old name will need a new meaning, and communion with Christ at His

table in His kingdom, and our exuberance of joy in the full drinking in

of His immortal life, will transcend the selectest hours of communion

here. Compared with that fulness of joy they will be as water unto

wine,'--the new wine of the kingdom.

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IS IT I?'

And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say

unto Him, Lord, is it I? 25. Then Judas, which betrayed Him, answered

and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.'--MATT.

xxvi. 22, 25.

He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto Him, Lord, who is it?'--JOHN

xiii. 25.

The genius of many great painters has portrayed the Lord's Supper, but

the reality of it was very different from their imaginings. We have to

picture to ourselves some low table, probably a mere tray spread upon

the ground, round which our Lord and the twelve reclined, in such a

fashion as that the head of each guest came against the bosom of him

that reclined above him; the place of honour being at the Lord's left

hand, or higher up the table than Himself, and the second place being

at His right, or below Himself.

So there would be no eager gesticulations of disciples starting to

their feet when our Lord uttered the sad announcement, One of you shall

betray Me!' but only horror-struck amazement settled down upon the

group. These verses, which we have put together, show us three stages

in the conversation which followed the sad announcement. The three

evangelists give us two of these; John alone omits these two, and only

gives us the third.

First, we have their question, born of a glimpse into the possibilities

of evil in their hearts, Lord, is it I?' The form of that question in

the original suggests that they expected a negative answer, and might

be reproduced in English: 'Surely it is not I?' None of them could

think that he was the traitor, yet none of them could be sure that he

was not. Their Master knew better than they did; and so, from a humble

knowledge of what lay in them, coiled and slumbering, but there, they

would not meet His words with a contradiction, but with a question. His

answer spares the betrayer, and lets the dread work in their

consciences for a little longer, for their good. For many hands dipped

in the dish together, to moisten their morsels; and to say, He that

dippeth with Me in the dish, the same shall betray Me,' was to say

nothing more than One of you at the table.'

Then comes the second stage. Judas, reassured that he has escaped

detection for the moment, and perhaps doubting whether the Master had

anything more than a vague suspicion of treachery, or knew who was the

traitor, shapes his lying lips with loathsome audacity into the same

question, but yet not quite the same, The others had said, Is it I,

Lord?' he falters when he comes to that name, and dare not say Lord!'

That sticks in his throat. Rabbi!' is as far as he can get. Is it I,

Rabbi?' Christ's answer to him, Thou hast said,' is another instance of

patient longsuffering. It was evidently a whisper that did not reach

the ears of any of the others, for he leaves the room without

suspicion. Our Lord still tries to save him from himself by showing

Judas that his purpose is known, and by still concealing his name.

Then comes the third stage, which we owe to John's Gospel. Here again

he is true to his task of supplementing the narrative of the three

synoptic Gospels. Remembering what I have said about the attitude of

the disciples at the table, we can understand that Peter, if he

occupied the principal place at the Lord's left, was less favourably

situated for speaking to Christ than John, who reclined in the second

seat at His right, and so he beckoned over the Master's head to John.

The Revised Version gives the force of the original more vividly than

the Authorised does: He, leaning back, as he was, on Jesus' breast,

saith unto Him, Lord! who is it?' John, with a natural movement, bends

back his head on his Master's breast, so as to ask and be answered, in

a whisper. His question is not, Is it I?' He that leaned on Christ's

bosom, and was compassed about by Christ's love, did not need to ask

that. The question now is, Who is it?' Not a question of presumption,

nor of curiosity, but of affection; and therefore answered: He it is to

whom I shall give the sop, when I have dipped it.'

The morsel dipped in the dish and passed by the host's hand to a guest,

was a token of favour, of unity and confidence. It was one more attempt

to save Judas, one more token of all-forgiving patience. No wonder that

that last sign of friendship embittered his hatred and sharpened his

purpose to an unalterable decision, or, as John says: After the sop,

Satan entered into him.' For then, as ever, the heart which is not

melted by Christ's offered love is hardened by it.

Now, if we take these three stages of this conversation we may learn

some valuable lessons from them. I take the first form of the question

as an example of that wholesome self-distrust which a glimpse into the

slumbering possibilities of evil in our hearts ought to give us all. I

take the second on the lips of Judas, as an example of the very

opposite of that self-distrust, the fixed determination to do a wrong

thing, however clearly we know it to be wrong. And I take the last form

of the question, as asked by John, as an illustration of the peaceful

confidence which comes from the consciousness of Christ's love, and of

communion with Him. Now a word or two about each of these.

I. First, we have an example of that wholesome self-distrust, which a

glimpse into the possibilities of evil that lie slumbering in all our

hearts ought to teach every one of us.

Every man is a mystery to himself. In every soul there lie, coiled and

dormant, like hibernating snakes, evils that a very slight rise in the

temperature will wake up into poisonous activity. And let no man say,

in foolish self-confidence, that any form of sin which his brother has

ever committed is impossible for him. Temperament shields us from much,

no doubt. There are sins that we are inclined to,' and there are sins

that we have no mind to.' But the identity of human nature is deeper

than the diversity of temperament, and there are two or three

considerations that should abate a man's confidence that anything which

one man has done it is impossible that he should do. Let me enumerate

them very briefly. Remember, to begin with, that all sins are at bottom

but varying forms of one root. The essence of every evil is

selfishness, and when you have that, it is exactly as with cooks who

have the stock' by the fireside. They can make any kind of soup out of

it, with the right flavouring. We have got the mother tincture of all

wickedness in each of our hearts; and therefore do not let us be so

sure that it cannot be manipulated and flavoured into any form of sin.

All sin is one at bottom, and this is the definition of it--living to

myself instead of living to God. So it may easily pass from one form of

evil into another, just as light and heat, motion and electricity, are

all--they tell us--various forms and phases of one force. Just as

doctors will tell you that there are types of disease which slip from

one form of sickness into another, so if we have got the infection

about us it is a matter very much of accidental circumstances what

shape it takes. And no man with a human heart is safe in pointing to

any sin, and saying, That form of transgression I reckon alien to

myself.'

And then let me remind you, too, that the same consideration is

reinforced by this other fact, that all sin is, if I may so say,

gregarious; is apt not only to slip from one form into another, but

that any evil is apt to draw another after it. The tangled mass of sin

is like one of those great fields of seaweed that you some times come

across upon the ocean, all hanging together by a thousand slimy

growths; which, if lifted from the wave at any point, drags up yards of

it inextricably grown together. No man commits only one kind of

transgression. All sins hunt in couples. According to the grim picture

of the Old Testament, about another matter, None of them shall want his

mate. The wild beasts of the desert shall meet with the wild beasts of

the islands.' One sin opens the door for another, and seven other

spirits worse than himself' come and make holiday in the man's heart.

Again, any evil is possible to us, seeing that all sin is but yielding

to tendencies common to us all. The greatest transgressions have

resulted from yielding to such tendencies. Cain killed his brother from

jealousy; David besmirched his name and his reign by animal passion;

Judas betrayed Christ because he was fond of money. Many a man has

murdered another one simply because he had a hot temper. And you have

got a temper, and you have got the love of money, and you have got

animal passions, and you have got that which may stir you up into

jealousy. Your neighbour's house has caught fire and been blown up.

Your house, too, is built of wood, and thatched with straw, and you

have as much dynamite in your cellars as he had in his. Do not be too

sure that you are safe from the danger of explosion.

And, again, remember that this same wholesome self-distrust is needful

for us all, because all transgression is yielding to temptations that

assail all men. Here are one hundred men in a plague-stricken city;

they have all got to draw their water from the same well. If five or

six of them died of cholera it would be very foolish of the other

ninety-five to say, There is no chance of our being touched.' We all

live in the same atmosphere; and the temptations that have overcome the

men that have headed the count of crimes appeal to you. So the lesson

is, Be not high-minded, but fear.'

And remember, still further, that the same solemn consideration is

enforced upon us by the thought that men will gradually drop down to

the level which, before they began the descent, seemed to be impossible

to them. Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?' said

Hazael when the crime of murdering his master first floated before him.

Yes, but he did it. By degrees he came down to the level to which he

thought that he would never sink. First the imagination is inflamed,

then the wish begins to draw the soul to the sin, then conscience pulls

it back, then the fatal decision is made, and the deed is done.

Sometimes all the stages are hurried quickly through, and a man spins

downhill as cheerily and fast as a diligence down the Alps. Sometimes,

as the coast of a country may sink an inch in a century until long

miles of the flat seabeach are under water, and towers and cities are

buried beneath the barren waves, so our lives may be gradually lowered,

with a motion imperceptible but most real, bringing us down within

high-water mark, and at last the tide may wash over what was solid

land.

So, dear friends, there is nothing more foolish than for any man to

stand, self-confident that any form of evil that has conquered his

brother has no temptation for him. It may not have for you, under

present circumstances; it may not have for you to-day; but, oh! we have

all of us one human heart, and he that trusteth in his own heart is a

fool.' Blessed is the man that feareth always.' Humble self-distrust,

consciousness of sleeping sin in my heart that may very quickly be

stirred into stinging and striking; rigid self-control over all these

possibilities of evil, are duties dictated by the plainest

common-sense.

Do not say, I know when to stop.' Do not say, I can go so far; it will

not do me any harm.' Many a man has said that, and many a man has been

ruined by it. Do not say, It is natural to me to have these

inclinations and tastes, and there can be no harm in yielding to them.'

It is perfectly natural for a man to stoop down over the edge of a

precipice to gather the flowers that are growing in some cranny in the

cliff; and it is as natural for him to topple over, and be smashed to a

mummy at the bottom. God gave you your dispositions and your whole

nature under lock and key,'--keep them so. And when you hear of, or

see, great criminals and great crimes, say to yourself, as the good old

Puritan divine said, looking at a man going to the scaffold, But for

the grace of God there go I!' And in the contemplation of sins and

apostasies, let us each look humbly at our own weakness, and pray Him

to keep us from our brother's evils which may easily become ours.

II. Secondly, we have here an example of precisely the opposite sort,

namely, of that fixed determination to do evil which is unshaken by the

clearest knowledge that it is evil.

Judas heard his crime described in its own ugly reality. He heard his

fate proclaimed by lips of absolute love and truth; and notwithstanding

both, he comes unmoved and unshaken with his question. The dogged

determination in his heart, that dares to see his evil stripped naked

and is not ashamed,' is even more dreadful than the hypocrisy and sleek

simulation of friendship in his face.

Now most men turn away with horror from even the sins that they are

willing to do, when they are put plainly and bluntly before them. As an

old mediaeval preacher once said, There is nothing that is weaker than

the devil stripped naked.' By which he meant exactly this--that we have

to dress wrong in some fantastic costume or other, so as to hide its

native ugliness, in order to tempt men to do it. So we have two sets of

names for wrong things, one of which we apply to our brethren's sins,

and the other to the same sins in ourselves. What I do is prudence,'

what you do of the same sort is covetousness'; what I do is sowing my

wild oats,' what you do is immorality' and dissipation'; what I do is

generous living,' what you do is drunkenness' and gluttony'; what I do

is righteous indignation,' what you do is passionate anger.' And so you

may go the whole round of evil. Very bad are the men who can look at

their deed, described in Its own inherent deformity, and yet say, Yes;

that is it, and I am going to do it.' One of you shall betray Me.' Yes;

I will betray you!' It must have taken something to look into the

Master's face, and keep the fixed purpose steady.

Now I ask you to think, dear friends, of this, that that obstinate

condition of dogged determination to do a wrong thing, knowing it to be

a wrong thing, is a condition to which all evil steadily tends. We may

not come to it in this world--I do not know that men ever do so wholly;

but we are all getting towards it in regard to the special wrong deeds

and desires which we cherish and commit. And when a man has once

reached the point of saying to evil, Be thou my good,' then he is a

devil' in the true meaning of the word; and wherever he is, he is in

hell! And the one unpardonable sin is the sin of clear recognition that

a given thing is contrary to God's will, and unfaltering determination,

notwithstanding, to do it. That is the only sin that cannot be

pardoned, either in this world or in the world to come.'

And so, my brother, seeing that such a condition is possible, and that

all the paths of evil, however tentative and timorous they may be at

first, and however much the sin may be wrapped up with excuses and

forms and masks, tend to that condition, let us take that old prayer

upon our lips, which befits both those who distrust themselves because

of slumbering sins, and those who dread being conquered by manifest

iniquity:--Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret

faults. Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins. Let them not

have dominion over me.'

III. Now, lastly, we have in the last question an example of the

peaceful confidence that comes from communion with Jesus Christ.

John leaned on the Master's bosom. He was the disciple whom Jesus

loved.' And so compassed with that great love, and feeling absolute

security within the enclosure of that strong hand, his question is not,

Is it I?' but Who is it?' From which I think we may fairly draw the

conclusion that to feel that Christ loves me, and that I am compassed

about by Him, is the true security against my falling into any sin.

It was not John's love to Christ, but Christ's to John that made his

safety. He did not say: I love Thee so much that I cannot betray Thee.'

For all our feelings and emotions are but variable, and to build

confidence upon them is to build a heavy building upon quicksand; the

very weight of it drives out the foundations. But he thought to

himself--or he felt rather than he thought--that all about him lay the

sweet, warm, rich atmosphere of his Master's love; and to a man who was

encompassed by that, treachery was impossible.

Sin has no temptation so long as we actually enjoy the greater

sweetness of Christ's felt love. Would thirty pieces of silver have

been a bribe to John? Would anything that could have terrified others

have frightened him from his Master's side whilst he felt His love?

Will a handful of imitation jewellery, made out of coloured glass and

paste, be any temptation to a man who bears a rich diamond on his

finger? And will any of earth's sweetness be a temptation to a man who

lives in the continual consciousness of the great rich love of Christ

wrapping him round about? Brethren, not ourselves, not our faith, not

our emotion, not our religious experience; nothing that is in us, is

any security that we may not be tempted, and yield to the temptation,

and deny or betray our Lord. There is only one thing that is a

security, and that is that we be folded to the heart, and held by the

hand, of that loving Lord. Then--then we may be confident that we shall

not fall; for the Lord is able to make us stand.'

Such confidence is but the other side of our self-distrust; is the

constant accompaniment of it, must have that self-distrust for its

condition and prerequisite, and leads to a yet deeper and more blessed

form of that self-distrust. Faith in Him and no confidence in the

flesh' are but the two sides of the same coin, the obverse and the

reverse. The seed, planted in the ground, sends a little rootlet down,

and a little spikelet up, by the same vital act. And so in our hearts,

as it were, the downward rootlet is self-despair, and the upward shoot

is faith in Christ. The two emotions go together--the more we distrust

ourselves the more we shall rest upon Him, and the more we rest upon

Him, and feel that all our strength comes, not from our foot, but from

the Rock on which it stands, the more we shall distrust our own ability

and our own faithfulness.

Therefore, dear brethren, looking upon all the evil that is around us,

and conscious in some measure of the weakness of our own hearts, let us

do as a man would do who stands upon the narrow ledge of a cliff, and

look sheer down into the depth below, and feels his head begin to reel

and turn giddy; let us lay hold of the Guide's hand, and if we cleave

by Him, He will hold up our goings that our footsteps slip not. Nothing

else will. No length of obedient service is any guarantee against

treachery and rebellion. As John Bunyan saw, there was a backdoor to

hell from the gate of the Celestial City. Men have lived for years

consistent professing Christians, and have fallen at last. Many a ship

has come across half the world, and gone to pieces on the harbour bar.

Many an army, victorious in a hundred fights, has been annihilated at

last. No depths of religious experience, no heights of religious

blessedness, no attainments of past virtue and self-sacrifice, are any

guarantees for to-morrow. Trust in nothing and in nobody, least of all

in yourselves and your own past. Trust only in Jesus Christ.

Now unto Him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us

faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; to the

only wise God our Saviour be glory and majesty, dominion and power,

both now and for ever.' Amen.

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THIS CUP'

And Jesus took the cup, and grave thanks, and gave it to them, saying,

Drink ye all of it; 28. For this is My blood of the new testament,

which is shed for many for the remission of sins'--MATT. xxvi. 27, 28.

The comparative silence of our Lord as to the sacrificial character of

His death has very often been urged as a reason for doubting that

doctrine, and for regarding it as no part of the original Christian

teaching. That silence may be accounted for by sufficient reasons. It

has been very much exaggerated, and those who argue from it against the

doctrine of the Atonement have forgotten that Jesus Christ founded the

Lord's Supper.

That rite shows us what He thought, and what He would have us think, of

His death; and in the presence of its testimony it seems to me

impossible to deny that His conception of it was distinctly

sacrificial. By it He points out the moment of His whole career which

He desires that men should remember. Not His words of tenderness and

wisdom; not His miracles, amazing and gracious as these were; not the

flawless beauty of His character, though it touches all hearts and wins

the most rugged to love, and the most degraded to hope; but the moment

in which He gave His life is what He would imprint for ever on the

memory of the world.

And not only so, but in the rite he distinctly tells us in what aspect

He would have that death remembered. Not as the tragic end of a noble

career which might be hallowed by tears such as are shed over a

martyr's ashes; not as the crowning proof of love; not as the supreme

act of patient forgiveness; but as a death for us, in which, as by the

blood of the sacrifice, is secured the remission of sins.

And not only so, but the double symbol in the Lord's Supper--whilst in

some respects the bread and wine speak the same truths, and certainly

point to the same Cross--has in each of its parts special lessons

intrusted to it, and special truths to proclaim. The bread and the wine

both say:--Remember Me and My death.' Taken in conjunction they point

to that death as violent; taken separately they each suggest various

aspects of it, and of the blessings that will flow to us therefrom. And

it is my present purpose to bring out, as briefly and as clearly as I

can, the special lessons which our Lord would have us draw from that

cup which is the emblem of His shed blood.

I. First, then, observe that it speaks to us of a divine treaty or

covenant.

Ancient Israel had lived for nearly 2000 years under the charter of

their national existence which, as we read in the Old Testament, was

given on Sinai amidst thunderings and lightnings--Now, therefore, if ye

will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a

peculiar treasure unto Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine,

and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation.'

And that covenant, or agreement, or treaty, on the part of God, was

ratified by a solemn act, in which the blood of the sacrifice, divided

into two portions, was sprinkled, one half upon the altar, and the

other half, after their acceptance of the conditions and obligations of

the covenant, on the people, who had pledged themselves to obedience.

And now, here is a Galilean peasant, in a borrowed upper room, within

four-and-twenty hours of His ignominious death which might seem to

blast all His work, who steps forward and says, I put away that ancient

covenant which knits this nation to God. It is antiquated. I am the

true offering and sacrifice, by the blood of which, sprinkled on altar

and on people, a new covenant, built upon better promises, shall

henceforth be.'

What a tremendous piece of audacity, except on the one hypothesis that

He that spake was indeed the Word of God; and that He was making that

which Himself had established of old, to give way to that which He

establishes now! The new covenant which Christ seals in His blood, is

the charter, the better charter, under the conditions of which, not a

nation but the world may find an external salvation which dwarfs all

the deliverances of the past. That idea of a covenant confirmed by

Christ's blood may sound to many hearers dry and hard. But if you will

try to think what great truths are wrapped up in the theological

phraseology, you will find them very real and very strong. Is it not a

grand thought that between us and the infinite divine Nature there is

established a firm and unmovable agreement? Then He has revealed His

purposes; we are not left to grope in darkness, at the mercy of

peradventures' and probablies'; nor reduced to consult the ambiguous

oracles of nature or of Providence, or the varying voices of our own

hearts, or painfully and dubiously to construct more or less strong

bases for confidence in a loving God out of such hints and fragments of

revelation as these supply. He has come out of His darkness, and spoken

articulate words, plain words, faithful words, which bind Him to a

distinctly defined course of action. Across the great ocean of possible

modes of action for a divine nature He has, if I may so say, buoyed out

for Himself a channel, so as that we know His path, which is in the

deep waters. He has limited Himself by the utterance of a faithful

word, and we can now come to Him with His own promise, and cast it down

before Him, and say: Thou hast spoken, and Thou art bound to fulfil

it.' We have a covenant wherein God has shown us His hand, has told us

what He is going to do and has thereby pledged Himself to its

performance.

And, still further, in order to get the full sweetness of this thought,

to break the husk and reach to the kernel, you must remember what,

according to the New Testament, are the conditions of this covenant.

The old agreement was, If ye will obey My voice and do My commandments,

then,'--so and so will happen. The old condition was, Do and live; be

righteous and blessed!' The new condition is: Take and have; believe

and live!' The one was law, the other is gift; the one was retribution,

the other is forgiveness. One was outward, hard, rigid law, fitly

graven with a pen of iron on the rocks for ever'; the other is impulse,

love, a power bestowed that will make us obedient; and the sole

condition that we have to render is the condition of humble and

believing acceptance of the divine gift. The new covenant, in the

exuberant fulness of its mercy, and in the tenderness of its gracious

purposes, is at once the completion and the antithesis of the ancient

covenant with its precepts and its retribution.

And, still further, this new covenant,' of which the essence is God's

bestowment of Himself on every heart that wills to possess Him; this

new covenant, according to the teaching of these words of my text and

of the symbol to which they refer, is ratified and sealed by that great

sacrifice. The blood was sprinkled on the altar; the blood was

sprinkled on the people, which being translated into plain,

unmetaphorical language is simply this, that Christ's death remains for

ever present to the divine mind as the great reason and motive which

modifies His government, and which ensures that His love shall ever

find its way to every seeking soul. His death is the token; His death

is the reason; His death is the pledge of the unending and the

inexhaustible mercy of God bestowed upon each of us. He that spared not

His own Son, shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?' The

outward rite with its symbol is the exhibition in visible form of that

truth, that the blood of Jesus Christ seals to the world the infinite

mercy of God.

And, on the other hand, that same blood of the covenant, sprinkled upon

the other parties to the treaty, even our poor sinful hearts, binds

them to the fulfilment of the condition which belongs to them. That is

to say, by the power of that sacrifice there are evoked in our poor

souls, faith, love, surrender. It, and it alone, knits us to God; it,

and it alone, binds us to the fulfilment of the covenant. My brother,

have you entered into that sweet, solemn, sacred alliance and union

with God? Have you accepted and fulfilled the conditions? Is your heart

'sprinkled with the blood so freely shed for you'; and have you thereby

been brought into living alliance with the God who has pledged His

being and His name to be the all-sufficient God to you?

II. Still further, this cup speaks to us of the forgiveness of sins.

One theory, and one theory only, as it seems to me, of the meaning of

Christ's death, is possible if these words of my text ever dropped from

Christ's lips, or if He ever instituted the rite to which they refer;

He must have believed that His death was a sacrifice, without which the

sins of the world were not forgiven; and by which forgiveness came to

us all.

And I do not think that we rightly conceive the relation between the

sacrifices of barbarous heathen tribes, or the sacrifices appointed in

Israel, and the great sacrifice on the Cross, if we say that our Lord's

death is only figuratively accommodated to these in order to meet lower

or grosser conceptions, but rather, I take it, that the accommodation

is the other way. In all nations beyond the limits of Israel the

sacrifices of living victims spoke not only of surrender and

dependence, but likewise of the consciousness of demerit and evil on

the part of the offerers, and were at once a confession of sin, a

prayer for pardon, and a propitiation of an offended God. And I believe

that the sacrifices in Israel were intended and adapted not only to

meet the deep-felt want of human nature, common to them as to all other

tribes, but also were intended and adapted to point onwards to Him in

whose death a real want of mankind was met, in whose death a real

sacrifice was offered, in whose death an angry God was not indeed

propitiated, but in whose death the loving Father of our souls Himself

provided the Lamb for the offering, without which, for reasons deeper

than we can wholly fathom, it was impossible that sin should be

remitted.

I insist upon no theory of an Atonement. I believe there is no Gospel,

worth calling so, worth the preaching, worth your believing, or that

will ever move the world or purify society, except the Gospel which

begins with the fact of an Atonement, and points to the Cross as the

altar on which the Sacrifice for the sins of the world, without whose

death pardon is impossible, has died for us all.

Oh! dear friends, do not let yourselves be confused by the difficulties

that beset all human and incomplete statements of the philosophy of the

death of Christ; but getting away from these, cleave you to the fact

that your sins were laid upon Christ, and that He has died for us all;

that His death is a sacrifice; His body broken for us; and for the

remission of our sins, His blood freely shed. Thus, and only thus, will

you come to the understanding either of the sweetness of His love or of

the power of His example; then, and only then, shall we know why it was

that He elected to be remembered, out of all the moments of His life,

by that one when He hung in weakness upon the Cross, and out of the

darkness came the cry, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?'

III. And now, again, let me remind you that this cup speaks likewise of

a life infused.

The blood is the life,' says the physiology of the Hebrews. The blood

is the life, and when men drink of that cup they symbolise the fact

that Christ's own life and spirit are imparted to them that love Him.

Except ye eat the flesh, and drink the blood of the Son of Man, ye have

no life in you.' The very heart of Christ's gift to us is the gift of

His own very life to be the life of our lives. In deep, mystical

reality He Himself passes into our being, and the law of the spirit of

life makes us free from the law of sin and death,' so that we may say:

He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit,' and the humble believing

soul may rejoice in this: I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in Me.'

This is, in one aspect, the very deepest meaning of this Communion

rite. As physicians sometimes tried to restore life to an almost dead

man by the transfusion into his shrunken veins of the fresh warm blood

from a young and healthy subject, so into our fevered life, into our

corrupted blood, there is poured the full tide of the pure and perfect

life of Jesus Christ Himself, and we live, not by our own power, nor

for our own will, nor in obedience to our own caprices, but by Him and

in Him, and with Him and for Him. This is the heart of Christianity,

the possession within us of the life, the immortal life of Him that

died for us.

My brother have you that great gift in your heart? Be sure of this,

that unless the life of Christ is in you by faith, ye are dead, dead in

trespasses and in sins'; dead, and sure to rot away and disintegrate

into corruption. The cup of blessing which we drink speaks to us of the

transfusion into our spirits of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

IV. And lastly, it speaks of a festal gladness.

The bread says nothing to us of the remission of sins. The broken bread

proclaims, indeed, our nourishment from Jesus, but falls short of the

deep and solemn truth that it is the very life-blood of Christ Himself

which nourishes us and vitalises us. And the bread, in like manner,

proclaims indeed the fact that we are fed on Him, but says nothing of

the joy of that feeding. The wine is the symbol of that, and it

proclaims to us that the Christian life here on earth, just because it

is the feeding on and the drinking in of Jesus Christ, ought ever to be

a life of blessedness, of abounding joy, by whatsoever darkness,

burdens, cares, toils, sorrows, and solitude it may be shaded and

saddened. They who live on Christ, they who drink in of His spirit,

they should be glad in all circumstances, they, and they alone. We sit

at a table, though it be in the wilderness, though it be in the

presence of our enemies, where there ought to be joy and the voice of

rejoicing.

But beyond that, as our Master Himself taught these apostles in that

upper room, this cup points onwards to a future feast. At that solemn

hour Jesus stayed His own heart with the vision of the perfected

kingdom and the glad festival then. So this Communion has a prophetic

element in it, and links on with predictions and parables which speak

of the marriage supper' of the great King, and of the time when we

shall sit at His table in His kingdom.

For the past the Lord's Supper speaks of the one sufficient oblation

and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. For the present it

speaks of life produced and sustained by communion with Jesus Christ.

And for the future it speaks of the unending, joyful satisfaction of

all desires in the upper room' of the heavens.

How unlike, and yet how like to that scene in the upper room at

Jerusalem! From it the sad disciples went out, some of them to deny

their Master; all of them to struggle, to sin, to lose Him from their

sight, to toil, to sorrow, and at last to die. From that other table we

shall go no more out, but sit there with Him in full fruition of

unfailing blessedness and participation of His immortal life for

evermore.

Dear brethren, these are the lessons, these the hopes, which this blood

of the new covenant' teaches and inspires. Have you entered into that

covenant with God? Have you made sure work of the forgiveness of your

sins through His blood? Have you received into your spirits His

immortal life? Then you may humbly be confident that, after life's

weariness and lonesomeness are past, you will be welcomed to the

banqueting hall by the Lord of the feast, and sit with Him and His

servants who loved Him at that table and be glad.

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UNTIL THAT DAY'

I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day

when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'--MATT. xxvi. 29.

This remarkable saying of our Lord's is recorded in all of the accounts

of the institution of the Lord's Supper. The thought embodied in it

ought to be present in the minds of all who partake of that rite. It

converts what is primarily a memorial into a prophecy. It bids us hope

as well as, and because we, remember. The light behind us is cast

forward on to the dimness before. So the Apostle Paul, in his solitary

reference to the Communion--which, indeed, is an entirely incidental

one, and evoked simply by the corruptions in the Corinthian Church,

emphasises this prophetic and onward-looking aspect of the

backward-looking rite when he says, Ye do show the Lord's death till He

come.'

Now, it seems to me that those of us who so strongly hold that the

Communion is primarily a simple memorial service, with no mysterious or

magical efficacy of any sort about it, do rather ignore in our ordinary

thoughts the other aspect which is brought out in my text; and that

comparative ignoring seems to me to be but a part of a very lamentable

and general tendency of this day, whereby the prospect of a future life

has become somewhat dimmed and does not fill the place either in

ordinary Christian thinking, or as a motive for Christian service which

the proportion of faith, and the relative importance of the present and

the future suggest that it ought to fill. The Christianity of this day

has so much to do with the present life, and the thought of the Gospel

as a power in the present has been so emphasised, in legitimate

reaction from the opposite exaggeration, that there is great need, as I

believe, to preach to Christian people the wisdom of making more

prominent in their faith their immortal hope. I wish, then, to turn now

to this aspect of the rite which we regard as a memorial, and try to

emphasise its forward-looking attitude, and the large blessed truths

that emerge if we consider that.

I. First, let me say just a word about the twin aspect of the Communion

as a memorial prophecy, or prophetic remembrance.

Now, I need not remind you, I suppose, that according to the view

which, as I believe, the New Testament takes, and which certainly we

Nonconformists take, of all the rites of external worship, every one of

them is a prophecy, because every act in which our sense is brought in

to reinforce the spirit--and by outward forms, be they vocal, or be

they manual, or be they of any other sort, we try to express and to

quicken spiritual emotions and intellectual convictions--declares its

own imperfection, digs its own grave, and prophecies its own

resurrection in a nobler and better fashion. Just because these outward

symbols of bread and wine do, through the senses, quicken the faith and

the love of the spirit, they declare themselves to be transitory, and

they point onwards to the time when that which is perfect shall absorb,

and so destroy, that which is in part, and when sense shall be no

longer necessary as the ally and humble servant of spirit. I saw no

temple therein.' Temples, and rites, and services, and holy days, and

all the external apparatus of worship, are but scaffolding, and just as

the scaffolding round a building is a prophecy of its own being pulled

down when the building is reared and completed, so we cannot partake of

these external symbols rightly, unless we recognise their transiency,

and feel that they say to us, A mightier than I cometh after me, the

latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose.' The light that

shines in the dark heralds the day and its own extinction.

So, looking back we must look forward, and partaking of the symbol, we

must reach out to the time when the symbol shall be antiquated, the

reality having come. The Passover of Israel did not more truly point

onwards to the true Lamb of Sacrifice, and to the true Passover that

was slain for us, and to its own elevation into the Lord's Supper of

the Christian Church, than the Lord's Supper of the Christian Church

points onwards to the marriage supper of the Lamb,' and its own

cessation.

But then, again, let me remind you that this prophetic aspect is

inherent in the memorial aspect of the Communion, because what we

remember necessarily demands the coming of what we hope. That is to

say, if Jesus Christ be what the Lord's Supper says that He is, and if

He has done what that broken bread and poured out wine proclaim,

according to His own utterance, that He has done, then clearly that

death which was for the life of the world, that death which was the

seal of a covenant, that body broken for the remission of sins, that

wine partaken of as a reception into ourselves of the very life-blood

of Jesus Christ, do all demand something far nobler and more perfect

than the broken, incomplete obedience and loyalties and communions

which Christian men here exercise and possess.

If He died, as the rite says that He did, and if dying He left such a

commentary upon His act as that ordinance affords, then He cannot have

done with the world; then the powers that were set in motion by His

death cannot pause nor cease their action until they have reached their

appropriate culmination in effecting all that it was in them to effect.

If, leaving His people, He said to them, Never forget My death for you,

My broken body, and My shed blood,' He therein said that the time will

come, must come, when all the powers of the Cross shall be incorporated

in humanity, and when the parted shall be reunited. The Communion would

stand as the expression of Christ's mistaken estimate of His own

importance, if there were not beyond the grave the perfecting of it,

and the full appropriation and joyful possession of all which the death

that it signifies brought to mankind.

Therefore, dear brethren, it seems to me that the best way by which

Christians can deepen their confidence and brighten their hope in the

perfect reunion and blessedness of the heavens, is to increase the

firmness of their faith in, and the depth of their apprehension of, the

sacrifice of the Cross. If the Cross demands the Crown, then our surest

way to realise as certain our own possession of that Crown is to cling

very close to that Cross. The more we look backwards to it the more

will it fling its light into all the dark places that are in front of

us, and flush the heavens up to the seventh and beyond, with the

glories that stream from it. Hold fast by the Cross, and the more

fully, believingly, joyously, unfalteringly, we recognise in it the

foundation of our salvation, the more gladly, clearly, operatively,

shall we cherish the hope that the headstone shall be brought forth

with shoutings,' and that the imperfect symbolical communion of earth

will grow and greaten into complete and real union in eternal bliss.

Let me urge, then, this, that, as a matter of fact, a faith in eternal

glory goes with and fluctuates in the same degree and manner as does

the faith in the past sacrifice that Christ has made. He, and He alone,

as I believe, turns nebulae into solidity, and makes of the more or

less tremulous anticipation of a more or less dim and distant future, a

calm, still certainty. We know that He will come because, and in

proportion as, we believe that He has come. Keep these two things,

then, always together, the memory and the hope. They stand like two

great piers, one on either side of a narrow, dark glen, and suspended

from them is stretched the bridge, along which the happy pilgrims may

travel and enter into rest.

II. And now, let us turn for a moment to the lovely vision of that

future which is suggested by our text.

The truest way, I was going to say the only way, by which we can have

any conceptions of a condition of being of which we have no experience,

is to fall back upon the experiences which we have, and use them as

symbols and metaphors. The curtain is the picture. So our Lord here, in

accordance with the necessary limitations of our human knowledge,

contents Himself with using what lay at His hand, and taking it as

giving faint shadows and metaphorical suggestions as to spiritual

blessedness yonder.

There is one other way, as it seems to me, by which we can in any

measure body forth to ourselves that unknown condition of things, and

that is to fall back upon our present experiences in another fashion,

and negative all of them which involve pain and limitation and

incompleteness. There shall be no night--no sorrow--no tears--no

sighing, and the like. These negatives of the strong and stinging

griefs and limitations of the present are perhaps our second-best way

of coming to some prophetic vision of that great future.

Remembering, then, that we are dealing with pure metaphor, and that the

exact translation of the metaphor into reality is not yet possible for

us, let us take one or two very plain thoughts out of this great

saying--Until I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.'

Then, we have to think of the completion of the Christian life beyond,

which is also the completion of the results of Christ's death on the

Cross, as being, according to the very frequent metaphor both of the

Old and the New Testament, a prolonged festival. I do not need to speak

of the details of the thoughts that thence emerge. Let me sum them up

as briefly as may be. They include the satisfaction of every desire and

the nourishment of all strength, and food for every faculty. When we

think of the hungry hearts that all men carry, and how true it is that

even the wisest and the holiest of us are spending our money for that

which is not bread, and our labour for that which satisfieth not'; when

we think of how the choicest foods that life can provide, even for the

noblest hunger of noble hearts, are too often to us but as a feeding on

ashes that will leave grit between the teeth and a foul taste upon the

palate, surely it is blessed to think that we may, after all life's

disappointments, cherish the hope of a perfect fruition, and that

yonder, if not here, it will be fully true that God never sends mouths

but He sends meat to feed them.' That is not so in this world, for we

all carry hungers which impel us forward to nobler living, and which it

would not be good for us to have satisfied here. But, unless the whole

universe is a godless chaos, there must be somewhere a state in which a

man shall have all that he wants, and shall want only what he ought.

The emblem of a feast suggests also society. The solitary travellers

who have been toiling and moiling through the desert all the day long,

snatching up a hasty mouthful as they march, and lonely many a time,

come together at last, and sit together there joyous and united. Deep

down in our hearts some of us have gashes that always bleed. We know

losses and loneliness, and we can feel, I hope, how blessed is the

thought that all the wanderers shall sit there together, and rejoice in

each other's communion, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.'

But besides satisfaction and society the figure suggests repose. That

rest is not indolence, for we have to carry other metaphors with us in

order to come to the full significance of this one, and the festal

imagery is not all that we have to take into account; for we read, I

grant unto you a kingdom, and ye shall sit on twelve thrones judging

the twelve tribes of Israel,' as well as ye shall eat and drink with Me

at My table in My kingdom.' So repose, which is consistent and

coexistent with the intensest activity, is the great hope that comes

out of these metaphors. But for many of us--I suppose for all of us

elderly people--who are about weary of work and worry, there is no

deeper hope than the hope of rest. I have had labour enough for one,'

says one of our poets. And I think there is something in most of our

hearts that echoes that and rejoices to hear that, after the long

march, ye shall sit with Me at My table.'

But besides satisfaction, society, and rest, the figure suggests

gladness. Wine is the emblem of the joyous side of a feast, just as

bread is the emblem of the necessary nourishment. And it is new wine;

joy raised to a higher power, transformed and glorified; and yet the

old emotion in a new form. As for that gladness, eye hath not seen,

neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things

that God hath prepared for them that love Him.' Only all we weary,

heavy-laden, saddened, anxious, disappointed, tormented people may hope

for these festal joys, if we are Christ's. The feast will last when all

the troubles and the cares which helped us to it are dead and buried

and forgotten.

These four things, brethren--satisfaction, society, rest, new

gladness--are proclaimed and prophesied to each of us, if we will, by

this memorial rite.

Again, there comes from this aspect of the Communion the thought that

the blessed condition of the Christian soul hereafter is a feast on a

sacrifice. We must distinguish between the sense in which our Lord

drinks with us, and the sense in which we alone partake of that feast

of which He provides the viands. But just as in the symbolic ordinance

of the Communion the very essence of it is that what was offered as

sacrifice is now incorporated into the participant's spiritual being,

and becomes part of himself, and the life of his life, so, in the

future, all the blessedness of the clustered and constellated joys of

that life, which is one eternal festival, shall arise from the

reception into perfected spirits with ever-growing greatness and

blessedness of the Christ that died and ever lives for them. That

heavenly glory, to its highest pinnacle of aspiration, to its most rapt

completeness of gladness, is all the consequence of Christ's death on

the Cross. That death, which we commemorate, is the procuring cause of

man's entrance into bliss, and that death is the subject of the

continual, grateful remembrance of the saints in the seventh heaven of

their glory. Life yonder, as all true life here, consists in taking

into ourselves the life of Jesus Christ, and the law for heaven is the

same as the law for earth, He that eateth Me, even he shall live by

Me.'

Lastly, the conception of the future for Christian souls arising from

this aspect of the Lord's Supper is that it is not only a feast, and a

feast on a sacrifice, but that it is a feast with the King.

With you I will drink it.' Brethren, we pass beyond metaphor when we

gather up and condense all the vague brightness and glories of that

perfect future into this one rapturous, overwhelming, all-embracing

thought: So shall we ever be with the Lord.' I could almost wish that

Christian people had no other thought of that future than this, for

surely in its grand simplicity, in its ineffable depth, there lie the

germs of every blessedness. How poor all the material emblems are of

which sensuous imaginations make so much, when compared with that hope!

As the good old hymn has it, which to me says more, in its bold

simplicity, than all the sentimental enlargements of Scriptural

metaphors which some people admire so much--

It is enough that Christ knows all,

And I shall be with Him.'

Strange that He says, I will drink it with you.' Does He need

sustenance? Does He need any external things in order to make His

feast? No! and Yes! I will sup with Him' as well as He with me.' And,

surely, His meat and drink are the love, the loyalty, the obedience,

the receptiveness, the society of His redeemed children. The joy of the

Lord' comes from seeing of the travail of His soul,' and His servants

do enter into that joy in deep and wondrous fashion. We not only shall

live on Christ, but He Himself puts to His own lips the chalice that He

commends to ours, and in marvellous condescension to, and identity

with, our glorified humanity drinks with us the new wine' in the

Father's kingdom.

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GETHSEMANE, THE OIL-PRESS

Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith

unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. 37. And He

took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be

sorrowful and very heavy. 38. Then saith He unto them, My soul is

exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with Me.

39. And He went a little farther, and fell on His face, and prayed,

saying, O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me:

nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt. 40. And He cometh unto

the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What,

could ye not watch with Me one hour! 41. Watch and pray, that ye enter

not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is

weak. 42. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O My

Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy

will be done. 43. And He came and found them asleep again: for their

eyes were heavy. 44. And He left them, and went away again, and prayed

the third time, saying the same words. 45. Then cometh He to His

disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest:

behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the

hands of sinners. 46. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that

doth betray Me.'--MATT. xxvi. 36-46.

One shrinks from touching this incomparable picture of unexampled

sorrow, for fear lest one's finger-marks should stain it. There is no

place here for picturesque description, which tries to mend the gospel

stories by dressing them in to-day's fashions, nor for theological

systematisers and analysers of the sort that would botanise upon their

mother's grave.' We must put off our shoes, and feel that we stand on

holy ground. Though loving eyes saw something of Christ's agony, He did

not let them come beside Him, but withdrew into the shadow of the

gnarled olives, as if even the moonbeams must not look too closely on

the mystery of such grief. We may go as near as love was allowed to go,

but stop where it was stayed, while we reverently and adoringly listen

to what the Evangelist tells us of that unspeakable hour.

I. Mark the exceeding sorrow' of the Man of Sorrows. Somewhere on the

western foot of Olivet lay the garden, named from an oil-press formerly

or then in it, which was to be the scene of the holiest and sorest

sorrow on which the moon, that has seen so much misery, has ever

looked. Truly it was an oil-press,' in which the good olive' was

crushed by the grip of unparalleled agony, and yielded precious oil,

which has been poured into many a wound since then. Eight of the eleven

are left at or near the entrance, while He passes deeper into the

shadows with the three. They had been witnesses of His prayers once

before, on the slopes of Hermon, when He was transfigured before them.

They are now to see a no less wonderful revelation of His glory in His

filial submission. There is something remarkable in Matthew's

expression, He began to be sorrowful,'--as if a sudden wave of emotion,

breaking over His soul, had swept His human sensibilities before it.

The strange word translated by the Revisers sore troubled' is of

uncertain derivation, and may possibly be simply intended to intensify

the idea of sorrow; but more probably it adds another element, which

Bishop Lightfoot describes as the confused, restless, half-distracted

state which is produced by physical derangement or mental distress.' A

storm of agitation and bewilderment broke His calm, and forced from His

patient lips, little wont to speak of His own emotions, or to seek for

sympathy, the unutterably pathetic cry, My soul is exceeding

sorrowful'--compassed about with sorrow, as the word means--even unto

death.' No feeble explanation of these words does justice to the abyss

of woe into which they let us dimly look. They tell the fact, that, a

little more and the body would have sunk under the burden. He knew the

limits of human endurance, for all things were made by Him,' and,

knowing it, He saw that He had grazed the very edge. Out of the

darkness He reaches a hand to feel for the grasp of a friend, and

piteously asks these humble lovers to stay beside Him, not that they

could help Him to bear the weight, but that their presence had some

solace in it. His agony must be endured alone, therefore He bade them

tarry there; but He desired to have them at hand, therefore He went but

a little forward.' They could not bear it with Him, but they could

watch with' Him, and that poor comfort is all He asks. No word came

from them. They were, no doubt, awed into silence, as the truest

sympathy is used to be, in the presence of a great grief. Is it

permitted us to ask what were the fountains of these bitter floods that

swept over Christ's sinless soul? Was the mere physical shrinking from

death all? If so, we may reverently say that many a maiden and old man,

who drew all their fortitude from Jesus, have gone to stake or gibbet

for His sake, with a calm which contrasts strangely with His agitation.

Gethsemane is robbed of its pathos and nobleness if that be all. But it

was not all. Rather it was the least bitter of the components of the

cup. What lay before Him was not merely death, but the death which was

to atone for a world's sin, and in which, therefore, the whole weight

of sin's consequences was concentrated. The Lord hath made to meet on

Him the iniquities of us all'; that is the one sufficient explanation

of this infinitely solemn and tender scene. Unless we believe that, we

shall find it hard to reconcile His agitation in Gethsemane with the

perfection of His character as the captain of the noble army of

martyrs.'

II. Note the prayer of filial submission. Matthew does not tell us of

the sweat falling audibly and heavily, and sounding to the three like

slow blood-drops from a wound, nor of the strengthening angel, but he

gives us the prostrate form, and the threefold prayer, renewed as each

moment of calm, won by it, was again broken in upon by a fresh wave of

emotion. Thrice He had to leave the disciples, and came back, a calm

conqueror; and twice the enemy rallied and returned to the assault, and

was at last driven finally from the field by the power of prayer and

submission. The three Synoptics differ in their report of our Lord's

words, but all mean the same thing in substance; and it is obvious that

much more must have been spoken than they report. Possibly what we have

is only the fragments that reached the three before they fell asleep.

In any case, Jesus was absent from them on each occasion long enough to

allow of their doing so.

Three elements are distinguishable in our Lord's prayer. There is,

first, the sense of Sonship, which underlies all, and was never more

clear than at that awful moment. Then there is the recoil from the

cup,' which natural instinct could not but feel, though sinlessly. The

flesh shrank from the Cross, which else had been no suffering; and if

no suffering, then had been no atonement. His manhood would not have

been like ours, nor His sorrows our pattern, if He had not thus drawn

back, in His sensitive humanity, from the awful prospect now so near.

But natural instinct is one thing, and the controlling will another.

However currents may have tossed the vessel, the firm hand at the helm

never suffered them to change her course. The will, which in this

prayer He seems so strangely to separate from the Father's, even in the

act of submission, was the will which wishes, not that which resolves.

His fixed purpose to die for the world's sin never wavered. The

shrinking does not reach the point of absolutely and unconditionally

asking that the cup might pass. Even in the act of uttering the wish,

it is limited by that if it be possible,' which can only

mean--possible, in view of the great purpose for which He came. That is

to be accomplished, at any cost; and unless it can be accomplished

though the cup be withdrawn, He does not even wish, much less will,

that it should be withdrawn. So, the third element in the prayer is the

utter resignation to the Father's will, in which submission He found

peace, as we do.

He prayed His way to perfect calm, which is ever the companion of

perfect self-surrender to God. They who cease from their own works do

enter into rest.' All the agitations which had come storming in massed

battalions against Him are defeated by it. They have failed to shake

His purpose, they now fail even to disturb His peace. So, victorious

from the dreadful conflict, and at leisure of heart to care for others,

He can go back to the disciples. But even whilst seeking to help them,

a fresh wave of suffering breaks in on His calm, and once again He

leaves them to renew the struggle. The instinctive shrinking reasserts

itself, and, though overcome, is not eradicated. But the second prayer

is yet more rooted in acquiescence than the first. It shows that He had

not lost what He had won by the former; for it, as it were, builds on

that first supplication, and accepts as answer to its contingent

petition the consciousness, accompanying the calm, that it was not

possible for the cup to pass from Him. The sense of Sonship underlies

the complete resignation of the second prayer as of the first. It has

no wish but God's will, and is the voluntary offering of Himself. Here

He is both Priest and Sacrifice, and offers the victim with this prayer

of consecration. So once more He triumphs, because once more, and yet

more completely, He submits, and accepts the Cross. For Him, as for us,

the Cross accepted ceases to be a pain, and the cup is no more bitter

when we are content to drink it. Once more in fainter fashion the enemy

came on, casting again his spent arrows, and beaten back by the same

weapon. The words were the same, because no others could have expressed

more perfectly the submission which was the heart of His prayers and

the condition of His victory.

Christ's prayer, then, was not for the passing of the cup, but that the

will of God might be done in and by Him, and He was heard in that He

feared,' not by being exempted from the Cross, but by being

strengthened through submission for submission. So His agony is the

pattern of all true prayer, which must ever deal with our wishes, as He

did with His instinctive shrinking,--present them wrapped in an if it

be possible,' and followed by a nevertheless.' The meaning of prayer is

not to force our wills on God's, but to bend our wills to His; and that

prayer is really answered of which the issue is our calm readiness for

all that He lays upon us.

III. Note the sad and gentle remonstrance with the drowsy three. The

sleep of the disciples, and of these disciples, and of all three, and

such an overpowering sleep, remains even after Luke's explanation, "for

sorrow," a psychological riddle' (Meyer). It is singularly parallel

with the sleep of the same three at the Transfiguration--an event which

presents the opposite pole of our Lord's experiences, and yields so

many antithetical parallels to Gethsemane. No doubt the tension of

emotion, which had lasted for many hours, had worn them out; but, if

weariness had weighed down their eyelids, love should have kept them

open. Such sleep of such disciples may have been a riddle, but it was

also a crime, and augured imperfect sympathy. Gentle surprise and the

pain of disappointed love are audible in the question, addressed to

Peter especially, as he had promised so much, but meant for all. This

was all that Jesus got in answer to His yearning for sympathy. I looked

for some to take pity, but there was none.' Those who loved Him most

lay curled in dead slumber within earshot of His prayers. If ever a

soul tasted the desolation of utter loneliness, that suppliant beneath

the olives tasted it. But how little of the pain escapes His lips! The

words but hint at the slightness of their task compared with His, at

the brevity of the strain on their love, and at the companionship which

ought to have made sleep impossible. May we not see in Christ's

remonstrance a word for all? For us, too, the task of keeping awake in

the enchanted ground is light, measured against His, and the time is

short, and we have Him to keep us company in the watch, and every

motive of grateful love should make it easy; but, alas, how many of us

sleep a drugged and heavy slumber!

The gentle remonstrance soon passes over into counsel as gentle.

Watchfulness and prayer are inseparable. The one discerns dangers, the

other arms against them. Watchfulness keeps us prayerful, and

prayerfulness keeps us watchful. To watch without praying is

presumption, to pray without watching is hypocrisy. The eye that sees

clearly the facts of life will turn upwards from its scanning of the

snares and traps, and will not look in vain. These two are the

indispensable conditions of victorious encountering of temptation.

Fortified by them, we shall not enter into' it, though we encounter it.

The outward trial will remain, but its power to lead us astray will

vanish. It will still be danger or sorrow, but it will not be

temptation; and we shall pass through it, as a sunbeam through foul

air, untainted, and keeping heaven's radiance. That is a lesson for a

wider circle than the sleepy three.

It is followed by words which would need a volume to expound in all

their depth and width of application, but which are primarily a reason

for the preceding counsel, as well as a loving apology for the

disciples' sleep. Christ is always glad to give us credit for even

imperfect good; His eye, which sees deeper than ours, sees more

lovingly, and is not hindered from marking the willing spirit by

recognising weak flesh. But these words are not to be made a pillow for

indolent acquiescence in the limitations which the flesh imposes on the

spirit. He may take merciful count of these, and so may we, in judging

others, but it is fatal to plead them at the bar of our own

consciences. Rather they should be a spur to our watchfulness and to

our prayer. We need these because the flesh is weak, still more

because, in its weakness toward good, it is strong to evil. Such

exercise will give governing power to the spirit, and enable it to

impose its will on the reluctant flesh. If we watch and pray, the

conflict between these two elements in the renewed nature will tend to

unity and peace by the supremacy of the spirit; if we do not, it will

tend to cease by the unquestioned tyranny of the flesh. In one or other

direction our lives are tending.

Strange that such words had no effect. But so it was, and so deep was

the apostles' sleep that Christ left them undisturbed the second time.

The relapse is worse than the original disease. Sleep broken and

resumed is more torpid and fatal than if it had not been interrupted.

We do not know how long it lasted, though the whole period in the

garden must have been measured by hours; but at last it was broken by

the enigmatical last words of our Lord. The explanation of the direct

opposition between the consecutive sentences, by taking the Sleep on

now' as ironical, jars on one's reverence. Surely irony is out of

keeping with the spirit of Christ then. Rather He bids them sleep on,

since the hour is come, in sad recognition that the need for their

watchful sympathy is past, and with it the opportunity for their proved

affection. It is said with a tone of contemplative melancholy, and is

almost equivalent to too late, too late.' The memorable sermon of F. W.

Robertson, on this text, rightly grasps the spirit of the first clause,

when it dwells with such power on the thought of the irrevocable past'

of wasted opportunities and neglected duty. But the sudden transition

to the sharp, short command and broken sentences of the last verse is

to be accounted for by the sudden appearance of the flashing lights of

the band led by Judas, somewhere near at hand, in the valley. The mood

of pensive reflection gives place to rapid decision. He summons them to

arise, not for flight, but that He may go out to meet the traitor.

Escape would have been easy. There was time to reach some sheltering

fold of the hill in the darkness; but the prayer beneath the

silver-grey olives had not been in vain, and these last words in

Gethsemane throb with the Son's willingness to yield Himself up, and to

empty to its dregs the cup which the Father had given Him.

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THE LAST PLEADING OF LOVE

And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come?'--MATT. xxvi.

50.

We are accustomed to think of the betrayer of our Lord as a kind of

monster, whose crime is so mysterious in its atrocity as to put him

beyond the pale of human sympathy. The awful picture which the great

Italian poet draws of him as alone in hell, shunned even there, as

guilty beyond all others, expresses the general feeling about him. And

even the attempts which have been made to diminish the greatness of his

guilt, by supposing that his motive was only to precipitate Christ's

assumption of His conquering Messianic power, are prompted by the same

thought that such treason as his is all but inconceivable. I cannot but

think that these attempts fail, and that the narratives of the Gospels

oblige us to think of his crime as deliberate treachery. But even when

so regarded, other emotions than wondering loathing should be excited

by the awful story.

There had been nothing in his previous history to suggest such sin, as

is proved by the disciples' question, when our Lord announced that one

of them should betray Him. No suspicion lighted on him--no finger

pointed to where he sat. But self-distrust asked, Lord, is it I?' and

only love, pillowed on the Master's breast, and strong in the happy

sense of His love, was sufficiently assured of its own constancy, to

change the question into Lord! who is it?' The process of corruption

was unseen by all eyes but Christ's. He came to his terrible

pre-eminence in crime by slow degrees, and by paths which we may all

tread. As for his guilt, that is in other hands than ours. As for his

fate, let us copy the solemn and pitying reticence of Peter, and say,

that he might go to his own place'--the place that belongs to him, and

that he is fit for, wherever that may be. As for the growth and

development of his sin, let us remember that we have all of us one

human heart,' and that the possibilities of crime as dark are in us

all. And instead of shuddering abhorrence at a sin that can scarcely be

understood, and can never be repeated, let us be sure that whatever man

has done, man may do, and ask with humble consciousness of our own

deceitful hearts, Lord, is it I?' These remarkable and solemn words of

Christ, with which He meets the treacherous kiss, appear to be a last

appeal to Judas. They may possibly not be a question, as in our

version--but an incomplete sentence, What thou hast come to

do'--leaving the implied command, That do,' unexpressed. They would

then be very like other words which the betrayer had heard but an hour

or two before, That thou doest, do quickly.' But such a rendering does

not seem so appropriate to the circumstances as that which makes them a

question, smiting on his heart and conscience, and seeking to tear away

the veil of sophistications with which he had draped from his own eyes

the hideous shape of his crime. And, if so, what a wonderful instance

we have here of that long-suffering love. They are the last effort of

the divine patience to win back even the traitor. They show us the

wrestle between infinite mercy and a treacherous, sinful heart, and

they bring into awful prominence the power which that heart has of

rejecting the counsel of God against itself. I venture to use them now

as suggesting these three things: the patience of Christ's love; the

pleading of Christ's love; and the refusal of Christ's love.

I. The patience of Christ's love.

If we take no higher view of this most pathetic incident than that the

words come from a man's lips, even then all its beauty will not be

lost. There are some sins against friendship in which the manner is

harder to bear than the substance of the evil. It must have been a

strangely mean and dastardly nature, as well as a coarse and cold one,

that could think of fixing on the kiss of affection as the concerted

sign to point out their victim to the legionaries. Many a man who could

have planned and executed the treason would have shrunk from that. And

many a man who could have borne to be betrayed by his own familiar

friend would have found that heartless insult worse to endure than the

treason itself. But what a picture of perfect patience and unruffled

calm we have here, in that the answer to the poisonous, hypocritical

embrace was these moving words! The touch of the traitor's lips has

barely left His cheek, but not one faint passing flush of anger tinges

it. He is perfectly self-oblivious--absorbed in other thoughts, and

among them in pity for the guilty wretch before Him. His words have no

agitation in them, no instinctive recoil from the pollution of such a

salutation. They have grave rebuke, but it is rebuke which derives its

very force from the appeal to former companionship. Christ still

recognises the ancient bond, and is true to it. He will still plead

with this man who has been beside Him long; and though His heart be

wounded yet He is not wroth, and He will not cast him off. If this were

nothing more than a picture of human friendship it would stand alone,

above all other records that the world cherishes in its inmost heart,

of the love that never fails, and is not soon angry.

But we, I hope, dear brethren, think more loftily and more truly of our

dear Lord than as simply a perfect manhood, the exemplar of all

goodness. How He comes to be that, if He be not more than that, I do

not understand, and I, for one, feel that my confidence in the flawless

completeness of His human character lives or dies with my belief that

He is the Eternal Word, God manifest in the flesh. Certainly we shall

never truly grasp the blessed meaning of His life on earth until we

look upon it all as the revelation of God. The tears of Christ are the

pity of God. The gentleness of Jesus is the long-suffering of God. The

tenderness of Jesus is the love of God. He that hath seen Me hath seen

the Father'; and all that life so beautiful but so anomalous as to be

all but incredible, when we think of it as only the life of a man,

glows with a yet fairer beauty, and corresponds with the nature which

it expresses, when we think of it as being the declaration to us by the

divine Son of the divine Father--our loftiest, clearest, and authentic

revelation of God.

How that thought lifts these words before us into a still higher

region! We are now in the presence of the solemn greatness of a divine

love. If the meaning of this saying is what we have suggested, it is

pathetic even in the lower aspect, but how infinitely that pathos is

deepened when we view it in the higher!

Surely if ever there was a man who might have been supposed to be

excluded from the love of God, it was Judas. Surely if ever there was a

moment in a human life, when one might have supposed that even Christ's

ever open heart would shut itself together against any one, it was this

moment. But no, the betrayer in the very instant of his treason has

that changeless tenderness lingering around him, and that merciful hand

beckoning to him still.

And have we not a right to generalise this wonderful fact, and to

declare its teaching to be--that the love of God is extended to us all,

and cannot be made to turn away from us by any sins of ours? Sin is

mighty; it can work endless evils on us; it can disturb and embitter

all our relations with God; it can, as we shall presently have to point

out, make it necessary for the tenderest grace of God to come

disciplining'--to come with a rod,' just because it comes in the spirit

of meekness.' But one thing it cannot do, and that is--make God cease

to love us. I suppose all human affection can be worn out by constant

failure to evoke a response from cold hearts. I suppose that it can be

so nipped by frosts, so constantly checked in blossoming, that it

shrivels and dies. I suppose that constant ingratitude, constant

indifference can turn the warmest springs of our love to a river of

ice. Can a mother forget her child?--Yea, she may forget.' But we have

to do with a God, whose love is His very being; who loves us not for

reasons in us but in Himself; whose love is eternal and boundless as

all His nature; whose love, therefore, cannot be turned away by our

sin--but abides with us for ever, and is granted to every soul of man.

Dear brethren, we cannot believe too firmly, we cannot trust too

absolutely, we cannot proclaim too broadly that blessed thought,

without which we have no hope to feed on for ourselves, or to share

with our fellows--the universal love of God in Christ.

Is there a worst man on earth at this moment? If there be, he, too, has

a share in that love. Harlots and thieves, publicans and sinners,

leprous outcasts, and souls tormented by unclean spirits, the wrecks of

humanity whom decent society and respectable Christianity passes by

with averted head and uplifted hands, criminals on the gibbet with the

rope round their necks--and those who are as hopeless as any of these,

self-complacent formalists and Gospel-hardened professors'--all have a

place in that heart. And that, not as undistinguished members of a

class, but as separate souls, singly the objects of God's knowledge and

love. He loves all, because He loves each. We are not massed together

in His view, nor in His regard. He does not lose the details in the

whole; as we, looking on some great crowd of upturned faces, are

conscious of all but recognise no single one. He does not love a

class--a world--but He loves the single souls that make it up--you and

me, and every one of the millions that we throw together in the vague

phrase, the race.' Let us individualise that love in our thoughts as it

individualises us in its outflow--and make our own the exceeding broad'

promises, which include us, too. God loves me; Christ gave Himself for

me. I have a place in that royal, tender heart.'

Nor should any sin make us doubt this. He loved us with exceeding love,

even when we were dead in trespasses.' He did not begin to love because

of anything in us; He will not cease because of anything in us. We

change; He abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself.' As the sunshine

pours down as willingly and abundantly on filth and dunghills, as on

gold that glitters in its beam, and jewels that flash back its lustre,

so the light and warmth of that unsetting and unexhausted source of

life pours down on the unthankful and on the good.' The great ocean

clasps some black and barren crag that frowns against it, as closely as

with its waves it kisses some fair strand enamelled with flowers and

fragrant with perfumes. So that sea of love in which we live, and move,

and have our being,' encircles the worst with abundant flow. He Himself

sets us the pattern, which to imitate is to be the children of our

Father which is in heaven,' in that He loves His enemies, blessing them

that curse, and doing good to them that hate. He Himself is what He has

enjoined us to be, in that He feeds His enemies when they hunger, and

when they thirst gives them drink, heaping coals of fire on their

heads, and seeking to kindle in them thereby the glow of answering

love, not being overcome of their evil, so that He repays hate with

hate and scorn with scorn, but in patient continuance of loving

kindness seeking to overcome evil with good. He is Himself that

charity' which is not easily provoked, is not soon angry, beareth all

things, hopeth all things, and never faileth.' His love is mightier

than all our sins, and waits not on our merits, nor is turned away by

our iniquities. God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten

Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have

everlasting life.'

II. Then, secondly, we have here--the pleading of Christ's patient

love.

I have been trying to say as broadly and strongly as I can, that our

sins do not turn away the love of God in Christ from us. The more

earnestly we believe and proclaim that, the more needful is it to set

forth distinctly--and that not as limiting, but as explaining the

truth--the other thought, that the sin which does not avert, does

modify the expression of, the love of God. Man's sin compels Him to do

what the prophet calls his strange work'--the work which is not dear to

His heart, nor natural, if one may so say, to His hands--His work of

judgment.

The love of Christ has to come to sinful men with patient pleading and

remonstrance, that it may enter their hearts and give its blessings. We

are familiar with a modern work of art in which that long-suffering

appeal is wonderfully portrayed. He who is the Light of the world

stands, girded with the royal mantle clasped with the priestly

breastplate, bearing in His hand the lamp of truth, and there, amidst

the dew of night and the rank hemlock, He pleads for entrance at the

closed door which has no handle on its outer side, and is hinged to

open only from within. I stand at the door and knock. If any man open

the door, I will come in.'

And in this incident before us, we see represented not only the endless

patience of God's pitying love, but the method which it needs to take

in order to reach the heart.

There is an appeal to the traitor's heart, and an appeal to his

conscience. Christ would have him think of the relations that have so

long subsisted between them; and He would have him think, too, of the

real nature of the deed he is doing, or, perhaps, of the motives that

impel him. The grave, sad word, by which He addresses him, is meant to

smite upon his heart. The sharp question which He puts to him is meant

to wake up his conscience; and both taken together represent the two

chief classes of remonstrance which He brings to bear upon us all--the

two great batteries from which He assails the fortress of our sins.

There is first, then--Christ's appeal to the heart. He tries to make

Judas feel the considerations that should restrain him. The appellation

by which our Lord addresses him does not in the original convey quite

so strongly the idea of amity, as our word Friend' does. It is not the

same as that which He had used a few hours before in the upper chamber,

when He said, Henceforth I call you not servants, but I have called you

friends.--Ye are My friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.' It is

the same as is put into the lips of the Lord of the vineyard,

remonstrating with his jealous labourer, Friend, I do thee no wrong.'

There is a tone, then, of less intimate association and graver rebuke

in it than in that name with which He honours those who make His will

theirs, and His word the law of their lives. It does not speak of close

confidence, but it does suggest companionship and kindness on the part

of the speaker. There is rebuke in it, but it is rebuke which derives

its whole force from the remembrance of ancient concord and connection.

Our Lord would recall to the memory of the betrayer the days in which

they had taken sweet counsel together. It is as if He had said--Hast

thou forgotten all our former intercourse? Thou hast eaten My bread,

thou hast been Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted--canst thou

lift up thy heel against Me?' What happy hours of quiet fellowship on

many a journey, of rest together after many a day of toil, what

forgotten thoughts of the loving devotion and the glow of glad

consecration that he had once felt, what a long series of proofs of

Christ's gentle goodness and meek wisdom should have sprung again to

remembrance at such an appeal! And how black and dastardly would his

guilt have seemed if once he had ventured to remember what unexampled

friendship he was sinning against!

Is it not so with us all, dear brethren? All our evils are betrayals of

Christ, and all our betrayals of Christ are sins against a perfect

friendship and an unvaried goodness. We, too, have sat at His table,

heard His wisdom, seen His miracles, listened to His pleadings, have

had a place in His heart; and if we turn away from Him to do our own

pleasure, and sell His love for a handful of silver, we need not

cherish shuddering abhorrence against that poor wretch who gave Him up

to the cross. Oh! if we could see aright, we should see our Saviour's

meek, sad face standing between us and each of our sins, with warning

in the pitying eyes, and His pleading voice would sound in our ears,

appealing to us by loving remembrances of His ancient friendship, to

turn from the evil which is treason against Him, and wounds His heart

as much as it harms ours. Take heed lest in condemning the traitor we

doom ourselves. If we flush into anger at the meanness of his crime,

and declare, He shall surely die,' do we not hear a prophet's voice

saying to each, Thou art the man'?

The loving hand laid on the heart-strings is followed by a strong

stroke on conscience. The heart vibrates most readily in answer to

gentle touches: the conscience, in answer to heavier, as the breath

that wakes the chords of an Aeolian harp would pass silent through the

brass of a trumpet. Wherefore art thou come?'--if to be taken as a

question at all, which, as I have said, seems most natural, is either,

What hast thou come to do?'--or, Why hast thou come to do it?' Perhaps

it maybe fairly taken as including both. But, at all events, it is

clearly an appeal to Judas to make him see what his conduct really is

in itself, and possibly in its motive too. And this is the constant

effort of the love of Christ--to get us to say to ourselves the real

name of what we are about.

We cloak our sins from ourselves with many wrappings, as they swathe a

mummy in voluminous folds. And of these veils, one of the thickest is

woven by our misuse of words to describe the very same thing by

different names, according as we do it, or another man does it. Almost

all moral actions--the thing to which we can apply the words right or

wrong--have two or more names, of which the one suggests the better and

the other the worse side of the action. For instance what in ourselves

we call prudent regard for our own interest, we call, in our neighbour,

narrow selfishness; what in ourselves is laudable economy, in him is

miserable avarice. We are impetuous, he is passionate; we generous, he

lavish; we are clever men of business, he is a rogue; we sow our wild

oats and are gay, he is dissipated. So we cheat ourselves by more than

half-transparent veils of our own manufacture, which we fling round the

ugly features and misshapen limbs of these sins of ours, and we are

made more than ever their bond-slaves thereby.

Therefore, it is the office of the truest love to force us to look at

the thing as it is. It would go some way to keep a man from some of his

sins if he would give the thing its real name. A distinct conscious

statement to oneself, Now I am going to tell a lie'--This that I am

doing is fraud'--This emotion that I feel creeping with devilish warmth

about the roots of my heart is revenge'--and so on, would surely

startle us sometimes, and make us fling the gliding poison from our

breast, as a man would a snake that he found just lifting its head from

the bosom of his robe. Suppose Judas had answered the question, and,

gathering himself up, had looked his Master in the face, and said--What

have I come for?' I have come to betray Thee for thirty pieces of

silver!' Do you not think that putting his guilt into words might have

moved even him to more salutary feelings than the remorse which

afterwards accompanied his tardy discernment of what he had done? So

the patient love of Christ comes rebuking, and smiting hard on

conscience. The grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men hath

appeared disciplining'--and His hand is never more gentle than when it

plucks away the films with which we hide our sins from ourselves, and

shows us the rottenness and dead men's bones' beneath the whited walls

of the sepulchres and the velvet of the coffins.

He must begin with rebukes that He may advance to blessing. He must

teach us what is separating us from Him that, learning it, we may flee

to His grace to help us. There is no entrance for the truest gifts of

His patient love into any heart that has not yielded to His pleading

remonstrance, and in lowly penitence has answered His question as He

would have us answer it, Friend and Lover of my soul, I have sinned

against Thy tender heart, against the unexampled patience of Thy love.

I have departed from Thee and betrayed Thee. Blessed be Thy merciful

voice which hath taught me what I have done! Blessed be Thine unwearied

goodness which still bends over me! Raise me fallen! forgive me

treacherous! Keep me safe and happy, ever true and near to Thee!'

III. Notice the possible rejection of the pleading of Christ's patient

love.

Even that appeal was vain. Here we are confronted with a plain instance

of man's mysterious and awful power of frustrating the counsel of

God'--of which one knows not whether is greater, the difficulty of

understanding how a finite will can rear itself against the Infinite

Will, or the mournful mystery that a creature should desire to set

itself against its loving Maker and Benefactor. But strange as it is,

yet so it is; and we can turn round upon Sovereign Fatherhood bidding

us to its service, and say, I will not.' He pleads with us, and we can

resist His pleadings. He holds out the mercies of His hands and the

gifts of His grace, and we can reject them. We cannot cease to be the

objects of His love, but we can refuse to be the recipients of its most

precious gifts. We can bar our hearts against it. Then, of what avail

is it to us? To go back to an earlier illustration, the sunshine pours

down and floods a world, what does that matter to us if we have

fastened up shutters on all our windows, and barred every crevice

through which the streaming gladness can find its way? We shall grope

at noontide as in the dark within our gloomy house, while our

neighbours have light in theirs. What matters it though we float in the

great ocean of the divine love, if with pitch and canvas we have

carefully closed every aperture at which the flood can enter? A

hermetically closed jar, plunged in the Atlantic, will be as dry inside

as if it were lying on the sand of the desert. It is possible to perish

of thirst within sight of the fountain. It is possible to separate

ourselves from the love of God, not to separate the love of God from

ourselves.

The incident before us carries another solemn lesson--how simple and

easy a thing it is to repel that pleading love. What did Judas do?

Nothing; it was enough. He merely held his peace--no more. There was no

need for him to break out with oaths and curses, to reject his Lord

with wild words. Silence was sufficient. And for us--no more is

required. We have but to be passive; we have but to stand still. Not to

accept is to refuse; non-submission is rebellion. We do not need to

emphasise our refusal by any action--no need to lift our clenched hands

in defiance. We have simply to put them behind our backs or to keep

them folded. The closed hand must remain an empty hand. He that

believeth not is condemned.' My friend, remember that, when Christ

pleads and draws, to do nothing is to oppose, and to delay is to

refuse. It is a very easy matter to ruin your soul. You have simply to

keep still when He says Come unto Me'--to keep your eyes fixed where

they were, when He says, Look unto Me, and be ye saved,' and all the

rest will follow of itself.

Notice, too, how the appeal of Christ's love hardens where it does not

soften. That gentle voice drove the traitor nearer the verge over which

he fell into a gulf of despair. It should have drawn him closer to the

Lord, but he recoiled from it, and was thereby brought nearer

destruction. Every pleading of Christ's grace, whether by providences,

or by books, or by His own word, does something with us. It is never

vain. Either it melts or it hardens. The sun either scatters the summer

morning mists, or it rolls them into heavier folds, from whose livid

depths the lightning will be flashing by mid-day. You cannot come near

the most inadequate exhibition of the pardoning love of Christ without

being either drawn closer to Him or driven further from Him. Each act

of rejection prepares the way for another, which will be easier, and

adds another film to the darkness which covers your eyes, another layer

to the hardness which incrusts your hearts.

Again, that silence, so eloquent and potent in its influence, was

probably the silence of a man whose conscience was convicted while his

will was unchanged. Such a condition is possible. It points to solemn

thoughts, and to deep mysteries in man's awful nature. He knew that he

was wrong, he had no excuse, his deed was before him in some measure in

its true character, and yet he would not give it up. Such a state, if

constant and complete, presents the most frightful picture we can frame

of a soul. That a man shall not be able to say, I did it ignorantly';

that Christ shall not be able to ground His intercession on, They know

not what they do'; that with full knowledge of the true nature of the

deed, there shall be no wavering of the determination to do it--we may

well turn with terror from such an awful abyss. But let us remember

that, whether such a condition in its completeness is conceivable or

not, at all events we may approach it indefinitely; and we do approach

it by every sin, and by every refusal to yield to the love that would

touch our consciences and fill our hearts.

Have you ever noticed what a remarkable verbal correspondence there is

between these words of our text, and some other very solemn ones of

Christ's? The question that He puts into the lips of the king who came

in to see his guests is, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having

on a wedding garment?' The question asked on earth shall be repeated

again at last. The silence which once indicated a convinced conscience

and an unchanged will may at that day indicate both of these and

hopelessness beside. The clear vision of the divine love, if it do not

flood the heart with joy and evoke the bliss of answering love, may

fill it with bitterness. It is possible that the same revelation of the

same grace may be the heaven of heaven to those who welcome it, and the

pain of hell to those who turn from it. It is possible that love

believed and received may be life, and love recognised and rejected may

be death. It is possible that the vision of the same face may make some

break forth with the rapturous hymn, Lo, this is our God, we have

waited for Him!' and make others call on the hills to fall on them and

cover them from its brightness.

But let us not end with such words. Rather, dear brethren, let us yield

to His patient beseechings; let Him teach us our evil and our sin.

Listen to His great love who invites us to plead, and promises to

pardon--Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though

your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be

red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'

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THE REAL HIGH PRIEST AND HIS COUNTERFEIT

And they that had laid hold on Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high

priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. 58. But Peter

followed Him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and

sat with the servants, to see the end. 59. Now the chief priests, and

elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put

Him to death; 60. But found none: yea, though many false witnesses

came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, 61.

And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and

to build it in three days. 62 And the high priest arose, and said unto

Him, Answerest Thou nothing? what is it which these witness against

Thee? 63. But Jesus held His peace. And the high priest answered and

said unto Him, I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us

whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God. 64. Jesus saith unto him,

Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the

Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds

of heaven. 65. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath

spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now

ye have heard His blasphemy. 66. What think ye? They answered and said,

He is guilty of death. 67. Then did they spit in His face, and buffeted

Him; and others smote Him with the palms of their hands, 68. Saying,

Prophesy unto us, Thou Christ, Who is he that smote Thee?'--MATT. xxvi.

57-68.

John's Gospel tells us that Jesus was brought before Annas first,'

probably in the same official priestly residence as Caiaphas, his

son-in-law, occupied. That preliminary examination brought out nothing

to incriminate the prisoner, and was flagrantly illegal, being an

attempt to entrap Him into self-accusing statements. It was baffled by

Jesus being silent first, and subsequently taking His stand on the

undeniable principle that a charge must be sustained by evidence, not

based on self-accusation. Annas, having made nothing of this strange

criminal, sent Him bound unto Caiaphas.'

A meeting of the Sanhedrin had been hastily summoned in the dead of

night, which was itself an illegality. Now Jesus stands before the poor

shadow of a judicial tribunal, which, though it was all that Rome had

left a conquered people, was still entitled to sit in judgment on Him.

Strange inversion, and awful position for these formalists! And with

sad persistence of bitter prejudice they proceeded to try the prisoner,

all unaware that it was themselves, not Him, that they were trying.

They began wrongly, and betrayed their animus at once. They were

sitting there to inquire whether Jesus was guilty or no; they had made

up their minds beforehand that He was, and their effort now was but to

manufacture some thin veil of legality for a judicial murder. So they

sought false witness, . . . that they might put Him to death.' Matthew

simply says that no evidence sufficient for the purpose was

forthcoming; Mark adds that the weak point, was that the lies

contradicted each other. Christ's presence has a strange, solemn power

of unmasking our falsehoods, both of thought and deed, and it is hard

to speak evil of Him before His face. If His calumniators were confused

when He stood as Prisoner, what will they be when He sits as a Judge?

Only Matthew and Mark tell us of the two witnesses whose twisted

version of the word about destroying the Temple and rebuilding it in

three days' seemed to Caiaphas serious enough to require an answer.

Their mistake was one which might have been made in good faith, but

none the less was their travesty false witness.' Their version of His

great word shows how easily the teaching of a lofty soul, passed

through the popular brain, is degraded, and made to mean the opposite

of what he had meant by it. For the destruction of the Temple had

appeared in the saying as the Jews' work, and Jesus had presented

Himself in it as the Restorer, not the Destroyer, of the Temple and of

all that it symbolised. We destroy, He rebuilds. The murder of Jesus

was the suicide of the nation. Caiaphas and his council were even now

pulling down the Temple. And that murder was the destruction, so far as

men could effect it, of the true Temple of His body,' in which the

fulness of the Godhead dwelt, and which was more gloriously

reconstituted in the Resurrection. The risen Christ rears the true

temple on earth, for through Him the Holy Ghost dwells in His Church,

which is collectively the Temple,' and in all believing spirits, which

are individually the temples' of God. So the false witnesses distorted

into a lie a great truth.

The Incarnate Word was dumb all the while. He was still and refrained'

Himself. It was the silence of the King before a lawless tribunal of

rebels, of patient meekness, as a sheep before her shearers'; of

innocence that will not stoop to defend itself from groundless

accusations; of infinite pity and forbearing love, which sees that it

cannot win, but will not smite. Jesus is still silent, but one day,

with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked.' Caiaphas seems

to have been annoyed as well as surprised at Jesus' silence, for there

is a trace of irritation, as at contempt of court,' in his words. But

our Lord's continued silence appears to have somewhat awed him, and the

dawning consciousness of his dignity is, perhaps, the reason for the

high priest's casting aside all the foolery of false witnessing, and

coming at last to the real point,-- the Messianic claims of Jesus.

Caiaphas was doing his duty as high priest in inquiring into such

claims, but he was somewhat late in the day, and he had made up his

mind before he inquired. What he wished to get was a plain assertion on

which the death sentence could be pronounced. Jesus knew this, and yet

He answered. But Luke tells us that He first scathingly pointed to the

unreality and animus of the question by saying, If I tell you, ye will

not believe.' But yet it was fitting that He should solemnly, before

the supreme court, representative of the nation, declare that He was

the Messiah, and that, if He was to be rejected and condemned, it

should be on the ground of that declaration. Before Caiaphas He claimed

to be Messiah, before Pilate He claimed to be King. Each rejected Him

in the character that appealed to them most. The many-sidedness of the

perfect Revealer of God brings Him to each soul in the aspect that most

loudly addresses each. Therefore the love in the appeal and the guilt

in its rejection are the greater.

But Christ's self-attestation to the council was not limited to the

mere claim to the name of Messiah. It disclosed the implications of

that name in a way altogether unlike the conceptions held by Caiaphas.

When Caiaphas put in apposition the Christ' and the Son of God,' he was

not speaking from the ordinary Jewish point of view, but from some

knowledge, of Christ's teaching, and there are two charges combined

into one.

But Jesus' answer, while plainly claiming to be the Messiah, expands

itself in regard to the claim to be Son of God,' and shows its

tremendous significance. It involves participation in divine authority

and omnipotence. It involves a future coming to be the Judge of His

judges. It declares that these blind scribes and elders will see Him

thus exalted, and it asserts that all this is to begin then and there

(henceforth'), as if that hour of humiliation was to His consciousness

the beginning of His manifestation as Lord, or, as John has it, the

hour that the Son of Man should be glorified.' Nor must we leave out of

sight the fact that it is the Son of Man' of whom all this is said, for

thereby are indicated the raising of His perfect humanity to

participation in Deity, and the possibility that His brethren, too, may

sit where He sits. Much was veiled in the answer to the council, much

is veiled to us. But this remains,--that Jesus, at that supreme moment,

when He was bound to leave no misunderstandings, made the plainest

claim to divinity, and could have saved His life if He had not done so.

Either Caiaphas, in his ostentatious horror of such impiety, was right

in calling Christ's words blasphemy, and not far wrong in inferring

that Jesus was not fit to live, or He is the everlasting Son of the

Father,' and will come to be our Judge.'

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JESUS CHARGED WITH BLASPHEMY

Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken

blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses?'--MATT. xxvi. 65.

Jesus was tried and condemned by two tribunals, the Jewish

ecclesiastical and the Roman civil. In each case the charge

corresponded to the Court. The Sanhedrin took no cognisance of, and had

no concern with, rebellion against Caesar; though for the time they

pretended loyalty. Pilate had still less concern about Jewish

superstitions. And so the investigation in each case turned on a

different question. In the one it was, Art Thou the Son of God?' in the

other, Art Thou the King of Israel?' The answer to both was a simple

Yes!' but with very significant differences. Pilate received an

explanation; the Sanhedrin none. The Roman governor was taught that

Christ's title of King belonged to another region altogether from that

of Caesar, and did not in the slightest degree infringe upon the

dominion that he represented. But Son of God' was capable of no

explanation that could make it any less offensive; and the only thing

to be done was to accept it or to condemn Him.

So this saying of the high priest differs from other words of our

Lord's antagonists, which we have been considering in recent pages, in

that it is no distortion of our Lord's characteristics or meaning. It

correctly understands, but it fatally rejects, His claims; and does not

hesitate to take the further step, on the ground of these, of branding

Him as a blasphemer.

We may turn the high priest's question in another direction: What

further need have we of witnesses?' These horror-stricken judges,

rending their garments in simulated grief and zeal, and that silent

Prisoner, knowing that His life was the forfeit of His claims, yet

saying no word of softening or explanation of them, may teach us much.

They are witnesses to some of the central facts of the revelation of

God in Christ. Let us turn to these for a few moments.

I. First, then, they witness to Christ's claims.

The question that was proposed to Jesus, Art Thou the Christ, the Son

of the living God?' was suggested by the facts of His ministry, and not

by anything that had come out in the course of this investigation. It

was the summing up of the impression made on the ecclesiastical

authorities of Judaism by His whole attitude and demeanour. And if we

look back to His life we shall see that there were instances, long

before this, on which, on the same ground, the same charge was flung at

Him. For example, when He would heal the paralytic, and, before He

dealt with bodily disease, attended to spiritual weakness, and said,

Thy sins be forgiven thee,' ere He said, Take up thy bed and walk,'

there was a group of keen-eyed hunters after heresy sitting eagerly on

the watch, who snatched at the words in a moment, and said, Who is this

that forgiveth sins? No man forgiveth sins, but God only! This man

speaketh blasphemies!' And they were right. He did claim a divine

prerogative; and either the claim must be admitted or the charge of

blasphemy urged.

Again, when He infringed Rabbinical Sabbath law by a cure, and they

said, This Man has broken the Sabbath day,' His vindication was worse

than His offence, for He answered, My Father worketh hitherto, and I

work.' And then they sought the more to kill Him, because He not only

brake the Sabbath, but also called God His own Father, making Himself

equal with God.' And again, when He declared that the safety of His

sheep in His hands was identical with their safety in His Father's

hands, and vindicated the audacious parallelism by the tremendous

assertion, I and My Father are One,' the charge of blasphemy rang out;

and was inevitable, unless the claim was true.

These outstanding instances are but, as it were, summits that rise

above the general level. But the general level is that of One who takes

an altogether unique position. No one else, professing to lead men in

paths of righteousness, has so constantly put the stress of His

teaching, not upon morality, nor religion, nor obedience to God, but

upon this, Believe in Me'; or ever pushed forward His own personality

into the foreground, and made the whole nobleness and blessedness and

security and devoutness of a life to hinge upon that one thing, its

personal relation to Him.

People talk about the sweet and gentle wisdom that flowed from Christ's

lips, and so on; about the lofty morality, about the beauty of pity and

tenderness, and all the other commonplaces so familiar to us, and we

gladly admit them all. But I venture to go a step further than all

these, and to say that the outstanding differentia, the characteristic

which marks off Christ's teaching as something new, peculiar, and

altogether per se, is not its morality, not its philanthropy, not its

meek wisdom, not its sweet reasonableness, but its tremendous

assertions of the importance of Himself.

And if I am asked to state the ground upon which such an assertion may

be vindicated, I would point you to such facts as these, that this Man

took up a position of equality with, and of superiority to, the

legislation which He and the people to whom He was speaking regarded as

being divinely sent, and said, Ye have heard that it hath been said to

them of old time' so and so; but I say unto you': that this Man

declared that to build upon His words was to build upon a rock; that

this Man declared that He--He--was the legitimate object of absolute

trust, of utter submission and obedience; that He claimed from His

followers affiance, love, reverence which cannot be distinguished from

worship, and that He did not therein conceive that He was intercepting

anything that belonged to the Father. This Man professed to be able to

satisfy the desires of every human heart when He said, If any man

thirst let him come to Me and drink.' This Man claimed to be able to

breathe the sanctity of repose in the blessedness of obedience over all

the weary and the heavy laden; and assured them that He Himself,

through all the ages, and in all lands, and for all troubles, would

give them rest. This Man declared that He who stood there, in the quiet

homes of Galilee, and went about its acres with those blessed feet for

our advantage, was to be Judge of the whole world. This Man said that

His name was Son of God'; and this Man declared, He that hath seen Me

hath seen the Father.'

And then people say to us, Oh! your Gospel narratives, even if they be

the work of men in good faith, telling what they suppose He said,

mistook the Teacher; and if we could strip away the accretion of

mistaken reverence, and come to the historical person, we should find

no claims like these.'

Well, this is not the time to enter into the large questions which that

contention involves, but I point you to the incident which makes my

text, and I say, What need we any further witnesses?' Nobody denies

that Jesus Christ was crucified as the result of a combination of

Sanhedrin and Pilate. What set the Jewish rulers against Him with such

virulent and murderous determination? Is there anything in the life of

Jesus Christ, if it is watered down as the people, who want to knock

out all the supernatural, desire to water it down--is there anything in

the life that will account for the inveterate acrimony and hostility

which pursued Him to the death? The fact remains that, whether or not

Evangelists and Apostles misconceived His teaching when they gave such

prominence to His personality and His lofty claims, His enemies were

under the same delusion, if it were a delusion; and the reason why the

whole orthodox religionism of Judaism rejoiced when He was nailed to

the Cross was summed up in the taunt which they flung at Him as He hung

there, If He be the Son of God, let Him come down, and we will believe

Him.'

So, brethren, I put into the witness-box Annas and Caiaphas and all

their satellites, and I say, What need we any further witnesses?' He

died because He declared that He was the Son of God.

And I beseech you ask yourselves whether we are not being put off with

a maimed version of His teaching, if there is struck out of it this its

central characteristic, that He, the sage and humble,' declared that He

was likewise One with the Creator.'

II. Secondly, note how we have here the witness that Jesus Christ

assented always to the loftiest meaning that men attached to His

claims.

I have already pointed out the remarkable difference between the

explanations which He condescended to give to the Roman governor as to

the perfectly innocent meaning of His claim to be the King of Israel,

and His silence before the Sanhedrin. That silence is only explicable

because they rightly understood the meaning of the claim which they

contemptuously and perversely rejected. Jesus Christ knew that His

death was the forfeit, as I have said, and yet He locked His lips and

said not a word.

In like manner when, on the other occasion to which I have already

referred, the Pharisees stumbled at His claims to forgive sins, He said

nothing to soften down that claim. If He had meant then only what some

people would desire to make Him mean when He said, Thy sins be forgiven

thee'--viz., that He was simply acting as a minister of the divine

forgiveness, and assuring a poor sinner that God had pardoned him--why

in common honesty, in discharge of His plain obligations of a teacher,

did He not say so--not for His own sake, but for the sake of preventing

such a tremendous misunderstanding of His meaning? But He let them go

away with the conviction that He intended to claim a divine

prerogative, and vindicated the assertion by doing what only a divine

power could do: That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power enough

on earth to forgive sins, He saith unto the sick of the palsy, Take up

thy bed and walk.' There was no need for Him to have wrought a miracle

to establish His right to tell a poor soul that God forgave sin. And

the fact that the miracle was supposed to be the demonstration and the

vindication of His right to declare forgiveness shows that He was

exercising that prerogative which belongs, as they rightly said, to God

only.

And in precisely the same manner, the commonest obligations of honesty,

the plain duty of a misunderstood Teacher, to say nothing of the duty

of self-preservation, ought to have opened His lips in the presence of

the Jewish authorities, if they understood wrongly and set too high

their estimate of the meaning of His claims. His silence establishes

the fact that they understood these aright.

And so, all through His life, we note this peculiarity, that He never

puts aside as too lofty for truth men's highest interpretations of His

claims, nor as too lowly for their mutual relation the lowest reverence

which bowed before Him. Peter, in the house of Cornelius, said, Stand

up! for I myself also am a man.' Paul and Barnabas, when the priests

brought out the oxen and garlands to the gates of Lystra, could say, We

also are men of like passions with yourselves.' But this meek Jesus

lets men fall at His feet; and women wash them with their tears and

wipe them with the hairs of their head; and souls stretch out maimed

hands of faith, and grasp Him as their only hope. When His apostle

said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,' His answer was,

Blessed art thou, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee,'

and when another exclaimed, My Lord and my God!' this Pattern of all

meekness accepted and endorsed the title, and pronounced a benediction

on all who, not having seen Him, should hereafter attain a like faith.

Now I want to know whether that characteristic, which runs through all

His life, and is inseparable from it, can be vindicated on any ground

except the ground that He was God manifest in the flesh.' Either Jesus

Christ had a greedy appetite for excessive adoration, was a victim to

diseased vanity and ever-present self-regard--the most damning charge

that you can bring against a religious teacher--or He accepted love and

reverence and trust, because the love and the reverence and the trust

knit souls to the Incarnate God their Saviour.

III. And so, lastly we have here witness to the only alternative to the

acceptance of His claims.

He hath spoken blasphemy,' not because He had derogated from the

dignity of divinity, but because He had presumed to participate in it.

And it seems to me, with all deference, that this rough alternative is

the only legitimate one. If Jesus Christ did make such claims, and His

relation to the Jewish hierarchy and His death are, as I have shown

you, apart even from the testimony of the Evangelists, strong

confirmation of the fact that He did--if Jesus Christ did make such

claims, and they were not valid, one of two things follows. Either He

believed them, and then, what about His sanity? or He did not believe

them, and then, what about His honesty? In either case, what about His

claims to be a Teacher of religion? What about His claims to be the

Pattern of humanity? That part of His teaching and character is either

the manifestation of His glory or it is like one of those fatal black

seams that run through and penetrate into the substance of a fair white

marble statue, marring all the rest of its pale and celestial beauty.

Brethren, it seems to me that, when all is said and done, we come to

one of three things about Jesus Christ. Either He blasphemeth' if He

said these things, and they were not true, or He is beside Himself' if

He said these things and believed them, or

Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ;

Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.'

Now I know that there are many men who, I venture to say, are far

better than their creed, and who, believing it impossible to accept, in

their plain meaning, the plain claims of Jesus Christ to divinity, do

yet cleave to Him with a love and a reverence and an obedience which

more orthodox men might well copy. And far be it from me to say one

word which might seem even to quench the faintest beam of light that,

shining from His perfect character, draws any heart, however

imperfectly, to Himself. Only, if I speak to any such at this time, I

beseech them to follow the light which draws them, and to see whether

their reverence for that fair character should not lead them to accept

implicitly the claims that came from His own lips. I humbly venture to

say that if we know anything at all about Jesus Christ, we know that He

lived declaring Himself to be the Everlasting Son of the Father, and

that He died because He did so declare Himself. And I beseech you to

ponder the question whether reverence for Him and admiration of His

character can be logically and reasonably retained, side by side with

the repudiation of that which is the most distinctive part of His

message to men.

Oh, brethren, if it is true that God has come in the flesh, and that

that sweet, gracious, infinitely beautiful life is really the

revelation of the heart of God, then what a beam of sunshine falls upon

all the darkness of this world! Then God is love; then that love holds

us all; did not shrink from dying for us, and lives for ever to bless

us. If these claims are true, what should our attitude be but that of

infinite trust, love, submission, obedience, and the shaping of our

lives after the pattern of His life?

These rejectors, when they said, He speaketh blasphemies,' were sealing

their own doom, and the ruined Temple and nineteen centuries of

wandering misery show what comes to men who hear Christ declaring that

He is the Son of the living God and the Judge of the world, and who

find nothing in the words but blasphemy. On the other hand, if we will

answer His question, Whom say ye that I am?' as the apostle answered

it, we shall, like the apostle, receive a benediction from His lips,

and be set on that faith as on a rock against which the gates of hell'

shall not prevail.

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'SEE THOU TO THAT!'

I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they

said, What is that to us? See thou to that. 24. I am innocent of the

blood of this just Person: see ye to it.'--MATT. xxvii. 4, 24.

So, what the priests said to Judas, Pilate said to the priests. They

contemptuously bade their wretched instrument bear the burden of his

own treachery. They had condescended to use his services, but he

presumed too far if he thought that that gave him a claim upon their

sympathies. The tools of more respectable and bolder sinners are flung

aside as soon as they are done with. What were the agonies or the tears

of a hundred such as he to these high-placed and heartless

transgressors? Priests though they were, and therefore bound by their

office to help any poor creature that was struggling with a wounded

conscience, they had nothing better to say to him than this scornful

gibe, What is that to us? See thou to that.'

Pilate, on the other hand, metes to them the measure which they had

meted to Judas. With curious verbal correspondence, he repeats the very

words of Judas and of the priests. Innocent blood,' said Judas. I am

innocent of the blood of this just Person,' said Pilate. See thou to

that,' answered they. See ye to it,' says he. He tries to shove off his

responsibility upon them, and they are quite willing to take it. Their

consciences are not easily touched. Fanatical hatred which thinks

itself influenced by religious motives is the blindest and cruellest of

all passions, knowing no compunction, and utterly unperceptive of the

innocence of its victim.

And so these three, Judas, the priests, and Pilate, suggest to us, I

think, a threefold way in which conscience is perverted. Judas

represents the agony of conscience, Pilate represents the shuffling

sophistications of a half-awakened conscience, and those priests and

people represent the torpor of an altogether misdirected conscience.

I. Judas, or the agony of conscience.

I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.' We do not

need to enter at any length upon the difficult question as to what were

the motives of Judas in his treachery. For my part I do not see that

there is anything in the Scripture narrative, simply interpreted, to

bear out the hypothesis that his motives were mistaken zeal and

affection for Christ; and a desire to force Him to the avowal of His

Messiahship. One can scarcely suppose zeal so strangely perverted as to

begin by betrayal, and if the object was to make our Lord speak out His

claims, the means adopted were singularly ill-chosen. The story, as it

stands, naturally suggests a much less far-fetched explanation.

Judas was simply a man of a low earthly nature, who became a follower

of Christ, thinking that He was to prove a Messiah of the vulgar type,

or another Judas Maccab浳. He was not attracted by Christ's character

and teaching. As the true nature of Christ's work and kingdom became

more obvious, he became more weary of Him and it. The closest proximity

to Jesus Christ made eleven enthusiastic disciples, but it made one

traitor. No man could live near Him for three years without coming to

hate Him if he did not love Him. Then, as ever, He was set for the fall

and for the rise of many. He was the savour of life unto life, or of

death unto death.'

But be this as it may, we have here to do with the sudden revulsion of

feeling which followed upon the accomplished act. This burst of

confession does not sound like the words of a man who had been actuated

by motives of mistaken affection. He knows himself a traitor, and that

fair, perfect character rises before him in its purity, as he had never

seen it before--to rebuke and confound him.

So this exclamation of his puts into a vivid shape, which may help it

to stick in our memories and hearts, this thought--what an awful

difference there is in the look of a sin before we do it and

afterwards! Before we do it the thing to be gained seems so attractive,

and the transgression that gains it seems so comparatively

insignificant. Yes! and when we have done it the two change places; the

thing that we win by it seems so contemptible--thirty pieces of silver!

pitch them over the Temple enclosure and get rid of them!--and the

thing that we did to win them dilates into such awful magnitude!

For instance, suppose we do anything that we know to be wrong, being

tempted to it by a momentary indulgence of some mere animal impulse. By

the very nature of the case, that dies in its satisfaction and the

desire dies along with it. We do not wish the prize any more when once

we have got it. It lasts but a moment and is past. Then we are left

alone with the thought of the sin that we have done. When we get the

prize of our wrong-doing, we find out that it is not as all-satisfying

as we expected it would be. Most of our earthly aims are like that. The

chase is a great deal more than the hare. Or, as George Herbert has it,

Nothing between two dishes--a splendid service of silver plate, and

when you take the cover off there is no food to eat--such are the

pleasures here.'

Universally, this is true, that sooner or later, when the delirium of

passion and the rush of temptation are over and we wake to

consciousness, we find that we are none the richer for the thing

gained, and oh! so infinitely the poorer for the means by which we

gained it. It is that old story of the Veiled Prophet that wooed and

won the hearts of foolish maidens, and, when he had them in his power

in the inner chamber, removed the silver veil which they had thought

hid dazzling glory and showed hideous features that struck despair into

their hearts. Every man's sin does that for him. And to you I come now

with this message: every wrong thing that you do, great or small, will

be like some of those hollow images of the gods that one hears of in

barbarian temples--looked at in front, fair, but when you get behind

them you find a hollow, full of dust and spiders' webs and unclean

things. Be sure of this, every sin is a blunder.

That is the first lesson that lies in these words of this wretched

traitor; but again, here is an awful picture for us of the hell upon

earth, of a conscience which has no hope of pardon. I do not suppose

that Judas was lost, if he were lost, because he betrayed Jesus Christ,

but because, having betrayed Jesus Christ, he never asked to be

forgiven. And I suppose that the difference between the traitor who

betrayed Him and the other traitor who denied Him, was this, that the

one, when he went out and wept bitterly,' had the thought of a loving

Master with him, and the other, when he went out and hanged himself,'

had the thought of nothing but that foul deed glaring before him. I

pray you to learn this lesson--you cannot think too much, too blackly,

of your own sins, but you may think too exclusively of them, and if you

do they will drive you to madness of despair.

My dear friend, there is no penitence or remorse which is deep enough

for the smallest transgression; but there is no transgression which is

so great but that forgiveness for it may come. And we may have it for

the asking, if we will go to that dear Christ that died for us. The

consciousness of sinfulness is a wholesome consciousness. I would that

every man and woman listening to me now had it deep in their

consciences, and then I would that it might lead us all to that one

Lord in whom there is forgiveness and peace. Be sure of this, that if

Judas Iscariot, when his soul flared forth in the dark,' died without

hope and without pardon, it was not because his crime was too great for

forgiveness, but because the forgiveness had never been asked. There is

no unpardonable sin except that of refusing the pardon that avails for

all sin.

II. So much, then, for this first picture and the lessons that come out

of it. In the next place we take Pilate, as the representative of what

I have ventured to call the shufflings of a half-awakened conscience.

I am innocent of the blood of this just Person,' says he: see ye to

it.' He is very willing to shuffle off his responsibility upon priests

and people, and they, for their part, are quite as willing to accept

it; but the responsibility can neither be shuffled off by him nor

accepted by them. His motive in surrendering Jesus to them was probably

nothing more than the low and cowardly wish to humour his turbulent

subjects, and so to secure an easy tenure of office. For such an end

what did one poor man's life matter? He had a great contempt for the

accusers, which he is scarcely at the pains to conceal. It breaks out

in half-veiled sarcasms, by which he cynically indemnifies himself for

his ignoble yielding to the constraint which they put upon him. He

knows perfectly well that the Roman power has nothing to fear from this

King, whose kingdom rested on His witness to the Truth. He knows

perfectly well that unavowed motives of personal enmity lie at the

bottom of the whole business. In the words of our text he acquits

Christ, and thereby condemns himself. If Pilate knew that Jesus was

innocent, he knew that he, as governor, was guilty of prostituting

Roman justice, which was Rome's best gift to her subject nations, and

of giving up an innocent man to death, in order to save himself trouble

and to conciliate a howling mob. No washing of his hands will cleanse

them. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten that hand. But his

words let us see how a man may sophisticate his conscience and quibble

about his guilt.

Here, then, we get once more a vivid picture that may remind us of

what, alas! we all know in our own experience, how a man's conscience

may be clearsighted enough to discern, and vocal enough to declare,

that a certain thing is wrong, but not strong enough to restrain from

doing it. Conscience has a voice and an eye; alas! it has no hands. It

shares the weakness of all law, it cannot get itself executed. Men will

get over a fence, although the board that says, Trespassers will be

prosecuted' is staring them in the face in capital letters at the very

place where they leap it. Your conscience is a king without an army, a

judge without officers. If it had authority, as it has the power, it

would govern the world,' but as things are, it is reduced to issuing

vain edicts and to saying, Thou shalt not,' and if you turn round and

say, I will, though,' then conscience has no more that it can do.

And then here, too, is an illustration of one of the commonest of the

ways by which we try to slip our necks out of the collar, and to get

rid of the responsibilities that really belong to us. See ye to it'

does not avail to put Pilate's crime on the priests' shoulders. Men

take part in evil, and each thinks himself innocent, because he has

companions. Half-a-dozen men carry a burden together; none of them

fancies that he is carrying it. It is like the case of turning out a

platoon of soldiers to shoot a mutineer--nobody knows whose bullet

killed him, and nobody feels himself guilty; but there the man lies

dead, and it was somebody that did it. So corporations, churches,

societies, and nations do things that individuals would not do, and

each man of them wipes his mouth and says, I have done no harm.' And

even when we sin alone we are clever at finding scapegoats. The woman

tempted me, and I did eat,' is the formula universally used yet. The

schoolboy's excuse, Please, sir, it was not me, it was the other boy,'

is what we are all ready to say.

Now I pray you, brethren, to remember that, whether our consciences try

to shuffle off responsibility for united action upon the other members

of the firm, or whether we try to excuse our individual actions by

laying blame on our tempers, or whether we adopt the modern slang, and

talk about circumstances and heredity and the like, as being reasons

for the diminution or the extinction of the notion of guilt, it is

sophistical trifling; and down at the bottom most of us know that we

alone are responsible for the volition which leads to our act. We could

have helped it if we had liked. Nobody compelled us to keep in the

partnership of evil, or to yield to the tempter. Pilate was not forced

by his subjects to give the commandment that it should be as they

required.' They had their own burden to carry. Each man has to bear the

consequences of his actions. There are many burdens' which we can bear

for one another, and so fulfil the law of Christ'; but every man has to

bear as his own the burden of the fruits of his deeds. In that harvest,

he that soweth and he that reapeth are one, and each of us has to drink

as we ourselves have brewed. You have to pay for your share, however

many companions you may have had in the act.

So do not you sophisticate your consciences with the delusion that your

responsibility may be shifted to any other person or thing. These may

diminish, or may modify your responsibility, and God takes all these

into account. But after all these have been taken into account there is

this left--that you yourselves have done the act, which you need not

have done unless you had so willed, and that having done it, you have

to carry it on your back for evermore. See thou to that,' was a

heartless word, but it was a true one. Every one of us shall give an

account of himself to God,' and as the old Book of Proverbs has it, If

thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: and if thou scornest,

thou alone shalt bear it.'

III. And so, lastly, we have here another group still--the priests and

people. They represent for us the torpor and misdirection of

conscience.

Then answered all the people and said, His blood be on us and on our

children.' They were perfectly ready to take the burden upon

themselves. They thought that they were doing God service' when they

slew God's Messenger. They had no perception of the beauty and

gentleness of Christ's character. They believed Him to be a blasphemer,

and they believed it to be a solemn religious duty to slay Him then and

there. Were they to blame because they slew a blasphemer? According to

Jewish law--no. They were to blame because they had brought themselves

into such a moral condition that that was all which they thought of and

saw in Jesus Christ. With their awful words they stand before us, as

perhaps the crowning instances in Scripture history of the possible

torpor which may paralyse consciences.

I need not dwell, I suppose, even for a moment, upon the thought of how

the highest and noblest sentiments may be perverted into becoming the

allies of the lowest crime. O Liberty! what crimes have been done in

thy name!' you remember one of the victims of the guillotine said, as

her last words. O Religion! what crimes have been done in thy name!' is

one of the lessons to be gathered from Calvary.

But, passing that, to come to the thing that is of more consequence to

each of us, let us take this thought, dear brethren, as to the awful

possibility of a conscience going fast asleep in the midst of the

wildest storm of passion, like that unfaithful prophet Jonah, down in

the hold of the heathen ship. You can lull your consciences into dead

slumber. You can stifle them so that they shall not speak a word

against the worst of your sins. You can do so by simply neglecting

them, by habitually refusing to listen to them. If you keep picking all

the leaves and buds off the tree before they open, it will stop

flowering. You can do it by gathering round yourself always, and only,

evil associations and evil deeds. The habit of sinning will lull a

conscience faster than almost anything else. We do not know how hot a

room is, or how much the air is exhausted, when we have been sitting in

it for an hour and a half. But if we came into it from outside we

should feel the difference. Styrian peasants thrive and fatten upon

arsenic, and men may flourish upon all iniquity and evil, and

conscience will say never a word. Take care of that delicate balance

within you; and see that you do not tamper with it nor twist it.

Conscience may be misguided as well as lulled. It may call evil good,

and good evil; it may take honey for gall, and gall for honey. And so

we need something outside of ourselves to be our guide, our standard.

We are not to be contented that our consciences acquit us. I know

nothing against myself, yet I am not hereby justified,' says the

apostle; he that judgeth me is the Lord.' And it is quite possible that

a man may have no prick of conscience and yet have done a very wrong

thing. So we want, as it seems to me, something outside of ourselves

that shall not be affected by our variations. Conscience is like the

light on the binnacle of a ship. It tosses up and down along with the

vessel. We want a steady light yonder on that headland, on the fixed

solid earth, which shall not heave with the heaving wave, nor vary at

all. Conscience speaks lowest when it ought to speak loudest. The worst

man is least troubled by his conscience. It is like a lamp that goes

out in the thickest darkness. Therefore we need, as I believe, a

revelation of truth and goodness and beauty outside of ourselves to

which we may bring our consciences that they may be enlightened and set

right. We want a standard like the authorised weights and measures that

are kept in the Tower of London, to which all the people in the little

country villages may send up their yard measures and their pound

weights, and find out if they are just and true. We want a Bible, and

we want a Christ to tell us what is duty, as well as to make it

possible for us to do it.

These groups which we have been looking at now, show us how very little

help and sympathy a wounded conscience can get from its fellows. The

conspirators turn upon each other as soon as the detectives are amongst

them, and there is always one of them ready to go into the witness-box

and swear away the lives of the others to save his own neck. Wolves

tear sick wolves to pieces.

Round us there stand Society, pitiless and stern, and Nature, rigid and

implacable; not to be besought, not to be turned. And when I, in the

midst of this universe of fixed law and cause and consequence, wail

out, I have sinned,' a thousand voices say to me, What is that to us?

See thou to that.' And so I am left with my guilt--it and I together.

There comes One with outstretched, wounded hands, and says, Cast all

thy burden upon Me, and I will free thee from it all.' 'Surely He hath

borne our griefs and carried our sorrows!' Trust in Him, in His great

sacrifice, and you will find that His innocent blood' has a power that

will liberate your conscience from its torpor, its vain excuses, its

agony and despair.

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THE SENTENCE WHICH CONDEMNED THE JUDGES

And Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked Him,

saying, Art Thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou

sayest. 12. And when He was accused of the chief priests and elders, He

answered nothing. 13. Then said Pilate unto Him, Hearest Thou not how

many things they witness against Thee? 14. And He answered him to never

a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly. 15. Now at that

feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom

they would. 16. And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas.

17. Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them,

Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is

called Christ? 18. For he knew that for envy they had delivered Him.

19. When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him,

saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered

many things this day in a dream because of Him. 20. But the chief

priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask

Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. 21. The governor answered and said unto

them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said,

Barabbas. 22. Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus

which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let Him be crucified.

23. And the governor said, Why, what evil hath He done? But they cried

out the more, saying, Let him be crucified. 24. When Pilate saw that he

could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took

water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent

of the blood of this just Person: see ye to it. 25. Then answered all

the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children. 26. Then

released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he

delivered Him to be crucified.'--ST. MATT. xxvii. 11-26.

The principal figures in this passage are Pilate and the Jewish rulers

and people. Jesus is all but passive. They are busy in condemning Him,

and little know that they are condemning themselves. They are

unconsciously exemplifying the tragic truth of Christ's saying,

Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken.' They do not

dislodge it, but their attempt to dislodge it wounds them.

I. Matthew gives a very summary account of our Lord's appearing before

Pilate, but, brief as it is, and much as it omits, it throws up into

strong light the two essential points,--Christ's declaration that He

was the King of the Jews, and His silence while a storm of accusations

raged around Him. As to the former, it was the only charge with which

Pilate was properly concerned. He had a right to know whether this

strange criminal was dangerous to Rome, because He claimed kingship,

and, if he were satisfied that He was not, his bounden duty was to

liberate Him. One can understand the scornful emphasis which Pilate

laid on Thou' as he looked on his Prisoner, who certainly would not

seem to his practical eyes a very formidable leader of revolt. There is

a world of contempt, amused rather than alarmed, in the question, and

behind it lies the consciousness of commanding legions enough to crush

any rising headed by such a person. John's account shows the pains

which Jesus took to make sure of the sense in which the question was

asked before He answered it, and then to make clear that His kingship

bore no menace to Rome. That being made plain, He answered with an

affirmative. Just as He had in unmistakable language claimed before the

Sanhedrin to be the Messiah, the Son of God, so He claimed before

Pilate to be the King of Israel, answering each tribunal as to what

each had the right to inquire into, and thus before Pontius Pilate

witnessing the good confession,' and leaving both tribunals without

excuse. Jesus died because He would not bate His claims to Messianic

dignity. Did He fling away His life for a false conception of Himself?

He was either a dreamer intoxicated with an illusion, and His death was

suicide, or He was--what?

The one avowal was all that Pilate was entitled to. For the rest Jesus

locked His lips, and He whose very name was The Word was silent. What

was the meaning of that silence? It was not disdain, nor unwillingness

to make Himself known; but it was partly merciful--inasmuch as He knew

that all speech would have been futile, and would but have added to the

condemnation of such hearers as Caiaphas, Herod, and Pilate--and partly

judicial. Still more was it the silence of perfect, unresisting

submission,--as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not

His mouth.' And it is a pattern for us, as Peter tells us in his

Epistle; for it is with regard to this very matter of taking unjust

suffering patiently and without resistance that the apostle says that

Jesus has left us an example.' There are limits to such silent

endurance of wrong, for Paul defended himself tooth and nail before

priests and kings; but Christ's followers are strongest by meek

patience, and descend when they take a leaf out of their enemies' book.

II. The next point is Pilate's weak attempt to save Jesus. Christ's

silence had impressed Pilate, and, if he had been a true man, he would

not have stopped at marvelling greatly.' He was clearly convinced of

Christ's innocence of any crime that threatened Roman supremacy, and

therefore was bound to have given effect to his convictions, and let

Jesus go. He had read the motives of the priests, which were too plain

for a shrewd man of the world to be blind to them. That Jews should be

taken with such a sudden fit of loyalty as to yell for the death of a

fellow-countryman because he was a rebel against Caesar was too absurd

to swallow, and Pilate was not taken in. He knew that something else

was working below ground, and hit on envy' as the solution. He was not

far wrong; for the zeal which to the priests themselves seemed to be

excited by devout regard for God's honour was really kindled by

determination to keep their own prerogatives, and keen insight into the

curtailment of these which would follow if this Jesus were recognised

as Messiah. Pilate's diagnosis coincided with Christ's in the parable:

This is the Heir; come, let us kill Him, and the inheritance shall be

ours.'

So, willing to deliver Jesus, and yet afraid to cross the wishes of his

ticklish subjects, Pilate, like other weak men, tries a trick by which

he may get his way and seem to give them theirs. He hoped that they

would choose Jesus rather than Barabbas as the object of the customary

release. It was ingenious of him to narrow the choice to one or other

of the two, ignoring all other prisoners who might have had the benefit

of the custom. But there is also, perhaps, a dash of sarcasm, and a

hint of his having penetrated the priests' motives, in his confining

their choice to Jesus or Barabbas; for Barabbas was what they had

charged Jesus with being,--a rebel; and, if they preferred him to

Jesus, the hypocrisy of their suspicious loyalty would be patent. The

same sub-acid tone is obvious in Pilate's twice designating our Lord as

Jesus which is called Christ.' He delights to mortify them by pushing

the title into their faces, as it were. He dare not be just, and he

relieves and revenges himself by being cynical and mocking.

III. Having referred the choice to the multitude,' Pilate takes his

place on his official seat to wait for, and then to ratify, their vote.

In that pause, he perhaps felt some compunction at paltering with

justice, which it was Rome's one virtue to administer. How his wife's

message would increase his doubt! Was her dream a divine warning, or a

mere reflection in sleep of waking thoughts? It is noticeable that

Matthew records several dreams which conveyed God's will,--for example,

to Joseph and to the Magi, and here may be another instance; or some

tidings as to Jesus may have reached the lady, though not her husband,

and her womanly sense of right may have shaped the dream, and given her

vivid impressions of the danger of abetting a judicial murder. But

Matthew seems to tell of her intervention mainly in order to preserve

her testimony to Jesus' innocence, and to point out one more of the

fences which Pilate trampled down in his dread of offending the rulers.

A wife's message, conveying what both he and she probably regarded as a

supernatural warning, was powerless to keep him back from his

disgraceful failure of duty.

IV. While he was fighting against the impression of that message, the

rulers were busy in the crowd, suggesting the choice of Barabbas. It

was perhaps his wife's words that stung him to act at once, and have

done with his inner conflict. So he calls for the decision of the

alternative which he had already submitted. His dignity would suffer,

if he had to wait longer for an answer. He got it at once, and the

unanimous vote was for Barabbas. Probably the rulers had skilfully

manipulated the people. The multitude is easily led by demagogues, but,

left to itself, its instincts are usually right, though its perception

of character is often mistaken. Why was Barabbas preferred? Probably

just because he had been cast into prison for sedition, and so was

thought to be a good patriot. Popular heroes often win their reputation

by very questionable acts, and Barabbas was forgiven his being a

murderer for the sake of his being a rebel. But it was not so much that

Barabbas was loved as that Jesus was hated, and it was not the

multitude so much as the rulers that hated him. Many of those now

shrieking Crucify Him!' had shouted Hosanna!' a day or two before till

they were hoarse. The populace was guilty of fickleness, blindness,

rashness, too easy credence of the crafty calumnies of the rulers. But

a far deeper stain rests on these rulers who had resisted the light,

and were now animated by the basest self-interest in the garb of keen

regard for the honour of God. There were very different degrees of

guilt in the many voices that roared Barabbas!' Pilate made one more

feeble attempt to save Jesus by asking what was to be done with Him.

The question was an ignoble abdication of his judicial office, and

perhaps was meant as a salve for his own conscience, and an excuse to

his wife, enabling him to say, I did not crucify Him; they did,'--a

miserable pretext, the last resort of a weak man, who knew that he was

doing a wrong and cowardly thing.

V. The same nervous fear and vain attempt to shuffle responsibility off

himself give tragic interest to his theatrical washing of his hands.

The one thing that he feared was a riot, which would be like a spark in

a barrel of gunpowder, if it broke out at the Passover, when Jerusalem

swarmed with excited crowds. To avoid that, the sacrifice of one Jew's

life was a small matter, even though he was an interesting and

remarkable person, and Pilate knew Him to be perfectly harmless.

But no washing of hands could shift the guilt from Pilate.

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood

Clean from my hand? No.'

His vain declaration of innocence is an acknowledgment of guilt, for he

is forced by conscience to declare that Jesus is a righteous Man,' and,

as such, He should have been under the broad shield of Roman justice.

We too often deceive ourselves by throwing the blame of our sins on

companions or circumstances, and try to cheat our consciences into

silence. But our guilt is ours, however many allies we have had, and

however strong have been our temptations; and though we may say, I am

innocent,' God will sooner or later say to each of us, Thou art the

man!' The wild cry of passion with which the multitude accepted the

responsibility has been only too completely fulfilled in the

millennium-long Iliad of woes which has attended the Jews. Surely, the

existence, in such circumstances, for all these centuries, of that

strange, weird, fated race, is a standing miracle, and the most

conspicuous proof that verily, there is a God that judgeth in the

earth.' But it is also a prophecy that Israel shall turn to the Lord,'

and that the blood which has so long been on them as a crime, carrying

its own punishment, will at last be sprinkled on their hearts, and take

away their sin.

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THE CRUCIFIXION

And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a

place of a skull, 34. They gave Him vinegar to drink mingled with gall:

and when He had tasted thereof, He would not drink. 35. And they

crucified Him, and parted His garments, casting lots: that it might be

fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted My garments

among them, and upon My vesture did they cast lots. 36. And sitting

down they watched Him there; 37. And set up over His head His

accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 38. Then were

there two thieves crucified with Him, one on the right hand, and

another on the left 39. And they that passed by reviled Him, wagging

their heads, 40. And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and

buildest it in three days, save Thyself. If Thou be the Son of God,

come down from the cross. 41. Likewise also the chief priests mocking

Him, with the scribes and elders, said, 42. He saved others; Himself He

cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from

the cross, and we will believe Him. 43. He trusted in God; let Him

deliver Him now, if He will have Him: for He said, I am the Son of God.

44. The thieves also, which were crucified with Him, cast the same in

His teeth. 45. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the

land unto the ninth hour. 46. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with

a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My

God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? 47. Some of them that stood

there, when they heard that, said. This Man calleth for Elias. 48. And

straightway one of them ran, and took a spunge, and filled it with

vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave Him to drink. 49. The rest

said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save Him. 50.

Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the

ghost.' --MATT. xxvii. 33-50.

The characteristic of Matthew's account of the crucifixion is its

representation of Jesus as perfectly passive and silent. His refusal of

the drugged wine, His cry of desolation, and His other cry at death,

are all His recorded acts. The impression of the whole is as a sheep

before his shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth.' We are bid

to look on the grim details of the infliction of the terrible death,

and to listen to the mockeries of people and priests; but reverent awe

forbids description of Him who hung there in His long, silent agony.

Would that like reticence had checked the ill-timed eloquence of

preachers and teachers of later days!

I. We have the ghastly details of the crucifixion.--Conder's suggestion

of the site of Calvary as a little knoll outside the city, seems

possible. It is now a low, bare hillock, with a scanty skin of

vegetation over the rock, and in its rounded shape and bony rockiness

explains why it was called skull.' It stands close to the main Damascus

road, so that there would be many passers by' on that feast day. Its

top commands a view over the walls into the temple enclosure, where, at

the very hour of the death of Jesus, the Passover lamb was perhaps

being slain. Arrived at the place, the executioners go about their task

with stolid precision. What was the crucifying of another Jew or two to

them? Before they lift the cross or fasten their prisoner to it, a

little touch of pity, or perhaps only the observance of the usual

custom, leads them to offer a draught of wine, in which some anodyne

had been mixed, to deaden agony. But the cup which He had to drink

needed that He should be in full possession of all His sensibilities to

pain, and of all His unclouded firmness of resolve; and so His patient

lips closed against the offered mercy. He would not drink because He

would suffer, and He would suffer because He would redeem. His last act

before He was nailed to the cross was an act of voluntary refusal of an

opened door of escape from some portion of His pains.

What a gap there is between verses 34 and 35! The unconcerned soldiers

went on to the next step in their ordinary routine on such an

occasion,--the fixing of the cross and fastening of the victim to it.

To them it was only what they had often done before; to Matthew, it was

too sacred to be narrated, He cannot bring his pen to write it. As it

were, he bids us turn away our eyes for a moment; and when next we

look, the deed is done, and there stands the cross, and the Lord

hanging, dumb and unresisting, on it. We see not Him, but the soldiers,

busy at their next task. So little were they touched by compassion or

awe, that they paid no heed to Him, and suspended their work to make

sure of their perquisites,--the poor robes which they stripped from His

body. Thus gently Matthew hints at the ignominy of exposure attendant

on crucifixion, and gives the measure of the hard stolidity of the

guards. Gain had been their first thought, comfort was their second.

They were a little tired with their march and their work, and they had

to stop there on guard for an indefinite time, with nothing to do but

two more prisoners to crucify: so they take a rest, and idly keep watch

over Him till He shall die. How possible it is to look at Christ's

sufferings and see nothing! These rude legionaries gazed for hours on

what has touched the world ever since, and what angels desired to look

into, and saw nothing but a dying Jew. They thought about the worth of

the clothes, or about how long they would have to stay there, and in

the presence of the most stupendous fact in the world's history were

all unmoved. We too may gaze on the cross and see nothing. We too may

look at it without emotion, because without faith, or any consciousness

of what it may mean for us. Only they who see there the sacrifice for

their sins and the world's, see what is there. Others are as blind as,

and less excusable than, these soldiers who watched all day by the

Cross, seeing nothing, and tramped back at night to their barrack

utterly ignorant of what they had been doing. But their work was not

quite done. There was still a piece of grim mockery to be performed,

which they would much enjoy. The cause,' as Matthew calls it, had to be

nailed to the upper part of the cross. It was tri-lingual, as John

tells us,--in Hebrew, the language of revelation; in Greek, the tongue

of philosophy and art; in Latin, the speech of law and power. The three

chief forces of the human spirit gave unconscious witness to the King;

the three chief languages of the western world proclaimed His universal

monarchy, even while they seemed to limit it to one nation. It was

meant as a gibe at Him and at the nation, and as Pilate's statement of

the reason for his sentence; but it meant more than Pilate meant by it,

and it was fitting that His royal title should hang above His head; for

the cross is His throne, and He is the King of men because He has died

for them all. One more piece of work the soldiers had still to do. The

crucifixion of the two robbers (perhaps of Barabbas' gang, though less

fortunate than he) by Christ's side was intended to associate Him in

the public mind with them and their crimes, and was the last stroke of

malice, as if saying, Here is your King, and here are two of His

subjects and ministers.' Matthew says nothing of the triumph of

Christ's love, which won the poor robber for a disciple even at that

hour of ignominy. His one purpose seems to be to accumulate the tokens

of suffering and shame, and so to emphasise the silent endurance of the

meek Lamb of God. Therefore, without a word about any of our Lord's

acts or utterances, he passes on to the next group of incidents.

II. The mockeries of people and priests. There would be many coming and

going on the adjoining road, most of them too busy about their own

affairs to delay long; for crucifixion was a slow process, and, when

once the cross has been lifted, there would be little to see. But they

were not too busy to spit venom at Him as they passed. How many of

these scoffers, to whom death cast no shield round the object of their

poor taunts, had shouted themselves hoarse on the Monday, and waved

palm branches that were not withered yet! What had made the change?

There was no change. They were running with the stream in both their

hosannas and their jeers, and the one were worth as much as the other.

They had been tutored to cry, Blessed is He that cometh!' and now they

were tutored to repeat what had been said at the trial about destroying

the temple. The worshippers of success are true to themselves when they

mock at failure. They who shout round Jesus, when other people are

doing it, are only consistent when they join in the roar of execration.

Let us take care that our worship of Him is rooted in our own personal

experience, and independent of what rulers or influential minds today

say of Him.

A common passion levels all distinctions of culture and rank. The

reverend dignitaries echoed the ferocious ridicule of the mob, whom

they despised so much. The poorest criminal would have been left to die

in peace; but brutal laughter surged round the silent sufferer, and

showers of barbed sarcasms were flung at Him. The throwers fancied them

exquisite jests, and demonstrations of the absurdity of Christ's

claims; but they were really witnesses to His claims, and explanations

of His sufferings. Look at them in turn, with this thought in our

minds. He saved others; Himself He cannot save,' was launched as a

sarcasm which confuted His alleged miracles by His present

helplessness. How much it admits, even while it denies! Then, He did

work miracles; and they were all for others, never for His own ends;

and they were all for saving, never for destroying. Then, too, by this

very taunt His claim to be the Saviour' is presupposed. And so,

Physician, heal Thyself,' seemed to them an unanswerable missile to

fling. If they had only known what made the cannot,' and seen that it

was a will not,' they would have stood full in front of the great

miracle of love which was before them unsuspected, and would have

learned that the not saving Himself, which they thought blew to atoms

His pretensions to save others, was really the condition of His saving

a world. If He is to save others He cannot save Himself. That is the

law for all mutual help. The lamp burns out in giving light, but the

necessity for the death of Him who is the life of the world is founded

on a deeper must.' His only way of delivering us from the burden of sin

is His taking it on Himself. He has to bear our griefs and carry our

sorrows,' if He is to bear away the sin of the world. But the cannot'

derives all its power from His own loving will. The rulers' taunt was a

venomous lie, as they meant it. If for cannot' we read will not,' it is

the central truth of the Gospel.

Nor did they succeed better with their second gibe, which made mirth of

such a throne, and promised allegiance if He would come down. O blind

leaders of the blind! That death which seemed to them to shatter His

royalty really established it. His Cross is His throne of saving power,

by which He sways hearts and wills, and because of it He receives from

the Father universal dominion, and every knee shall bow to Him. It is

just because He did not come down from it that we believe on Him. On

His head are many crowns; but, however many they be, they all grow out

of the crown of thorns. The true kingship is absolute command over

willingly submitted spirits; and it is His death which bows us before

Him in raptures of glad love which counts submission, liberty, and

sacrifice blessed. He has the right to command because He has given

Himself for us, and His death wakes all-surrendering and all-expecting

faith.

Nor was the third taunt more fortunate. These very religious men had

read their Bibles so badly that they might never have heard of Job, nor

of the latter half of Isaiah. They had been poring over the letter all

their lives, and had never seen, with their microscopes, the great

figure of the Innocent Sufferer, so plain there. So they thought that

the Cross demonstrated the hollowness of Jesus' trust in God, and the

rejection of Him by God. Surely religious teachers should have been

slow to scoff at religious trust, and surely they might have known that

failure and disaster even to death were no signs of God's displeasure.

But, in one aspect, they were right. It is a mystery that such a life

should end thus; and the mystery is none the less because many another

less holy life has also ended in suffering. But the mystery is solved

when we know that God did not deliver Him, just because He would have

Him,' and that the Father's delight in the Son reached its very highest

point when He became obedient until death, and offered Himself a

sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing unto God.'

III. We pass on to the darkness, desolation, and death. Matthew

represents these three long hours from noon till what answers to our 3

P.M. as passed in utter silence by Christ. What went on beneath that

dread veil, we are not meant to know. Nor do we need to ask its

physical cause or extent. It wrapped the agony from cruel eyes; it

symbolised the blackness of desolation in His spirit, and by it God

draped the heavens in mourning for man's sin. What were the onlookers

doing then? Did they cease their mocking, and feel some touch of awe

creeping over them?

His brow was chill with dying,

And His soul was faint with loss.'

The cry that broke the awful silence, and came out of the darkness, was

more awful still. The fewer our words the better; only we may mark how,

even in His agony, Jesus has recourse to prophetic words, and finds in

a lesser sufferer's cry voice for His desolation. Further, we may

reverently note the marvellous blending of trust and sense of

desertion. He feels that God has left Him, and yet he holds on to God.

His faith, as a man, reached its climax in that supreme hour when,

loaded with the mysterious burden of God's abandonment, He yet cried in

His agony, My God!' and that with reduplicated appeal. Separation from

God is the true death, the wages of sin'; and in that dread hour He

bore in His own consciousness the uttermost of its penalty. The

physical fact of Christ's death, if it could have taken place without

this desolation from the consciousness of separation from God, would

not have been the bearing of all the consequences of man's sins. The

two must never be parted in our grateful contemplations; and, while we

reverently abjure the attempt to pierce into that which God hid from us

by the darkness, we must reverently ponder what Christ revealed to us

by the cry that cleft it, witnessing that He then was indeed bearing

the whole weight of a world's sin. By the side of such thoughts, and in

the presence of such sorrow, the clumsy jest of the bystanders, which

caught at the half-heard words, and pretended to think that Jesus was a

crazy fanatic calling for Elijah with his fiery chariot to come and

rescue Him, may well be passed by. One little touch of sympathy

moistened His dying lips, not without opposition from the heartless

crew who wanted to have their jest out. Then came the end. The loud cry

of the dying Christ is worthy of record; for crucifixion ordinarily

killed by exhaustion, and this cry was evidence of abundant remaining

vitality. In accordance therewith, the fact of death is expressed by a

phrase, which, though used for ordinary deaths, does yet naturally

express the voluntariness of Christ. He sent away His spirit,' as if He

had bid it depart, and it obeyed. Whether the expression may be fairly

pressed so far or no, the fact is the same, that Jesus died, not

because He was crucified, but because He chose. He was the Lord and

Master of Death; and when He bid His armour-bearer strike, the slave

struck, and the King died, not like Saul on the field of his defeat,

but a victor in and by and over death.

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THE BLIND WATCHERS AT THE CROSS

And sitting down they watched Him there.' --MATT. xxvii. 36.

Our thoughts are, rightly, so absorbed by the central Figure in this

great chapter that we pass by almost unnoticed the groups round the

cross. And yet there are large lessons to be learned from each of them.

These rude soldiers, four in number, as we infer from John's Gospel,

had no doubt joined with their comrades in the coarse mockery which

preceded the sad procession to Calvary; and then they had to do the

rough work of the executioners, fastening the sufferers to the rude

wooden crosses, lifting these, with their burden, filing them into the

ground, then parting the raiment. And when all that is done they sit

stolidly down to take their ease at the foot of the cross, and idly to

wait, with eyes that look and see nothing, until the sufferers die. A

strange picture; and a strange thing to think of, how they were so

close to the great event in the world's history, and had to stare at it

for three or four hours, and never saw anything!

The lessons that the incident teaches us may be very simply gathered

together.

I. First we infer from this the old truth of how ignorant men are of

the real meaning and outcome of what they do.

These four Roman soldiers were foreigners; I suppose that they could

not speak a word to a man in that crowd. They had no means of

communication with them. They had had plenty of practice in crucifying

Jews. It was part of their ordinary work in these troublesome times,

and this was just one more. Think of what a corporal's guard of rough

English soldiers, out in Northern India, would think if they were

bidden to hang a native who was charged with rebellion against the

British Government. So much, and not one whit more, did these men know

of what they were doing; and they went back to their barracks, stolid

and unconcerned, and utterly ignorant of what they had been about.

But in part it is so with us all, though in less extreme fashion. None

of us know the real meaning, and none of us know the possible issues

and outcome of a great deal of our lives. We are like people sowing

seed in the dark; it is put into our hands and we sow. We do the deed;

this end of it is in our power, but where it runs out to, and what will

come of it, lie far beyond our ken. We are compassed about, wherever we

go, by this atmosphere of mystery, and enclosed within a great ring of

blackness.

And so the simple lesson to be drawn from that clear fact, about all

our conduct, is this--let results alone. Never mind about what you

cannot get hold of; you cannot see to the other end, and you have

nothing to do with it. You can see this end; make that right. Be sure

that the motive is right, and then into whatever unlooked-for

consequences your act may run out at the further end, you will be

right. Never mind what kind of harvest is coming out of your deeds, you

cannot forecast it. Thou soweth not that body that shall be, but bare

grain. . .. God giveth it a body as it pleaseth Him.' Let alone that

profitless investigation, the attempt to fashion and understand either

the significance or the issues of your conduct, and stick fast by

this--look after your motive for doing it, and your temper in doing it;

and then be quite sure, Thou shalt find it after many days,' and the

fruit will be unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of

Jesus Christ.'

II. Take another very simple and equally plain lesson from this

incident, viz., the limitation of responsibility by knowledge.

These men, as I said, were ignorant of what they were doing, and,

therefore, they were guiltless. Christ Himself said so: They know not

what they do.' But it is marvellous to observe that whilst the people

who stood round the cross, and were associated in the act that led

Jesus there, had all degrees of responsibility, the least guilty of the

whole were the men who did the actual work of nailing Him to the cross,

and lifting it with Him upon it. These soldiers were not half as much

to blame as were many of the men that stood by; and just in the measure

in which the knowledge or the possibility of knowledge increased, just

in that measure did the responsibility increase. The high priest was a

great deal more to blame than the Roman soldiers. The rude tool that

nailed Christ to the cross, the hammer that was held in the hand of the

legionary, was almost as much to blame as the hand that wielded it. For

the hand that wielded it had very little more knowledge than it had.

In so far as it was possible that these men might have known something

of what they were doing, in so far were they to blame; but remember

what a very, very little light could possibly have shone upon these

souls. If there is no light there cannot be any shadow; and if these

men were, as certainly they were, all but absolutely ignorant, and

never could have been anything else, of what they were doing, then they

were all but absolutely guiltless. And so you come to this, which is

only a paradox to superficial thinkers, that the men that did the

greatest crime in the whole history of the world, did it with all but

clean hands; and the people that were to be condemned were those who

delivered the Just One' into the hands of more lawless, and therefore

less responsible, men.

So here is the general principle, that as knowledge and light rise and

fall, so responsibility rises and falls along with them. And therefore

let us be thankful that we have not to judge one another, but that we

have all to stand before that merciful and loving tribunal of the God

who is a God of knowledge, and by whom actions are weighed, as the Old

Book has it--not counted, but weighed. And let us be thankful, too,

that we may extend our charity to all round us, and refrain from

thinking of any man or woman that we can pronounce upon their

criminality, because we do not know the light in which they walk.

III. And now the last lesson, and the one that I most desire to lay

upon your hearts, is this, how possible it is to look at Christ on the

cross, and see nothing.

For half a day there they sat, and it was but a dying Jew that they

saw, one of three. A touch of pity came into their hearts once or

twice, alternating to mockery, which was not savage because it was

simply brutal; but when it was all over, and they had pierced His side,

and gone away back to their barracks, they had not the least notion

that they, with their dim, purblind eyes, had been looking at the most

stupendous miracle in the whole world's history, had been gazing at the

thing into which angels desired to look; and had seen that to which the

hearts and the gratitude of unconverted millions would turn for all

eternity. They laid their heads down on their pillows that night and

did not know what had passed before their eyes, and they shut the eyes

that had served them so ill, and went to sleep, unconscious that they

had seen the pivot on which the whole history of humanity had turned;

and been the unmoved witnesses of God manifest in the flesh,' dying on

the cross for the whole world, and for them. What should they have seen

if they had seen the reality? They should have seen not a dying rebel

but a dying Christ; they should have looked with emotion, they should

have looked with faith, they should have looked with thankfulness.

Any one who looks at that cross, and sees nothing but a pure and

perfect man dying upon it, is very nearly as blind as the Roman

legionaries. Any one to whom it is only an example of perfect innocence

and patient suffering has only seem an inch into the Infinite; and the

depths of it are as much concealed from him as they were from them. Any

one who looks with an unmoved heart, without one thrill of gratitude,

is nearly as blind as the rough soldiers. He that looks and does not

say--

My faith would lay her hand

On that dear head of Thine;

While like a penitent I stand

And there confess my sin,'

has not learned more of the meaning of the Cross than they did. And any

one who looks to it, and then turns away and forgets, or who looks at

it and fails to recognise in it the law of his own life and pattern for

his own conduct, has yet to see more deeply into it before he sees even

such portion of its meaning as here we can apprehend.

Oh! dear friends, we all of us, as the apostle says in one of his

letters, have had this Christ manifestly set forth before us as if

painted upon a placard upon a wall' (for that is the meaning of the

picturesque words that he employs). And if we look with calm, unmoved

hearts; if we look without personal appropriation of that Cross and

dying love to ourselves, and if we look without our hearts going out in

thankfulness and laying themselves at His feet in a calm rapture of

life-long devotion, then we need not wonder that four ignorant heathen

men sat and looked at Him for four long hours and saw nothing, for we

are as blind as ever they were.

You say, We see.' Do you see? Do you look? Does the look touch your

hearts? Have you fathomed the meaning of the fact? Is it to you the

sacrifice of the living Christ for your salvation? Is it to you the

death on which all your hopes rest? You say that you see. Do you see

that in it? Do you see your only ground of confidence and peace? And do

you so see that, like a man who has looked at the sun for a moment or

two, when you turn away your head you carry the image of what you

beheld still stamped on your eyeball, and have it both as a memory and

a present impression? So is the cross photographed on your heart; and

is it true about us that every day, and all days, we behold our

Saviour, and beholding Him are being changed into His likeness? Is it

true about us that we thus bear about with us in the body the dying of

the Lord Jesus'? If we look to Him with faith and love, and make His

Cross our own, and keep it ever in our memory, ever before us as an

inspiration and a hope and a joy and a pattern, then we see. If not,

for judgment am I come into the world, that they which see not may see,

and that they which see might be made blind.' For what men are so blind

to the infinite pathos and tenderness, power, mystery, and miracle of

the Cross, as the men and women who all their lives long have heard a

Gospel which has been held up before their lack-lustre eyes, and have

looked at it so long that they cannot see it any more?

Let us pray that our eyes may be purged, that we may see, and seeing

may copy, that dying love of the ever-loving Lord.

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TAUNTS TURNING TO TESTIMONIES

. . . The chief priests mocking Him . . . said, 42. He saved others;

Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come

down from the cross, and we will believe Him. 43. He trusted in God;

let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him.' --MATT. xxvii. 41-43.

It is an old saying that the corruption of the best is the worst. What

is more merciful and pitiful than true religion? What is more merciless

and malicious than hatred which calls itself religious'? These priests,

like many a persecutor for religion since, came to feast their eyes on

the long-drawn-out agonies of their Victim, and their rank tongues

blossomed into foul speech. Characteristically enough, though they

shared in the mockeries of the mob, they kept themselves separate. The

crowd pressed near enough to the cross to speak their gibes to Jesus;

the dignified movers of the ignorant crowd stood superciliously apart,

and talked scoffingly about Him. Whilst the populace yelled, Thou that

destroyest the Temple and buildest it in three days, come down,' the

chief priests, with the scribes, looked at each other with a smile, and

said, He saved others; Himself He cannot save.' Now, these brutal

taunts have lessons for us. They witness to the popular impression of

Christ, and what His claims were. He asserted Himself to be a worker of

miracles, the Messiah-King of Israel, the Son of God, therefore He

died. And they witness to the misconception which ruled in the minds of

these priests as to the relation of His claims to the Cross. They

thought that it had finally burst the bubble, and disposed once for all

of these absurd and blasphemous pretensions. Was it credible that a man

who possessed miraculous power should not, in this supreme moment, use

it to deliver Himself? Did not Physician, heal Thyself,' come in

properly there? Would any of the most besotted followers of this

pretender retain a rag of belief in His Messiahship if He was

crucified? Could it be possible that, if there was a God at all, He

should leave a man that really trusted in Him, not to say who was

really His Son, to die thus? A cracked mirror gives a distorted image.

The facts were seen, but their relation was twisted. If we will take

the guidance of these gibes, and see what is the real explanation to

the anomaly that they suggest, then we shall find that the taunts turn

to Him for a testimony, and that out of the mouths of mockers there is

perfected praise.' The stones flung at the Master turn to roses strewed

in His path.

I. So, then, first the Cross shows us the Saviour who could not save

Himself.

The priests did not believe in Christ's miracles, and they thought that

this final token of his impotence, as they took it to be, was clear

proof that the miracles were either tricks or mistakes. They saw the

two things, they fatally misunderstood the relation between them. Let

us put the two things together.

Here, on the one hand, is a Man who has exercised absolute authority in

all the realms of the universe, who has spoken to dead matter, and it

has obeyed; who by His word has calmed the storm, and hushed the winds

by His word, has multiplied bread, has transmuted pale water into ruddy

wine; who has moved omnipotent amongst the disturbed minds and diseased

bodies of men, who has cast His sovereign word into the depth and

darkness of the grave, and brought out the dead, stumbling and

entangled in the grave-clothes. All these are facts on the one side.

And on the other there is this--that there, passive, and, to

superficial eyes, impotent, He hangs the helpless Victim of Roman

soldiers and of Jewish priests. The short and easy vulgar way to solve

the apparent contradiction was to deny the reality of the one of its

members; to say Miracles? Absurd! He never worked one, or He would have

been working one now.'

But let their error lead us into truth, and let us grasp the relation

of the two apparently contradictory facts. He saved others,' that is

certain. He did not save Himself,' that is as certain. Was the

explanation cannot'? The priests by cannot' meant physical

impossibility, defect of power, and they were wrong. But there is a

profound sense in which the word cannot' is absolutely true. For this

is in all time, and in all human relations, the law of

service--sacrifice; and no man can truly help humanity, or an

individual, unless he is prepared to surrender himself in the service.

The lamp burns away in giving light. The fire consumes in warming the

hearth, and no brotherly sympathy or help has ever yet been rendered,

or ever will be, except at the price of self-surrender. Now, some

people think that this is the whole explanation of our Lord's history,

both in His life and in His death. I do not believe that it is the

whole explanation, but I do believe it carries us some way towards the

central sanctuary, where the explanation lies. And yet it is not

complete or adequate, because, to parallel Christ's work with the work

of any of the rest of us to our brethren, however beautiful,

disinterested, self-oblivious, and self-consuming it may be, seems to

me--I say it with deference, though I must here remember considerations

of brevity and be merely assertive--entirely to ignore the unique

special characteristic of the work of Jesus Christ--viz., that it was

the atonement for the sins of the world. He could not bear away our

sins, unless the burden of them was laid on His own back, and He

carried our griefs, our sorrows, our diseases, and our transgressions.

He saved others, Himself He cannot save.' But the impossibility was

purely the result of His own willing and obedient love; or, if I put it

in more epigrammatic form, the priests' cannot' was partially true, but

if they had said would not' they would have hit the mark, and come to

full truth. The reason for His death becomes clear, and each of the

contrasted facts is enhanced, when we set side by side the opulence and

ease of His manifold miracles and the apparent impotence and

resourcelessness of the passive Victim on the cross.

That cannot' did not come from defect of power, but from plenitude of

love, and it was a will not' in its deepest depths. For you will find

scattered throughout Scripture, especially these Gospels, indications

from our Lord's own lips, and by His own acts, that, in the truest and

fullest sense, His sufferings were voluntary. No man taketh it from

me'--He says about His life--I have power to lay it down, and I have

power to take it again.' And once He did choose to flash out for a

moment the always present power, that we might learn that when it did

not appear, it was not because he could not, but because he would not.

When the soldiers came to lay their hands upon Him, He presented

Himself before them, saving them all the trouble of search, and when He

asked a question, and received the answer that it was He of whom they

were in search, there came one sudden apocalypse of His majesty, and

they fell to the ground, and lay there prone before Him. They could

have had no power at all against Him, except He had willed to surrender

Himself to them. Again, though it is hypercritical perhaps to attach

importance to what may only be natural idiomatic forms of speech, yet

in this connection it is not to be overlooked that the language of all

the Evangelists, in describing the supreme moment of Christ's death, is

congruous with the idea that He died neither from the exhaustion of

crucifixion, nor from the thrust of the soldier's spear, but because He

would. For they all have expressions equivalent to that of one of them,

He gave up His spirit.' Be that as it may, the cannot' was a will not';

and it was neither nails that fastened Him to the tree, nor violence

that slew Him, but He was fixed there by His own steadfast will, and He

died because He would. So if we rightly understand the cannot' we may

take up with thankfulness the taunt which, as I say, is tuned to a

testimony, and reiterate adoringly, He saved others, Himself He cannot

save.'

II. The Cross shows us the King on His throne.

To the priests it appeared ludicrous to suppose that a King of Israel

should, by Israel, be nailed upon the cross. Let Him come down, and we

will believe Him.' They saw the two facts, they misconceived their

relation. There was a relation between them, and it is not difficult

for us to apprehend it.

The Cross is Christ's throne. There are two ways in which the tragedy

of His crucifixion is looked at in the Gospels, one that prevails in

the three first, another that prevails in the fourth. These two seem

superficially to be opposite; they are complementary. It depends upon

your station whether a point in the sky is your zenith or your nadir.

Here it is your zenith; at the antipodes it is the nadir. In the first

three gospels the aspect of humiliation, degradation, inanition,

suffering, is prominent in the references to the Crucifixion. In the

fourth gospel the aspect of glory and triumph is uppermost. Even so

must the Son of Man be lifted up'; I, if I be lifted up, will draw all

men unto Me'; Now the hour is come that the Son of Man should be

glorified.' And it is His glory, for on that Cross Jesus Christ

manifests, in transcendent and superlative form, at once power and love

that are boundless and divine. The Cross is the foundation of His

kingdom. In his great passage in Philippians the Apostle brings

together, in the closest causal connection, His obedience unto death,

the death of the Cross, and His exaltation and reception of the name

that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should

bow.' The title over the Cross was meant for a gibe. It was a prophecy.

By the Cross He becomes the King,' and not only the King of the Jews.'

The sceptre that was put in His hand, though it was meant for a sneer,

was a forecast of a truth, for He rules, not with a rod of iron, but

with the reed of gentleness; and the crown of thorns, that was pressed

down on His wounded and bleeding head, foretold for our faith the great

truth that suffering is the foundation of dominion, and that men will

bow as to their King and Lord before Him who died for them, with a

prostration of spirit, a loyalty of allegiance, and an alertness of

service, which none other, monarch or superior, may even dream of

attaining. The Cross establishes, not destroys, Christ's dominion over

men.

Yes; and that Cross wins their faith as nothing else can. The blind

priests said, Let Him come down, and we will believe Him.' Precisely

because He did not come down, do sad and sorrowful and sinful hearts

turn to Him from the ends of the earth, and from the distances of the

ages pour the treasures of their trust and their love at His feet. Did

you ever think how strange it is, except with one explanation, that the

gibes of the priests did not turn out to be true? Why is it that

Christ's shameful death did not burst the bubble, as they thought it

had done? Why is it that in His case--and I was going to say, and it

would have been no exaggeration, in His case only--the death of the

leader did not result in the dispersion of the led? Why is it that His

fate and future were the opposite of that of multitudes of other

pseudo-Messiahs, of whom it is true that when they were slain their

followers came to nought? Why? There is only one explanation, I think,

and that is that the death was not the end, but that He rose again from

the dead. My brother, you will either have to accept the Resurrection,

with all that comes from it, or else you will have to join the ranks of

the priests, and consider that Christ's death blew to atoms Christ's

pretensions. If we know anything about Him, we know that He asserted

miraculous power, Messiahship, and a filial relation to God. These

things are facts. Did He rise or did He not? If He did not, He was an

enthusiast. If He did, He is the King to whom our hearts can cleave,

and to whom our loyalty is due.

III. Now, lastly, the Cross shows us the Son, beloved of the Father.

The priests thought that it was altogether incredible that His devotion

should have been genuine, or His claim to be the Son of God should have

any reality, since the Cross, to their vulgar eyes, disproved them

both. Like all coarse-minded people, they estimated character by

condition, but they who do that make no end of mistakes. They had

forgotten their own Prophecies, which might have told them that the

Servant of the Lord in whom' His heart delighted,' was a suffering

Servant. But whilst they recognised the facts, here again, as in the

other two cases, they misconceived the relation. We have the means of

rectifying the distorted image.

We ought to know, and to be sure, that the Cross of Christ was the very

token that this was God's beloved Son in whom He was well pleased.' If

we dare venture on the comparison of parts of that which is all

homogeneous and perfect, we might say that in the moment of His death

Jesus Christ was more than ever the object of the Father's delight.

Why? It is not my purpose now to enlarge upon all the reasons which

might be suggested. Let me put them together in a sentence or two. In

that Cross Jesus Christ revealed God as God's heart had always yearned

to be revealed, infinite in love, pitifulness, forbearance, and

pardoning mercy. There was the highest manifestation of the glory of

God. What?' you say, a poor weak Man, hanging on a cross, and dying in

the dark--is that the very shining apex of all that humanity can know

of divinity?' Yes, for it is the pure manifestation that God is Love.

Therefore the whole sunshine of the Father's presence rested on the

dying Saviour. It was the hour when God most delighted in Him, if I may

venture the comparison, for the other reasons that then He carried

filial obedience to its utmost perfection, that then His trust in God

was deepest, even at the hour when His spirit was darkened by the cloud

that the world's sin, which He was carrying, had spread thunderous

between Him and the sunshine of the Father's face. For in that

mysterious voice, which we can never understand in its depths, there

were blended trust and desolation, each in its highest degree: My God!

my God! Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' And the Cross was the complete

carrying out of God's dearest purpose for the world, that He might be

just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.' Therefore,

then--I was going to say as never before--was Christ His Son, in whom

He delighted.

Brethren, let us, led by the errors of these scoffers, grasp the truths

that they pervert. Let us see that weak Man hanging helpless on the

cross, whose cannot' is the impotence of omnipotence, imposed by His

own loving will to save a world by the sacrifice of Himself. Let us

crown Him our King, and let our deepest trust and our gladdest

obedience be rendered to Him because He did not come down from, but

endured, the cross.' Let us behold with wonder, awe, and endless love

the Father not withholding His only Son, but delivering Him up to the

death for us all,' and from the empty grave and the occupied Throne let

us learn how the Father by both proclaims to all the world concerning

Him hanging dying on the cross: This is My beloved Son, in whom I am

well pleased.'

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THE VEIL RENT

Behold, the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the

bottom.'--MATT. xxvii. 51.

As I suppose we are all aware, the Jewish Temple was divided into three

parts: the Outer Court, open to all; the Holy Place, to which the

ministering priests had daily access to burn incense and trim the

lamps; and the Holy of Holies, where only the High Priest was permitted

to go, and that but once a year, on the great Day of Atonement. For the

other three hundred and sixty-four days the shrine lay silent,

untrodden, dark. Between it and the less sacred Holy Place hung the

veil, whose heavy folds only one man was permitted to lift or to pass.

To all others it was death to peer into the mysteries, and even to him,

had he gone at another time, and without the blood of the sacrifice,

death would have ensued.

If we remember all this and try to cast ourselves back in imagination

to the mental attitude of the ordinary Jew, the incident of my text

receives its true interpretation. At the moment when the loud cry of

the dying Christ rung over the heads of the awestruck multitude, that

veil was, as it were, laid hold of by a pair of giant hands and torn

asunder, as the Evangelist says, from the top to the bottom.' The

incident was a symbol. In one aspect it proclaimed the end of the long

years of Israel's prerogative. In another it ushered in an epoch of new

relations between man and God. If Jesus Christ was what He said He was,

if His death was what He declared it to be, it was fitting that it

should be attended by a train of subordinate and interpreting wonders.

These were, besides that of my text, the darkened sun, the trembling

earth, the shivered rocks, the open graves, the rising saints--all of

them, in their several ways, illuminating the significance of that

death on Calvary.

Not less significant is this symbol of my text, and I desire now to

draw your attention to its meanings.

I. The rent veil proclaims the desecrated temple.

There is a striking old legend, preserved by the somewhat mendacious

historian of the Jewish people, that, before Jerusalem fell, the

anxious watchers heard from within the sanctuary a great voice saying,

Let us depart hence!' and through the night were conscious of the

winnowing of the mighty wings of the withdrawing cherubim. And soon a

Roman soldier tossed a brand into the most Holy Place, and the

beautiful house where their fathers praised was burned with fire.' The

legend is pathetic and significant. But that departing' had taken place

forty years before; and at the moment when Jesus gave up the ghost,'

purged eyes might have seen the long trail of brightness as the winged

servitors of the Most High withdrew from the desecrated shrine. The

veil rent declared that the sacred soil within it was now common as any

foot of earth in Galilee; and its rending, so to speak, made way for a

departing God.

That conception, that the death of Christ Jesus was the

de-consecration--if I may coin a word--of the Temple, and the end of

all its special sanctity, and that thenceforward the Presence had

departed from it, is distinctly enough taught us by Himself in words

which move in the same circle of ideas as that in which the symbol

resides. . .. You remember, no doubt, that, if we accept the testimony

of John's Gospel, at the very beginning of our Lord's ministry He

vindicated His authority to cleanse the sanctuary against the cavils of

the sticklers for propriety by the enigmatical words, Destroy this

Temple, and in three days I will build it up,' to which the Evangelist

appends the comment, He spake of the Temple of His body,' that body in

which all the fulness of the Godhead' dwelt, and which was, and is

to-day, all that the Temple shadowed and foretold, the dwelling-place

of God in humanity, the place of sacrifice, the meeting-place between

God and man. But just because our Lord in these dark words predicted

His death and His resurrection, He also hinted the destruction of the

literal stone and lime building, and its rearing again in nobler and

more spiritual form. When He said, Destroy this Temple,' He implied,

secondarily, the destruction of the house in which He stood, and laid

that destruction, whensoever it should come to pass, at their doors.

And, inasmuch as the saying in its deepest depth meant His death by

their violence and craft, therefore, in that early saying of His, was

wrapped up the very same truth which was symbolised by the rent veil,

and was bitterly fulfilled at last. When they slew Christ they killed

the system under which they lived, and for which they would have been

glad to die, in a zeal without knowledge; and destroyed the very Temple

on the distorted charge of being the destroyer of which, they handed

Him over to the Roman power.

The death of Christ is, then, the desecration and the destruction of

that Temple. Of course it is; because when a nation that had had

millenniums of education, of forbearance, of revelation, turned at last

upon the very climax and brightest central light of all the Revelation,

standing there amongst them in a bodily form, there was nothing more to

be done. God had shot His last arrow; His quiver was empty. Last of all

He sent unto them His Son, saying,' with a wistful kind of

half-confidence, They will reverence My Son,' and the divine

expectation was disappointed, and exhaustless Love was empty-handed,

and all was over. He could turn to themselves and say, Judge between Me

and My vineyard. What more could have been done that I have not done to

it?' Therefore, there was nothing left but to let the angels of

destruction loose, and to call for the Roman eagles with their

broad-spread wings, and their bloody beaks, and their strong talons, to

gather together round the carcase. When He gave up the Ghost, the veil

of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.'

A time of repentance was given. It was possible for the most guilty

participator in that judicial murder to have his gory hands washed and

made white in the very blood that he had shed; but, failing repentance,

that death was the death of Israel, and the destruction of Israel's

Temple. Let us take the lesson, dear brethren. If we turn away from

that Saviour, and refuse the offered gifts of His love, there is no

other appeal left in the power of Heaven; and there is nothing for it

after that except judgment and destruction. We can crucify the Son of

God afresh and put Him to an open shame.' And the hearts that are

insensitive, as are some of our hearts, to that great love and grace,

are capable of nothing except to be pulverised by means of a judgment.

Repentance is possible for us all, but, failing that, the continuance

of rejection of Christ is the pulling down, on our own heads, of the

ruins of the Temple, like the Israelitish hero in his blindness and

despair.

II. Now, secondly, the rent veil means, in another way of looking at

the incident, light streaming in on the mystery of God.

Let me recall to your imaginations what lay behind that heavy veil. In

the Temple, in our Lord's time, there was no presence of the Shekinah,

the light that symbolised the divine presence. There was the

mercy-seat, with the outstretched wings of the cherubim; there were the

dimly pictured forms on the tapestry hangings; there was silence deep

as death; there was darkness absolute and utter, whilst the Syrian sun

was blazing down outside. Surely that is the symbol of the imperfect

knowledge or illumination as to the divine nature which is over all the

world. The veil is spread over all nations, and the covering over all

people.' And surely that sudden, sharp tearing asunder of the obscuring

medium, and letting the bright sunlight stream into every corner of the

dark chamber, is for us a symbol of the great fact that in the life,

and especially in the death, of Jesus Christ our Lord, we have light

thrown in to the depths of God.

What does that Cross tell us about God that the world did not know? And

how does it tell us? and why does it tell us? It tells us of absolute

righteousness, of that in the divine nature which cannot tolerate sin;

of the stern law of retribution which must be wrought out, and by which

the wages of every sin is death. It tells us not only of a divine

righteousness which sees guilt and administers punishment, but it tells

us of a divine love, perfect, infinite, utter, perennial, which shrinks

from no sacrifice, which stoops to the lowest conditions, which itself

takes upon it all the miseries of humanity, and which dies because it

loves and will save men from death. And as we look upon that dying Man

hanging on the cross, the very embodiment and consummation of weakness

and of shame, we have to say, Lo! this is our God! We have waited for

Him'--through all the weary centuries--and He will save us.' How does

it tell us all this? Not by eloquent and gracious thoughts, not by

sweet and musical words, but by a deed. The only way by which we can

know men is by what they do. The only way by which we know God is by

what He does. And so we point to that Cross and say, There! not in

words, not in thoughts, not in speculations, not in hopes and fears and

peradventures and dim intuitions, but in a solid fact; there is the

Revelation which lays bare the heart of God, and shows us its very

throbbing of love to every human soul.' The veil was rent in twain from

the top to the bottom.'

The Cross will reveal God to you only if you believe that Jesus Christ

was the Incarnate Word. Brethren, if that death was but the death of

even the very holiest, noblest, sweetest, perfectest soul that ever

lived on earth and breathed human breath, there is no revelation of God

in it for us. It tells us what Jesus was, and by a very roundabout

inference may suggest something of what the divine nature is, but

unless you can say, as the New Testament says, In the beginning was the

Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . .. And the

Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the

glory as of the only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,'

I fail to see how the death of Christ can be a revelation of the love

of God.

I need not occupy time in dilating upon the contrast between this solid

certitude, and all that the world, apart from Jesus Christ, has to lay

hold of about God. We want something else than mist on which to build,

and on which to lay hold. And there is a substantial, warm,

flesh-and-blood hand, if I may so say, put out to us through the mist

when we believe in Christ the Son of God, who died on the cross for us

all. Then, amidst whirling mists and tossing seas, there is a fixed

point to which we can moor; then our confidence is built, not on

peradventures or speculations or wishes or dreams or hopes, but on a

historical fact, and grasping that firm we may stand unmoved.

Dear friends, I may be very old-fashioned and very narrow--I suppose I

am; but I am bound to declare my conviction, which I think every day's

experience of the tendency of thought only makes more certain, that,

practically for this generation, the choice lies between accepting the

life and death of Jesus Christ as the historical Revelation of God, or

having no knowledge of Him--knowledge, I say,--of Him at all; you must

choose between the barred sanctuary, within which lies couched a hidden

Something--with a capital S--or perhaps a hidden Someone whom you never

can know and never will; or the rent veil, rent by Christ's death,

through which you can pass, and behold the mercy-seat and, above the

outstretched wings of the adoring cherubim, the Father whose name is

Love.

III. Lastly, the rent veil permits any and every man to draw near to

God.

You remember what I have already said as to the jealous guarding of the

privacy of that inner shrine, and how not only the common herd of the

laity, but the whole of the priesthood, with the solitary exception of

its titular head, were shut out from ever entering it. In the old times

of Israel there was only one man alive at once who had ever been beyond

the veil. And now that it is rent, what does that show but this, that

by the death of Jesus Christ any one, every one, is welcome to pass in

to the very innermost sanctuary, and to dwell, nestling as close as he

will, to the very heart of the throned God? There is a double veil, if

I may so say, between man and God: the side turned outward is woven by

our own sins; and the other turned inwards is made out of the necessary

antagonism of the divine nature to man's sin. There hangs the veil, and

when the Psalmist asked, Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord; or

who shall stand in His holy place?' he was putting a question which

echoes despairingly in the very heart of all religions. And he answered

it as conscience ever answers it when it gets fair play: He that hath

clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto

vanity.' And where or who is he? Nowhere; nobody. Access is barred,

because it is impossible that a holy and righteous God should

communicate the selectest gifts of His love, even the sense of His

favour, and of harmony and fellowship with Him, to sinful men, and

barred, because it is impossible that men, with the consciousness of

evil and the burden of guilt sometimes chafing their shoulders, and

always bowing down their backs, should desire to possess, or be capable

of possessing, that fellowship and union with God. A black, frowning

wall, if I may change the metaphor of my text, rises between us and

God. But One comes with the sacrificial vessel in His hand, and pours

His blood on the barrier, and that melts the black blocks that rise

between us and God, and the path is patent and permeable for every

foot. The veil of the Temple was rent in twain' when Christ died. That

death, because it is a sacrifice, makes it possible that the whole

fulness of the divine love should be poured upon man. That death moves

our hearts, takes away our sense of guilt, draws us nearer to Him; and

so both by its operation--not on the love of God--but on the government

of God, and by its operation on the consciousness of men, throws open

the path into His very presence.

If I might use abstract words, I would say that Christ's death

potentially opens the path for every man, which being put into plain

English--which is better--is just that by the death of Christ every man

can, if he will, go to God, and live beside Him. And our faith is our

personal laying hold of that great sacrifice and treading on that path.

It turns the potentiality' into an actuality, the possibility into a

fact. If we believe on Him who died on the cross for us all, then by

that way we come to God, than which there is none other given under

heaven among men.

So all believers are priests, or none of them are. The absolute right

of direct access to God, without the intervention of any man who has an

officially greater nearness to Him than others, and through whom as

through a channel the grace of sacrament comes, is contained in the

great symbol of my text. And it is a truth that this day needs. On the

one hand there is agnostic unbelief, which needs to see in the rent

veil the illumination streaming through it on to the depths of God; and

on the other hand there is the complementary error--and the two always

breed each other--the superstition which drags back by an anachronism

the old Jewish notions of priesthood into the Christian Church. It

needs to see in the rent veil the charter of universal priesthood for

all believers, and to hearken to the words which declare, Ye are a

chosen generation, a spiritual house, a royal priesthood, that ye

should offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable unto God by Jesus

Christ.' That is the lesson that this day wants. Having, therefore,

brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest of all, by the blood of

Jesus, by a new and living way, which He has consecrated for us through

the veil, that is His flesh, let us draw near with true hearts in full

assurance of faith.'

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THE PRINCE OF LIFE

In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of

the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

2. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord

descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the

door, and sat upon it. 3. His countenance was like lightning, and his

raiment white as snow: 4. And for fear of him the keepers did shake,

and became as dead men. 5. And the angel answered and said unto the

women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

6. He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place

where the Lord lay. 7. And go quickly, and tell His disciples that He

is risen from the dead; and, behold, He goeth before you into Galilee;

there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you. 8. And they departed

quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to

bring His disciples word. 9. And as they went to tell His disciples,

behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held Him by

the feet, and worshipped Him. 10. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not

afraid: go tell My brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall

they see Me. 11. Now, when they were going, behold, some of the watch

came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things

that were done. 12. And when they were assembled with the elders, and

had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, 13. Saying,

Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept.

14. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and

secure you. 15. So they took the money, and did as they were taught:

and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.'

--MATT. xxviii. 1-15.

The attempts at harmonising the resurrection narratives are not only

unsatisfactory, but they tend to blur the distinctive characteristics

of each account. We shall therefore confine ourselves entirely to

Matthew's version, and leave the others alone, with the simple remark

that a condensed report of a series of events does not deny what it

omits, nor contradict a fuller one. The peculiarities of Matthew's last

chapter are largely due to the purpose of his gospel. Throughout, it

has been the record of the Galilean ministry, the picture of the King

of Israel, and of His treatment by those who should have been His

subjects. This chapter establishes the fact of His resurrection; but,

passing by the Jerusalem appearances of the risen Lord, as being

granted to individuals and having less bearing on His royalty,

emphasises two points: His rejection by the representatives of the

nation, whose lie is endorsed by popular acceptance; and the solemn

assumption, in Galilee, so familiar to the reader, of universal

dominion, with the world-wide commission, in which the kingdom bursts

the narrow national limits and becomes co-extensive with humanity. It

is better to learn the meaning of Matthew's selection of his incidents

than to wipe out instructive peculiarities in the vain attempt after

harmony.

First, notice his silence (in which all the four narratives are alike)

as to the time and circumstances of the resurrection itself. That had

taken place before the grey twilight summoned the faithful women, and

before the earthquake and the angel's descent. No eye saw Him rise. The

guards were not asleep, for the statement that they were is a lie put

into their mouths by the rulers; but though they kept jealous watch,

His rising was invisible to them. The prison was shut with all safety,'

for the stone was rolled away after He was risen, and the keepers

standing before the doors,' but there was no man within.' As in the

evening of that day He appeared in the closed chamber, so He passed

from the sealed grave. Divine decorum required that that transcendent

act should be done without mortal observers of the actual rising of the

Sun which scatters for ever the darkness of death.

Matthew next notices the angel ministrant and herald. His narrative

leaves the impression that the earthquake and appearance of the angel

immediately preceded the arrival of the women, and the Behold!'

suggests that they felt and saw both. But that is a piece of chronology

on which there may be difference of opinion. The other narratives tell

of two angels. Matthew's mention of one only may be due either to the

fact that one was speaker, or to the subjective impressions of his

informant, who saw but the one, or to variation in the number visible

at different times. We know too little of the laws which determine

their appearances to be warranted in finding contradiction or

difficulty here. The power of seeing may depend on the condition of the

beholder. It may depend, not as with gross material bodies, on optics,

but on the volition of the radiant beings seen. They may pass from

visibility to its opposite, lightly and repeatedly, flickering into and

out of sight, as the Pleiades seem to do. Where there is such store of

possibilities, he is rash who talks glibly about contradictions.

Of far more value is it to note the purpose served by this waiting

angel. We heard much of a herald angel of the Lord in the story of the

Nativity. We hear nothing of him during the life of Christ. Now again

he appears, as the stars, quenched in the noontide, shine again when

the sun is out of the sky. He attends as humble servitor, in token that

the highest beings gazed on that empty grave with reverent adoration,

and were honoured by being allowed to guard the sacred place. Death was

an undreaded thing to them, and no hopes for themselves blossomed from

Christ's grave; but He who had lain in it was their King as well as

ours, and new lessons of divine love were taught them, as they wondered

and watched. They come to minister by act and word to the weeping

women's faith and joy. Their appearance paralyses the guards, who would

have kept the Marys from the grave. They roll away the great circular

stone, which women's hands, however nerved by love, could not have

moved in its grooves. They speak tender words to them. There by the

empty tomb, the strong heavenly and the weak earthly lovers of the

risen King meet together, and clasp hands of help, the pledge and

first-fruits of the standing order henceforth, and the inauguration of

their office of ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for . . .

heirs of salvation.' The risen Christ hath made both one. The servants

of the same King must needs be friends of one another.

The angel's words fall into three parts. First, he calms fears by the

assurance that the seekers for Christ are dear to Him. Fear not ye'

glances at the prostrate watchers, and almost acknowledges the

reasonableness of their abject terror. To them he could not but be

hostile, but to hearts that longed for their and his Lord, he and all

his mighty fellows were brethren. Let us learn that all God's angels

are our lovers and helpers, if we love and seek for Jesus. Superstition

has peopled the gulf between God and man with crowds of beings;

revelation assures us that it is full of creatures who excel in

strength. Men have cowered before them, but whether they be thrones, or

dominions, or principalities, or powers,' our King was their Creator,

and is their Sovereign, and, if we serve Him, all these are on our

side. The true deliverer from superstitious terrors is the risen

Christ. Again, the angel announces in simplest words the glorious fact,

He is risen,' and helps them to receive it by a double way. He reminds

them of Christ's own words, which had seemed so mysterious and had

turned out so simple, so incredible, and now had proved so true. He

calls them with a smile of welcome to draw near, and with him to look

into the empty place. The invitation extends to us all, for the one

assurance of immortality; and the only answer to the despairing

question, If a man die, shall he live again?' which is solid enough to

resist the corrosion of modern doubt as of ancient ignorance, is that

empty grave, and the filled throne, which was its necessary

consequence. By it we measure the love that stooped so low, we school

our hearts to anticipate without dread or reluctance our own lying down

there, we fasten our faith on the risen Forerunner, and rejoice in the

triumphant assurance of a living Christ. If the wonder of the women's

stunned gaze is no more ours, our calm acceptance of the familiar fact

need be none the less glad, and our estimate of its far-reaching

results more complete than their tumult of feeling permitted to them.

No wonder that, swiftly, new duty which was privilege followed on the

new, glad knowledge. It was emphatically a day of good tidings,' and

they could not hold their peace. A brief glance, enough for certitude

and joy, was permitted; and then, with urgent haste, they are sent to

be apostles to the Apostles. The possession of the news of a risen

Saviour binds t